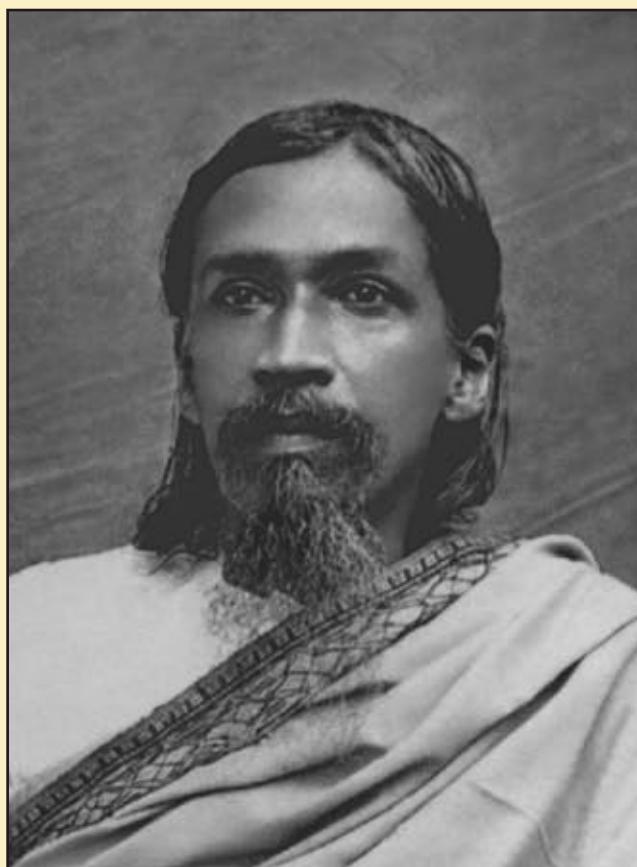


The Human Cycle
The Ideal of Human Unity
War and Self-Determination



Sri Aurobindo

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The Human Cycle

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War and Self-Determination

Publisher's Note

The Human Cycle was first published in monthly instalments in the review *Arya* between August 1916 and July 1918 under the title *The Psychology of Social Development*. Each chapter was written immediately before its publication. The text was revised during the late 1930s and again, more lightly, in 1949. That year it was published as a book under the title *The Human Cycle*. The Publisher's Note to the first edition, which was dictated by Sri Aurobindo, is reproduced in the present edition.

The Ideal of Human Unity was written and published in monthly instalments in the *Arya* between September 1915 and July 1918. In 1919 it was brought out as a book. Sri Aurobindo wrote a Preface to that edition which is reproduced in the present volume. He revised the book during the late 1930s, before the outbreak of World War II. References to political developments of the period between the world wars were introduced at this time, often in footnotes. In 1949 Sri Aurobindo undertook a final revision of *The Ideal of Human Unity*. He commented on the changed international situation in footnotes and made alterations here and there throughout the book, but brought it up to date mainly by the addition of a Postscript Chapter. In 1950 the revised text was published in an Indian and an American edition.

Five of the essays making up *War and Self-Determination* were published in the *Arya* between 1916 and 1920. In 1920 three of them — “The Passing of War?”, “The Unseen Power” and “Self-Determination” — along with a Foreword and a newly written essay, “The League of Nations”, were published as a book. In later editions the other two *Arya* essays, “1919” and “After the War”, were added by the editors.

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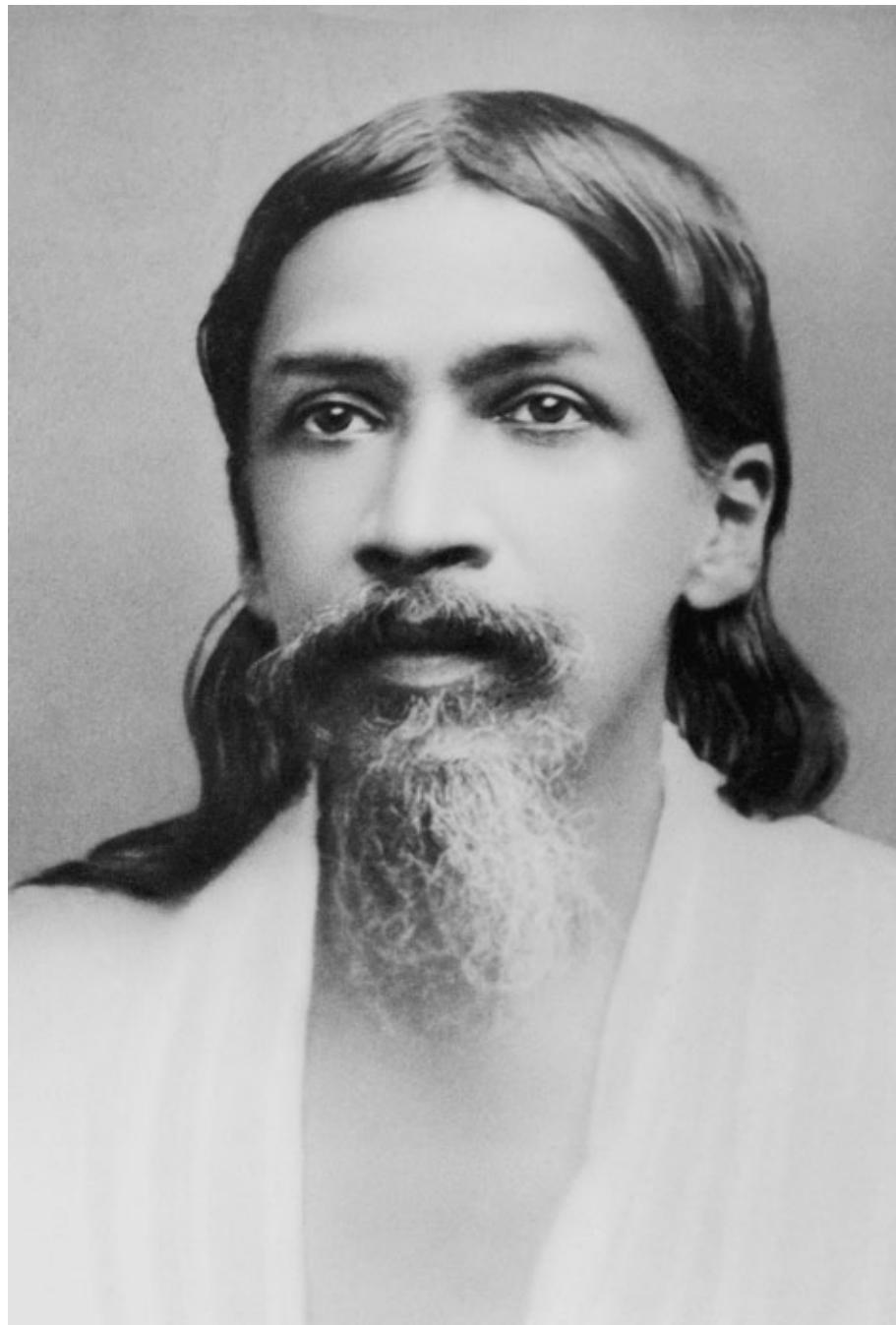
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Sri Aurobindo in Pondicherry

tendency and culture, that is bound to have an enormous effect on the direction of the world's civilisation; we can measure its probable influence by the profound results of the first reflux of the ideas even of the unawakened East upon Europe. Whatever that effect may be, it will not be in favour of the re-ordering of society on the lines of tendency towards a mechanical economism which will dominate in Europe. Its influence is likely to be rather in the direction of subjectivism and practical spirituality,

*A greater
The opinion of many
financial resistance to
the re-ordering of society
other than the amount
suggested by the life
and the body in their
own given labour.*

But, most important of all, the individualistic age of Europe has in its discovery of the individual fixed among the forces of the future two of a master potency which cannot be entirely eliminated by any temporary reaction. The first of these, now universally accepted, is the democratic conception of the right of all individuals as members of the society to the full life and the full development of which they are individually capable. It is no longer possible that we should accept as an ideal any arrangement by which certain classes of society should arrogate development and full social fruition to themselves while assigning service alone to others. It is now fixed that social development and well-being mean the development and well-being of all the individuals in the society and not merely a flourishing of the community in the mass which resolves itself really into the splendour and power of one or two classes. This conception has been accepted in full by all progressive nations and is the basis of the present socialistic tendency of the world. But in addition there is this deeper truth which individualism has discovered, that the individual is not merely a social unit,^{*} ~~but does his~~ existence, right and claim to live and grow ~~depends~~ on his social work and functions. ~~but~~ He is not merely a member of a human pack, hive or ant-hill, but something in himself, a soul, a being, who has to fulfil his own individual truth and law as well as his natural or his assigned part in the truth and law of the collectivity. He demands freedom, space, initiative for his soul, for his nature, for that puissant and tremendous thing which society so much distrusts and has laboured in the past either to

** There is no longer required by the re-order front
or movement - by the demand is reduced to a call on
the soul of the socialist*

A page of the Arya with changes made in the 1930s

The Human Cycle

Publisher's Note to the First Edition

The chapters constituting this book were written under the title "The Psychology of Social Development" from month to month in the philosophical monthly, "Arya", from August 15, 1916 to July 15, 1918 and used recent and contemporary events as well as illustrations from the history of the past in explanation of the theory of social evolution put forward in these pages. The reader has therefore to go back in his mind to the events of that period in order to follow the line of thought and the atmosphere in which it developed. At one time there suggested itself the necessity of bringing this part up to date, especially by some reference to later developments in Nazi Germany and the development of a totalitarian Communist regime in Russia. But afterwards it was felt that there was sufficient prevision and allusion to these events and more elaborate description or criticism of them was not essential; there was already without them an adequate working out and elucidation of this theory of the social cycle.

November, 1949

Chapter I

The Cycle of Society

MODERN Science, obsessed with the greatness of its physical discoveries and the idea of the sole existence of Matter, has long attempted to base upon physical data even its study of Soul and Mind and of those workings of Nature in man and animal in which a knowledge of psychology is as important as any of the physical sciences. Its very psychology founded itself upon physiology and the scrutiny of the brain and nervous system. It is not surprising therefore that in history and sociology attention should have been concentrated on the external data, laws, institutions, rites, customs, economic factors and developments, while the deeper psychological elements so important in the activities of a mental, emotional, ideative being like man have been very much neglected. This kind of science would explain history and social development as much as possible by economic necessity or motive,—by economy understood in its widest sense. There are even historians who deny or put aside as of a very subsidiary importance the working of the idea and the influence of the thinker in the development of human institutions. The French Revolution, it is thought, would have happened just as it did and when it did, by economic necessity, even if Rousseau and Voltaire had never written and the eighteenth-century philosophic movement in the world of thought had never worked out its bold and radical speculations.

Recently, however, the all-sufficiency of Matter to explain Mind and Soul has begun to be doubted and a movement of emancipation from the obsession of physical science has set in, although as yet it has not gone beyond a few awkward and rudimentary stumbling. Still there is the beginning of a perception that behind the economic motives and causes of social and historical development there are profound psychological, even perhaps soul factors; and in pre-war Germany, the metropolis of

rationalism and materialism but the home also, for a century and a half, of new thought and original tendencies good and bad, beneficent and disastrous, a first psychological theory of history was conceived and presented by an original intelligence. The earliest attempts in a new field are seldom entirely successful, and the German historian, originator of this theory, seized on a luminous idea, but was not able to carry it very far or probe very deep. He was still haunted by a sense of the greater importance of the economic factor, and like most European science his theory related, classified and organised phenomena much more successfully than it explained them. Nevertheless, its basic idea formulated a suggestive and illuminating truth, and it is worth while following up some of the suggestions it opens out in the light especially of Eastern thought and experience.

The theorist, Lamprecht, basing himself on European and particularly on German history, supposed that human society progresses through certain distinct psychological stages which he terms respectively symbolic, typal and conventional, individualist and subjective. This development forms, then, a sort of psychological cycle through which a nation or a civilisation is bound to proceed. Obviously, such classifications are likely to err by rigidity and to substitute a mental straight line for the coils and zigzags of Nature. The psychology of man and his societies is too complex, too synthetical of many-sided and intermixed tendencies to satisfy any such rigorous and formal analysis. Nor does this theory of a psychological cycle tell us what is the inner meaning of its successive phases or the necessity of their succession or the term and end towards which they are driving. But still to understand natural laws whether of Mind or Matter it is necessary to analyse their working into its discoverable elements, main constituents, dominant forces, though these may not actually be found anywhere in isolation. I will leave aside the Western thinker's own dealings with his idea. The suggestive names he has offered us, if we examine their intrinsic sense and value, may yet throw some light on the thickly veiled secret of our historic evolution, and this is the line on which it would be most useful to investigate.

Undoubtedly, wherever we can seize human society in what to us seems its primitive beginnings or early stages,— no matter whether the race is comparatively cultured or savage or economically advanced or backward,— we do find a strongly symbolic mentality that governs or at least pervades its thought, customs and institutions. Symbolic, but of what? We find that this social stage is always religious and actively imaginative in its religion; for symbolism and a widespread imaginative or intuitive religious feeling have a natural kinship and especially in earlier or primitive formations they have gone always together. When man begins to be predominantly intellectual, sceptical, ratiocinative he is already preparing for an individualist society and the age of symbols and the age of conventions have passed or are losing their virtue. The symbol then is of something which man feels to be present behind himself and his life and his activities,— the Divine, the Gods, the vast and deep unnameable, a hidden, living and mysterious nature of things. All his religious and social institutions, all the moments and phases of his life are to him symbols in which he seeks to express what he knows or guesses of the mystic influences that are behind his life and shape and govern or at the least intervene in its movements.

If we look at the beginnings of Indian society, the far-off Vedic age which we no longer understand, for we have lost that mentality, we see that everything is symbolic. The religious institution of sacrifice governs the whole society and all its hours and moments, and the ritual of the sacrifice is at every turn and in every detail, as even a cursory study of the Brahmanas and Upanishads ought to show us, mystically symbolic. The theory that there was nothing in the sacrifice except a propitiation of Nature-gods for the gaining of worldly prosperity and of Paradise, is a misunderstanding by a later humanity which had already become profoundly affected by an intellectual and practical bent of mind, practical even in its religion and even in its own mysticism and symbolism, and therefore could no longer enter into the ancient spirit. Not only the actual religious worship but also the social institutions of the time were penetrated through and through with the symbolic spirit. Take

the hymn of the Rig Veda which is supposed to be a marriage hymn for the union of a human couple and was certainly used as such in the later Vedic ages. Yet the whole sense of the hymn turns about the successive marriages of Suryā, daughter of the Sun, with different gods and the human marriage is quite a subordinate matter overshadowed and governed entirely by the divine and mystic figure and is spoken of in the terms of that figure. Mark, however, that the divine marriage here is not, as it would be in later ancient poetry, a decorative image or poetical ornamentation used to set off and embellish the human union; on the contrary, the human is an inferior figure and image of the divine. The distinction marks off the entire contrast between that more ancient mentality and our modern regard upon things. This symbolism influenced for a long time Indian ideas of marriage and is even now conventionally remembered though no longer understood or effective.

We may note also in passing that the Indian ideal of the relation between man and woman has always been governed by the symbolism of the relation between the Purusha and Prakriti (in the Veda Nri and Gna), the male and female divine Principles in the universe. Even, there is to some degree a practical correlation between the position of the female sex and this idea. In the earlier Vedic times when the female principle stood on a sort of equality with the male in the symbolic cult, though with a certain predominance for the latter, woman was as much the mate as the adjunct of man; in later times when the Prakriti has become subject in idea to the Purusha, the woman also depends entirely on the man, exists only for him and has hardly even a separate spiritual existence. In the Tantrik Shakta religion which puts the female principle highest, there is an attempt which could not get itself translated into social practice,—even as this Tantrik cult could never entirely shake off the subjugation of the Vedantic idea,—to elevate woman and make her an object of profound respect and even of worship.

Or let us take, for this example will serve us best, the Vedic institution of the fourfold order, *caturvarṇa*, miscalled the system of the four castes,—for caste is a conventional, *varṇa* a

symbolic and typal institution. We are told that the institution of the four orders of society was the result of an economic evolution complicated by political causes. Very possibly;¹ but the important point is that it was not so regarded and could not be so regarded by the men of that age. For while we are satisfied when we have found the practical and material causes of a social phenomenon and do not care to look farther, they cared little or only subordinately for its material factors and looked always first and foremost for its symbolic, religious or psychological significance. This appears in the Purushasukta of the Veda, where the four orders are described as having sprung from the body of the creative Deity, from his head, arms, thighs and feet. To us this is merely a poetical image and its sense is that the Brahmins were the men of knowledge, the Kshatriyas the men of power, the Vaishyas the producers and support of society, the Shudras its servants. As if that were all, as if the men of those days would have so profound a reverence for mere poetical figures like this of the body of Brahma or that other of the marriages of Suryā, would have built upon them elaborate systems of ritual and sacred ceremony, enduring institutions, great demarcations of social type and ethical discipline. We read always our own mentality into that of these ancient forefathers and it is therefore that we can find in them nothing but imaginative barbarians. To us poetry is a revel of intellect and fancy, imagination a plaything and caterer for our amusement, our entertainer, the nautch-girl of the mind. But to the men of old the poet was a seer, a revealer of hidden truths, imagination no dancing courtesan but a priestess in God's house commissioned not to spin fictions but to image difficult and hidden truths; even the metaphor or simile in the Vedic style is used with a serious purpose and expected to convey a reality, not to suggest a pleasing artifice of thought. The image was to these seers a revelative symbol of the unrevealed and it was used because it could hint luminously to the mind what the precise intellectual

¹ It is at least doubtful. The Brahmin class at first seem to have exercised all sorts of economic functions and not to have confined themselves to those of the priesthood.

word, apt only for logical or practical thought or to express the physical and the superficial, could not at all hope to manifest. To them this symbol of the Creator's body was more than an image, it expressed a divine reality. Human society was for them an attempt to express in life the cosmic Purusha who has expressed himself otherwise in the material and the supraphysical universe. Man and the cosmos are both of them symbols and expressions of the same hidden Reality.

From this symbolic attitude came the tendency to make everything in society a sacrament, religious and sacrosanct, but as yet with a large and vigorous freedom in all its forms,—a freedom which we do not find in the rigidity of "savage" communities because these have already passed out of the symbolic into the conventional stage though on a curve of degeneration instead of a curve of growth. The spiritual idea governs all; the symbolic religious forms which support it are fixed in principle; the social forms are lax, free and capable of infinite development. One thing, however, begins to progress towards a firm fixity and this is the psychological type. Thus we have first the symbolic idea of the four orders, expressing — to employ an abstractly figurative language which the Vedic thinkers would not have used nor perhaps understood, but which helps best our modern understanding — the Divine as knowledge in man, the Divine as power, the Divine as production, enjoyment and mutuality, the Divine as service, obedience and work. These divisions answer to four cosmic principles, the Wisdom that conceives the order and principle of things, the Power that sanctions, upholds and enforces it, the Harmony that creates the arrangement of its parts, the Work that carries out what the rest direct. Next, out of this idea there developed a firm but not yet rigid social order based primarily upon temperament and psychic type² with a corresponding ethical discipline and secondarily upon the social and economic function.³ But the function was determined by its suitability to the type and its helpfulness to the discipline; it was not the

² *guna*.

³ *karma*.

primary or sole factor. The first, the symbolic stage of this evolution is predominantly religious and spiritual; the other elements, psychological, ethical, economic, physical are there but subordinated to the spiritual and religious idea. The second stage, which we may call the typal, is predominantly psychological and ethical; all else, even the spiritual and religious, is subordinate to the psychological idea and to the ethical ideal which expresses it. Religion becomes then a mystic sanction for the ethical motive and discipline, Dharma; that becomes its chief social utility, and for the rest it takes a more and more other-worldly turn. The idea of the direct expression of the divine Being or cosmic Principle in man ceases to dominate or to be the leader and in the forefront; it recedes, stands in the background and finally disappears from the practice and in the end even from the theory of life.

This typal stage creates the great social ideals which remain impressed upon the human mind even when the stage itself is passed. The principal active contribution it leaves behind when it is dead is the idea of social honour; the honour of the Brahmin which resides in purity, in piety, in a high reverence for the things of the mind and spirit and a disinterested possession and exclusive pursuit of learning and knowledge; the honour of the Kshatriya which lives in courage, chivalry, strength, a certain proud self-restraint and self-mastery, nobility of character and the obligations of that nobility; the honour of the Vaishya which maintains itself by rectitude of dealing, mercantile fidelity, sound production, order, liberality and philanthropy; the honour of the Shudra which gives itself in obedience, subordination, faithful service, a disinterested attachment. But these more and more cease to have a living root in the clear psychological idea or to spring naturally out of the inner life of the man; they become a convention, though the most noble of conventions. In the end they remain more as a tradition in the thought and on the lips than a reality of the life.

For the typal passes naturally into the conventional stage. The conventional stage of human society is born when the external supports, the outward expressions of the spirit or the ideal become more important than the ideal, the body or even the

clothes more important than the person. Thus in the evolution of caste, the outward supports of the ethical fourfold order,— birth, economic function, religious ritual and sacrament, family custom,— each began to exaggerate enormously its proportions and its importance in the scheme. At first, birth does not seem to have been of the first importance in the social order, for faculty and capacity prevailed; but afterwards, as the type fixed itself, its maintenance by education and tradition became necessary and education and tradition naturally fixed themselves in a hereditary groove. Thus the son of a Brahmin came always to be looked upon conventionally as a Brahmin; birth and profession were together the double bond of the hereditary convention at the time when it was most firm and faithful to its own character. This rigidity once established, the maintenance of the ethical type passed from the first place to a secondary or even a quite tertiary importance. Once the very basis of the system, it came now to be a not indispensable crown or pendent tassel, insisted upon indeed by the thinker and the ideal code-maker but not by the actual rule of society or its practice. Once ceasing to be indispensable, it came inevitably to be dispensed with except as an ornamental fiction. Finally, even the economic basis began to disintegrate; birth, family custom and remnants, deformations, new accretions of meaningless or fanciful religious sign and ritual, the very scarecrow and caricature of the old profound symbolism, became the riveting links of the system of caste in the iron age of the old society. In the full economic period of caste the priest and the Pundit masquerade under the name of the Brahmin, the aristocrat and feudal baron under the name of the Kshatriya, the trader and money-getter under the name of the Vaishya, the half-fed labourer and economic serf under the name of the Shudra. When the economic basis also breaks down, then the unclean and diseased decrepitude of the old system has begun; it has become a name, a shell, a sham and must either be dissolved in the crucible of an individualist period of society or else fatally affect with weakness and falsehood the system of life that clings to it. That in visible fact is the last and present state of the caste system in India.

The tendency of the conventional age of society is to fix, to arrange firmly, to formalise, to erect a system of rigid grades and hierarchies, to stereotype religion, to bind education and training to a traditional and unchangeable form, to subject thought to infallible authorities, to cast a stamp of finality on what seems to it the finished life of man. The conventional period of society has its golden age when the spirit and thought that inspired its forms are confined but yet living, not yet altogether walled in, not yet stifled to death and petrified by the growing hardness of the structure in which they are cased. That golden age is often very beautiful and attractive to the distant view of posterity by its precise order, symmetry, fine social architecture, the admirable subordination of its parts to a general and noble plan. Thus at one time the modern litterateur, artist or thinker looked back often with admiration and with something like longing to the mediaeval age of Europe; he forgot in its distant appearance of poetry, nobility, spirituality the much folly, ignorance, iniquity, cruelty and oppression of those harsh ages, the suffering and revolt that simmered below these fine surfaces, the misery and squalor that was hidden behind that splendid façade. So too the Hindu orthodox idealist looks back to a perfectly regulated society devoutly obedient to the wise yoke of the Shastra, and that is his golden age,—a nobler one than the European in which the apparent gold was mostly hard burnished copper with a thin gold-leaf covering it, but still of an alloyed metal, not the true Satya Yuga. In these conventional periods of society there is much indeed that is really fine and sound and helpful to human progress, but still they are its copper age and not the true golden; they are the age when the Truth we strive to arrive at is not realised, not accomplished,⁴ but the exiguity of it eked out or its full appearance imitated by an artistic form, and what we have of the reality has begun to fossilise and is doomed to be lost in a hard mass of rule and order and convention.

For always the form prevails and the spirit recedes and

⁴ The Indian names of the golden age are Satya, the Age of the Truth, and Krita, the Age when the law of the Truth is accomplished.

diminishes. It attempts indeed to return, to revive the form, to modify it, anyhow to survive and even to make the form survive; but the time-tendency is too strong. This is visible in the history of religion; the efforts of the saints and religious reformers become progressively more scattered, brief and superficial in their actual effects, however strong and vital the impulse. We see this recession in the growing darkness and weakness of India in her last millennium; the constant effort of the most powerful spiritual personalities kept the soul of the people alive but failed to resuscitate the ancient free force and truth and vigour or permanently revivify a conventionalised and stagnating society; in a generation or two the iron grip of that conventionalism has always fallen on the new movement and annexed the names of its founders. We see it in Europe in the repeated moral tragedy of ecclesiasticism and Catholic monasticism. Then there arrives a period when the gulf between the convention and the truth becomes intolerable and the men of intellectual power arise, the great "swallowers of formulas", who, rejecting robustly or fiercely or with the calm light of reason symbol and type and convention, strike at the walls of the prison-house and seek by the individual reason, moral sense or emotional desire the Truth that society has lost or buried in its whitened sepulchres. It is then that the individualistic age of religion and thought and society is created; the Age of Protestantism has begun, the Age of Reason, the Age of Revolt, Progress, Freedom. A partial and external freedom, still betrayed by the conventional age that preceded it into the idea that the Truth can be found in outsides, dreaming vainly that perfection can be determined by machinery, but still a necessary passage to the subjective period of humanity through which man has to circle back towards the recovery of his deeper self and a new upward line or a new revolving cycle of civilisation.

Chapter II

The Age of Individualism and Reason

AN INDIVIDUALISTIC age of human society comes as a result of the corruption and failure of the conventional, as a revolt against the reign of the petrified typal figure. Before it can be born it is necessary that the old truths shall have been lost in the soul and practice of the race and that even the conventions which ape and replace them shall have become devoid of real sense and intelligence; stripped of all practical justification, they exist only mechanically by fixed idea, by the force of custom, by attachment to the form. It is then that men in spite of the natural conservatism of the social mind are compelled at last to perceive that the Truth is dead in them and that they are living by a lie. The individualism of the new age is an attempt to get back from conventionalism of belief and practice to some solid bed-rock, no matter what, of real and tangible Truth. And it is necessarily individualistic, because all the old general standards have become bankrupt and can no longer give any inner help; it is therefore the individual who has to become a discoverer, a pioneer, and to search out by his individual reason, intuition, idealism, desire, claim upon life or whatever other light he finds in himself the true law of the world and of his own being. By that, when he has found or thinks he has found it, he will strive to rebase on a firm foundation and remould in a more vital even if a poorer form religion, society, ethics, political institutions, his relations with his fellows, his strivings for his own perfection and his labour for mankind.

It is in Europe that the age of individualism has taken birth and exercised its full sway; the East has entered into it only by contact and influence, not from an original impulse. And it is to its passion for the discovery of the actual truth of things and for

the governing of human life by whatever law of the truth it has found that the West owes its centuries of strength, vigour, light, progress, irresistible expansion. Equally, it is due not to any original falsehood in the ideals on which its life was founded, but to the loss of the living sense of the Truth it once held and its long contented slumber in the cramping bonds of a mechanical conventionalism that the East has found itself helpless in the hour of its awakening, a giant empty of strength, inert masses of men who had forgotten how to deal freely with facts and forces because they had learned only how to live in a world of stereotyped thought and customary action. Yet the truths which Europe has found by its individualistic age covered only the first more obvious, physical and outward facts of life and only such of their more hidden realities and powers as the habit of analytical reason and the pursuit of practical utility can give to man. If its rationalistic civilisation has swept so triumphantly over the world, it is because it found no deeper and more powerful truth to confront it; for all the rest of mankind was still in the inactivity of the last dark hours of the conventional age.

The individualistic age of Europe was in its beginning a revolt of reason, in its culmination a triumphal progress of physical Science. Such an evolution was historically inevitable. The dawn of individualism is always a questioning, a denial. The individual finds a religion imposed upon him which does not base its dogma and practice upon a living sense of ever verifiable spiritual Truth, but on the letter of an ancient book, the infallible dictum of a Pope, the tradition of a Church, the learned casuistry of schoolmen and Pundits, conclaves of ecclesiastics, heads of monastic orders, doctors of all sorts, all of them unquestionable tribunals whose sole function is to judge and pronounce, but none of whom seems to think it necessary or even allowable to search, test, prove, inquire, discover. He finds that, as is inevitable under such a regime, true science and knowledge are either banned, punished and persecuted or else rendered obsolete by the habit of blind reliance on fixed authorities; even what is true in old authorities is no longer of any value, because its words are learnedly or ignorantly repeated but its real

sense is no longer lived except at most by a few. In politics he finds everywhere divine rights, established privileges, sanctified tyrannies which are evidently armed with an oppressive power and justify themselves by long prescription, but seem to have no real claim or title to exist. In the social order he finds an equally stereotyped reign of convention, fixed disabilities, fixed privileges, the self-regarding arrogance of the high, the blind prostration of the low, while the old functions which might have justified at one time such a distribution of status are either not performed at all or badly performed without any sense of obligation and merely as a part of caste pride. He has to rise in revolt; on every claim of authority he has to turn the eye of a resolute inquisition; when he is told that this is the sacred truth of things or the command of God or the immemorial order of human life, he has to reply, "But is it really so? How shall I know that this is the truth of things and not superstition and falsehood? When did God command it, or how do I know that this was the sense of His command and not your error or invention, or that the book on which you found yourself is His word at all, or that He has ever spoken His will to mankind? This immemorial order of which you speak, is it really immemorial, really a law of Nature or an imperfect result of Time and at present a most false convention? And of all you say, still I must ask, does it agree with the facts of the world, with my sense of right, with my judgment of truth, with my experience of reality?" And if it does not, the revolting individual flings off the yoke, declares the truth as he sees it and in doing so strikes inevitably at the root of the religious, the social, the political, momentarily perhaps even the moral order of the community as it stands, because it stands upon the authority he discredits and the convention he destroys and not upon a living truth which can be successfully opposed to his own. The champions of the old order may be right when they seek to suppress him as a destructive agency perilous to social security, political order or religious tradition; but he stands there and can no other, because to destroy is his mission, to destroy falsehood and lay bare a new foundation of truth.

But by what individual faculty or standard shall the innovator find out his new foundation or establish his new measures? Evidently, it will depend upon the available enlightenment of the time and the possible forms of knowledge to which he has access. At first it was in religion a personal illumination supported in the West by a theological, in the East by a philosophical reasoning. In society and politics it started with a crude primitive perception of natural right and justice which took its origin from the exasperation of suffering or from an awakened sense of general oppression, wrong, injustice and the indefensibility of the existing order when brought to any other test than that of privilege and established convention. The religious motive led at first; the social and political, moderating itself after the swift suppression of its first crude and vehement movements, took advantage of the upheaval of religious reformation, followed behind it as a useful ally and waited its time to assume the lead when the spiritual momentum had been spent and, perhaps by the very force of the secular influences it called to its aid, had missed its way. The movement of religious freedom in Europe took its stand first on a limited, then on an absolute right of the individual experience and illumined reason to determine the true sense of inspired Scripture and the true Christian ritual and order of the Church. The vehemence of its claim was measured by the vehemence of its revolt from the usurpations, pretensions and brutalities of the ecclesiastical power which claimed to withhold the Scripture from general knowledge and impose by moral authority and physical violence its own arbitrary interpretation of Sacred Writ, if not indeed another and substituted doctrine, on the recalcitrant individual conscience. In its more tepid and moderate forms the revolt engendered such compromises as the Episcopalian Churches, at a higher degree of fervour Calvinistic Puritanism, at white heat a riot of individual religious judgment and imagination in such sects as the Anabaptist, Independent, Socinian and countless others. In the East such a movement divorced from all political or any strongly iconoclastic social significance would have produced simply a series of religious reformers, illumined saints,

new bodies of belief with their appropriate cultural and social practice; in the West atheism and secularism were its inevitable and predestined goal. At first questioning the conventional forms of religion, the mediation of the priesthood between God and the soul and the substitution of Papal authority for the authority of the Scripture, it could not fail to go forward and question the Scripture itself and then all supernaturalism, religious belief or suprarational truth no less than outward creed and institute.

For, eventually, the evolution of Europe was determined less by the Reformation than by the Renascence; it flowered by the vigorous return of the ancient Graeco-Roman mentality of the one rather than by the Hebraic and religio-ethical temperament of the other. The Renascence gave back to Europe on one hand the free curiosity of the Greek mind, its eager search for first principles and rational laws, its delighted intellectual scrutiny of the facts of life by the force of direct observation and individual reasoning, on the other the Roman's large practicality and his sense for the ordering of life in harmony with a robust utility and the just principles of things. But both these tendencies were pursued with a passion, a seriousness, a moral and almost religious ardour which, lacking in the ancient Graeco-Roman mentality, Europe owed to her long centuries of Judaeo-Christian discipline. It was from these sources that the individualistic age of Western society sought ultimately for that principle of order and control which all human society needs and which more ancient times attempted to realise first by the materialisation of fixed symbols of truth, then by ethical type and discipline, finally by infallible authority or stereotyped convention.

Manifestly, the unrestrained use of individual illumination or judgment without either any outer standard or any generally recognisable source of truth is a perilous experiment for our imperfect race. It is likely to lead rather to a continual fluctuation and disorder of opinion than to a progressive unfolding of the truth of things. No less, the pursuit of social justice through the stark assertion of individual rights or class interests and desires must be a source of continual struggle and revolution and may end in an exaggerated assertion of the will in each to

live his own life and to satisfy his own ideas and desires which will produce a serious malaise or a radical trouble in the social body. Therefore on every individualistic age of mankind there is imperative the search for two supreme desiderata. It must find a general standard of Truth to which the individual judgment of all will be inwardly compelled to subscribe without physical constraint or imposition of irrational authority. And it must reach too some principle of social order which shall be equally founded on a universally recognisable truth of things; an order is needed that will put a rein on desire and interest by providing at least some intellectual and moral test which these two powerful and dangerous forces must satisfy before they can feel justified in asserting their claims on life. Speculative and scientific reason for their means, the pursuit of a practicable social justice and sound utility for their spirit, the progressive nations of Europe set out on their search for this light and this law.

They found and held it with enthusiasm in the discoveries of physical Science. The triumphant domination, the all-shattering and irresistible victory of Science in nineteenth-century Europe is explained by the absolute perfection with which it at least seemed for a time to satisfy these great psychological wants of the Western mind. Science seemed to it to fulfil impeccably its search for the two supreme desiderata of an individualistic age. Here at last was a truth of things which depended on no doubtful Scripture or fallible human authority but which Mother Nature herself had written in her eternal book for all to read who had patience to observe and intellectual honesty to judge. Here were laws, principles, fundamental facts of the world and of our being which all could verify at once for themselves and which must therefore satisfy and guide the free individual judgment, delivering it equally from alien compulsion and from erratic self-will. Here were laws and truths which justified and yet controlled the claims and desires of the individual human being; here a science which provided a standard, a norm of knowledge, a rational basis for life, a clear outline and sovereign means for the progress and perfection of the individual and the race. The attempt to govern and organise human life by verifiable Science,

by a law, a truth of things, an order and principles which all can observe and verify in their ground and fact and to which therefore all may freely and must rationally subscribe, is the culminating movement of European civilisation. It has been the fulfilment and triumph of the individualistic age of human society; it has seemed likely also to be its end, the cause of the death of individualism and its putting away and burial among the monuments of the past.

For this discovery by individual free-thought of universal laws of which the individual is almost a by-product and by which he must necessarily be governed, this attempt actually to govern the social life of humanity in conscious accordance with the mechanism of these laws seems to lead logically to the suppression of that very individual freedom which made the discovery and the attempt at all possible. In seeking the truth and law of his own being the individual seems to have discovered a truth and law which is not of his own individual being at all, but of the collectivity, the pack, the hive, the mass. The result to which this points and to which it still seems irresistibly to be driving us is a new ordering of society by a rigid economic or governmental Socialism in which the individual, deprived again of his freedom in his own interest and that of humanity, must have his whole life and action determined for him at every step and in every point from birth to old age by the well-ordered mechanism of the State.¹ We might then have a curious new version, with very important differences, of the old Asiatic or even of the old Indian order of society. In place of the religio-ethical sanction there will be a scientific and rational or naturalistic motive and rule; instead of the Brahmin Shastrakara the scientific, administrative and economic expert. In the place of the King himself observing the law and compelling with the aid and consent of the society all to tread without deviation

¹ We already see a violent though incomplete beginning of this line of social evolution in Fascist Italy, Nazi Germany, Communist Russia. The trend is for more and more nations to accept this beginning of a new order, and the resistance of the old order is more passive than active—it lacks the fire, enthusiasm and self-confidence which animates the innovating Idea.

the line marked out for them, the line of the Dharma, there will stand the collectivist State similarly guided and empowered. Instead of a hierarchical arrangement of classes each with its powers, privileges and duties there will be established an initial equality of education and opportunity, ultimately perhaps with a subsequent determination of function by experts who shall know us better than ourselves and choose for us our work and quality. Marriage, generation and the education of the child may be fixed by the scientific State as of old by the Shastra. For each man there will be a long stage of work for the State superintended by collectivist authorities and perhaps in the end a period of liberation, not for action but for enjoyment of leisure and personal self-improvement, answering to the Vanaprastha and Sannyasa Asramas of the old Aryan society. The rigidity of such a social state would greatly surpass that of its Asiatic forerunner; for there at least there were for the rebel, the innovator two important concessions. There was for the individual the freedom of an early Sannyasa, a renunciation of the social for the free spiritual life, and there was for the group the liberty to form a sub-society governed by new conceptions like the Sikh or the Vaishnava. But neither of these violent departures from the norm could be tolerated by a strictly economic and rigorously scientific and unitarian society. Obviously, too, there would grow up a fixed system of social morality and custom and a body of socialistic doctrine which one could not be allowed to question practically, and perhaps not even intellectually, since that would soon shatter or else undermine the system. Thus we should have a new typal order based upon purely economic capacity and function, *gunakarma*, and rapidly petrifying by the inhibition of individual liberty into a system of rationalistic conventions. And quite certainly this static order would at long last be broken by a new individualist age of revolt, led probably by the principles of an extreme philosophical Anarchism.

On the other hand, there are in operation forces which seem likely to frustrate or modify this development before it can reach its menaced consummation. In the first place, rationalistic and physical Science has overpassed itself and must before long be

overtaken by a mounting flood of psychological and psychic knowledge which cannot fail to compel quite a new view of the human being and open a new vista before mankind. At the same time the Age of Reason is visibly drawing to an end; novel ideas are sweeping over the world and are being accepted with a significant rapidity, ideas inevitably subversive of any premature typal order of economic rationalism, dynamic ideas such as Nietzsche's Will-to-live, Bergson's exaltation of Intuition above intellect or the latest German philosophical tendency to acknowledge a suprarational faculty and a suprarational order of truths. Already another mental poise is beginning to settle and conceptions are on the way to apply themselves in the field of practice which promise to give the succession of the individualistic age of society not to a new typal order, but to a subjective age which may well be a great and momentous passage to a very different goal. It may be doubted whether we are not already in the morning twilight of a new period of the human cycle.

Secondly, the West in its triumphant conquest of the world has awakened the slumbering East and has produced in its midst an increasing struggle between an imported Western individualism and the old conventional principle of society. The latter is here rapidly, there slowly breaking down, but something quite different from Western individualism may very well take its place. Some opine, indeed, that Asia will reproduce Europe's Age of Reason with all its materialism and secularist individualism while Europe itself is pushing onward into new forms and ideas; but this is in the last degree improbable. On the contrary, the signs are that the individualistic period in the East will be neither of long duration nor predominantly rationalistic and secularist in its character. If then the East, as the result of its awakening, follows its own bent and evolves a novel social tendency and culture, that is bound to have an enormous effect on the direction of the world's civilisation; we can measure its probable influence by the profound results of the first reflux of the ideas even of the unawakened East upon Europe. Whatever that effect may be, it will not be in favour of any re-ordering of society on the lines of the still current tendency towards a

mechanical economism which has not ceased to dominate mind and life in the Occident. The influence of the East is likely to be rather in the direction of subjectivism and practical spirituality, a greater opening of our physical existence to the realisation of ideals other than the strong but limited aims suggested by the life and the body in their own gross nature.

But, most important of all, the individualistic age of Europe has in its discovery of the individual fixed among the idea-forces of the future two of a master potency which cannot be entirely eliminated by any temporary reaction. The first of these, now universally accepted, is the democratic conception of the right of all individuals as members of the society to the full life and the full development of which they are individually capable. It is no longer possible that we should accept as an ideal any arrangement by which certain classes of society should arrogate development and full social fruition to themselves while assigning a bare and barren function of service alone to others. It is now fixed that social development and well-being mean the development and well-being of all the individuals in the society and not merely a flourishing of the community in the mass which resolves itself really into the splendour and power of one or two classes. This conception has been accepted in full by all progressive nations and is the basis of the present socialistic tendency of the world. But in addition there is this deeper truth which individualism has discovered, that the individual is not merely a social unit; his existence, his right and claim to live and grow are not founded solely on his social work and function. He is not merely a member of a human pack, hive or ant-hill; he is something in himself, a soul, a being, who has to fulfil his own individual truth and law as well as his natural or his assigned part in the truth and law of the collective existence.² He demands freedom, space, initiative for his soul, for his nature, for that puissant and tremendous thing which society so much

² This is no longer recognised by the new order, Fascist or Communistic,—here the individual is reduced to a cell or atom of the social body. "We have destroyed" proclaims a German exponent "the false view that men are individual beings; there is no liberty of individuals, there is only liberty of nations or races."

distrusts and has laboured in the past either to suppress altogether or to relegate to the purely spiritual field, an individual thought, will and conscience. If he is to merge these eventually, it cannot be into the dominating thought, will and conscience of others, but into something beyond into which he and all must be both allowed and helped freely to grow. That is an idea, a truth which, intellectually recognised and given its full exterior and superficial significance by Europe, agrees at its root with the profoundest and highest spiritual conceptions of Asia and has a large part to play in the moulding of the future.

Chapter III

The Coming of the Subjective Age

THE INHERENT aim and effort and justification, the psychological seed-cause, the whole tendency of development of an individualistic age of mankind, all go back to the one dominant need of rediscovering the substantial truths of life, thought and action which have been overlaid by the falsehood of conventional standards no longer alive to the truth of the ideas from which their conventions started. It would seem at first that the shortest way would be to return to the original ideas themselves for light, to rescue the kernel of their truth from the shell of convention in which it has become incrusted. But to this course there is a great practical obstacle; and there is another which reaches beyond the surface of things, nearer to the deeper principles of the development of the soul in human society. The recovery of the old original ideas now travestied by convention is open to the practical disadvantage that it tends after a time to restore force to the conventions which the Time-Spirit is seeking to outgrow and, if or when the deeper truth-seeking tendency slackens in its impulse, the conventions re-establish their sway. They revive, modified, no doubt, but still powerful; a new incrustation sets in, the truth of things is overlaid by a more complex falsity. And even if it were otherwise, the need of a developing humanity is not to return always to its old ideas. Its need is to progress to a larger fulfilment in which, if the old is taken up, it must be transformed and exceeded. For the underlying truth of things is constant and eternal, but its mental figures, its life forms, its physical embodiments call constantly for growth and change.

It is this principle and necessity that justify an age of individualism and rationalism and make it, however short it may be, an inevitable period in the cycle. A temporary reign of the critical reason largely destructive in its action is an imperative need for

human progress. In India, since the great Buddhistic upheaval of the national thought and life, there has been a series of recurrent attempts to rediscover the truth of the soul and life and get behind the veil of stifling conventions; but these have been conducted by a wide and tolerant spiritual reason, a plastic soul-intuition and deep subjective seeking, insufficiently militant and destructive. Although productive of great internal and considerable external changes, they have never succeeded in getting rid of the predominant conventional order. The work of a dissolvent and destructive intellectual criticism, though not entirely absent from some of these movements, has never gone far enough; the constructive force, insufficiently aided by the destructive, has not been able to make a wide and free space for its new formation. It is only with the period of European influence and impact that circumstances and tendencies powerful enough to enforce the beginnings of a new age of radical and effective revaluation of ideas and things have come into existence. The characteristic power of these influences has been throughout—or at any rate till quite recently—rationalistic, utilitarian and individualistic. It has compelled the national mind to view everything from a new, searching and critical standpoint, and even those who seek to preserve the present or restore the past are obliged unconsciously or half-consciously to justify their endeavour from the novel point of view and by its appropriate standards of reasoning. Throughout the East, the subjective Asiatic mind is being driven to adapt itself to the need for changed values of life and thought. It has been forced to turn upon itself both by the pressure of Western knowledge and by the compulsion of a quite changed life-need and life-environment. What it did not do from within, has come on it as a necessity from without and this externality has carried with it an immense advantage as well as great dangers.

The individualistic age is, then, a radical attempt of mankind to discover the truth and law both of the individual being and of the world to which the individual belongs. It may begin, as it began in Europe, with the endeavour to get back, more especially in the sphere of religion, to the original truth which convention

has overlaid, defaced or distorted; but from that first step it must proceed to others and in the end to a general questioning of the foundations of thought and practice in all the spheres of human life and action. A revolutionary reconstruction of religion, philosophy, science, art and society is the last inevitable outcome. It proceeds at first by the light of the individual mind and reason, by its demand on life and its experience of life; but it must go from the individual to the universal. For the effort of the individual soon shows him that he cannot securely discover the truth and law of his own being without discovering some universal law and truth to which he can relate it. Of the universe he is a part; in all but his deepest spirit he is its subject, a small cell in that tremendous organic mass: his substance is drawn from its substance and by the law of its life the law of his life is determined and governed. From a new view and knowledge of the world must proceed his new view and knowledge of himself, of his power and capacity and limitations, of his claim on existence and the high road and the distant or immediate goal of his individual and social destiny.

In Europe and in modern times this has taken the form of a clear and potent physical Science: it has proceeded by the discovery of the laws of the physical universe and the economic and sociological conditions of human life as determined by the physical being of man, his environment, his evolutionary history, his physical and vital, his individual and collective need. But after a time it must become apparent that the knowledge of the physical world is not the whole of knowledge; it must appear that man is a mental as well as a physical and vital being and even much more essentially mental than physical or vital. Even though his psychology is strongly affected and limited by his physical being and environment, it is not at its roots determined by them, but constantly reacts, subtly determines their action, effects even their new-shaping by the force of his psychological demand on life. His economic state and social institutions are themselves governed by his psychological demand on the possibilities, circumstances, tendencies created by the relation between the mind and soul of humanity and its life and body. Therefore to find the

truth of things and the law of his being in relation to that truth he must go deeper and fathom the subjective secret of himself and things as well as their objective forms and surroundings.

This he may attempt to do for a time by the power of the critical and analytic reason which has already carried him so far; but not for very long. For in his study of himself and the world he cannot but come face to face with the soul in himself and the soul in the world and find it to be an entity so profound, so complex, so full of hidden secrets and powers that his intellectual reason betrays itself as an insufficient light and a fumbling seeker: it is successfully analytical only of superficialities and of what lies just behind the superficies. The need of a deeper knowledge must then turn him to the discovery of new powers and means within himself. He finds that he can only know himself entirely by becoming actively self-conscious and not merely self-critical, by more and more living in his soul and acting out of it rather than floundering on surfaces, by putting himself into conscious harmony with that which lies behind his superficial mentality and psychology and by enlightening his reason and making dynamic his action through this deeper light and power to which he thus opens. In this process the rationalistic ideal begins to subject itself to the ideal of intuitionist knowledge and a deeper self-awareness; the utilitarian standard gives way to the aspiration towards self-consciousness and self-realisation; the rule of living according to the manifest laws of physical Nature is replaced by the effort towards living according to the veiled Law and Will and Power active in the life of the world and in the inner and outer life of humanity.

All these tendencies, though in a crude, initial and ill-developed form, are manifest now in the world and are growing from day to day with a significant rapidity. And their emergence and greater dominance means the transition from the rationalistic and utilitarian period of human development which individualism has created to a greater subjective age of society. The change began by a rapid turning of the current of thought into large and profound movements contradictory of the old intellectual standards, a swift breaking of the old tables. The

materialism of the nineteenth century gave place first to a novel and profound vitalism which has taken various forms from Nietzsche's theory of the Will to be and Will to Power as the root and law of life to the new pluralistic and pragmatic philosophy which is pluralistic because it has its eye fixed on life rather than on the soul and pragmatic because it seeks to interpret being in the terms of force and action rather than of light and knowledge. These tendencies of thought, which had until yesterday a profound influence on the life and thought of Europe prior to the outbreak of the great War, especially in France and Germany, were not a mere superficial recoil from intellectualism to life and action,—although in their application by lesser minds they often assumed that aspect; they were an attempt to read profoundly and live by the Life-Soul of the universe and tended to be deeply psychological and subjective in their method. From behind them, arising in the void created by the discrediting of the old rationalistic intellectualism, there had begun to arise a new Intuitionism, not yet clearly aware of its own drive and nature, which seeks through the forms and powers of Life for that which is behind Life and sometimes even lays as yet uncertain hands on the sealed doors of the Spirit.

The art, music and literature of the world, always a sure index of the vital tendencies of the age, have also undergone a profound revolution in the direction of an ever-deepening subjectivism. The great objective art and literature of the past no longer commands the mind of the new age. The first tendency was, as in thought so in literature, an increasing psychological vitalism which sought to represent penetratingly the most subtle psychological impulses and tendencies of man as they started to the surface in his emotional, aesthetic and vitalistic cravings and activities. Composed with great skill and subtlety but without any real insight into the law of man's being, these creations seldom got behind the reverse side of our surface emotions, sensations and actions which they minutely analysed in their details but without any wide or profound light of knowledge; they were perhaps more immediately interesting but ordinarily inferior as art to the old literature which at least seized firmly and with a

large and powerful mastery on its province. Often they described the malady of Life rather than its health and power, or the riot and revolt of its cravings, vehement and therefore impotent and unsatisfied, rather than its dynamis of self-expression and self-possession. But to this movement which reached its highest creative power in Russia, there succeeded a turn towards a more truly psychological art, music and literature, mental, intuitive, psychic rather than vitalistic, departing in fact from a superficial vitalism as much as its predecessors departed from the objective mind of the past. This new movement aimed like the new philosophic Intuitionism at a real rending of the veil, the seizure by the human mind of that which does not overtly express itself, the touch and penetration into the hidden soul of things. Much of it was still infirm, unsubstantial in its grasp on what it pursued, rudimentary in its forms, but it initiated a decisive departure of the human mind from its old moorings and pointed the direction in which it is being piloted on a momentous voyage of discovery, the discovery of a new world within which must eventually bring about the creation of a new world without in life and society. Art and literature seem definitely to have taken a turn towards a subjective search into what may be called the hidden inside of things and away from the rational and objective canon or motive.

Already in the practical dealing with life there are advanced progressive tendencies which take their inspiration from this profounder subjectivism. Nothing indeed has yet been firmly accomplished, all is as yet tentative initiation and the first feeling out towards a material shape for this new spirit. The dominant activities of the world, the great recent events such as the enormous clash of nations in Europe and the stirrings and changes within the nations which preceded and followed it, were rather the result of a confused half struggle half effort at accommodation between the old intellectual and materialistic and the new still superficial subjective and vitalistic impulses in the West. The latter unenlightened by a true inner growth of the soul were necessarily impelled to seize upon the former and utilise them for their unbridled demand upon life; the world was moving

towards a monstrously perfect organisation of the Will-to-live and the Will-to-power and it was this that threw itself out in the clash of War and has now found or is finding new forms of life for itself which show better its governing idea and motive. The Asuric or even Rakshasic character of the recent world-collision was due to this formidable combination of a falsely enlightened vitalistic motive-power with a great force of servile intelligence and reasoning contrivance subjected to it as instrument and the genius of an accomplished materialistic Science as its Djinn, its giant worker of huge, gross and soulless miracles. The War was the bursting of the explosive force so created and, even though it strewed the world with ruins, its after results may well have prepared the collapse, as they have certainly produced a disintegrating chaos or at least poignant disorder, of the monstrous combination which produced it, and by that salutary ruin are emptying the field of human life of the principal obstacles to a truer development towards a higher goal.

Behind it all the hope of the race lies in those infant and as yet subordinate tendencies which carry in them the seed of a new subjective and psychic dealing of man with his own being, with his fellow-men and with the ordering of his individual and social life. The characteristic note of these tendencies may be seen in the new ideas about the education and upbringing of the child that became strongly current in the pre-war era. Formerly, education was merely a mechanical forcing of the child's nature into arbitrary grooves of training and knowledge in which his individual subjectivity was the last thing considered, and his family upbringing was a constant repression and compulsory shaping of his habits, his thoughts, his character into the mould fixed for them by the conventional ideas or individual interests and ideals of the teachers and parents. The discovery that education must be a bringing out of the child's own intellectual and moral capacities to their highest possible value and must be based on the psychology of the child-nature was a step forward towards a more healthy because a more subjective system; but it still fell short because it still regarded him as an object to be handled and moulded by the teacher, to be educated. But at least

there was a glimmering of the realisation that each human being is a self-developing soul and that the business of both parent and teacher is to enable and to help the child to educate himself, to develop his own intellectual, moral, aesthetic and practical capacities and to grow freely as an organic being, not to be kneaded and pressured into form like an inert plastic material. It is not yet realised what this soul is or that the true secret, whether with child or man, is to help him to find his deeper self, the real psychic entity within. That, if we ever give it a chance to come forward, and still more if we call it into the foreground as "the leader of the march set in our front", will itself take up most of the business of education out of our hands and develop the capacity of the psychological being towards a realisation of its potentialities of which our present mechanical view of life and man and external routine methods of dealing with them prevent us from having any experience or forming any conception. These new educational methods are on the straight way to this truer dealing. The closer touch attempted with the psychical entity behind the vital and physical mentality and an increasing reliance on its possibilities must lead to the ultimate discovery that man is inwardly a soul and a conscious power of the Divine and that the evocation of this real man within is the right object of education and indeed of all human life if it would find and live according to the hidden Truth and deepest law of its own being. That was the knowledge which the ancients sought to express through religious and social symbolism, and subjectivism is a road of return to the lost knowledge. First deepening man's inner experience, restoring perhaps on an unprecedented scale insight and self-knowledge to the race, it must end by revolutionising his social and collective self-expression.

Meanwhile, the nascent subjectivism preparative of the new age has shown itself not so much in the relations of individuals or in the dominant ideas and tendencies of social development, which are still largely rationalistic and materialistic and only vaguely touched by the deeper subjective tendency, but in the new collective self-consciousness of man in that organic mass of his life which he has most firmly developed in the past, the

nation. It is here that it has already begun to produce powerful results whether as a vitalistic or as a psychical subjectivism, and it is here that we shall see most clearly what is its actual drift, its deficiencies, its dangers as well as the true purpose and conditions of a subjective age of humanity and the goal towards which the social cycle, entering this phase, is intended to arrive in its wide revolution.

Chapter IV

The Discovery of the Nation-Soul

THE PRIMAL law and purpose of the individual life is to seek its own self-development. Consciously or half-consciously or with an obscure unconscious groping it strives always and rightly strives at self-formulation,—to find itself, to discover within itself the law and power of its own being and to fulfil it. This aim in it is fundamental, right, inevitable because, even after all qualifications have been made and caveats entered, the individual is not merely the ephemeral physical creature, a form of mind and body that aggregates and dissolves, but a being, a living power of the eternal Truth, a self-manifesting spirit. In the same way the primal law and purpose of a society, community or nation is to seek its own self-fulfilment; it strives rightly to find itself, to become aware within itself of the law and power of its own being and to fulfil it as perfectly as possible, to realise all its potentialities, to live its own self-revealing life. The reason is the same; for this too is a being, a living power of the eternal Truth, a self-manifestation of the cosmic Spirit, and it is there to express and fulfil in its own way and to the degree of its capacities the special truth and power and meaning of the cosmic Spirit that is within it. The nation or society, like the individual, has a body, an organic life, a moral and aesthetic temperament, a developing mind and a soul behind all these signs and powers for the sake of which they exist. One may say even that, like the individual, it essentially is a soul rather than has one; it is a group-soul that, once having attained to a separate distinctness, must become more and more self-conscious and find itself more and more fully as it develops its corporate action and mentality and its organic self-expressive life.

The parallel is just at every turn because it is more than a parallel; it is a real identity of nature. There is only this difference that the group-soul is much more complex because it has

a great number of partly self-conscious mental individuals for the constituents of its physical being instead of an association of merely vital subconscious cells. At first, for this very reason, it seems more crude, primitive and artificial in the forms it takes; for it has a more difficult task before it, it needs a longer time to find itself, it is more fluid and less easily organic. When it does succeed in getting out of the stage of vaguely conscious self-formation, its first definite self-consciousness is objective much more than subjective. And so far as it is subjective, it is apt to be superficial or loose and vague. This objectiveness comes out very strongly in the ordinary emotional conception of the nation which centres round its geographical, its most outward and material aspect, the passion for the land in which we dwell, the land of our fathers, the land of our birth, *country, patria, vaterland, jamma-bhumi*. When we realise that the land is only the shell of the body, though a very living shell indeed and potent in its influences on the nation, when we begin to feel that its more real body is the men and women who compose the nation-unit, a body ever changing, yet always the same like that of the individual man, we are on the way to a truly subjective communal consciousness. For then we have some chance of realising that even the physical being of the society is a subjective power, not a mere objective existence. Much more is it in its inner self a great corporate soul with all the possibilities and dangers of the soul-life.

The objective view of society has reigned throughout the historical period of humanity in the West; it has been sufficiently strong though not absolutely engrossing in the East. Rulers, people and thinkers alike have understood by their national existence a political status, the extent of their borders, their economic well-being and expansion, their laws, institutions and the working of these things. For this reason political and economic motives have everywhere predominated on the surface and history has been a record of their operations and influence. The one subjective and psychological force consciously admitted and with difficulty deniable has been that of the individual. This predominance is so great that most modern historians and some

political thinkers have concluded that objective necessities are by law of Nature the only really determining forces, all else is result or superficial accidents of these forces. Scientific history has been conceived as if it must be a record and appreciation of the environmental motives of political action, of the play of economic forces and developments and the course of institutional evolution. The few who still valued the psychological element have kept their eye fixed on individuals and are not far from conceiving of history as a mass of biographies. The truer and more comprehensive science of the future will see that these conditions only apply to the imperfectly self-conscious period of national development. Even then there was always a greater subjective force working behind individuals, policies, economic movements and the change of institutions; but it worked for the most part subconsciously, more as a subliminal self than as a conscious mind. It is when this subconscious power of the group-soul comes to the surface that nations begin to enter into possession of their subjective selves; they set about getting, however vaguely or imperfectly, at their souls.

Certainly, there is always a vague sense of this subjective existence at work even on the surface of the communal mentality. But so far as this vague sense becomes at all definite, it concerns itself mostly with details and unessentials, national idiosyncrasies, habits, prejudices, marked mental tendencies. It is, so to speak, an objective sense of subjectivity. As man has been accustomed to look on himself as a body and a life, the physical animal with a certain moral or immoral temperament, and the things of the mind have been regarded as a fine flower and attainment of the physical life rather than themselves anything essential or the sign of something essential, so and much more has the community regarded that small part of its subjective self of which it becomes aware. It clings indeed always to its idiosyncrasies, habits, prejudices, but in a blind objective fashion, insisting on their most external aspect and not at all going behind them to that for which they stand, that which they try blindly to express.

This has been the rule not only with the nation, but with

all communities. A Church is an organised religious community and religion, if anything in the world, ought to be subjective; for its very reason for existence — where it is not merely an ethical creed with a supernatural authority — is to find and realise the soul. Yet religious history has been almost entirely, except in the time of the founders and their immediate successors, an insistence on things objective, rites, ceremonies, authority, church governments, dogmas, forms of belief. Witness the whole external religious history of Europe, that strange sacrilegious tragi-comedy of discords, sanguinary disputations, "religious" wars, persecutions, State churches and all else that is the very negation of the spiritual life. It is only recently that men have begun seriously to consider what Christianity, Catholicism, Islam really mean and are in their soul, that is to say, in their very reality and essence.

But now we have, very remarkably, very swiftly coming to the surface this new psychological tendency of the communal consciousness. Now first we hear of the soul of a nation and, what is more to the purpose, actually see nations feeling for their souls, trying to find them, seriously endeavouring to act from the new sense and make it consciously operative in the common life and action. It is only natural that this tendency should have been, for the most part, most powerful in new nations or in those struggling to realise themselves in spite of political subjection or defeat. For these need more to feel the difference between themselves and others so that they may assert and justify their individuality as against the powerful superlife which tends to absorb or efface it. And precisely because their objective life is feeble and it is difficult to affirm it by its own strength in the adverse circumstances, there is more chance of their seeking for their individuality and its force of self-assertion in that which is subjective and psychological or at least in that which has a subjective or a psychological significance.

Therefore in nations so circumstanced this tendency of self-finding has been most powerful and has even created in some of them a new type of national movement, as in Ireland and India. This and no other was the root-meaning of Swadeshim.

in Bengal and of the Irish movement in its earlier less purely political stages. The emergence of Bengal as a sub-nation in India was throughout a strongly subjective movement and in its later development it became very consciously that. The movement of 1905 in Bengal pursued a quite new conception of the nation not merely as a country, but a soul, a psychological, almost a spiritual being and, even when acting from economical and political motives, it sought to dynamise them by this subjective conception and to make them instruments of self-expression rather than objects in themselves. We must not forget, however, that in the first stages these movements followed in their superficial thought the old motives of an objective and mostly political self-consciousness. The East indeed is always more subjective than the West and we can see the subjective tinge even in its political movements whether in Persia, India or China, and even in the very imitative movement of the Japanese resurgence. But it is only recently that this subjectivism has become self-conscious. We may therefore conclude that the conscious and deliberate subjectivism of certain nations was only the sign and precursor of a general change in humanity and has been helped forward by local circumstances, but was not really dependent upon them or in any sense their product.

This general change is incontestable; it is one of the capital phenomena of the tendencies of national and communal life at the present hour. The conception to which Ireland and India have been the first to give a definite formula, "to be ourselves", — so different from the impulse and ambition of dependent or unfortunate nations in the past which was rather to become like others,— is now more and more a generally accepted motive of national life. It opens the way to great dangers and errors, but it is the essential condition for that which has now become the demand of the Time-Spirit on the human race, that it shall find subjectively, not only in the individual, but in the nation and in the unity of the human race itself, its deeper being, its inner law, its real self and live according to that and no longer by artificial standards. This tendency was preparing itself everywhere and partly coming to the surface before the War, but most

prominently, as we have said, in new nations like Germany or in dependent nations like Ireland and India. The shock of the war brought about from its earliest moments an immediate—and for the time being a militant—emergence of the same deeper self-consciousness everywhere. Crude enough were most of its first manifestations, often of a really barbarous and reactionary crudeness. Especially, it tended to repeat the Teutonic lapse, preparing not only “to be oneself”, which is entirely right, but to live solely for and to oneself, which, if pushed beyond a certain point, becomes a disastrous error. For it is necessary, if the subjective age of humanity is to produce its best fruits, that the nations should become conscious not only of their own but of each other’s souls and learn to respect, to help and to profit, not only economically and intellectually but subjectively and spiritually, by each other.

The great determining force has been the example and the aggression of Germany; the example, because no other nation has so self-consciously, so methodically, so intelligently, and from the external point of view so successfully sought to find, to dynamise, to live itself and make the most of its own power of being; its aggression, because the very nature and declared watchwords of the attack have tended to arouse a defensive self-consciousness in the assailed and forced them to perceive what was the source of this tremendous strength and to perceive too that they themselves must seek consciously an answering strength in the same deeper sources. Germany was for the time the most remarkable present instance of a nation preparing for the subjective stage because it had, in the first place, a certain kind of vision—unfortunately intellectual rather than illuminated—and the courage to follow it—unfortunately again a vital and intellectual rather than a spiritual hardihood,—and, secondly, being master of its destinies, was able to order its own life so as to express its self-vision. We must not be misled by appearances into thinking that the strength of Germany was created by Bismarck or directed by the Kaiser Wilhelm II. Rather the appearance of Bismarck was in many respects a misfortune for the growing nation because his rude and powerful hand

precipitated its subjectivity into form and action at too early a stage; a longer period of incubation might have produced results less disastrous to itself, if less violently stimulative to humanity. The real source of this great subjective force which has been so much disfigured in its objective action, was not in Germany's statesmen and soldiers — for the most part poor enough types of men — but came from her great philosophers, Kant, Hegel, Fichte, Nietzsche, from her great thinker and poet Goethe, from her great musicians, Beethoven and Wagner, and from all in the German soul and temperament which they represented. A nation whose master achievement has lain almost entirely in the two spheres of philosophy and music, is clearly predestined to lead in the turn to subjectivism and to produce a profound result for good or evil on the beginnings of a subjective age.

This was one side of the predestination of Germany; the other is to be found in her scholars, educationists, scientists, organisers. It was the industry, the conscientious diligence, the fidelity to ideas, the honest and painstaking spirit of work for which the nation has been long famous. A people may be highly gifted in the subjective capacities, and yet if it neglects to cultivate this lower side of our complex nature, it will fail to build that bridge between the idea and imagination and the world of facts, between the vision and the force, which makes realisation possible; its higher powers may become a joy and inspiration to the world, but it will never take possession of its own world until it has learned the humbler lesson. In Germany the bridge was there, though it ran mostly through a dark tunnel with a gulf underneath; for there was no pure transmission from the subjective mind of the thinkers and singers to the objective mind of the scholars and organisers. The misapplication by Treitschke of the teaching of Nietzsche to national and international uses which would have profoundly disgusted the philosopher himself, is an example of this obscure transmission. But still a transmission there was. For more than a half-century Germany turned a deep eye of subjective introspection on herself and things and ideas in search of the truth of her own being and of the world, and for another half-century a patient eye of scientific research on the

objective means for organising what she had or thought she had gained. And something was done, something indeed powerful and enormous, but also in certain directions, not in all, misshapen and disconcerting. Unfortunately, those directions were precisely the very central lines on which to go wrong is to miss the goal.

It may be said, indeed, that the last result of the something done — the war, the collapse, the fierce reaction towards the rigid, armoured, aggressive, formidable Nazi State, — is not only discouraging enough, but a clear warning to abandon that path and go back to older and safer ways. But the misuse of great powers is no argument against their right use. To go back is impossible; the attempt is always, indeed, an illusion; we have all to do the same thing which Germany has attempted, but to take care not to do it likewise. Therefore we must look beyond the red mist of blood of the War and the dark fuliginous confusion and chaos which now oppress the world to see why and where was the failure. For her failure which became evident by the turn her action took and was converted for the time being into total collapse, was clear even then to the dispassionate thinker who seeks only the truth. That befell her which sometimes befalls the seeker on the path of Yoga, the art of conscious self-finding, — a path exposed to far profounder perils than beset ordinarily the average man, — when he follows a false light to his spiritual ruin. She had mistaken her vital ego for herself; she had sought for her soul and found only her force. For she had said, like the Asura, "I am my body, my life, my mind, my temperament," and become attached with a Titanic force to these; especially she had said, "I am my life and body," and than that there can be no greater mistake for man or nation. The soul of man or nation is something more and diviner than that; it is greater than its instruments and cannot be shut up in a physical, a vital, a mental or a temperamental formula. So to confine it, even though the false formation be embodied in the armour-plated social body of a huge collective human dinosaur, can only stifle the growth of the inner Reality and end in decay or the extinction that overtakes all that is unplastic and unadaptable.

It is evident that there is a false as well as a true subjectivism and the errors to which the subjective trend may be liable are as great as its possibilities and may well lead to capital disasters. This distinction must be clearly grasped if the road of this stage of social evolution is to be made safe for the human race.

Chapter V

True and False Subjectivism

THE SUBJECTIVE stage of human development is that critical juncture in which, having gone forward from symbols, types, conventions, having turned its gaze superficially on the individual being to discover his truth and right law of action and its relation to the superficial and external truth and law of the universe, our race begins to gaze deeper, to see and feel what is behind the outside and below the surface and therefore to live from within. It is a step towards self-knowledge and towards living in and from the self, away from knowledge of things as the not-self and from the living according to this objective idea of life and the universe. Everything depends on how that step is taken, to what kind of subjectivity we arrive and how far we go in self-knowledge; for here the dangers of error are as great and far-reaching as the results of right seeking. The symbolic, the typal, the conventional age avoid these dangers by building a wall of self-limitation against them; and it is because this wall becomes in the end a prison of self-ignorance that it has to be broken down and the perilous but fruitful adventure of subjectivism undertaken.

A psychic self-knowledge tells us that there are in our being many formal, frontal, apparent or representative selves and only one that is entirely secret and real; to rest in the apparent and to mistake it for the real is the one general error, root of all others and cause of all our stumbling and suffering, to which man is exposed by the nature of his mentality. We may apply this truth to the attempt of man to live by the law of his subjective being whether as an individual or as a social unit one in its corporate mind and body.

For this is the sense of the characteristic turn which modern civilisation is taking. Everywhere we are beginning, though still sparsely and in a groping tentative fashion, to approach things

from the subjective standpoint. In education our object is to know the psychology of the child as he grows into man and to found our systems of teaching and training upon that basis. The new aim is to help the child to develop his intellectual, aesthetic, emotional, moral, spiritual being and his communal life and impulses out of his own temperament and capacities,— a very different object from that of the old education which was simply to pack so much stereotyped knowledge into his resisting brain and impose a stereotyped rule of conduct on his struggling and dominated impulses.¹ In dealing with the criminal the most advanced societies are no longer altogether satisfied with regarding him as a law-breaker to be punished, imprisoned, terrified, hanged or else tortured physically and morally, whether as a revenge for his revolt or as an example to others; there is a growing attempt to understand him, to make allowance for his heredity, environment and inner deficiencies and to change him from within rather than crush him from without. In the general view of society itself, we begin to regard the community, the nation or any other fixed grouping of men as a living organism with a subjective being of its own and a corresponding growth and natural development which it is its business to bring to perfection and fruition. So far, good; the greater knowledge, the truer depth, the wiser humanity of this new view of things are obvious. But so also are the limitations of our knowledge and experience on this new path and the possibility of serious errors and stumblings.

If we look at the new attempt of nations, whether subject or imperial, to fulfil themselves consciously and especially at the momentous experiment of the subjective German nationality, we shall see the starting-point of these possible errors. The first danger arises from the historical fact of the evolution of the subjective age out of the individualistic; and the first enormous stumble has accordingly been to transform the error

¹ There has been a rude set-back to this development in totalitarian States whose theory is that the individual does not exist and only the life of the community matters, but this new larger view still holds its own in freer countries.

of individualistic egoism into the more momentous error of a great communal egoism. The individual seeking for the law of his being can only find it safely if he regards clearly two great psychological truths and lives in that clear vision. First, the ego is not the self; there is one self of all and the soul is a portion of that universal Divinity. The fulfilment of the individual is not the utmost development of his egoistic intellect, vital force, physical well-being and the utmost satisfaction of his mental, emotional, physical cravings, but the flowering of the divine in him to its utmost capacity of wisdom, power, love and universality and through this flowering his utmost realisation of all the possible beauty and delight of existence.

The will to be, the will to power, the will to know are perfectly legitimate, their satisfaction the true law of our existence and to discourage and repress them improperly is to mutilate our being and dry up or diminish the sources of life and growth. But their satisfaction must not be egoistic,—not for any other reason moral or religious, but simply because they cannot so be satisfied. The attempt always leads to an eternal struggle with other egoisms, a mutual wounding and hampering, even a mutual destruction in which if we are conquerors today, we are the conquered or the slain tomorrow; for we exhaust ourselves and corrupt ourselves in the dangerous attempt to live by the destruction and exploitation of others. Only that which lives in its own self-existence can endure. And generally, to devour others is to register oneself also as a subject and predestined victim of Death.

No doubt, so long as we live without self-knowledge, we can do no other; men and nations have to act and think egoistically, because in their self-ignorance that is the only life known to them, and to live is their God-given impulse; therefore they must live egoistically rather than not at all, with whatever curb of law, ethics and practical common sense of self-restraint nature and experience have taught them. But subjectivism is in its very nature an attempt at self-knowledge and at living by a true self-knowledge and by an inner strength, and there is no real gain in it if we only repeat the old error in new terms.

Therefore we must find out that the true individual is not the ego, but the divine individuality which is through our evolution preparing to emerge in us; its emergence and satisfaction and not the satisfaction of the mere egoistic will-to-live for the sake of one's lower members is the true object at which a humanity subjectively seeking to know and fulfil its own deepest law and truth should increasingly aim.

The second psychic truth the individual has to grasp is this, that he is not only himself, but is in solidarity with all of his kind, — let us leave aside for the moment that which seems to be not of his kind. That which we are has expressed itself through the individual, but also through the universality, and though each has to fulfil itself in its own way, neither can succeed independently of the other. The society has no right to crush or efface the individual for its own better development or self-satisfaction; the individual, so long at least as he chooses to live in the world, has no right to disregard for the sake of his own solitary satisfaction and development his fellow-beings and to live at war with them or seek a selfishly isolated good. And when we say, no right, it is from no social, moral or religious standpoint, but from the most positive and simply with a view to the law of existence itself. For neither the society nor the individual can so develop to their fulfilment. Every time the society crushes or effaces the individual, it is inflicting a wound on itself and depriving its own life of priceless sources of stimulation and growth. The individual too cannot flourish by himself; for the universal, the unity and collectivity of his fellow-beings, is his present source and stock; it is the thing whose possibilities he individually expresses, even when he transcends its immediate level, and of which in his phenomenal being he is one result. Its depression strikes eventually at his own sources of life, by its increasing he also increases. This is what a true subjectivism teaches us, — first, that we are a higher self than our ego or our members, secondly, that we are in our life and being not only ourselves but all others; for there is a secret solidarity which our egoism may kick at and strive against, but from which we cannot escape. It is the old Indian discovery that our real "I"

is a Supreme Being which is our true self and which it is our business to discover and consciously become and, secondly, that that Being is one in all, expressed in the individual and in the collectivity,² and only by admitting and realising our unity with others can we entirely fulfil our true self-being.³

Of these two truths mankind has had some vague vision in the principle with regard to the individual, though it has made only a very poor and fragmentary attempt to regard them in practice and in nine-tenths of its life has been busy departing from them—even where it outwardly professed something of the law. But they apply not only to the individual but to the nation. Here was the first error of the German subjectivism. Reasoning of the Absolute and the individual and the universal, it looked into itself and saw that in fact, as a matter of life, That seemed to express itself as the ego and, reasoning from the conclusions of modern Science, it saw the individual merely as a cell of the collective ego. This collective ego was, then, the greatest actual organised expression of life and to that all ought to be subservient, for so could Nature and its evolution best be assisted and affirmed. The greater human collectivity exists, but it is an inchoate and unorganised existence, and its growth can best be developed by the better development of the most efficient organised collective life already existing; practically, then, by the growth, perfection and domination of the most advanced nations, or possibly of the one most advanced nation, the collective ego which has best realised the purpose of Nature and whose victory and rule is therefore the will of God. For all organised lives, all self-conscious egos are in a state of war, sometimes overt, sometimes covert, sometimes complete, sometimes partial, and by the survival of the best is secured the highest advance of the race. And where was the best, which was the most advanced, self-realising, efficient, highest-cultured nation,

² *vyaṣṭi* and *samaṣṭi*.

³ There is another side of the truth in which this interdependence is not so imperative, but that is a phenomenon of spiritual evolution which has nothing to do with the present subject.

if not, by common admission as well as in Germany's own self-vision, Germany itself? To fulfil then the collective German ego and secure its growth and domination was at once the right law of reason, the supreme good of humanity and the mission of the great and supreme Teutonic race.⁴

From this egoistic self-vision flowed a number of logical consequences, each in itself a separate subjective error. First, since the individual is only a cell of the collectivity, his life must be entirely subservient to the efficient life of the nation. He must be made efficient indeed,—the nation should see to his education, proper living, disciplined life, carefully trained and subordinated activity,—but as a part of the machine or a disciplined instrument of the national Life. Initiative must be the collectivity's, execution the individual's. But where was that vague thing, the collectivity, and how could it express itself not only as a self-conscious, but an organised and efficient collective will and self-directing energy? The State, there was the secret. Let the State be perfect, dominant, all-pervading, all-seeing, all-affecting; so only could the collective ego be concentrated, find itself, and its life be brought to the highest pitch of strength, organisation and efficiency. Thus Germany founded and established the growing modern error of the cult of the State and the growing subordination driving in the end towards the effacement of the individual. We can see what it gained, an immense collective power and a certain kind of perfection and scientific adjustment of means to end and a high general level of economic, intellectual and social efficiency,—apart from the tremendous momentary force which the luminous fulfilment of a great idea gives to man or nation. What it had begun to lose is as yet only slightly apparent,—all that deeper life, vision, intuitive power, force of personality, psychical sweetness and largeness which the free individual brings as his gift to the race.

Secondly, since the State is supreme, the representative of the

⁴ The emphasis has somewhat shifted now and taken its stand more upon the crude vitalistic notions of blood, race, life-room, but the old idea is there giving more force to the later formulation.

Divine or the highest realised functioning of human existence, and has a divine right to the obedience, the unquestioning service and the whole activity of the individual, the service of State and community is the only absolute rule of morality. Within the State this may include and sanction all other moral rules because there no rebel egoism can be allowed, for the individual ego must be lost in that of the State or become part of it and all condition of covert or overt war must be abrogated in obedience to the collective good as determined by the collective will. But in relation to other States, to other collective egos the general condition, the effective law is still that of war, of strife between sharply divided egoisms each seeking to fulfil itself, each hampered and restricted in its field by the others. War then is the whole business of the State in its relation to other States, a war of arms, a war of commerce, a war of ideas and cultures, a war of collective personalities each seeking to possess the world or at least to dominate and be first in the world. Here there can enter no morality except that of success, though the pretence of morality may be a useful stratagem of war. To serve the State, the German collectivity which is his greater and real self is the business of the German individual whether at home or abroad, and to that end everything which succeeds is justifiable. Inefficiency, incompetence, failure are the only immorality. In war every method is justified which leads to the military success of the State, in peace every method which prepares it; for peace between nations is only a covert state of war. And as war is the means of physical survival and domination, so commerce is the means of economic survival and domination; it is in fact only another kind of war, another department of the struggle to live, one physical, the other vital. And the life and the body are, so Science has assured us, the whole of existence.

Thirdly, since the survival of the best is the highest good of mankind and the survival of the best is secured by the elimination of the unfit and the assimilation of the less fit, the conquest of the world by German culture is the straight path of human progress. But culture is not, in this view, merely a state of knowledge or a system or cast of ideas and moral and aesthetic tendencies;

culture is life governed by ideas, but by ideas based on the truths of life and so organised as to bring it to its highest efficiency. Therefore all life not capable of this culture and this efficiency must be eliminated or trodden down, all life capable of it but not actually reaching to it must be taken up and assimilated. But capacity is always a matter of genus and species and in humanity a matter of race. Logically, then, the Teutonic⁵ race is alone entirely capable, and therefore all Teutonic races must be taken into Germany and become part of the German collectivity; races less capable but not wholly unfit must be Germanised; others, hopelessly decadent like the Latins of Europe and America or naturally inferior like the vast majority of the Africans and Asiatics, must be replaced where possible, like the Hereros, or, where not possible, dominated, exploited and treated according to their inferiority. So evolution would advance, so the human race grow towards its perfection.⁶

We need not suppose that all Germany thought in this strenuous fashion, as it was too long represented, or that the majority thought thus consciously; but it is sufficient that an energetic minority of thinkers and strong personalities should seize upon the national life and impress certain tendencies upon it for these to prevail practically or at the least to give a general trend subconsciously even where the thought itself is not actually proposed in the conscious mind. And the actual events of the present hour seem to show that it was this gospel that partly consciously, partly subconsciously or half articulately had taken possession of the collective German mind. It is easy to deride the rigidity of this terrible logic or riddle it with the ideas and truths it has ignored, and it is still easier to abhor, fear, hate and spew at it while practically following its principles in our own action with less openness, thoroughness and courage. But it is more profitable to begin by seeing that behind it there was and is a tremendous sincerity which is the secret of its force, and a

⁵ "Nordic" is now the established term.

⁶ This was written more than thirty years ago, but later developments have emphasised and brought out the truth of the description which was indeed much less apparent then.

sort of perverse honesty in its errors; the sincerity which tries to look straight at one's own conduct and the facts of life and the honesty to proclaim the real principles of that conduct and not — except as an occasional diplomacy — profess others with the lips while disregarding them in the practice. And if this ideal is to be defeated not merely for a time in the battle-field and in the collective person of the nation or nations professing it, as happened abortively in the War, but in the mind of man and in the life of the human race, an equal sincerity and a less perverse honesty has to be practised by those who have arrived at a better law.

The German gospel has evidently two sides, the internal and the external, the cult of the State, nation or community and the cult of international egoism. In the first, Germany, even if for a time entirely crushed in the battle-field, seems to have already secured the victory in the moral sense of the human race. The unsparing compulsion as against the assistance of the individual by the State⁷ — for his and the common good, of course, but who professes to compel for harm? — is almost everywhere either dominant or else growing into a strong and prevailing current of opinion; the champions of individual freedom are now a morally defeated and dwindling army who can only fight on in the hope of a future reaction or of saving something of their principle from the wreck. On the external side, the international, the battle of ideas still goes on, but there were from the beginning ominous signs;⁸ and now after the physical war with its first psychological results is well over, we are already able to see in which direction the tide is likely to flow. War is a dangerous teacher and physical victory leads often to a moral defeat. Germany, defeated in the war, has won in the after war; the German gospel rearisen in a sterner and fiercer avatar threatens to sweep over all Europe.

⁷ Not always in the form of Socialism, Bolshevik Communism or Fascism. Other forms of government that are nominally based on the principles of individualistic democracy and freedom have begun to follow the same trend under the guise or the mere profession of its opposite.

⁸ The League of Nations was at no time a contrary sign. Whatever incidental or temporary good it might achieve, it could only be an instrument for the domination of the rest of the earth by Europe and of all by two or three major nations.

It is necessary, if we are not to deceive ourselves, to note that even in this field what Germany has done is to systematise certain strong actual tendencies and principles of international action to the exclusion of all that either professed to resist or did actually modify them. If a sacred egoism—and the expression did not come from Teutonic lips—is to govern international relations, then it is difficult to deny the force of the German position. The theory of inferior and decadent races was loudly proclaimed by other than German thinkers and has governed, with whatever assuaging scruples, the general practice of military domination and commercial exploitation of the weak by the strong; all that Germany has done is to attempt to give it a wider extension and more rigorous execution and apply it to European as well as to Asiatic and African peoples. Even the severity or brutality of her military methods or of her ways of colonial or internal political repression, taken at their worst, for much once stated against her has been proved and admitted to be deliberate lies manufactured by her enemies, was only a crystallising of certain recent tendencies towards the revival of ancient and mediaeval hardheartedness in the race. The use and even the justification of massacre and atrocious cruelty in war on the ground of military exigency and in the course of commercial exploitation or in the repression of revolt and disorder has been quite recently witnessed in the other continents, to say nothing of certain outskirts of Europe.⁹ From one point of view, it is well that terrible examples of the utmost logic of these things should be prominently forced on the attention of mankind; for by showing the evil stripped of all veils the choice between good and evil instead of a halting between the two will be forced on the human conscience. Woe to the race if it blinds its conscience and buttresses up its animal egoism with the old justifications; for the gods have shown that Karma is not a jest.

But the whole root of the German error lies in its mistaking life and the body for the self. It has been said that this gospel

⁹ Witness Egypt, Ireland, India, and afterwards Abyssinia, Spain, China—wherever still man tries to dominate by force over man or nation over nation.

is simply a reversion to the ancient barbarism of the religion of Odin; but this is not the truth. It is a new and a modern gospel born of the application of a metaphysical logic to the conclusions of materialistic Science, of a philosophic subjectivism to the objective pragmatic positivism of recent thought. Just as Germany applied the individualistic position to the realisation of her communal subjective existence, so she applied the materialistic and vitalistic thought of recent times and equipped it with a subjective philosophy. Thus she arrived at a bastard creed, an objective subjectivism which is miles apart from the true goal of a subjective age. To show the error it is necessary to see wherein lies the true individuality of man and of the nation. It lies not in its physical, economic, even its cultural life which are only means and adjuncts, but in something deeper whose roots are not in the ego, but in a Self one in difference which relates the good of each, on a footing of equality and not of strife and domination, to the good of the rest of the world.

Chapter VI

The Objective and Subjective Views of Life

THE PRINCIPLE of individualism is the liberty of the human being regarded as a separate existence to develop himself and fulfil his life, satisfy his mental tendencies, emotional and vital needs and physical being according to his own desire governed by his reason; it admits no other limit to this right and this liberty except the obligation to respect the same individual liberty and right in others. The balance of this liberty and this obligation is the principle which the individualistic age adopted in its remodelling of society; it adopted in effect a harmony of compromises between rights and duties, liberty and law, permissions and restraints as the scheme both of the personal life and the life of the society. Equally, in the life of nations the individualistic age made liberty the ideal and strove though with less success than in its own proper sphere to affirm a mutual respect for each other's freedom as the proper conduct of nations to one another. In this idea of life, as with the individual, so with the nation, each has the inherent right to manage its own affairs freely or, if it wills, to mismanage them freely and not to be interfered with in its rights and liberties so long as it does not interfere with the rights and liberties of other nations. As a matter of fact, the egoism of individual and nation does not wish to abide within these bounds; therefore the social law of the nation has been called in to enforce the violated principle as between man and man and it has been sought to develop international law in the same way and with the same object. The influence of these ideas is still powerful. In the recent European struggle the liberty of nations was set forth as the ideal for which the war was being waged,—in defiance of the patent fact that it had come about by nothing better than

a clash of interests. The development of international law into an effective force which will restrain the egoism of nations as the social law restrains the egoism of individuals, is the solution which still attracts and seems the most practicable to most when they seek to deal with the difficulties of the future.¹

The growth of modern Science has meanwhile created new ideas and tendencies, on one side an exaggerated individualism or rather vitalistic egoism, on the other the quite opposite ideal of collectivism. Science investigating life discovered that the root nature of all living is a struggle to take the best advantage of the environment for self-preservation, self-fulfilment, self-aggrandisement. Human thought seizing in its usual arbitrary and trenchant fashion upon this aspect of modern knowledge has founded on it theories of a novel kind which erect into a gospel the right for each to live his own life not merely by utilising others, but even at the expense of others. The first object of life in this view is for the individual to survive as long as he may, to become strong, efficient, powerful, to dominate his environment and his fellows and to raise himself on this strenuous and egoistic line to his full stature of capacity and reap his full measure of enjoyment. Philosophies like Nietzsche's, certain forms of Anarchism,—not the idealistic Anarchism of the thinker which is rather the old individualism of the ideal reason carried to its logical conclusion,—certain forms too of Imperialism have been largely influenced and strengthened by this type of ideas, though not actually created by them.

On the other hand, Science investigating life has equally discovered that not only is the individual life best secured and made efficient by association with others and subjection to a law of communal self-development rather than by aggressive self-affirmation, but that actually what Nature seeks to preserve is not the individual but the type and that in her scale of values the pack, herd, hive or swarm takes precedence over the individual

¹ No longer perhaps now, except with a dwindling minority — now that the League of Nations, constantly misused or hampered from its true functioning by the egoism and insincerity of its greater members, has collapsed into impotence and failure.

animal or insect and the human group over the individual human being. Therefore in the true law and nature of things the individual should live for all and constantly subordinate and sacrifice himself to the growth, efficiency and progress of the race rather than live for his own self-fulfilment and subordinate the race-life to his own needs. Modern collectivism derives its victorious strength from the impression made upon human thought by this opposite aspect of modern knowledge. We have seen how the German mind took up both these ideas and combined them on the basis of the present facts of human life: it affirmed the entire subordination of the individual to the community, nation or State; it affirmed, on the other hand, with equal force the egoistic self-assertion of the individual nation as against others or against any group or all the groups of nations which constitute the totality of the human race.

But behind this conflict between the idea of a nationalistic and imperialistic egoism and the old individualistic doctrine of individual and national liberty and separateness, there is striving to arise a new idea of human universalism or collectivism for the race which, if it succeeds in becoming a power, is likely to overcome the ideal of national separatism and liberty as it has overcome within the society itself the ideal of individual freedom and separate self-fulfilment. This new idea demands of the nation that it shall subordinate, if not merge and sacrifice, its free separateness to the life of a larger collectivity, whether that of an imperialistic group or a continental or cultural unity, as in the idea of a united Europe, or the total united life of the human race.

The principle of subjectivism entering into human thought and action, while necessarily it must make a great difference in the view-point, the motive-power and the character of our living, does not at first appear to make any difference in its factors. Subjectivism and objectivism start from the same data, the individual and the collectivity, the complex nature of each with its various powers of the mind, life and body and the search for the law of their self-fulfilment and harmony. But objectivism proceeding by the analytical reason takes an external and mechanical view

of the whole problem. It looks at the world as a thing, an object, a process to be studied by an observing reason which places itself abstractly outside the elements and the sum of what it has to consider and observes it thus from outside as one would an intricate mechanism. The laws of this process are considered as so many mechanical rules or settled forces acting upon the individual or the group which, when they have been observed and distinguished by the reason, have by one's will or by some will to be organised and applied fully much as Science applies the laws it discovers. These laws or rules have to be imposed on the individual by his own abstract reason and will isolated as a ruling authority from his other parts or by the reason and will of other individuals or of the group, and they have to be imposed on the group itself either by its own collective reason and will embodied in some machinery of control which the mind considers as something apart from the life of the group or by the reason and will of some other group external to it or of which it is in some way a part. So the State is viewed in modern political thought as an entity in itself, as if it were something apart from the community and its individuals, something which has the right to impose itself on them and control them in the fulfilment of some idea of right, good or interest which is inflicted on them by a restraining and fashioning power rather than developed in them and by them as a thing towards which their self and nature are impelled to grow. Life is to be managed, harmonised, perfected by an adjustment, a manipulation, a machinery through which it is passed and by which it is shaped. A law outside oneself,—outside even when it is discovered or determined by the individual reason and accepted or enforced by the individual will,—this is the governing idea of objectivism; a mechanical process of management, ordering, perfection, this is its conception of practice.

Subjectivism proceeds from within and regards everything from the point of view of a containing and developing self-consciousness. The law here is within ourselves; life is a self-creating process, a growth and development at first subconscious, then half-conscious and at last more and more fully

conscious of that which we are potentially and hold within ourselves; the principle of its progress is an increasing self-recognition, self-realisation and a resultant self-shaping. Reason and will are only effective movements of the self, reason a process in self-recognition, will a force for self-affirmation and self-shaping. Moreover, reason and intellectual will are only a part of the means by which we recognise and realise ourselves. Subjectivism tends to take a large and complex view of our nature and being and to recognise many powers of knowledge, many forces of effectuation. Even, we see it in its first movement away from the external and objective method discount and belittle the importance of the work of the reason and assert the supremacy of the life-impulse or the essential Will-to-be in opposition to the claims of the intellect or else affirm some deeper power of knowledge, called nowadays the intuition, which sees things in the whole, in their truth, in their profundities and harmonies while intellectual reason breaks up, falsifies, affirms superficial appearances and harmonises only by a mechanical adjustment. But substantially we can see that what is meant by this intuition is the self-consciousness feeling, perceiving, grasping in its substance and aspects rather than analysing in its mechanism its own truth and nature and powers. The whole impulse of subjectivism is to get at the self, to live in the self, to see by the self, to live out the truth of the self internally and externally, but always from an internal initiation and centre.

But still there is the question of the truth of the self, what it is, where is its real abiding-place; and here subjectivism has to deal with the same factors as the objective view of life and existence. We may concentrate on the individual life and consciousness as the self and regard its power, freedom, increasing light and satisfaction and joy as the object of living and thus arrive at a subjective individualism. We may, on the other hand, lay stress on the group consciousness, the collective self; we may see man only as an expression of this group-self necessarily incomplete in his individual or separate being, complete only by that larger entity, and we may wish to subordinate the life of the individual man to the growing power, efficiency, knowledge, happiness,

self-fulfilment of the race or even sacrifice it and consider it as nothing except in so far as it lends itself to the life and growth of the community or the kind. We may claim to exercise a righteous oppression on the individual and teach him intellectually and practically that he has no claim to exist, no right to fulfil himself except in his relations to the collectivity. These alone then are to determine his thought, action and existence and the claim of the individual to have a law of his own being, a law of his own nature which he has a right to fulfil and his demand for freedom of thought involving necessarily the freedom to err and for freedom of action involving necessarily the freedom to stumble and sin may be regarded as an insolence and a chimera. The collective self-consciousness will then have the right to invade at every point the life of the individual, to refuse to it all privacy and apartness, all self-concentration and isolation, all independence and self-guidance and determine everything for it by what it conceives to be the best thought and highest will and rightly dominant feeling, tendency, sense of need, desire for self-satisfaction of the collectivity.

But also we may enlarge the idea of the self and, as objective Science sees a universal force of Nature which is the one reality and of which everything is the process, we may come subjectively to the realisation of a universal Being or Existence which fulfils itself in the world and the individual and the group with an impartial regard for all as equal powers of its self-manifestation. This is obviously the self-knowledge which is most likely to be right, since it most comprehensively embraces and accounts for the various aspects of the world-process and the eternal tendencies of humanity. In this view neither the separate growth of the individual nor the all-absorbing growth of the group can be the ideal, but an equal, simultaneous and, as far as may be, parallel development of both, in which each helps to fulfil the other. Each being has his own truth of independent self-realisation and his truth of self-realisation in the life of others and should feel, desire, help, participate more and more, as he grows in largeness and power, in the harmonious and natural growth of all the individual selves and all the collective selves of the

one universal Being. These two, when properly viewed, would not be separate, opposite or really conflicting lines of tendency, but the same impulse of the one common existence, companion movements separating only to return upon each other in a richer and larger unity and mutual consequence.

Similarly, the subjective search for the self may, like the objective, lean preponderantly to identification with the conscious physical life, because the body is or seems to be the frame and determinant here of the mental and vital movements and capacities. Or it may identify itself with the vital being, the life-soul in us and its emotions, desires, impulses, seekings for power and growth and egoistic fulfilment. Or it may rise to a conception of man as a mental and moral being, exalt to the first place his inner growth, power and perfection, individual and collective, and set it before us as the true aim of our existence. A sort of subjective materialism, pragmatic and outward-going, is a possible standpoint; but in this the subjective tendency cannot long linger. For its natural impulse is to go always inward and it only begins to feel itself and have satisfaction of itself when it gets to the full conscious life within and feels all its power, joy and forceful potentiality pressing for fulfilment. Man at this stage regards himself as a profound, vital Will-to-be which uses body as its instrument and to which the powers of mind are servants and ministers. This is the cast of that vitalism which in various striking forms has played recently so great a part and still exercises a considerable influence on human thought. Beyond it we get to a subjective idealism now beginning to emerge and become prominent, which seeks the fulfilment of man in the satisfaction of his inmost religious, aesthetic, intuitive, his highest intellectual and ethical, his deepest sympathetic and emotional nature and, regarding this as the fullness of our being and the whole object of our being, tries to subject to it the physical and vital existence. These come to be considered rather as a possible symbol and instrument of the subjective life flowing out into forms than as having any value in themselves. A certain tendency to mysticism, occultism and the search for a self independent of the life and the body accompanies this new

movement — new to modern life after the reign of individualism and objective intellectualism — and emphasises its real trend and character.

But here also it is possible for subjectivism to go beyond and to discover the true Self as something greater even than mind. Mind, life and body then become merely an instrumentation for the increasing expression of this Self in the world, — instruments not equal in their hierarchy, but equal in their necessity to the whole, so that their complete perfection and harmony and unity as elements of our self-expression become essential to the true aim of our living. And yet that aim would not be to perfect life, body and mind in themselves, but to develop them so as to make a fit basis and fit instruments for the revelation in our inner and outer life of the luminous Self, the secret Godhead who is one and yet various in all of us, in every being and existence, thing and creature. The ideal of human existence personal and social would be its progressive transformation into a conscious outflowering of the joy, power, love, light, beauty of the transcendent and universal Spirit.

Chapter VII

The Ideal Law of Social Development

THE TRUE law of our development and the entire object of our social existence can only become clear to us when we have discovered not only, like modern Science, what man has been in his past physical and vital evolution, but his future mental and spiritual destiny and his place in the cycles of Nature. This is the reason why the subjective periods of human development must always be immeasurably the most fruitful and creative. In the others he either seizes on some face, image, type of the inner reality Nature in him is labouring to manifest or else he follows a mechanical impulse or shapes himself in the mould of her external influences; but here in his subjective return inward he gets back to himself, back to the root of his living and infinite possibilities, and the potentiality of a new and perfect self-creation begins to widen before him. He discovers his real place in Nature and opens his eyes to the greatness of his destiny.

Existence is an infinite and therefore indefinable and illimitable Reality which figures itself out in multiple values of life. It begins, at least in our field of existence, with a material figure of itself, a mould of firm substance into which and upon which it can build,—worlds, the earth, the body. Here it stamps firmly and fixes the essential law of its movement. That law is that all things are one in their being and origin, one in their general law of existence, one in their interdependence and the universal pattern of their relations; but each realises this unity of purpose and being on its own lines and has its own law of variation by which it enriches the universal existence. In Matter variation is limited; there is variation of type, but, on the whole, uniformity

of the individuals of the type. These individuals have a separate movement, but yet the same movement; subject to some minute differences, they adhere to one particular pattern and have the same assemblage of properties. Variety within the type, apart from minor unicities of detail, is gained by variation of group sub-types belonging to one general kind, species and sub-species of the same genus. In the development of Life, before mind has become self-conscious, the same law predominates; but, in proportion as life grows and still more when mind emerges, the individual also arrives at a greater and more vital power of variation. He acquires the freedom to develop according, no doubt, to the general law of Nature and the general law of his type, but also according to the individual law of his being.

Man, the mental being in Nature, is especially distinguished from her less developed creatures by a greater power of individuality, by the liberation of the mental consciousness which enables him finally to understand more and more himself and his law of being and his development, by the liberation of the mental will which enables him under the secret control of the universal Will to manage more and more the materials and lines of his development and by the capacity in the end to go beyond himself, beyond his mentality and open his consciousness into that from which mind, life and body proceed. He can even, however imperfectly at present, get at his highest to some consciousness of the Reality which is his true being and possess consciously also, as nothing else in terrestrial Nature can possess, the Self, the Idea, the Will which have constituted him and can become by that the master of his own nature and increasingly, not as now he is, a wrestler with dominant circumstance but the master of Nature. To do this, to arrive through mind and beyond mind at the Self, the Spirit which expresses itself in all Nature and, becoming one with it in his being, his force, his consciousness, his will, his knowledge, to possess at once humanly and divinely — according to the law and nature of human existence, but of human existence fulfilled in God and fulfilling God in the world — both himself and the world is

the destiny of man and the object of his individual and social existence.¹

This is done primarily through the individual man; for this end man has become an individual soul, that the One may find and manifest Himself in each human being. That end is not indeed achieved by the individual human being in his unaided mental force. He needs the help of the secret Divine above his mentality in his superconscious self; he needs the help also of the secret Divine around him in Nature and in his fellow-men. Everything in Nature is an occasion for him to develop his divine potentiality, an occasion which he has a certain relative freedom to use or to misuse, although in the end both his use and misuse of his materials are overruled in their results by the universal Will so as to assist eventually the development of his law of being and his destiny. All life around him is a help towards the divine purpose in him; every human being is his fellow-worker and assists him whether by association and union or by strife and opposition. Nor does he achieve his destiny as the individual Man for the sake of the individual soul alone,—a lonely salvation is not his complete ideal,—but for the world also or rather for God in the world, for God in all as well as above all and not for God solely and separately in one. And he achieves it by the stress, not really of his separate individual Will, but of the universal Will in its movement towards the goal of its cycles.

The object of all society should be, therefore, and must become, as man grows conscious of his real being, nature and destiny and not as now only of a part of it, first to provide the conditions of life and growth by which individual Man,—not isolated men or a class or a privileged race, but all individual men according to their capacity,—and the race through the growth

¹ It may be said that since man is a mental being limited by the mind, life and body, this development and organisation of a power beyond mind, a supramental power, would be the creation of a new superhuman race and that the use of the words human and humanly would no longer be in place. This is no doubt true, but the possibility for the race still remains, if not for all in the same degree or at the same time, yet in an eventual fulfilment.

of its individuals may travel towards this divine perfection. It must be, secondly, as mankind generally more and more grows near to some figure of the Divine in life and more and more men arrive at it,— for the cycles are many and each cycle has its own figure of the Divine in man,— to express in the general life of mankind, the light, the power, the beauty, the harmony, the joy of the Self that has been attained and that pours itself out in a freer and nobler humanity. Freedom and harmony express the two necessary principles of variation and oneness,— freedom of the individual, the group, the race, coordinated harmony of the individual's forces and of the efforts of all individuals in the group, of all groups in the race, of all races in the kind,— and these are the two conditions of healthy progression and successful arrival. To realise them and to combine them has been the obscure or half-enlightened effort of mankind throughout its history,— a task difficult indeed and too imperfectly seen and too clumsily and mechanically pursued by the reason and desires to be satisfactorily achieved until man grows by self-knowledge and self-mastery to the possession of a spiritual and psychical unity with his fellow-men. As we realise more and more the right conditions, we shall travel more luminously and spontaneously towards our goal and, as we draw nearer to a clear sight of our goal, we shall realise better and better the right conditions. The Self in man enlarging light and knowledge and harmonising will with light and knowledge so as to fulfil in life what he has seen in his increasing vision and idea of the Self, this is man's source and law of progress and the secret of his impulse towards perfection.

Mankind upon earth is one foremost self-expression of the universal Being in His cosmic self-unfolding; he expresses, under the conditions of the terrestrial world he inhabits, the mental power of the universal existence. All mankind is one in its nature, physical, vital, emotional, mental and ever has been in spite of all differences of intellectual development ranging from the poverty of the Bushman and negroid to the rich cultures of Asia and Europe, and the whole race has, as the human totality, one destiny which it seeks and increasingly approaches in the cycles of progression and retrogression it describes through the

countless millenniums of its history. Nothing which any individual race or nation can triumphantly realise, no victory of their self-aggrandisement, illumination, intellectual achievement or mastery over the environment, has any permanent meaning or value except in so far as it adds something or recovers something or preserves something for this human march. The purpose which the ancient Indian scripture offers to us as the true object of all human action, *lokasaingraha*, the holding together of the race in its cyclic evolution, is the constant sense, whether we know it or know it not, of the sum of our activities.

But within this general nature and general destiny of mankind each individual human being has to follow the common aim on the lines of his own nature and to arrive at his possible perfection by a growth from within. So only can the race itself attain to anything profound, living and deep-rooted. It cannot be done brutally, heavily, mechanically in the mass; the group self has no true right to regard the individual as if he were only a cell of its body, a stone of its edifice, a passive instrument of its collective life and growth. Humanity is not so constituted. We miss the divine reality in man and the secret of the human birth if we do not see that each individual man is that Self and sums up all human potentiality in his own being. That potentiality he has to find, develop, work out from within. No State or legislator or reformer can cut him rigorously into a perfect pattern; no Church or priest can give him a mechanical salvation; no order, no class life or ideal, no nation, no civilisation or creed or ethical, social or religious Shastra can be allowed to say to him permanently, "In this way of mine and thus far shalt thou act and grow and in no other way and no farther shall thy growth be permitted." These things may help him temporarily or they may curb and he grows in proportion as he can use them and then exceed them, train and teach his individuality by them, but assert it always in the end in its divine freedom. Always he is the traveller of the cycles and his road is forward.

True, his life and growth are for the sake of the world, but he can help the world by his life and growth only in proportion as he can be more and more freely and widely his own real self.

True, he has to use the ideals, disciplines, systems of cooperation which he finds upon his path; but he can only use them well, in their right way and to their right purpose if they are to his life means towards something beyond them and not burdens to be borne by him for their own sake or despotic controls to be obeyed by him as their slave or subject; for though laws and disciplines strive to be the tyrants of the human soul, their only purpose is to be its instruments and servants and when their use is over they have to be rejected and broken. True it is, too, that he has to gather in his material from the minds and lives of his fellow-men around him and to make the most of the experience of humanity's past ages and not confine himself in a narrow mentality; but this he can only do successfully by making all this his own through assimilation of it to the principle of his own nature and through its subservience to the forward call of his enlarging future. The liberty claimed by the struggling human mind for the individual is no mere egoistic challenge and revolt, however egoistically or with one-sided exaggeration and misapplication it may sometimes be advanced; it is the divine instinct within him, the law of the Self, its claim to have room and the one primary condition for its natural self-unfolding.

Individual man belongs not only to humanity in general, his nature is not only a variation of human nature in general, but he belongs also to his race-type, his class-type, his mental, vital, physical, spiritual type in which he resembles some, differs from others. According to these affinities he tends to group himself in Churches, sects, communities, classes, coteries, associations whose life he helps, and by them he enriches the life of the large economic, social and political group or society to which he belongs. In modern times this society is the nation. By his enrichment of the national life, though not in that way only, he helps the total life of humanity. But it must be noted that he is not limited and cannot be limited by any of these groupings; he is not merely the noble, merchant, warrior, priest, scholar, artist, cultivator or artisan, not merely the religionist or the worldling or the politician. Nor can he be limited by his nationality; he is not merely the Englishman or the Frenchman, the Japanese or

the Indian; if by a part of himself he belongs to the nation, by another he exceeds it and belongs to humanity. And even there is a part of him, the greatest, which is not limited by humanity; he belongs by it to God and to the world of all beings and to the godheads of the future. He has indeed the tendency of self-limitation and subjection to his environment and group, but he has also the equally necessary tendency of expansion and transcendence of environment and groupings. The individual animal is dominated entirely by his type, subordinated to his group when he does group himself; individual man has already begun to share something of the infinity, complexity, free variation of the Self we see manifested in the world. Or at least he has it in possibility even if there be as yet no sign of it in his organised surface nature. There is here no principle of a mere shapeless fluidity; it is the tendency to enrich himself with the largest possible material constantly brought in, constantly assimilated and changed by the law of his individual nature into stuff of his growth and divine expansion.

Thus the community stands as a mid-term and intermediary value between the individual and humanity and it exists not merely for itself, but for the one and the other and to help them to fulfil each other. The individual has to live in humanity as well as humanity in the individual; but mankind is or has been too large an aggregate to make this mutuality a thing intimate and powerfully felt in the ordinary mind of the race, and even if humanity becomes a manageable unit of life, intermediate groups and aggregates must still exist for the purpose of mass-differentiation and the concentration and combination of varying tendencies in the total human aggregate. Therefore the community has to stand for a time to the individual for humanity even at the cost of standing between him and it and limiting the reach of his universality and the wideness of his sympathies. Still the absolute claim of the community, the society or the nation to make its growth, perfection, greatness the sole object of human life or to exist for itself alone as against the individual and the rest of humanity, to take arbitrary possession of the one and make the hostile assertion of itself against the other, whether

defensive or offensive, the law of its action in the world—and not, as it unfortunately is, a temporary necessity,—this attitude of societies, races, religions, communities, nations, empires is evidently an aberration of the human reason, quite as much as the claim of the individual to live for himself egoistically is an aberration and the deformation of a truth.

The truth deformed into this error is the same with the community as with the individual. The nation or community is an aggregate life that expresses the Self according to the general law of human nature and aids and partially fulfils the development and the destiny of mankind by its own development and the pursuit of its own destiny according to the law of its being and the nature of its corporate individuality. It has like the individual the right to be itself, and its just claim, as against any attempt at domination by other nations or of attack upon its separate development by any excessive tendency of human uniformity and regimentation, is to defend its existence, to insist on being itself, to persist in developing according to the secret Idea within it or, as we say, according to the law of its own nature. This right it must assert not only or even principally for its own sake, but in the interests of humanity. For the only things that we can really call our rights are those conditions which are necessary to our free and sound development, and that again is our right because it is necessary to the development of the world and the fulfilment of the destiny of mankind.

Nor does this right to be oneself mean with the nation or community any more than with the individual that it should roll itself up like a hedgehog, shut itself up in its dogmas, prejudices, limitations, imperfections, in the form and mould of its past or its present achievement and refuse mental or physical commerce and interchange or spiritual or actual commingling with the rest of the world. For so it cannot grow or perfect itself. As the individual lives by the life of other individuals, so does the nation by the life of other nations, by accepting from them material for its own mental, economic and physical life; but it has to assimilate this material, subject it to the law of its own nature, change it into stuff of itself, work upon it by its own

free will and consciousness, if it would live securely and grow soundly. To have the principle or rule of another nature imposed upon it by force or a de-individualising pressure is a menace to its existence, a wound to its being, a fetter upon its march. As the free development of individuals from within is the best condition for the growth and perfection of the community, so the free development of the community or nation from within is the best condition for the growth and perfection of mankind.

Thus the law for the individual is to perfect his individuality by free development from within, but to respect and to aid and be aided by the same free development in others. His law is to harmonise his life with the life of the social aggregate and to pour himself out as a force for growth and perfection on humanity. The law for the community or nation is equally to perfect its corporate existence by a free development from within, aiding and taking full advantage of that of the individual, but to respect and to aid and be aided by the same free development of other communities and nations. Its law is to harmonise its life with that of the human aggregate and to pour itself out as a force for growth and perfection on humanity. The law for humanity is to pursue its upward evolution towards the finding and expression of the Divine in the type of mankind, taking full advantage of the free development and gains of all individuals and nations and groupings of men, to work towards the day when mankind may be really and not only ideally one divine family, but even then, when it has succeeded in unifying itself, to respect, aid and be aided by the free growth and activity of its individuals and constituent aggregates.

Naturally, this is an ideal law which the imperfect human race has never yet really attained and it may be very long before it can attain to it. Man, not possessing, but only seeking to find himself, not knowing consciously, obeying only in the rough subconsciously or half-consciously the urge of the law of his own nature with stumblings and hesitations and deviations and a series of violences done to himself and others, has had to advance by a tangle of truth and error, right and wrong, compulsion and revolt and clumsy adjustments, and he has as yet neither the

wideness of knowledge nor the flexibility of mind nor the purity of temperament which would enable him to follow the law of liberty and harmony rather than the law of discord and regimentation, compulsion and adjustment and strife. Still it is the very business of a subjective age when knowledge is increasing and diffusing itself with an unprecedented rapidity, when capacity is generalising itself, when men and nations are drawn close together and partially united though in an inextricable, confused entanglement of chaotic unity, when they are being compelled to know each other and impelled to know more profoundly themselves, mankind, God and the world and when the idea of self-realisation for men and nations is coming consciously to the surface,—it is the natural work and should be the conscious hope of man in such an age to know himself truly, to find the ideal law of his being and his development and, if he cannot even then follow it ideally owing to the difficulties of his egoistic nature, still to hold it before him and find out gradually the way by which it can become more and more the moulding principle of his individual and social existence.

Chapter VIII

Civilisation and Barbarism

ONCE WE have determined that this rule of perfect individuality and perfect reciprocity is the ideal law for the individual, the community and the race and that a perfect union and even oneness in a free diversity is its goal, we have to try to see more clearly what we mean when we say that self-realisation is the sense, secret or overt, of individual and of social development. As yet we have not to deal with the race, with mankind as a unity; the nation is still our largest compact and living unit. And it is best to begin with the individual, both because of his nature we have a completer and nearer knowledge and experience than of the aggregate soul and life and because the society or nation is, even in its greater complexity, a larger, a composite individual, the collective Man. What we find valid of the former is therefore likely to be valid in its general principle of the larger entity. Moreover, the development of the free individual is, we have said, the first condition for the development of the perfect society. From the individual, therefore, we have to start; he is our index and our foundation.

The Self of man is a thing hidden and occult; it is not his body, it is not his life, it is not — even though he is in the scale of evolution the mental being, the Manu, — his mind. Therefore neither the fullness of his physical, nor of his vital, nor of his mental nature can be either the last term or the true standard of his self-realisation; they are means of manifestation, subordinate indications, foundations of his self-finding, values, practical currency of his self, what you will, but not the thing itself which he secretly is and is obscurely groping or trying overtly and self-consciously to become. Man has not possessed as a race this truth about himself, does not now possess it except in the vision and self-experience of the few in whose footsteps the race is unable to follow, though it may adore them as Avatars,

seers, saints or prophets. For the Oversoul who is the master of our evolution, has his own large steps of Time, his own great eras, tracts of slow and courses of rapid expansion, which the strong, semi-divine individual may overleap, but not the still half-animal race. The course of evolution proceeding from the vegetable to the animal, from the animal to the man, starts in the latter from the subhuman; he has to take up into him the animal and even the mineral and vegetable: they constitute his physical nature, they dominate his vitality, they have their hold upon his mentality. His proneness to many kinds of inertia, his readiness to vegetate, his attachment to the soil and clinging to his roots, to safe anchorages of all kinds, and on the other hand his nomadic and predatory impulses, his blind servility to custom and the rule of the pack, his mob-movements and openness to subconscious suggestions from the group-soul, his subjection to the yoke of rage and fear, his need of punishment and reliance on punishment, his inability to think and act for himself, his incapacity for true freedom, his distrust of novelty, his slowness to seize intelligently and assimilate, his downward propensity and earthward gaze, his vital and physical subjection to his heredity, all these and more are his heritage from the subhuman origins of his life and body and physical mind. It is because of this heritage that he finds self-exceeding the most difficult of lessons and the most painful of endeavours. Yet it is by exceeding of the lower self that Nature accomplishes the great strides of her evolutionary process. To learn by what he has been, but also to know and increase to what he can be, is the task that is set for the mental being.

The time is passing away, permanently — let us hope — for this cycle of civilisation, when the entire identification of the self with the body and the physical life was possible for the general consciousness of the race. That is the primary characteristic of complete barbarism. To take the body and the physical life as the one thing important, to judge manhood by the physical strength, development and prowess, to be at the mercy of the instincts which rise out of the physical inconscient, to despise knowledge as a weakness and inferiority or look on it as a peculiarity and

no necessary part of the conception of manhood, this is the mentality of the barbarian. It tends to reappear in the human being in the atavistic period of boyhood,—when, be it noted, the development of the body is of the greatest importance,—but to the adult man in civilised humanity it is ceasing to be possible. For, in the first place, by the stress of modern life even the vital attitude of the race is changing. Man is ceasing to be so much of a physical and becoming much more of a vital and economic animal. Not that he excludes or is intended to exclude the body and its development or the right maintenance of and respect for the animal being and its excellences from his idea of life; the excellence of the body, its health, its soundness, its vigour and harmonious development are necessary to a perfect manhood and are occupying attention in a better and more intelligent way than before. But the first rank in importance can no longer be given to the body, much less that entire predominance assigned to it in the mentality of the barbarian.

Moreover, although man has not yet really heard and understood the message of the sages, "know thyself", he has accepted the message of the thinker, "educate thyself", and, what is more, he has understood that the possession of education imposes on him the duty of imparting his knowledge to others. The idea of the necessity of general education means the recognition by the race that the mind and not the life and the body are the man and that without the development of the mind he does not possess his true manhood. The idea of education is still primarily that of intelligence and mental capacity and knowledge of the world and things, but secondarily also of moral training and, though as yet very imperfectly, of the development of the aesthetic faculties. The intelligent thinking being, moralised, controlling his instincts and emotions by his will and his reason, acquainted with all that he should know of the world and his past, capable of organising intelligently by that knowledge his social and economic life, ordering rightly his bodily habits and physical being, this is the conception that now governs civilised humanity. It is, in essence, a return to and a larger development of the old Hellenic ideal, with a greater stress on capacity and

utility and a very diminished stress on beauty and refinement. We may suppose, however, that this is only a passing phase; the lost elements are bound to recover their importance as soon as the commercial period of modern progress has been overpassed, and with that recovery, not yet in sight but inevitable, we shall have all the proper elements for the development of man as a mental being.

The old Hellenic or Graeco-Roman civilisation perished, among other reasons, because it only imperfectly generalised culture in its own society and was surrounded by huge masses of humanity who were still possessed by the barbarian habit of mind. Civilisation can never be safe so long as, confining the cultured mentality to a small minority, it nourishes in its bosom a tremendous mass of ignorance, a multitude, a proletariat. Either knowledge must enlarge itself from above or be always in danger of submergence by the ignorant night from below. Still more must it be unsafe, if it allows enormous numbers of men to exist outside its pale uninformed by its light, full of the natural vigour of the barbarian, who may at any moment seize upon the physical weapons of the civilised without undergoing an intellectual transformation by their culture. The Graeco-Roman culture perished from within and from without, from without by the floods of Teutonic barbarism, from within by the loss of its vitality. It gave the proletariat some measure of comfort and amusement, but did not raise it into the light. When light came to the masses, it was from outside in the form of the Christian religion which arrived as an enemy of the old culture. Appealing to the poor, the oppressed and the ignorant, it sought to capture the soul and the ethical being, but cared little or not at all for the thinking mind, content that that should remain in darkness if the heart could be brought to feel religious truth. When the barbarians captured the Western world, it was in the same way content to Christianise them, but made it no part of its function to intellectualise. Distrustful even of the free play of intelligence, Christian ecclesiasticism and monasticism became anti-intellectual and it was left to the Arabs to reintroduce the beginnings of scientific and philosophical knowledge into a

semi-barbarous Christendom and to the half-pagan spirit of the Renaissance and a long struggle between religion and science to complete the return of a free intellectual culture in the re-emerging mind of Europe. Knowledge must be aggressive, if it wishes to survive and perpetuate itself; to leave an extensive ignorance either below or around it, is to expose humanity to the perpetual danger of a barbaric relapse.

The modern world does not leave room for a repetition of the danger in the old form or on the old scale. Science is there to prevent it. It has equipped culture with the means of self-perpetuation. It has armed the civilised races with weapons of organisation and aggression and self-defence which cannot be successfully utilised by any barbarous people, unless it ceases to be uncivilised and acquires the knowledge which Science alone can give. It has learned too that ignorance is an enemy it cannot afford to despise and has set out to remove it wherever it is found. The ideal of general education, at least to the extent of some information of the mind and the training of capacity, owes to it, if not its birth, at least much of its practical possibility. It has propagated itself everywhere with an irresistible force and driven the desire for increasing knowledge into the mentality of three continents. It has made general education the indispensable condition of national strength and efficiency and therefore imposed the desire of it not only on every free people, but on every nation that desires to be free and to survive, so that the universalisation of knowledge and intellectual activity in the human race is now only a question of Time; for it is only certain political and economic obstacles that stand in its way and these the thought and tendencies of the age are already labouring to overcome. And, in sum, Science has already enlarged for good the intellectual horizons of the race and raised, sharpened and intensified powerfully the general intellectual capacity of mankind.

It is true that the first tendencies of Science have been materialistic and its indubitable triumphs have been confined to the knowledge of the physical universe and the body and the physical life. But this materialism is a very different thing from

the old identification of the self with the body. Whatever its apparent tendencies, it has been really an assertion of man the mental being and of the supremacy of intelligence. Science in its very nature is knowledge, is intellectuality, and its whole work has been that of the Mind turning its gaze upon its vital and physical frame and environment to know and conquer and dominate Life and Matter. The scientist is Man the thinker mastering the forces of material Nature by knowing them. Life and Matter are after all our standing-ground, our lower basis and to know their processes and their own proper possibilities and the opportunities they give to the human being is part of the knowledge necessary for transcending them. Life and the body have to be exceeded, but they have also to be utilised and perfected. Neither the laws nor the possibilities of physical Nature can be entirely known unless we know also the laws and possibilities of supraphysical Nature; therefore the development of new and the recovery of old mental and psychic sciences have to follow upon the perfection of our physical knowledge, and that new era is already beginning to open upon us. But the perfection of the physical sciences was a prior necessity and had to be the first field for the training of the mind of man in his new endeavour to know Nature and possess his world.

Even in its negative work the materialism of Science had a task to perform which will be useful in the end to the human mind in its exceeding of materialism. But Science in its heyday of triumphant Materialism despised and cast aside Philosophy; its predominance discouraged by its positive and pragmatic turn the spirit of poetry and art and pushed them from their position of leadership in the front of culture; poetry entered into an era of decline and decadence, adopted the form and rhythm of a versified prose and lost its appeal and the support of all but a very limited audience, painting followed the curve of Cubist extravagance and espoused monstrosities of shape and suggestion; the ideal receded and visible matter of fact was enthroned in its place and encouraged an ugly realism and utilitarianism; in its war against religious obscurantism Science almost succeeded in slaying religion and the religious spirit. But philosophy had

become too much a thing of abstractions, a seeking for abstract truths in a world of ideas and words rather than what it should be, a discovery of the real reality of things by which human existence can learn its law and aim and the principle of its perfection. Poetry and art had become too much cultured pursuits to be ranked among the elegances and ornaments of life, concerned with beauty of words and forms and imaginations, rather than a concrete seeing and significant presentation of truth and beauty and of the living idea and the secret divinity in things concealed by the sensible appearances of the universe. Religion itself had become fixed in dogmas and ceremonies, sects and churches and had lost for the most part, except for a few individuals, direct contact with the living founts of spirituality. A period of negation was necessary. They had to be driven back and in upon themselves, nearer to their own eternal sources. Now that the stress of negation is past and they are raising their heads, we see them seeking for their own truth, reviving by virtue of a return upon themselves and a new self-discovery. They have learned or are learning from the example of Science that Truth is the secret of life and power and that by finding the truth proper to themselves they must become the ministers of human existence.

But if Science has thus prepared us for an age of wider and deeper culture and if in spite of and even partly by its materialism it has rendered impossible the return of the true materialism, that of the barbarian mentality, it has encouraged more or less indirectly both by its attitude to life and its discoveries another kind of barbarism,—for it can be called by no other name,—that of the industrial, the commercial, the economic age which is now progressing to its culmination and its close. This economic barbarism is essentially that of the vital man who mistakes the vital being for the self and accepts its satisfaction as the first aim of life. The characteristic of Life is desire and the instinct of possession. Just as the physical barbarian makes the excellence of the body and the development of physical force, health and prowess his standard and aim, so the vitalistic or economic barbarian makes the satisfaction of wants and desires and the accumulation of possessions his standard

and aim. His ideal man is not the cultured or noble or thoughtful or moral or religious, but the successful man. To arrive, to succeed, to produce, to accumulate, to possess is his existence. The accumulation of wealth and more wealth, the adding of possessions to possessions, opulence, show, pleasure, a cumbersome inartistic luxury, a plethora of conveniences, life devoid of beauty and nobility, religion vulgarised or coldly formalised, politics and government turned into a trade and profession, enjoyment itself made a business, this is commercialism. To the natural unredeemed economic man beauty is a thing otiose or a nuisance, art and poetry a frivolity or an ostentation and a means of advertisement. His idea of civilisation is comfort, his idea of morals social respectability, his idea of politics the encouragement of industry, the opening of markets, exploitation and trade following the flag, his idea of religion at best a pietistic formalism or the satisfaction of certain vitalistic emotions. He values education for its utility in fitting a man for success in a competitive or, it may be, a socialised industrial existence, science for the useful inventions and knowledge, the comforts, conveniences, machinery of production with which it arms him, its power for organisation, regulation, stimulus to production. The opulent plutocrat and the successful mammoth capitalist and organiser of industry are the supermen of the commercial age and the true, if often occult rulers of its society.

The essential barbarism of all this is its pursuit of vital success, satisfaction, productiveness, accumulation, possession, enjoyment, comfort, convenience for their own sake. The vital part of the being is an element in the integral human existence as much as the physical part; it has its place but must not exceed its place. A full and well-appointed life is desirable for man living in society, but on condition that it is also a true and beautiful life. Neither the life nor the body exist for their own sake, but as vehicle and instrument of a good higher than their own. They must be subordinated to the superior needs of the mental being, chastened and purified by a greater law of truth, good and beauty before they can take their proper place in the integrality of human perfection. Therefore in a commercial age with its

ideal, vulgar and barbarous, of success, vitalistic satisfaction, productiveness and possession the soul of man may linger a while for certain gains and experiences, but cannot permanently rest. If it persisted too long, Life would become clogged and perish of its own plethora or burst in its straining to a gross expansion. Like the too massive Titan it will collapse by its own mass, *mole ruet sua*.

Chapter IX

Civilisation and Culture

NATURE starts from Matter, develops out of it its hidden Life, releases out of involution in life all the crude material of Mind and, when she is ready, turns Mind upon itself and upon Life and Matter in a great mental effort to understand all three in their phenomena, their obvious action, their secret laws, their normal and abnormal possibilities and powers so that they may be turned to the richest account, used in the best and most harmonious way, elevated to their highest as well as extended to their widest potential aims by the action of that faculty which man alone of terrestrial creatures clearly possesses, the intelligent will. It is only in this fourth stage of her progress that she arrives at humanity. The atoms and the elements organise brute Matter, the plant develops the living being, the animal prepares and brings to a certain kind of mechanical organisation the crude material of Mind, but the last work of all, the knowledge and control of all these things and self-knowledge and self-control,—that has been reserved for Man, Nature's mental being. That he may better do the work she has given him, she compels him to repeat physically and to some extent mentally stages of her animal evolution and, even when he is in possession of his mental being, she induces him continually to dwell with an interest and even a kind of absorption upon Matter and Life and his own body and vital existence. This is necessary to the largeness of her purpose in him. His first natural absorption in the body and the life is narrow and unintelligent; as his intelligence and mental force increase, he disengages himself to some extent, is able to mount higher, but is still tied to his vital and material roots by need and desire and has to return upon them with a larger curiosity, a greater power of utilisation, a more and more highly mental and, in the end, a more and more spiritual aim in the return. For his cycles are circles of

a growing, but still imperfect harmony and synthesis, and she brings him back violently to her original principles, sometimes even to something like her earlier conditions so that he may start afresh on a larger curve of progress and self-fulfilment.

It would seem at first sight that since man is pre-eminently the mental being, the development of the mental faculties and the richness of the mental life should be his highest aim,—his preoccupying aim, even, as soon as he has got rid of the obsession of the life and body and provided for the indispensable satisfaction of the gross needs which our physical and animal nature imposes on us. Knowledge, science, art, thought, ethics, philosophy, religion, this is man's real business, these are his true affairs. To be is for him not merely to be born, grow up, marry, get his livelihood, support a family and then die,—the vital and physical life, a human edition of the animal round, a human enlargement of the little animal sector and arc of the divine circle; rather to become and grow mentally and live with knowledge and power within himself as well as from within outward is his manhood. But there is here a double motive of Nature, an insistent duality in her human purpose. Man is here to learn from her how to control and create; but she evidently means him not only to control, create and constantly re-create in new and better forms himself, his own inner existence, his mentality, but also to control and re-create correspondingly his environment. He has to turn Mind not only on itself, but on Life and Matter and the material existence; that is very clear not only from the law and nature of the terrestrial evolution, but from his own past and present history. And there comes from the observation of these conditions and of his highest aspirations and impulses the question whether he is not intended, not only to expand inwardly and outwardly, but to grow upward, wonderfully exceeding himself as he has wonderfully exceeded his animal beginnings, into something more than mental, more than human, into a being spiritual and divine. Even if he cannot do that, yet he may have to open his mind to what is beyond it and to govern his life more and more by the light and power that he receives from something greater than himself. Man's

consciousness of the divine within himself and the world is the supreme fact of his existence and to grow into that may very well be the intention of his nature. In any case the fullness of Life is his evident object, the widest life and the highest life possible to him, whether that be a complete humanity or a new and divine race. We must recognise both his need of integrality and his impulse of self-exceeding if we would fix rightly the meaning of his individual existence and the perfect aim and norm of his society.

The pursuit of the mental life for its own sake is what we ordinarily mean by culture; but the word is still a little equivocal and capable of a wider or a narrower sense according to our ideas and predilections. For our mental existence is a very complex matter and is made up of many elements. First, we have its lower and fundamental stratum, which is in the scale of evolution nearest to the vital. And we have in that stratum two sides, the mental life of the senses, sensations and emotions in which the subjective purpose of Nature predominates although with the objective as its occasion, and the active or dynamic life of the mental being concerned with the organs of action and the field of conduct in which her objective purpose predominates although with the subjective as its occasion. We have next in the scale, more sublimated, on one side the moral being and its ethical life, on the other the aesthetic; each of them attempts to possess and dominate the fundamental mind stratum and turn its experiences and activities to its own benefit, one for the culture and worship of Right, the other for the culture and worship of Beauty. And we have, above all these, taking advantage of them, helping, forming, trying often to govern them entirely, the intellectual being. Man's highest accomplished range is the life of the reason or ordered and harmonised intelligence with its dynamic power of intelligent will, the *buddhi*, which is or should be the driver of man's chariot.

But the intelligence of man is not composed entirely and exclusively of the rational intellect and the rational will; there enters into it a deeper, more intuitive, more splendid and powerful, but much less clear, much less developed and as yet hardly

at all self-possessing light and force for which we have not even a name. But, at any rate, its character is to drive at a kind of illumination,—not the dry light of the reason, nor the moist and suffused light of the heart, but a lightning and a solar splendour. It may indeed subordinate itself and merely help the reason and heart with its flashes; but there is another urge in it, its natural urge, which exceeds the reason. It tries to illuminate the intellectual being, to illuminate the ethical and aesthetic, to illuminate the emotional and the active, to illuminate even the senses and the sensations. It offers in words of revelation, it unveils as if by lightning flashes, it shows in a sort of mystic or psychic glamour or brings out into a settled but for mental man almost a supernatural light a Truth greater and truer than the knowledge given by Reason and Science, a Right larger and more divine than the moralist's scheme of virtues, a Beauty more profound, universal and entrancing than the sensuous or imaginative beauty worshipped by the artist, a joy and divine sensibility which leaves the ordinary emotions poor and pallid, a Sense beyond the senses and sensations, the possibility of a diviner Life and action which man's ordinary conduct of life hides away from his impulses and from his vision. Very various, very fragmentary, often very confused and misleading are its effects upon all the lower members from the reason downward, but this in the end is what it is driving at in the midst of a hundred deformations. It is caught and killed or at least diminished and stifled in formal creeds and pious observances; it is unmercifully traded in and turned into poor and base coin by the vulgarity of conventional religions; but it is still the light of which the religious spirit and the spirituality of man is in pursuit and some pale glow of it lingers even in their worst degradations.

This very complexity of his mental being, with the absence of any one principle which can safely dominate the others, the absence of any sure and certain light which can guide and fix in their vacillations the reason and the intelligent will, is man's great embarrassment and stumbling-block. All the hostile distinctions, oppositions, antagonisms, struggles, conversions, reversions, perversions of his mentality, all the chaotic war of

ideas and impulses and tendencies which perplex his efforts, have arisen from the natural misunderstandings and conflicting claims of his many members. His reason is a judge who gives conflicting verdicts and is bribed and influenced by the suitors; his intelligent will is an administrator harassed by the conflicts of the different estates of his realm and by the sense of his own partiality and final incompetence. Still in the midst of it all he has formed certain large ideas of culture and the mental life, and his conflicting notions about them follow certain definite lines determined by the divisions of his nature and shaped into a general system of curves by his many attempts to arrive either at an exclusive standard or an integral harmony.

We have first the distinction between civilisation and barbarism. In its ordinary, popular sense civilisation means the state of civil society, governed, policed, organised, educated, possessed of knowledge and appliances as opposed to that which has not or is not supposed to have these advantages. In a certain sense the Red Indian, the Basuto, the Fiji islander had their civilisation; they possessed a rigorously, if simply organised society, a social law, some ethical ideas, a religion, a kind of training, a good many virtues in some of which, it is said, civilisation is sadly lacking; but we are agreed to call them savages and barbarians, mainly it seems, because of their crude and limited knowledge, the primitive rudeness of their appliances and the bare simplicity of their social organisation. In the more developed states of society we have such epithets as semi-civilised and semi-barbarous which are applied by different types of civilisation to each other, — the one which is for a time dominant and physically successful has naturally the loudest and most self-confident say in the matter. Formerly men were more straightforward and simple-minded and frankly expressed their standpoint by stigmatising all peoples different in general culture from themselves as barbarians or Mlechchhas. The word civilisation so used comes to have a merely relative significance or hardly any fixed sense at all. We must therefore get rid in it of all that is temporary or accidental and fix it upon this distinction that barbarism is the state of society in which man is almost entirely preoccupied

with his life and body, his economic and physical existence,—at first with their sufficient maintenance, not as yet their greater or richer well-being,—and has few means and little inclination to develop his mentality, while civilisation is the more evolved state of society in which to a sufficient social and economic organisation is added the activity of the mental life in most if not all of its parts; for sometimes some of these parts are left aside or discouraged or temporarily atrophied by their inactivity, yet the society may be very obviously civilised and even highly civilised. This conception will bring in all the civilisations historic and prehistoric and put aside all the barbarism, whether of Africa or Europe or Asia, Hun or Goth or Vandal or Turcoman. It is obvious that in a state of barbarism the rude beginnings of civilisation may exist; it is obvious too that in a civilised society a great mass of barbarism or numerous relics of it may exist. In that sense all societies are semi-civilised. How much of our present-day civilisation will be looked back upon with wonder and disgust by a more developed humanity as the superstitions and atrocities of an imperfectly civilised era! But the main point is this that in any society which we can call civilised the mentality of man must be active, the mental pursuits developed and the regulation and improvement of his life by the mental being a clearly self-conscious concept in his better mind.

But in a civilised society there is still the distinction between the partially, crudely, conventionally civilised and the cultured. It would seem therefore that the mere participation in the ordinary benefits of civilisation is not enough to raise a man into the mental life proper; a farther development, a higher elevation is needed. The last generation drew emphatically the distinction between the cultured man and the Philistine and got a fairly clear idea of what was meant by it. Roughly, the Philistine was for them the man who lives outwardly the civilised life, possesses all its paraphernalia, has and mouths the current stock of opinions, prejudices, conventions, sentiments, but is impervious to ideas, exercises no free intelligence, is innocent of beauty and art, vulgarises everything that he touches, religion, ethics, literature,

life. The Philistine is in fact the modern civilised barbarian; he is often the half-civilised physical and vital barbarian by his unintelligent attachment to the life of the body, the life of the vital needs and impulses and the ideal of the merely domestic and economic human animal; but essentially and commonly he is the mental barbarian, the average sensational man. That is to say, his mental life is that of the lower substratum of the mind, the life of the senses, the life of the sensations, the life of the emotions, the life of practical conduct — the first status of the mental being. In all these he may be very active, very vigorous, but he does not govern them by a higher light or seek to uplift them to a freer and nobler eminence; rather he pulls the higher faculties down to the level of his senses, his sensations, his unenlightened and unchastened emotions, his gross utilitarian practicality. His aesthetic side is little developed; either he cares nothing for beauty or has the crudest aesthetic tastes which help to lower and vulgarise the general standard of aesthetic creation and the aesthetic sense. He is often strong about morals, far more particular usually about moral conduct than the man of culture, but his moral being is as crude and undeveloped as the rest of him; it is conventional, unchastened, unintelligent, a mass of likes and dislikes, prejudices and current opinions, attachment to social conventions and respectabilities and an obscure dislike — rooted in the mind of sensations and not in the intelligence — of any open defiance or departure from the generally accepted standard of conduct. His ethical bent is a habit of the sense-mind; it is the morality of the average sensational man. He has a reason and the appearance of an intelligent will, but they are not his own, they are part of the group-mind, received from his environment; or so far as they are his own, merely a practical, sensational, emotional reason and will, a mechanical repetition of habitual notions and rules of conduct, not a play of real thought and intelligent determination. His use of them no more makes him a developed mental being than the daily movement to and from his place of business makes the average Londoner a developed physical being or his quotidian contributions to the economic life of the country make the bank-clerk a developed

economic man. He is not mentally active, but mentally reactive, — a very different matter.

The Philistine is not dead, — quite the contrary, he abounds, — but he no longer reigns. The sons of Culture have not exactly conquered, but they have got rid of the old Goliath and replaced him by a new giant. This is the sensational man who has got awakened to the necessity at least of some intelligent use of the higher faculties and is trying to be mentally active. He has been whipped and censured and educated into that activity and he lives besides in a maelstrom of new information, new intellectual fashions, new ideas and new movements to which he can no longer be obstinately impervious. He is open to new ideas, he can catch at them and hurl them about in a rather confused fashion; he can understand or misunderstand ideals, organise to get them carried out and even, it would appear, fight and die for them. He knows he has to think about ethical problems, social problems, problems of science and religion, to welcome new political developments, to look with as understanding an eye as he can attain to at all the new movements of thought and inquiry and action that chase each other across the modern field or clash upon it. He is a reader of poetry as well as a devourer of fiction and periodical literature, — you will find in him perhaps a student of Tagore or an admirer of Whitman; he has perhaps no very clear ideas about beauty and aesthetics, but he has heard that Art is a not altogether unimportant part of life. The shadow of this new colossus is everywhere. He is the great reading public; the newspapers and weekly and monthly reviews are his; fiction and poetry and art are his mental caterers, the theatre and the cinema and the radio exist for him: Science hastens to bring her knowledge and discoveries to his doors and equip his life with endless machinery; politics are shaped in his image. It is he who opposed and then brought about the enfranchisement of women, who has been evolving syndicalism, anarchism, the war of classes, the uprising of labour, waging what we are told are wars of ideas or of cultures, — a ferocious type of conflict made in the very image of this new barbarism, — or bringing about in a few days Russian revolutions which the

century-long efforts and sufferings of the intelligentsia failed to achieve. It is his coming which has been the precipitative agent for the reshaping of the modern world. If a Lenin, a Mussolini, a Hitler have achieved their rapid and almost stupefying success, it was because this driving force, this responsive quick-acting mass was there to carry them to victory—a force lacking to their less fortunate predecessors.

The first results of this momentous change have been inspiring to our desire of movement, but a little disconcerting to the thinker and to the lover of a high and fine culture; for if it has to some extent democratised culture or the semblance of culture, it does not seem at first sight to have elevated or strengthened it by this large accession of the half-redeemed from below. Nor does the world seem to be guided any more directly by the reason and intelligent will of her best minds than before. Commercialism is still the heart of modern civilisation; a sensational activism is still its driving force. Modern education has not in the mass redeemed the sensational man; it has only made necessary to him things to which he was not formerly accustomed, mental activity and occupations, intellectual and even aesthetic sensations, emotions of idealism. He still lives in the vital substratum, but he wants it stimulated from above. He requires an army of writers to keep him mentally occupied and provide some sort of intellectual pabulum for him; he has a thirst for general information of all kinds which he does not care or has not time to coordinate or assimilate, for popularised scientific knowledge, for such new ideas as he can catch, provided they are put before him with force or brilliance, for mental sensations and excitation of many kinds, for ideals which he likes to think of as actuating his conduct and which do give it sometimes a certain colour. It is still the activism and sensationalism of the crude mental being, but much more open and free. And the cultured, the intelligentsia find that they can get a hearing from him such as they never had from the pure Philistine, provided they can first stimulate or amuse him; their ideas have now a chance of getting executed such as they never had before. The result has been to cheapen thought and art and literature, to make talent and even

genius run in the grooves of popular success, to put the writer and thinker and scientist very much in a position like that of the cultured Greek slave in a Roman household where he has to work for, please, amuse and instruct his master while keeping a careful eye on his tastes and preferences and repeating trickily the manner and the points that have caught his fancy. The higher mental life, in a word, has been democratised, sensationalised, activised with both good and bad results. Through it all the eye of faith can see perhaps that a yet crude but an enormous change has begun. Thought and Knowledge, if not yet Beauty, can get a hearing and even produce rapidly some large, vague, yet in the end effective will for their results; the mass of culture and of men who think and strive seriously to appreciate and to know has enormously increased behind all this surface veil of sensationalism, and even the sensational man has begun to undergo a process of transformation. Especially, new methods of education, new principles of society are beginning to come into the range of practical possibility which will create perhaps one day that as yet unknown phenomenon, a race of men — not only a class — who have to some extent found and developed their mental selves, a cultured humanity.

Chapter X

Aesthetic and Ethical Culture

THE IDEA of culture begins to define itself for us a little more clearly, or at least it has put away from it in a clear contrast its natural opposites. The unmental, the purely physical life is very obviously its opposite, it is barbarism; the unintellectualised vital, the crude economic or the grossly domestic life which looks only to money-getting, the procreation of a family and its maintenance, are equally its opposites; they are another and even uglier barbarism. We agree to regard the individual who is dominated by them and has no thought of higher things as an uncultured and undeveloped human being, a prolongation of the savage, essentially a barbarian even if he lives in a civilised nation and in a society which has arrived at the general idea and at some ordered practice of culture and refinement. The societies or nations which bear this stamp we agree to call barbarous or semi-barbarous. Even when a nation or an age has developed within itself knowledge and science and arts, but still in its general outlook, its habits of life and thought is content to be governed not by knowledge and truth and beauty and high ideals of living, but by the gross vital, commercial, economic view of existence, we say that that nation or age may be civilised in a sense, but for all its abundant or even redundant appliances and apparatus of civilisation it is not the realisation or the promise of a cultured humanity. Therefore upon even the European civilisation of the nineteenth century with all its triumphant and teeming production, its great developments of science, its achievement in the works of the intellect we pass a certain condemnation, because it has turned all these things to commercialism and to gross uses of vitalistic success. We say of it that this was not the perfection to which humanity ought to aspire and that this trend travels away from and not

towards the higher curve of human evolution. It must be our definite verdict upon it that it was inferior as an age of culture to ancient Athens, to Italy of the Renascence, to ancient or classical India. For great as might be the deficiencies of social organisation in those eras and though their range of scientific knowledge and material achievement was immensely inferior, yet they were more advanced in the art of life, knew better its object and aimed more powerfully at some clear ideal of human perfection.

In the range of the mind's life itself, to live in its merely practical and dynamic activity or in the mentalised emotional or sensational current, a life of conventional conduct, average feelings, customary ideas, opinions and prejudices which are not one's own but those of the environment, to have no free and open play of mind, but to live grossly and unthinkingly by the unintelligent rule of the many, to live besides according to the senses and sensations controlled by certain conventions, but neither purified nor enlightened nor chastened by any law of beauty,—all this too is contrary to the ideal of culture. A man may so live with all the appearance or all the pretensions of a civilised existence, enjoy successfully all the plethora of its appurtenances, but he is not in the real sense a developed human being. A society following such a rule of life may be anything else you will, vigorous, decent, well-ordered, successful, religious, moral, but it is a Philistine society; it is a prison which the human soul has to break. For so long as it dwells there, it dwells in an inferior, uninspired and unexpanding mental status; it vegetates infructuously in the lower stratum and is governed not by the higher faculties of man, but by the crudities of the unuplifted sense-mind. Nor is it enough for it to open windows in this prison by which it may get draughts of agreeable fresh air, something of the free light of the intellect, something of the fragrance of art and beauty, something of the large breath of wider interests and higher ideals. It has yet to break out of its prison altogether and live in that free light, in that fragrance and large breath; only then does it breathe the natural atmosphere of the developed mental being. Not to live principally in the

activities of the sense-mind, but in the activities of knowledge and reason and a wide intellectual curiosity, the activities of the cultivated aesthetic being, the activities of the enlightened will which make for character and high ethical ideals and a large human action, not to be governed by our lower or our average mentality but by truth and beauty and the self-ruling will is the ideal of a true culture and the beginning of an accomplished humanity.

We get then by elimination to a positive idea and definition of culture. But still on this higher plane of the mental life we are apt to be pursued by old exclusivenesses and misunderstandings. We see that in the past there seems often to have been a quarrel between culture and conduct; yet according to our definition conduct also is a part of the cultured life and the ethical ideality one of the master impulses of the cultured being. The opposition which puts on one side the pursuit of ideas and knowledge and beauty and calls that culture and on the other the pursuit of character and conduct and exalts that as the moral life must start evidently from an imperfect view of human possibility and perfection. Yet that opposition has not only existed, but is a naturally strong tendency of the human mind and therefore must answer to some real and important divergence in the very composite elements of our being. It is the opposition which Arnold drew between Hebraism and Hellenism. The trend of the Jewish nation which gave us the severe ethical religion of the Old Testament,—crude, conventional and barbarous enough in the Mosaic law, but rising to undeniable heights of moral exaltation when to the Law were added the Prophets, and finally exceeding itself and blossoming into a fine flower of spirituality in Judaic Christianity,¹—was dominated by the preoccupation of a terrestrial and ethical righteousness and the promised rewards of right worship and right doing, but innocent of science and philosophy, careless of knowledge,

¹ The epithet is needed, for European Christianity has been something different, even at its best of another temperament, Latinised, Graecised, Celticised or else only a rough Teutonic imitation of the old-world Hebraism.

indifferent to beauty. The Hellenic mind was less exclusively but still largely dominated by a love of the play of reason for its own sake, but even more powerfully by a high sense of beauty, a clear aesthetic sensibility and a worship of the beautiful in every activity, in every creation, in thought, in art, in life, in religion. So strong was this sense that not only manners, but ethics were seen by it to a very remarkable extent in the light of its master idea of beauty; the good was to its instinct largely the becoming and the beautiful. In philosophy itself it succeeded in arriving at the conception of the Divine as Beauty, a truth which the metaphysician very readily misses and impoverishes his thought by missing it. But still, striking as is this great historical contrast and powerful as were its results on European culture, we have to go beyond its outward manifestation if we would understand in its source this psychological opposition.

The conflict arises from that sort of triangular disposition of the higher or more subtle mentality which we have already had occasion to indicate. There is in our mentality a side of will, conduct, character which creates the ethical man; there is another side of sensibility to the beautiful,—understanding beauty in no narrow or hyper-artistic sense,—which creates the artistic and aesthetic man. Therefore there can be such a thing as a predominantly or even exclusively ethical culture; there can be too, evidently, a predominantly or even exclusively aesthetic culture. There are at once created two conflicting ideals which must naturally stand opposed and look askance at each other with a mutual distrust or even reprobation. The aesthetic man tends to be impatient of the ethical rule; he feels it to be a barrier to his aesthetic freedom and an oppression on the play of his artistic sense and his artistic faculty; he is naturally hedonistic,—for beauty and delight are inseparable powers,—and the ethical rule tramples on pleasure, even very often on quite innocent pleasures, and tries to put a strait waistcoat on the human impulse to delight. He may accept the ethical rule when it makes itself beautiful or even seize on it as one of his instruments for creating beauty, but only when he can subordinate it to the aesthetic principle of his nature,—just as

he is often drawn to religion by its side of beauty, pomp, magnificent ritual, emotional satisfaction, repose or poetic ideality and aspiration,— we might almost say, by the hedonistic aspects of religion. Even when fully accepted, it is not for their own sake that he accepts them. The ethical man repays this natural repulsion with interest. He tends to distrust art and the aesthetic sense as something lax and emollient, something in its nature undisciplined and by its attractive appeals to the passions and emotions destructive of a high and strict self-control. He sees that it is hedonistic and he finds that the hedonistic impulse is non-moral and often immoral. It is difficult for him to see how the indulgence of the aesthetic impulse beyond a very narrow and carefully guarded limit can be combined with a strict ethical life. He evolves the puritan who objects to pleasure on principle; not only in his extremes — and a predominant impulse tends to become absorbing and leads towards extremes — but in the core of his temperament he remains fundamentally the puritan. The misunderstanding between these two sides of our nature is an inevitable circumstance of our human growth which must try them to their fullest separate possibilities and experiment in extremes in order that it may understand the whole range of its capacities.

Society is only an enlargement of the individual; therefore this contrast and opposition between individual types reproduces itself in a like contrast and opposition between social and national types. We must not go for the best examples to social formulas which do not really illustrate these tendencies but are depravations, deformations or deceptive conformities. We must not take as an instance of the ethical turn the middle-class puritanism touched with a narrow, tepid and conventional religiosity which was so marked an element in nineteenth-century England; that was not an ethical culture, but simply a local variation of the general type of bourgeois respectability you will find everywhere at a certain stage of civilisation, — it was Philistinism pure and simple. Nor should we take as an instance of the aesthetic any merely Bohemian society or such examples as London of the Restoration or Paris in certain brief periods of its history; that,

whatever some of its pretensions, had for its principle, always, the indulgence of the average sensational and sensuous man freed from the conventions of morality by a superficial intellectualism and aestheticism. Nor even can we take Puritan England as the ethical type; for although there was there a strenuous, an exaggerated culture of character and the ethical being, the determining tendency was religious, and the religious impulse is a phenomenon quite apart from our other subjective tendencies, though it influences them all; it is *sui generis* and must be treated separately. To get at real, if not always quite pure examples of the type we must go back a little farther in time and contrast early republican Rome or, in Greece itself, Sparta with Periclean Athens. For as we come down the stream of Time in its present curve of evolution, humanity in the mass, carrying in it its past collective experience, becomes more and more complex and the old distinct types do not recur or recur precariously and with difficulty.

Republican Rome — before it was touched and finally taken captive by conquered Greece — stands out in relief as one of the most striking psychological phenomena of human history. From the point of view of human development it presents itself as an almost unique experiment in high and strong character-building divorced as far as may be from the sweetness which the sense of beauty and the light which the play of the reason brings into character and uninspired by the religious temperament; for the early Roman creed was a superstition, a superficial religiosity and had nothing in it of the true religious spirit. Rome was the human will oppressing and disciplining the emotional and sensational mind in order to arrive at the self-mastery of a definite ethical type; and it was this self-mastery which enabled the Roman republic to arrive also at the mastery of its environing world and impose on the nations its public order and law. All supremely successful imperial nations have had in their culture or in their nature, in their formative or expansive periods, this predominance of the will, the character, the impulse to self-discipline and self-mastery which constitutes the very basis of the ethical tendency. Rome and Sparta like other ethical civilisations

had their considerable moral deficiencies, tolerated or deliberately encouraged customs and practices which we should call immoral, failed to develop the gentler and more delicate side of moral character, but this is of no essential importance. The ethical idea in man changes and enlarges its scope, but the kernel of the true ethical being remains always the same,—will, character, self-discipline, self-mastery.

Its limitations at once appear, when we look back at its prominent examples. Early Rome and Sparta were barren of thought, art, poetry, literature, the larger mental life, all the amenity and pleasure of human existence; their art of life excluded or discouraged the delight of living. They were distrustful, as the exclusively ethical man is always distrustful, of free and flexible thought and the aesthetic impulse. The earlier spirit of republican Rome held at arm's length as long as possible the Greek influences that invaded her, closed the schools of the Greek teachers, banished the philosophers, and her most typical minds looked upon the Greek language as a peril and Greek culture as an abomination: she felt instinctively the arrival at her gates of an enemy, divined a hostile and destructive force fatal to her principle of living. Sparta, though a Hellenic city, admitted as almost the sole aesthetic element of her deliberate ethical training and education a martial music and poetry, and even then, when she wanted a poet of war, she had to import an Athenian. We have a curious example of the repercussion of this instinctive distrust even on a large and aesthetic Athenian mind in the utopian speculations of Plato who felt himself obliged in his Republic first to censure and then to banish the poets from his ideal polity. The end of these purely ethical cultures bears witness to their insufficiency. Either they pass away leaving nothing or little behind them by which the future can be attracted and satisfied, as Sparta passed, or they collapse in a revolt of the complex nature of man against an unnatural restriction and repression, as the early Roman type collapsed into the egoistic and often orgiastic licence of later republican and imperial Rome. The human mind needs to think, feel, enjoy, expand; expansion is its very nature and restriction is only useful to it in so far as it helps

to steady, guide and strengthen its expansion. It readily refuses the name of culture to those civilisations or periods, however noble their aim or even however beautiful in itself their order, which have not allowed an intelligent freedom of development.

On the other hand, we are tempted to give the name of a full culture to all those periods and civilisations, whatever their defects, which have encouraged a freely human development and like ancient Athens have concentrated on thought and beauty and the delight of living. But there were in the Athenian development two distinct periods, one of art and beauty, the Athens of Phidias and Sophocles, and one of thought, the Athens of the philosophers. In the first period the sense of beauty and the need of freedom of life and the enjoyment of life are the determining forces. This Athens thought, but it thought in the terms of art and poetry, in figures of music and drama and architecture and sculpture; it delighted in intellectual discussion, but not so much with any will to arrive at truth as for the pleasure of thinking and the beauty of ideas. It had its moral order, for without that no society can exist, but it had no true ethical impulse or ethical type, only a conventional and customary morality; and when it thought about ethics, it tended to express it in the terms of beauty, *to kalon, to epieikes*, the beautiful, the becoming. Its very religion was a religion of beauty and an occasion for pleasant ritual and festivals and for artistic creation, an aesthetic enjoyment touched with a superficial religious sense. But without character, without some kind of high or strong discipline there is no enduring power of life. Athens exhausted its vitality within one wonderful century which left it enervated, will-less, unable to succeed in the struggle of life, uncreative. It turned indeed for a time precisely to that which had been lacking to it, the serious pursuit of truth and the evolution of systems of ethical self-discipline; but it could only think, it could not successfully practise. The later Hellenic mind and Athenian centre of culture gave to Rome the great Stoic system of ethical discipline which saved her in the midst of the orgies of her first imperial century, but could not itself be stoical in its practice; for to Athens and to the characteristic temperament of Hellas, this thought was a

straining to something it had not and could not have; it was the opposite of its nature and not its fulfilment.

This insufficiency of the aesthetic view of life becomes yet more evident when we come down to its other great example, Italy of the Renascence. The Renascence was regarded at one time as pre-eminently a revival of learning, but in its Mediterranean birth-place it was rather the efflorescence of art and poetry and the beauty of life. Much more than was possible even in the laxest times of Hellas, aesthetic culture was divorced from the ethical impulse and at times was even anti-ethical and reminiscent of the licence of imperial Rome. It had learning and curiosity, but gave very little of itself to high thought and truth and the more finished achievements of the reason, although it helped to make free the way for philosophy and science. It so corrupted religion as to provoke in the ethically minded Teutonic nations the violent revolt of the Reformation, which, though it vindicated the freedom of the religious mind, was an insurgence not so much of the reason,—that was left to Science,—but of the moral instinct and its ethical need. The subsequent prostration and loose weakness of Italy was the inevitable result of the great defect of its period of fine culture, and it needed for its revival the new impulse of thought and will and character given to it by Mazzini. If the ethical impulse is not sufficient by itself for the development of the human being, yet are will, character, self-discipline, self-mastery indispensable to that development. They are the backbone of the mental body.

Neither the ethical being nor the aesthetic being is the whole man, nor can either be his sovereign principle; they are merely two powerful elements. Ethical conduct is not the whole of life; even to say that it is three-fourths of life is to indulge in a very doubtful mathematics. We cannot assign to it its position in any such definite language, but can at best say that its kernel of will, character and self-discipline are almost the first condition for human self-perfection. The aesthetic sense is equally indispensable, for without that the self-perfection of the mental being cannot arrive at its object, which is on the mental plane the right and harmonious possession and enjoyment of the truth, power,

beauty and delight of human existence. But neither can be the highest principle of the human order. We can combine them; we can enlarge the sense of ethics by the sense of beauty and delight and introduce into it to correct its tendency of hardness and austerity the element of gentleness, love, amenity, the hedonistic side of morals; we can steady, guide and strengthen the delight of life by the introduction of the necessary will and austerity and self-discipline which will give it endurance and purity. These two powers of our psychological being, which represent in us the essential principle of energy and the essential principle of delight,—the Indian terms are more profound and expressive, Tapas and Ananda,²—can be thus helped by each other, the one to a richer, the other to a greater self-expression. But that even this much reconciliation may come about they must be taken up and enlightened by a higher principle which must be capable of understanding and comprehending both equally and of disengaging and combining disinterestedly their purposes and potentialities. That higher principle seems to be provided for us by the human faculty of reason and intelligent will. Our crowning capacity, it would seem to be by right the crowned sovereign of our nature.

² Tapas is the energising conscious-power of cosmic being by which the world is created, maintained and governed; it includes all concepts of force, will, energy, power, everything dynamic and dynamising. Ananda is the essential nature of bliss of the cosmic consciousness and, in activity, its delight of self-creation and self-experience.

Chapter XI

The Reason as Governor of Life

REASON using the intelligent will for the ordering of the inner and the outer life is undoubtedly the highest developed faculty of man at his present point of evolution; it is the sovereign, because the governing and self-governing faculty in the complexities of our human existence. Man is distinguished from other terrestrial creatures by his capacity for seeking after a rule of life, a rule of his being and his works, a principle of order and self-development, which is not the first instinctive, original, mechanically self-operative rule of his natural existence. The principle he looks to is neither the unchanging, unprogressive order of the fixed natural type, nor in its process of change the mechanical evolution we see in the lower life, an evolution which operates in the mass rather than in the individual, imperceptibly to the knowledge of that which is being evolved and without its conscious cooperation. He seeks for an intelligent rule of which he himself shall be the governor and master or at least a partially free administrator. He can conceive a progressive order by which he shall be able to evolve and develop his capacities far beyond their original limits and workings; he can initiate an intelligent evolution which he himself shall determine or at least be in it a conscious instrument, more, a cooperating and constantly consulted party. The rest of terrestrial existence is helplessly enslaved and tyrannised over by its nature, but the instinct of man when he finds his manhood is to be master of his nature and free.

No doubt all is work of Nature and this too is Nature; it proceeds from the principle of being which constitutes his humanity and by the processes which that principle permits and which are natural to it. But still it is a second kind of Nature, a stage of being in which Nature becomes self-conscious in the individual, tries to know, modify, alter and develop, utilise, consciously

experiment with herself and her potentialities. In this change a momentous self-discovery intervenes; there appears something that is hidden in matter and in the first disposition of life and has not clearly emerged in the animal in spite of its possession of a mind; there appears the presence of the Soul in things which at first was concealed in its own natural and outward workings, absorbed and on the surface at least self-oblivious. Afterwards it becomes, as in the animal, conscious to a certain degree on the surface, but is still helplessly given up to the course of its natural workings and, not understanding, cannot govern itself and its movements. But finally, in man, it turns its consciousness upon itself, seeks to know, endeavours to govern in the individual the workings of his nature and through the individual and the combined reason and energy of many individuals to govern too as far as possible the workings of Nature in mankind and in things. This turning of the consciousness upon itself and on things, which man represents, has been the great crisis, a prolonged and developing crisis, in the terrestrial evolution of the soul in Nature. There have been others before it in the past of the earth, such as that which brought about the appearance of the conscious life of the animal; there must surely be another in its future in which a higher spiritual and supramental consciousness shall emerge and be turned upon the works of the mind. But at present it is this which is at work; a self-conscious soul in mind, mental being, *manomaya puruṣa*, struggles to arrive at some intelligent ordering of its self and life and some indefinite, perhaps infinite development of the powers and potentialities of the human instrument.

The intellectual reason is not man's only means of knowledge. All action, all perception, all aesthesis and sensation, all impulse and will, all imagination and creation imply a universal, many-sided force of knowledge at work and each form or power of this knowledge has its own distinct nature and law, its own principle of order and arrangement, its logic proper to itself, and need not follow, still less be identical with the law of nature, order and arrangement which the intellectual reason would assign to it or itself follow if it had control of all these

movements. But the intellect has this advantage over the others that it can disengage itself from the work, stand back from it to study and understand it disinterestedly, analyse its processes, disengage its principles. None of the other powers and faculties of the living being can do this: for each exists for its own action, is confined by the work it is doing, is unable to see beyond it, around it, into it as the reason can; the principle of knowledge inherent within each force is involved and carried along in the action of the force, helps to shape it, but is also itself limited by its own formulations. It exists for the fulfilment of the action, not for knowledge, or for knowledge only as part of the action. Moreover, it is concerned only with the particular action or working of the moment and does not look back reflectively or forward intelligently or at other actions and forces with a power of clear coordination. No doubt, the other evolved powers of the living being, as for instance the instinct whether animal or human,—the latter inferior precisely because it is disturbed by the questionings and seekings of reason,—carry in themselves their own force of past experience, of instinctive self-adaptation, all of which is really accumulated knowledge, and they hold sometimes this store so firmly that they are transmitted as a sure inheritance from generation to generation. But all this, just because it is instinctive, not turned upon itself reflectively, is of great use indeed to life for the conduct of its operations, but of none—so long as it is not taken up by the reason—for the particular purpose man has in view, a new order of the dealings of the soul in Nature, a free, rational, intelligently coordinating, intelligently self-observing, intelligently experimenting mastery of the workings of force by the conscious spirit.

Reason, on the other hand, exists for the sake of knowledge, can prevent itself from being carried away by the action, can stand back from it, intelligently study, accept, refuse, modify, alter, improve, combine and recombine the workings and capacities of the forces in operation, can repress here, indulge there, strive towards an intelligent, intelligible, willed and organised perfection. Reason is science, it is conscious art, it is invention. It is observation and can seize and arrange truth of facts; it is

speculation and can extricate and forecast truth of potentiality. It is the idea and its fulfilment, the ideal and its bringing to fruition. It can look through the immediate appearance and unveil the hidden truths behind it. It is the servant and yet the master of all utilities; and it can, putting away all utilities, seek disinterestedly Truth for its own sake and by finding it reveal a whole world of new possible utilities. Therefore it is the sovereign power by which man has become possessed of himself, student and master of his own forces, the godhead on which the other godheads in him have leaned for help in their ascent; it has been the Prometheus of the mythical parable, the helper, instructor, elevating friend, civiliser of mankind.

Recently, however, there has been a very noticeable revolt of the human mind against this sovereignty of the intellect, a dissatisfaction, as we might say, of the reason with itself and its own limitations and an inclination to give greater freedom and a larger importance to other powers of our nature. The sovereignty of the reason in man has been always indeed imperfect, in fact, a troubled, struggling, resisted and often defeated rule; but still it has been recognised by the best intelligence of the race as the authority and law-giver. Its only widely acknowledged rival has been faith. Religion alone has been strongly successful in its claim that reason must be silent before it or at least that there are fields to which it cannot extend itself and where faith alone ought to be heard; but for a time even Religion has had to forego or abate its absolute pretension and to submit to the sovereignty of the intellect. Life, imagination, emotion, the ethical and the aesthetic need have often claimed to exist for their own sake and to follow their own bent, practically they have often enforced their claim, but they have still been obliged in general to work under the inquisition and partial control of reason and to refer to it as arbiter and judge. Now, however, the thinking mind of the race has become more disposed to question itself and to ask whether existence is not too large, profound, complex and mysterious a thing to be entirely seized and governed by the powers of the intellect. Vaguely it is felt that there is some greater godhead than the reason.

To some this godhead is Life itself or a secret Will in life; they claim that this must rule and that the intelligence is only useful in so far as it serves that and that Life must not be repressed, minimised and mechanised by the arbitrary control of reason. Life has greater powers in it which must be given a freer play; for it is they alone that evolve and create. On the other hand, it is felt that reason is too analytical, too arbitrary, that it falsifies life by its distinctions and set classifications and the fixed rules based upon them and that there is some profounder and larger power of knowledge, intuition or another, which is more deeply in the secrets of existence. This larger intimate power is more one with the depths and sources of existence and more able to give us the indivisible truths of life, its root realities and to work them out, not in an artificial and mechanical spirit but with a divination of the secret Will in existence and in a free harmony with its large, subtle and infinite methods. In fact, what the growing subjectivism of the human mind is beginning obscurely to see is that the one sovereign godhead is the soul itself which may use reason for one of its ministers, but cannot subject itself to its own intellectuality without limiting its potentialities and artificialising its conduct of existence.

The highest power of reason, because its pure and characteristic power, is the disinterested seeking after true knowledge. When knowledge is pursued for its own sake, then alone are we likely to arrive at true knowledge. Afterwards we may utilise that knowledge for various ends; but if from the beginning we have only particular ends in view, then we limit our intellectual gain, limit our view of things, distort the truth because we cast it into the mould of some particular idea or utility and ignore or deny all that conflicts with that utility or that set idea. By so doing we may indeed make the reason act with great immediate power within the limits of the idea or the utility we have in view, just as instinct in the animal acts with great power within certain limits, for a certain end, yet finds itself helpless outside those limits. It is so indeed that the ordinary man uses his reason—as the animal uses his hereditary, transmitted instinct—with an absorbed devotion of it to the securing of some particular utility

or with a useful but hardly luminous application of a customary and transmitted reasoning to the necessary practical interests of his life. Even the thinking man ordinarily limits his reason to the working out of certain preferred ideas; he ignores or denies all that is not useful to these or does not assist or justify or actually contradicts or seriously modifies them,—except in so far as life itself compels or cautions him to accept modifications for the time being or ignore their necessity at his peril. It is in such limits that man's reason normally acts. He follows most commonly some interest or set of interests; he tramples down or through or ignores or pushes aside all truth of life and existence, truth of ethics, truth of beauty, truth of reason, truth of spirit which conflicts with his chosen opinions and interests; if he recognises these foreign elements, it is nominally, not in practice, or else with a distortion, a glossing which nullifies their consequences, perverts their spirit or whittles down their significance. It is this subjection to the interests, needs, instincts, passions, prejudices, traditional ideas and opinions of the ordinary mind¹ which constitutes the irrationality of human existence.

But even the man who is capable of governing his life by ideas, who recognises, that is to say, that it ought to express clearly conceived truths and principles of his being or of all being and tries to find out or to know from others what these are, is not often capable of the highest, the free and disinterested use of his rational mind. As others are subject to the tyranny of their interests, prejudices, instincts or passions, so he is subjected to the tyranny of ideas. Indeed, he turns these ideas into interests, obscures them with his prejudices and passions and is unable to think freely about them, unable to distinguish their limits or the relation to them of other, different and opposite ideas and the equal right of these also to existence. Thus, as we constantly see, individuals, masses of men, whole generations are carried away by certain ethical, religious, aesthetic, political ideas or a set of

¹ The ordinary mind in man is not truly the thinking mind proper, it is a life-mind, a vital mind as we may call it, which has learned to think and even to reason but for its own ends and on its own lines, not on those of a true mind of knowledge.

ideas, espouse them with passion, pursue them as interests, seek to make them a system and lasting rule of life and are swept away in the drive of their action and do not really use the free and disinterested reason for the right knowledge of existence and for its right and sane government. The ideas are to a certain extent fulfilled, they triumph for a time, but their very success brings disappointment and disillusionment. This happens, first, because they can only succeed by compromises and pacts with the inferior, irrational life of man which diminish their validity and tarnish their light and glory. Often indeed their triumph is convicted of unreality, and doubt and disillusionment fall on the faith and enthusiasm which brought victory to their side. But even were it not so, the ideas themselves are partial and insufficient; not only have they a very partial triumph, but if their success were complete, it would still disappoint, because they are not the whole truth of life and therefore cannot securely govern and perfect life. Life escapes from the formulas and systems which our reason labours to impose on it; it proclaims itself too complex, too full of infinite potentialities to be tyrannised over by the arbitrary intellect of man.

This is the cause why all human systems have failed in the end; for they have never been anything but a partial and confused application of reason to life. Moreover, even where they have been most clear and rational, these systems have pretended that their ideas were the whole truth of life and tried so to apply them. This they could not be, and life in the end has broken or undermined them and passed on to its own large incalculable movement. Mankind, thus using its reason as an aid and justification for its interests and passions, thus obeying the drive of a partial, a mixed and imperfect rationality towards action, thus striving to govern the complex totalities of life by partial truths, has stumbled on from experiment to experiment, always believing that it is about to grasp the crown, always finding that it has fulfilled as yet little or nothing of what it has to accomplish. Compelled by nature to apply reason to life, yet possessing only a partial rationality limited in itself and confused by the sieve of the lower members, it could do nothing else. For the limited

imperfect human reason has no self-sufficient light of its own; it is obliged to proceed by observation, by experiment, by action, through errors and stumbling to a larger experience.

But behind all this continuity of failure there has persisted a faith that the reason of man would end in triumphing over its difficulties, that it would purify and enlarge itself, become sufficient to its work and at last subject rebellious life to its control. For, apart from the stumbling action of the world, there has been a labour of the individual thinker in man and this has achieved a higher quality and risen to a loftier and clearer atmosphere above the general human thought-levels. Here there has been the work of a reason that seeks always after knowledge and strives patiently to find out truth for itself, without bias, without the interference of distorting interests, to study everything, to analyse everything, to know the principle and process of everything. Philosophy, Science, learning, the reasoned arts, all the agelong labour of the critical reason in man have been the result of this effort. In the modern era under the impulsion of Science this effort assumed enormous proportions and claimed for a time to examine successfully and lay down finally the true principle and the sufficient rule of process not only for all the activities of Nature, but for all the activities of man. It has done great things, but it has not been in the end a success. The human mind is beginning to perceive that it has left the heart of almost every problem untouched and illumined only outside and a certain range of processes. There has been a great and ordered classification and mechanisation, a great discovery and practical result of increasing knowledge, but only on the physical surface of things. Vast abysses of Truth lie below in which are concealed the real springs, the mysterious powers and secretly decisive influences of existence. It is a question whether the intellectual reason will ever be able to give us an adequate account of these deeper and greater things or subject them to the intelligent will as it has succeeded in explaining and canalising, though still imperfectly, yet with much show of triumphant result, the forces of physical Nature. But these other powers are much larger, subtler, deeper down,

more hidden, elusive and variable than those of physical Nature.

The whole difficulty of the reason in trying to govern our existence is that because of its own inherent limitations it is unable to deal with life in its complexity or in its integral movements; it is compelled to break it up into parts, to make more or less artificial classifications, to build systems with limited data which are contradicted, upset or have to be continually modified by other data, to work out a selection of regulated potentialities which is broken down by the bursting of a new wave of yet unregulated potentialities. It would almost appear even that there are two worlds, the world of ideas proper to the intellect and the world of life which escapes from the full control of the reason, and that to bridge adequately the gulf between these two domains is beyond the power and province of the reason and the intelligent will. It would seem that these can only create either a series of more or less empirical compromises or else a series of arbitrary and practically inapplicable or only partially applicable systems. The reason of man struggling with life becomes either an empiric or a doctrinaire.

Reason can indeed make itself a mere servant of life; it can limit itself to the work the average normal man demands from it, content to furnish means and justifications for the interests, passions, prejudices of man and clothe them with a misleading garb of rationality or at most supply them with their own secure and enlightened order or with rules of caution and self-restraint sufficient to prevent their more egregious stumbles and most unpleasant consequences. But this is obviously to abdicate its throne or its highest office and to betray the hope with which man set forth on his journey. It may again determine to found itself securely on the facts of life, disinterestedly indeed, that is to say, with a dispassionate critical observation of its principles and processes, but with a prudent resolve not to venture too much forward into the unknown or elevate itself far beyond the immediate realities of our apparent or phenomenal existence. But here again it abdicates; either it becomes a mere critic and observer or else, so far as it tries to lay down laws, it does so within very narrow limits of immediate potentiality and it

renounces man's drift towards higher possibilities, his saving gift of idealism. In this limited use of the reason subjected to the rule of an immediate, an apparent vital and physical practicality man cannot rest long satisfied. For his nature pushes him towards the heights; it demands a constant effort of self-transcendence and the impulsion towards things unachieved and even immediately impossible.

On the other hand, when it attempts a higher action reason separates itself from life. Its very attempt at a disinterested and dispassionate knowledge carries it to an elevation where it loses hold of that other knowledge which our instincts and impulses carry within themselves and which, however imperfect, obscure and limited, is still a hidden action of the universal Knowledge-Will inherent in existence that creates and directs all things according to their nature. True, even Science and Philosophy are never entirely dispassionate and disinterested. They fall into subjection to the tyranny of their own ideas, their partial systems, their hasty generalisations and by the innate drive of man towards practice they seek to impose these upon the life. But even so they enter into a world either of abstract ideas or of ideals or of rigid laws from which the complexity of life escapes. The idealist, the thinker, the philosopher, the poet and artist, even the moralist, all those who live much in ideas, when they come to grapple at close quarters with practical life, seem to find themselves something at a loss and are constantly defeated in their endeavour to govern life by their ideas. They exercise a powerful influence, but it is indirectly, more by throwing their ideas into Life which does with them what the secret Will in it chooses than by a direct and successfully ordered action. Not that the pure empiric, the practical man really succeeds any better by his direct action; for that too is taken by the secret Will in life and turned to quite other ends than the practical man had intended. On the contrary, ideals and idealists are necessary; ideals are the savour and sap of life, idealists the most powerful diviners and assistants of its purposes. But reduce your ideal to a system and it at once begins to fail; apply your general laws and fixed ideas systematically as the doctrinaire would do, and Life very

soon breaks through or writhes out of their hold or transforms your system, even while it nominally exists, into something the originator would not recognise and would repudiate perhaps as the very contradiction of the principles which he sought to eternise.

The root of the difficulty is this that at the very basis of all our life and existence, internal and external, there is something on which the intellect can never lay a controlling hold, the Absolute, the Infinite. Behind everything in life there is an Absolute, which that thing is seeking after in its own way; everything finite is striving to express an infinite which it feels to be its real truth. Moreover, it is not only each class, each type, each tendency in Nature that is thus impelled to strive after its own secret truth in its own way, but each individual brings in his own variations. Thus there is not only an Absolute, an Infinite in itself which governs its own expression in many forms and tendencies, but there is also a principle of infinite potentiality and variation quite baffling to the reasoning intelligence; for the reason deals successfully only with the settled and the finite. In man this difficulty reaches its acme. For not only is mankind unlimited in potentiality; not only is each of its powers and tendencies seeking after its own absolute in its own way and therefore naturally restless under any rigid control by the reason; but in each man their degrees, methods, combinations vary, each man belongs not only to the common humanity, but to the Infinite in himself and is therefore unique. It is because this is the reality of our existence that the intellectual reason and the intelligent will cannot deal with life as its sovereign, even though they may be at present our supreme instruments and may have been in our evolution supremely important and helpful. The reason can govern, but only as a minister, imperfectly, or as a general arbiter and giver of suggestions which are not really supreme commands, or as one channel of the sovereign authority, because that hidden Power acts at present not directly but through many agents and messengers. The real sovereign is another than the reasoning intelligence. Man's impulse to be free, master of Nature in himself and his environment cannot be

really fulfilled until his self-consciousness has grown beyond the rational mentality, become aware of the true sovereign and either identified itself with him or entered into constant communion with his supreme will and knowledge.

Chapter XII

The Office and Limitations of the Reason

IF THE reason is not the sovereign master of our being nor even intended to be more than an intermediary or minister, it cannot succeed in giving a perfect law to the other estates of the realm, although it may impose on them a temporary and imperfect order as a passage to a higher perfection. The rational or intellectual man is not the last and highest ideal of manhood, nor would a rational society be the last and highest expression of the possibilities of an aggregate human life,—unless indeed we give to this word, reason, a wider meaning than it now possesses and include in it the combined wisdom of all our powers of knowledge, those which stand below and above the understanding and logical mind as well as this strictly rational part of our nature. The Spirit that manifests itself in man and dominates secretly the phases of his development, is greater and profounder than his intellect and drives towards a perfection that cannot be shut in by the arbitrary constructions of the human reason.

Meanwhile, the intellect performs its function; it leads man to the gates of a greater self-consciousness and places him with unbandaged eyes on that wide threshold where a more luminous Angel has to take him by the hand. It takes first the lower powers of his existence, each absorbed in its own urge, each striving with a blind self-sufficiency towards the fulfilment of its own instincts and primary impulses; it teaches them to understand themselves and to look through the reflecting eyes of the intelligence on the laws of their own action. It enables them to discern intelligently the high in themselves from the low, the pure from the impure and out of a crude confusion to arrive at more and more luminous formulas of their possibilities. It gives

them self-knowledge and is a guide, teacher, purifier, liberator. For it enables them also to look beyond themselves and at each other and to draw upon each other for fresh motives and a richer working. It strengthens and purifies the hedonistic and the aesthetic activities and softens their quarrel with the ethical mind and instinct; it gives them solidity and seriousness, brings them to the support of the practical and dynamic powers and allies them more closely to the strong actualities of life. It sweetens the ethical will by infusing into it psychic, hedonistic and aesthetic elements and ennobles by all these separately or together the practical, dynamic and utilitarian temperament of the human being. At the same time it plays the part of a judge and legislator, seeks to fix rules, provide systems and regularised combinations which shall enable the powers of the human soul to walk by a settled path and act according to a sure law, an ascertained measure and in a balanced rhythm. Here it finds after a time that its legislative action becomes a force for limitation and turns into a bondage and that the regularised system which it has imposed in the interests of order and conservation becomes a cause of petrification and the sealing up of the fountains of life. It has to bring in its own saving faculty of doubt. Under the impulse of the intelligence warned by the obscure revolt of the oppressed springs of life, ethics, aesthetics, the social, political, economic rule begin to question themselves and, if this at first brings in again some confusion, disorder and uncertainty, yet it awakens new movements of imagination, insight, self-knowledge and self-realisation by which old systems and formulas are transformed or disappear, new experiments are made and in the end larger potentialities and combinations are brought into play. By this double action of the intelligence, affirming and imposing what it has seen and again in due season questioning what has been accomplished in order to make a new affirmation, fixing a rule and order and liberating from rule and order, the progress of the race is assured, however uncertain may seem its steps and stages.

But the action of the intelligence is not only turned downward and outward upon our subjective and external life to

understand it and determine the law and order of its present movement and its future potentialities. It has also an upward and inward eye and a more luminous functioning by which it accepts divinations from the hidden eternities. It is opened in this power of vision to a Truth above it from which it derives, however imperfectly and as from behind a veil, an indirect knowledge of the universal principles of our existence and its possibilities; it receives and turns what it can seize of them into intellectual forms and these provide us with large governing ideas by which our efforts can be shaped and around which they can be concentrated or massed; it defines the ideals which we seek to accomplish. It provides us with the great ideas that are forces (*idées forces*), ideas which in their own strength impose themselves upon our life and compel it into their moulds. Only the forms we give these ideas are intellectual; they themselves descend from a plane of truth of being where knowledge and force are one, the idea and the power of self-fulfilment in the idea are inseparable. Unfortunately, when translated into the forms of our intelligence which acts only by a separating and combining analysis and synthesis and into the effort of our life which advances by a sort of experimental and empirical seeking, these powers become disparate and conflicting ideals which we have all the difficulty in the world to bring into any kind of satisfactory harmony. Such are the primary principles of liberty and order, good, beauty and truth, the ideal of power and the ideal of love, individualism and collectivism, self-denial and self-fulfilment and a hundred others. In each sphere of human life, in each part of our being and our action the intellect presents us with the opposition of a number of such master ideas and such conflicting principles. It finds each to be a truth to which something essential in our being responds,—in our higher nature a law, in our lower nature an instinct. It seeks to fulfil each in turn, builds a system of action round it and goes from one to the other and back again to what it has left. Or it tries to combine them but is contented with none of the combinations it has made because none brings about their perfect reconciliation or their satisfied oneness. That indeed

belongs to a larger and higher consciousness, not yet attained by mankind, where these opposites are ever harmonised and even unified because in their origin they are eternally one. But still every enlarged attempt of the intelligence thus dealing with our inner and outer life increases the width and wealth of our nature, opens it to larger possibilities of self-knowledge and self-realisation and brings us nearer to our awakening into that greater consciousness.

The individual and social progress of man has been thus a double movement of self-illumination and self-harmonising with the intelligence and the intelligent will as the intermediaries between his soul and its works. He has had to bring out numberless possibilities of self-understanding, self-mastery, self-formation out of his first crude life of instincts and impulses; he has been constantly impelled to convert that lower animal or half-animal existence with its imperfect self-consciousness into the stuff of intelligent being, instincts into ideas, impulses into ordered movements of an intelligent will. But as he has to proceed out of ignorance into knowledge by a slow labour of self-recognition and mastery of his surroundings and his material and as his intelligence is incapable of seizing comprehensively the whole of himself in knowledge, unable to work out comprehensively the mass of his possibilities in action, he has had to proceed piecemeal, by partial experiments, by creation of different types, by a constant swinging backward and forward between the various possibilities before him and the different elements he has to harmonise.

It is not only that he has to contrive continually some new harmony between the various elements of his being, physical, vitalistic, practical and dynamic, aesthetic, emotional and hedonistic, ethical, intellectual, but each of them again has to arrive at some order of its own disparate materials. In his ethics he is divided by different moral tendencies, justice and charity, self-help and altruism, self-increase and self-abnegation, the tendencies of strength and the tendencies of love, the moral rule of activism and the moral rule of quietism. His emotions are necessary to his development and their indulgence essential

to the outflowering of his rich humanity; yet is he constantly called upon to coerce and deny them, nor is there any sure rule to guide him in the perplexity of this twofold need. His hedonistic impulse is called many ways by different fields, objects, ideals of self-satisfaction. His aesthetic enjoyment, his aesthetic creation forms for itself under the stress of the intelligence different laws and forms; each seeks to impose itself as the best and the standard, yet each, if its claim were allowed, would by its unjust victory impoverish and imprison his faculty and his felicity in its exercise. His politics and society are a series of adventures and experiments among various possibilities of autocracy, monarchism, military aristocracy, mercantile oligarchy, open or veiled plutocracy, pseudo-democracy of various kinds, bourgeois or proletarian, individualistic or collectivist or bureaucratic, socialism awaiting him, anarchism looming beyond it; and all these correspond to some truth of his social being, some need of his complex social nature, some instinct or force in it which demands that form for its effectuation. Mankind works out these difficulties under the stress of the spirit within it by throwing out a constant variation of types, types of character and temperament, types of practical activity, aesthetic creation, polity, society, ethical order, intellectual system, which vary from the pure to the mixed, from the simple harmony to the complex; each and all of these are so many experiments of individual and collective self-formation in the light of a progressive and increasing knowledge. That knowledge is governed by a number of conflicting ideas and ideals around which these experiments group themselves: each of them is gradually pushed as far as possible in its purity and again mixed and combined as much as possible with others so that there may be a more complex form and an enriched action. Each type has to be broken in turn to yield place to new types and each combination has to give way to the possibility of a new combination. Through it all there is growing an accumulating stock of self-experience and self-actualisation of which the ordinary man accepts some current formulation conventionally as if it were an absolute law and truth,—often enough he even thinks it to be that,—but

which the more developed human being seeks always either to break or to enlarge and make more profound or subtle in order to increase or make room for an increase of human capacity, perfectibility, happiness.

This view of human life and of the process of our development, to which subjectivism readily leads us, gives us a truer vision of the place of the intellect in the human movement. We have seen that the intellect has a double working, dispassionate and interested, self-centred or subservient to movements not its own. The one is a disinterested pursuit of truth for the sake of Truth and of knowledge for the sake of Knowledge without any ulterior motive, with every consideration put away except the rule of keeping the eye on the object, on the fact under enquiry and finding out its truth, its process, its law. The other is coloured by the passion for practice, the desire to govern life by the truth discovered or the fascination of an idea which we labour to establish as the sovereign law of our life and action. We have seen indeed that this is the superiority of reason over the other faculties of man that it is not confined to a separate absorbed action of its own, but plays upon all the others, discovers their law and truth, makes its discoveries serviceable to them and even in pursuing its own bent and end serves also their ends and arrives at a catholic utility. Man in fact does not live for knowledge alone; life in its widest sense is his principal preoccupation and he seeks knowledge for its utility to life much more than for the pure pleasure of acquiring knowledge. But it is precisely in this putting of knowledge at the service of life that the human intellect falls into that confusion and imperfection which pursues all human action. So long as we pursue knowledge for its own sake, there is nothing to be said: the reason is performing its natural function; it is exercising securely its highest right. In the work of the philosopher, the scientist, the savant labouring to add something to the stock of our ascertainable knowledge, there is as perfect a purity and satisfaction as in that of the poet and artist creating forms of beauty for the aesthetic delight of the race. Whatever individual error and limitation there may be, does not matter; for the collective and progressive knowledge of

the race has gained the truth that has been discovered and may be trusted in time to get rid of the error. It is when it tries to apply ideas to life that the human intellect stumbles and finds itself at fault.

Ordinarily, this is because in concerning itself with action the intelligence of man becomes at once partial and passionate and makes itself the servant of something other than the pure truth. But even if the intellect keeps itself as impartial and disinterested as possible,—and altogether impartial, altogether disinterested the human intellect cannot be unless it is content to arrive at an entire divorce from practice or a sort of large but ineffective tolerantism, eclecticism or sceptical curiosity,—still the truths it discovers or the ideas it promulgates become, the moment they are applied to life, the plaything of forces over which the reason has little control. Science pursuing its cold and even way has made discoveries which have served on one side a practical humanitarianism, on the other supplied monstrous weapons to egoism and mutual destruction; it has made possible a gigantic efficiency of organisation which has been used on one side for the economic and social amelioration of the nations and on the other for turning each into a colossal battering-ram of aggression, ruin and slaughter. It has given rise on the one side to a large rationalistic and altruistic humanitarianism, on the other it has justified a godless egoism, vitalism, vulgar will to power and success. It has drawn mankind together and given it a new hope and at the same time crushed it with the burden of a monstrous commercialism. Nor is this due, as is so often asserted, to its divorce from religion or to any lack of idealism. Idealistic philosophy has been equally at the service of the powers of good and evil and provided an intellectual conviction both for reaction and for progress. Organised religion itself has often enough in the past hounded men to crime and massacre and justified obscurantism and oppression.

The truth is that upon which we are now insisting, that reason is in its nature an imperfect light with a large but still restricted mission and that once it applies itself to life and action it becomes subject to what it studies and the servant and

counsellor of the forces in whose obscure and ill-understood struggle it intervenes. It can in its nature be used and has always been used to justify any idea, theory of life, system of society or government, ideal of individual or collective action to which the will of man attaches itself for the moment or through the centuries. In philosophy it gives equally good reasons for monism and pluralism or for any halting-place between them, for the belief in Being or for the belief in Becoming, for optimism and pessimism, for activism and quietism. It can justify the most mystic religionism and the most positive atheism, get rid of God or see nothing else. In aesthetics it supplies the basis equally for classicism and romanticism, for an idealistic, religious or mystic theory of art or for the most earthy realism. It can with equal power base austerely a strict and narrow moralism or prove triumphantly the thesis of the antinomian. It has been the sufficient and convincing prophet of every kind of autocracy or oligarchy and of every species of democracy; it supplies excellent and satisfying reasons for competitive individualism and equally excellent and satisfying reasons for communism or against communism and for State socialism or for one variety of socialism against another. It can place itself with equal effectivity at the service of utilitarianism, economism, hedonism, aestheticism, sensualism, ethicism, idealism or any other essential need or activity of man and build around it a philosophy, a political and social system, a theory of conduct and life. Ask it not to lean to one idea alone, but to make an eclectic combination or a synthetic harmony and it will satisfy you; only, there being any number of possible combinations or harmonies, it will equally well justify the one or the other and set up or throw down any one of them according as the spirit in man is attracted to or withdraws from it. For it is really that which decides and the reason is only a brilliant servant and minister of this veiled and secret sovereign.

This truth is hidden from the rationalist because he is supported by two constant articles of faith, first that his own reason is right and the reason of others who differ from him is wrong, and secondly that whatever may be the present deficiencies of

the human intellect, the collective human reason will eventually arrive at purity and be able to found human thought and life securely on a clear rational basis entirely satisfying to the intelligence. His first article of faith is no doubt the common expression of our egoism and arrogant fallibility, but it is also something more; it expresses this truth that it is the legitimate function of the reason to justify to man his action and his hope and the faith that is in him and to give him that idea and knowledge, however restricted, and that dynamic conviction, however narrow and intolerant, which he needs in order that he may live, act and grow in the highest light available to him. The reason cannot grasp all truth in its embrace because truth is too infinite for it; but still it does grasp the something of it which we immediately need, and its insufficiency does not detract from the value of its work, but is rather the measure of its value. For man is not intended to grasp the whole truth of his being at once, but to move towards it through a succession of experiences and a constant, though not by any means a perfectly continuous self-enlargement. The first business of reason then is to justify and enlighten to him his various experiences and to give him faith and conviction in holding on to his self-enlargings. It justifies to him now this, now that, the experience of the moment, the receding light of the past, the half-seen vision of the future. Its inconstancy, its divisibility against itself, its power of sustaining opposite views are the whole secret of its value. It would not do indeed for it to support too conflicting views in the same individual, except at moments of awakening and transition, but in the collective body of men and in the successions of Time that is its whole business. For so man moves towards the infinity of the Truth by the experience of its variety; so his reason helps him to build, change, destroy what he has built and prepare a new construction, in a word, to progress, grow, enlarge himself in his self-knowledge and world-knowledge and their works.

The second article of faith of the believer in reason is also an error and yet contains a truth. The reason cannot arrive at any final truth because it can neither get to the root of things nor embrace the totality of their secrets; it deals with the finite,

the separate, the limited aggregate, and has no measure for the all and the infinite. Nor can reason found a perfect life for man or a perfect society. A purely rational human life would be a life baulked and deprived of its most powerful dynamic sources; it would be a substitution of the minister for the sovereign. A purely rational society could not come into being and, if it could be born, either could not live or would sterilise and petrify human existence. The root powers of human life, its intimate causes are below, irrational, and they are above, suprarational. But this is true that by constant enlargement, purification, openness the reason of man is bound to arrive at an intelligent sense even of that which is hidden from it, a power of passive, yet sympathetic reflection of the Light that surpasses it. Its limit is reached, its function is finished when it can say to man, "There is a Soul, a Self, a God in the world and in man who works concealed and all is his self-concealing and gradual self-unfolding. His minister I have been, slowly to unseal your eyes, remove the thick integuments of your vision until there is only my own luminous veil between you and him. Remove that and make the soul of man one in fact and nature with this Divine; then you will know yourself, discover the highest and widest law of your being, become the possessors or at least the receivers and instruments of a higher will and knowledge than mine and lay hold at last on the true secret and the whole sense of a human and yet divine living."

Chapter XIII

Reason and Religion

IT WOULD seem then that reason is an insufficient, often an inefficient, even a stumbling and at its best a very partially enlightened guide for humanity in that great endeavour which is the real heart of human progress and the inner justification of our existence as souls, minds and bodies upon the earth. For that endeavour is not only the effort to survive and make a place for ourselves on the earth as the animals do, not only having made to keep it and develop its best vital and egoistic or communal use for the efficiency and enjoyment of the individual, the family or the collective ego, substantially as is done by the animal families and colonies, in bee-hive or ant-hill for example, though in the larger, many-sided way of reasoning animals; it is also, and much more characteristically of our human as distinguished from our animal element, the endeavour to arrive at a harmonised inner and outer perfection, and, as we find in the end, at its highest height, to culminate in the discovery of the divine Reality behind our existence and the complete and ideal Person within us and the shaping of human life in that image. But if that is the truth, then neither the Hellenic ideal of an all-round philosophic, aesthetic, moral and physical culture governed by the enlightened reason of man and led by the wisest minds of a free society, nor the modern ideal of an efficient culture and successful economic civilisation governed by the collective reason and organised knowledge of mankind can be either the highest or the widest goal of social development.

The Hellenic ideal was roughly expressed in the old Latin maxim, a sound mind in a sound body. And by a sound body the ancients meant a healthy and beautiful body well-fitted for the rational use and enjoyment of life. And by a sound mind they meant a clear and balanced reason and an enlightened and well-trained mentality,—trained in the sense of ancient, not of

modern education. It was not to be packed with all available information and ideas, cast in the mould of science and a rational utility and so prepared for the efficient performance of social and civic needs and duties, for a professional avocation or for an intellectual pursuit; rather it was to be cultured in all its human capacities intellectual, moral, aesthetic, trained to use them rightly and to range freely, intelligently and flexibly in all questions and in all practical matters of philosophy, science, art, politics and social living. The ancient Greek mind was philosophic, aesthetic and political; the modern mind has been scientific, economic and utilitarian. The ancient ideal laid stress on soundness and beauty and sought to build up a fine and rational human life; the modern lays very little or no stress on beauty, prefers rational and practical soundness, useful adaptation, just mechanism and seeks to build up a well-ordered, well-informed and efficient human life. Both take it that man is partly a mental, partly a physical being with the mentalised physical life for his field and reason for his highest attribute and his highest possibility. But if we follow to the end the new vistas opened by the most advanced tendencies of a subjective age, we shall be led back to a still more ancient truth and ideal that overtops both the Hellenic and the modern levels. For we shall then seize the truth that man is a developing spirit trying here to find and fulfil itself in the forms of mind, life and body; and we shall perceive luminously growing before us the greater ideal of a deeply conscious self-illumined, self-possessing, self-mastering soul in a pure and perfect mind and body. The wider field it seeks will be, not the mentalised physical life with which man has started, but a new spiritualised life inward and outward, by which the perfected internal figures itself in a perfected external living. Beyond man's long intelligent effort towards a perfected culture and a rational society there opens the old religious and spiritual ideal, the hope of the kingdom of heaven within us and the city of God upon earth.

But if the soul is the true sovereign and if its spiritual self-finding, its progressive largest widest integral fulfilment by the power of the spirit are to be accepted as the ultimate secret of our

evolution, then since certainly the instinctive being of man below reason is not the means of attaining that high end and since we find that reason also is an insufficient light and power, there must be a superior range of being with its own proper powers,—liberated soul-faculties, a spiritual will and knowledge higher than the reason and intelligent will,—by which alone an entire conscious self-fulfilment can become possible to the human being. We must remember that our aim of self-fulfilment is an integral unfolding of the Divine within us, a complete evolution of the hidden divinity in the individual soul and the collective life. Otherwise we may simply come back to an old idea of individual and social living which had its greatness, but did not provide all the conditions of our perfection. That was the idea of a spiritualised typal society. It proceeded upon the supposition that each man has his own peculiar nature which is born from and reflects one element of the divine nature. The character of each individual, his ethical type, his training, his social occupation, his spiritual possibility must be formed or developed within the conditions of that peculiar element; the perfection he seeks in this life must be according to its law. The theory of ancient Indian culture—its practice, as is the way of human practice, did not always correspond to the theory—worked upon this supposition. It divided man in society into the fourfold order—an at once spiritual, psychic, ethical and economic order—of the Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shudra,—practically, the spiritual and intellectual man, the dynamic man of will, the vital, hedonistic and economic man, the material man; the whole society organised in these four constituent classes represented the complete image of the creative and active Godhead.

A different division of the typal society is quite possible. But whatever the arrangement or division, the typal principle cannot be the foundation of an ideal human society. Even according to the Indian theory it does not belong either to the periods of man's highest attainment or to the eras of his lowest possibility; it is neither the principle of his ideal age, his age of the perfected Truth, Satyayuga, Kritayuga, in which he lives according to some high and profound realisation of his divine possibility, nor of his

iron age, the Kaliyuga, in which he collapses towards the life of the instincts, impulses and desires with the reason degraded into a servant of this nether life of man. This too precise order is rather the appropriate principle of the intermediate ages of his cycle in which he attempts to maintain some imperfect form of his true law, his *dharma*, by will-power and force of character in the Treta, by law, arrangement and fixed convention in the Dwapara.¹ The type is not the integral man, it is the fixing and emphasising of the generally prominent part of his active nature. But each man contains in himself the whole divine potentiality and therefore the Shudra cannot be rigidly confined within his Shudrahood, nor the Brahmin in his Brahminhood, but each contains within himself the potentialities and the need of perfection of his other elements of a divine manhood. In the Kali age these potentialities may act in a state of crude disorder, the anarchy of our being which covers our confused attempt at a new order. In the intermediate ages the principle of order may take refuge in a limited perfection, suppressing some elements to perfect others. But the law of the Satya age is the large development of the whole truth of our being in the realisation of a spontaneous and self-supported spiritual harmony. That can only be realised by the evolution, in the measure of which our human capacity in its enlarging cycles becomes capable of it, of the spiritual ranges of our being and the unmasking of their inherent light and power, their knowledge and their divine capacities.

We shall better understand what may be this higher being and those higher faculties, if we look again at the dealings of the reason with the trend towards the absolute in our other faculties, in the divergent principles of our complex existence. Let us study especially its dealings with the suprarational in them and the infrarational, the two extremes between which our intelligence is some sort of mediator. The spiritual or suprarational is always turned at its heights towards the Absolute; in its extension, living

¹ Therefore it is said that Vishnu is the King in the Treta, but in the Dwapara the arranger and codifier of the knowledge and the law.

in the luminous infinite, its special power is to realise the infinite in the finite, the eternal unity in all divisions and differences. Our spiritual evolution ascends therefore through the relative to the absolute, through the finite to the infinite, through all divisions to oneness. Man in his spiritual realisation begins to find and seize hold on the satisfying intensities of the absolute in the relative, feels the large and serene presence of the infinite in the finite, discovers the reconciling law of a perfect unity in all divisions and differences. The spiritual will in his outer as in his inner life and formulation must be to effect a great reconciliation between the secret and eternal reality and the finite appearances of a world which seeks to express and in expressing seems to deny it. Our highest faculties then will be those which make this possible because they have in them the intimate light and power and joy by which these things can be grasped in direct knowledge and experience, realised and made normally and permanently effective in will, communicated to our whole nature. The infrarational, on the other hand, has its origin and basis in the obscure infinite of the Inconscient; it wells up in instincts and impulses, which are really the crude and more or less haphazard intuitions of a subconscious physical, vital, emotional and sensational mind and will in us. Its struggle is towards definition, towards self-creation, towards finding some finite order of its obscure knowledge and tendencies. But it has also the instinct and force of the infinite from which it proceeds; it contains obscure, limited and violent velleities that move it to grasp at the intensities of the absolute and pull them down or some touch of them into its finite action: but because it proceeds by ignorance and not by knowledge, it cannot truly succeed in this more vehement endeavour. The life of the reason and intelligent will stands between that upper and this nether power. On one side it takes up and enlightens the life of the instincts and impulses and helps it to find on a higher plane the finite order for which it gropes. On the other side it looks up towards the absolute, looks out towards the infinite, looks in towards the One, but without being able to grasp and hold their realities; for it is able only to consider them with a sort of derivative and

remote understanding, because it moves in the relative and, itself limited and definite, it can act only by definition, division and limitation. These three powers of being, the suprarational, rational and infrarational are present, but with an infinitely varying prominence in all our activities.

The limitations of the reason become very strikingly, very characteristically, very nakedly apparent when it is confronted with that great order of psychological truths and experiences which we have hitherto kept in the background—the religious being of man and his religious life. Here is a realm at which the intellectual reason gazes with the bewildered mind of a foreigner who hears a language of which the words and the spirit are unintelligible to him and sees everywhere forms of life and principles of thought and action which are absolutely strange to his experience. He may try to learn this speech and understand this strange and alien life; but it is with pain and difficulty, and he cannot succeed unless he has, so to speak, unlearned himself and become one in spirit and nature with the natives of this celestial empire. Till then his efforts to understand and interpret them in his own language and according to his own notions end at the worst in a gross misunderstanding and deformation. The attempts of the positive critical reason to dissect the phenomena of the religious life sound to men of spiritual experience like the prattle of a child who is trying to shape into the mould of his own habitual notions the life of adults or the blunders of an ignorant mind which thinks fit to criticise patronisingly or adversely the labours of a profound thinker or a great scientist. At the best even this futile labour can extract, can account for only the externals of the things it attempts to explain; the spirit is missed, the inner matter is left out, and as a result of that capital omission even the account of the externals is left without real truth and has only an apparent correctness.

The unaided intellectual reason faced with the phenomena of the religious life is naturally apt to adopt one of two attitudes, both of them shallow in the extreme, hastily presumptuous and erroneous. Either it views the whole thing as a mass of superstition, a mystical nonsense, a farrago of ignorant barbaric

survivals,—that was the extreme spirit of the rationalist now happily, though not dead, yet much weakened and almost moribund,—or it patronises religion, tries to explain its origins, to get rid of it by the process of explaining it away; or it labours gently or forcefully to reject or correct its superstitions, crudities, absurdities, to purify it into an abstract nothingness or persuade it to purify itself in the light of the reasoning intelligence; or it allows it a role, leaves it perhaps for the edification of the ignorant, admits its value as a moralising influence or its utility to the State for keeping the lower classes in order, even perhaps tries to invent that strange chimera, a rational religion.

The former attitude has on its positive side played a powerful part in the history of human thought, has even been of a considerable utility in its own way—we shall have to note briefly hereafter how and why—to human progress and in the end even to religion; but its intolerant negations are an arrogant falsity, as the human mind has now sufficiently begun to perceive. Its mistake is like that of a foreigner who thinks everything in an alien country absurd and inferior because these things are not his own ways of acting and thinking and cannot be cut out by his own measures or suited to his own standards. So the thoroughgoing rationalist asks the religious spirit, if it is to stand, to satisfy the material reason and even to give physical proof of its truths, while the very essence of religion is the discovery of the immaterial Spirit and the play of a supraphysical consciousness. So too he tries to judge religion by his idea of its externalities, just as an ignorant and obstreperous foreigner might try to judge a civilisation by the dress, outward colour of life and some of the most external peculiarities in the social manners of the inhabitants. That in this he errs in company with certain of the so-called religious themselves, may be his excuse, but cannot be the justification of his ignorance. The more moderate attitude of the rational mind has also played its part in the history of human thought. Its attempts to explain religion have resulted in the compilation of an immense mass of amazingly ingenious perversions, such as certain pseudo-scientific attempts to form a comparative Science of Religion. It has built up in the approved

modern style immense façades of theory with stray bricks of misunderstood facts for their material. Its mild condonations of religion have led to superficial phases of thought which have passed quickly away and left no trace behind them. Its efforts at the creation of a rational religion, perfectly well-intentioned, but helpless and unconvincing, have had no appreciable effect and have failed like a dispersing cloud, *chinnābhram iva naśyati*.

The deepest heart, the inmost essence of religion, apart from its outward machinery of creed, cult, ceremony and symbol, is the search for God and the finding of God. Its aspiration is to discover the Infinite, the Absolute, the One, the Divine, who is all these things and yet no abstraction but a Being. Its work is a sincere living out of the true and intimate relations between man and God, relations of unity, relations of difference, relations of an illuminated knowledge, an ecstatic love and delight, an absolute surrender and service, a casting of every part of our existence out of its normal status into an uprush of man towards the Divine and a descent of the Divine into man. All this has nothing to do with the realm of reason or its normal activities; its aim, its sphere, its process is suprarational. The knowledge of God is not to be gained by weighing the feeble arguments of reason for or against his existence: it is to be gained only by a self-transcending and absolute consecration, aspiration and experience. Nor does that experience proceed by anything like rational scientific experiment or rational philosophic thinking. Even in those parts of religious discipline which seem most to resemble scientific experiment, the method is a verification of things which exceed the reason and its timid scope. Even in those parts of religious knowledge which seem most to resemble intellectual operations, the illuminating faculties are not imagination, logic and rational judgment, but revelations, inspirations, intuitions, intuitive discernments that leap down to us from a plane of suprarational light. The love of God is an infinite and absolute feeling which does not admit of any rational limitation and does not use a language of rational worship and adoration; the delight in God is that peace and bliss which passes all understanding. The surrender to God is the surrender of the whole being to a

suprarational light, will, power and love and his service takes no account of the compromises with life which the practical reason of man uses as the best part of its method in the ordinary conduct of mundane existence. Wherever religion really finds itself, wherever it opens itself to its own spirit,—there is plenty of that sort of religious practice which is halting, imperfect, half-sincere, only half-sure of itself and in which reason can get in a word,—its way is absolute and its fruits are ineffable.

Reason has indeed a part to play in relation to this highest field of our religious being and experience, but that part is quite secondary and subordinate. It cannot lay down the law for the religious life, it cannot determine in its own right the system of divine knowledge; it cannot school and lesson the divine love and delight; it cannot set bounds to spiritual experience or lay its yoke upon the action of the spiritual man. Its sole legitimate sphere is to explain as best it can, in its own language and to the rational and intellectual parts of man, the truths, the experiences, the laws of our suprarational and spiritual existence. That has been the work of spiritual philosophy in the East and—much more crudely and imperfectly done—of theology in the West, a work of great importance at moments like the present when the intellect of mankind after a long wandering is again turning towards the search for the Divine. Here there must inevitably enter a part of those operations proper to the intellect, logical reasoning, inferences from the data given by rational experience, analogies drawn from our knowledge of the apparent facts of existence, appeals even to the physical truths of science, all the apparatus of the intelligent mind in its ordinary workings. But this is the weakest part of spiritual philosophy. It convinces the rational mind only where the intellect is already predisposed to belief, and even if it convinces, it cannot give the true knowledge. Reason is safest when it is content to take the profound truths and experiences of the spiritual being and the spiritual life, just as they are given to it, and throw them into such form, order and language as will make them the most intelligible or the least unintelligible to the reasoning mind. Even then it is not quite safe, for it is apt to harden the order into an intellectual system

and to present the form as if it were the essence. And, at best, it has to use a language which is not the very tongue of the suprarational truth but its inadequate translation and, since it is not the ordinary tongue either of the rational intelligence, it is open to non-understanding or misunderstanding by the ordinary reason of mankind. It is well-known to the experience of the spiritual seeker that even the highest philosophising cannot give a true inner knowledge, is not the spiritual light, does not open the gates of experience. All it can do is to address the consciousness of man through his intellect and, when it has done, to say, "I have tried to give you the truth in a form and system which will make it intelligible and possible to you; if you are intellectually convinced or attracted, you can now seek the real knowledge, but you must seek it by other means which are beyond my province."

But there is another level of the religious life in which reason might seem justified in interfering more independently and entitled to assume a superior role. For as there is the suprarational life in which religious aspiration finds entirely what it seeks, so too there is also the infrarational life of the instincts, impulses, sensations, crude emotions, vital activities from which all human aspiration takes its beginning. These too feel the touch of the religious sense in man, share its needs and experience, desire its satisfactions. Religion includes this satisfaction also in its scope, and in what is usually called religion it seems even to be the greater part, sometimes to an external view almost the whole; for the supreme purity of spiritual experience does not appear or is glimpsed only through this mixed and turbid current. Much impurity, ignorance, superstition, many doubtful elements must form as the result of this contact and union of our highest tendencies with our lower ignorant nature. Here it would seem that reason has its legitimate part; here surely it can intervene to enlighten, purify, rationalise the play of the instincts and impulses. It would seem that a religious reformation, a movement to substitute a "pure" and rational religion for one that is largely infrarational and impure, would be a distinct advance in the religious development of humanity. To

a certain extent this may be, but, owing to the peculiar nature of the religious being, its entire urge towards the suprarational, not without serious qualifications, nor can the rational mind do anything here that is of a high positive value.

Religious forms and systems become effete and corrupt and have to be destroyed, or they lose much of their inner sense and become clouded in knowledge and injurious in practice, and in destroying what is effete or in negating aberrations reason has played an important part in religious history. But in its endeavour to get rid of the superstition and ignorance which have attached themselves to religious forms and symbols, intellectual reason unenlightened by spiritual knowledge tends to deny and, so far as it can, to destroy the truth and the experience which was contained in them. Reformations which give too much to reason and are too negative and protestant, usually create religions which lack in wealth of spirituality and fullness of religious emotion; they are not opulent in their contents; their form and too often their spirit is impoverished, bare and cold. Nor are they really rational; for they live not by their reasoning and dogma, which to the rational mind is as irrational as that of the creeds they replace, still less by their negations, but by their positive quantum of faith and fervour which is suprarational in its whole aim and has too its infrarational elements. If these seem less gross to the ordinary mind than those of less self-questioning creeds, it is often because they are more timid in venturing into the realm of suprarational experience. The life of the instincts and impulses on its religious side cannot be satisfactorily purified by reason, but rather by being sublimated, by being lifted up into the illuminations of the spirit. The natural line of religious development proceeds always by illumination; and religious reformation acts best when either it reilluminates rather than destroys old forms or, where destruction is necessary, replaces them by richer and not by poorer forms, and in any case when it purifies by suprarational illumination, not by rational enlightenment. A purely rational religion could only be a cold and bare Deism, and such attempts have always failed to achieve vitality and permanence; for they act contrary to

the *dharma*, the natural law and spirit of religion. If reason is to play any decisive part, it must be an intuitive rather than an intellectual reason, touched always by spiritual intensity and insight. For it must be remembered that the infrarational also has behind it a secret Truth which does not fall within the domain of the Reason and is not wholly amenable to its judgments. The heart has its knowledge, the life has its intuitive spirit within it, its intimations, divinations, outbreaks and upflamings of a Secret Energy, a divine or at least semi-divine aspiration and outreaching which the eye of intuition alone can fathom and only intuitive speech or symbol can shape or utter. To root out these things from religion or to purge religion of any elements necessary for its completeness because the forms are defective or obscure, without having the power to illuminate them from within or the patience to wait for their illumination from above or without replacing them by more luminous symbols, is not to purify but to pauperise.

But the relations of the spirit and the reason need not be, as they too often are in our practice, hostile or without any point of contact. Religion itself need not adopt for its principle the formula "I believe because it is impossible" or Pascal's "I believe because it is absurd." What is impossible or absurd to the unaided reason, becomes real and right to the reason lifted beyond itself by the power of the spirit and irradiated by its light. For then it is dominated by the intuitive mind which is our means of passage to a yet higher principle of knowledge. The widest spirituality does not exclude or discourage any essential human activity or faculty, but works rather to lift all of them up out of their imperfection and groping ignorance, transforms them by its touch and makes them the instruments of the light, power and joy of the divine being and the divine nature.

Chapter XIV

The Suprarational Beauty

REILIGION is the seeking after the spiritual, the suprarational and therefore in this sphere the intellectual reason may well be an insufficient help and find itself, not only at the end but from the beginning, out of its province and condemned to tread either diffidently or else with a stumbling presumptuousness in the realm of a power and a light higher than its own. But in the other spheres of human consciousness and human activity it may be thought that it has the right to the sovereign place, since these move on the lower plane of the rational and the finite or belong to that border-land where the rational and the infrarational meet and the impulses and the instincts of man stand in need above all of the light and the control of the reason. In its own sphere of finite knowledge, science, philosophy, the useful arts, its right, one would think, must be indisputable. But this does not turn out in the end to be true. Its province may be larger, its powers more ample, its action more justly self-confident, but in the end everywhere it finds itself standing between the two other powers of our being and fulfilling in greater or less degree the same function of an intermediary. On one side it is an enlightener — not always the chief enlightener — and the corrector of our life-impulses and first mental seekings, on the other it is only one minister of the veiled Spirit and a preparer of the paths for the coming of its rule.

This is especially evident in the two realms which in the ordinary scale of our powers stand nearest to the reason and on either side of it, the aesthetic and the ethical being, the search for Beauty and the search for Good. Man's seeking after beauty reaches its most intense and satisfying expression in the great creative arts, poetry, painting, sculpture, architecture, but in its full extension there is no activity of his nature or his life from which it

need or ought to be excluded,— provided we understand beauty both in its widest and its truest sense. A complete and universal appreciation of beauty and the making entirely beautiful our whole life and being must surely be a necessary character of the perfect individual and the perfect society. But in its origin this seeking for beauty is not rational; it springs from the roots of our life, it is an instinct and an impulse, an instinct of aesthetic satisfaction and an impulse of aesthetic creation and enjoyment. Starting from the infrarational parts of our being, this instinct and impulse begin with much imperfection and impurity and with great crudities both in creation and in appreciation. It is here that the reason comes in to distinguish, to enlighten, to correct, to point out the deficiencies and the crudities, to lay down laws of aesthetics and to purify our appreciation and our creation by improved taste and right knowledge. While we are thus striving to learn and correct ourselves, it may seem to be the true law-giver both for the artist and the admirer and, though not the creator of our aesthetic instinct and impulse, yet the creator in us of an aesthetic conscience and its vigilant judge and guide. That which was an obscure and erratic activity, it makes self-conscious and rationally discriminative in its work and enjoyment.

But again this is true only in restricted bounds or, if anywhere entirely true, then only on a middle plane of our aesthetic seeking and activity. Where the greatest and most powerful creation of beauty is accomplished and its appreciation and enjoyment rise to the highest pitch, the rational is always surpassed and left behind. The creation of beauty in poetry and art does not fall within the sovereignty or even within the sphere of the reason. The intellect is not the poet, the artist, the creator within us; creation comes by a suprarational influx of light and power which must work always, if it is to do its best, by vision and inspiration. It may use the intellect for certain of its operations, but in proportion as it subjects itself to the intellect, it loses in power and force of vision and diminishes the splendour and truth of the beauty it creates. The intellect may take hold of the influx, moderate and repress the divine enthusiasm of creation

and force it to obey the prudence of its dictates, but in doing so it brings down the work to its own inferior level, and the lowering is in proportion to the intellectual interference. For by itself the intelligence can only achieve talent, though it may be a high and even, if sufficiently helped from above, a surpassing talent. Genius, the true creator, is always suprarational in its nature and its instrumentation even when it seems to be doing the work of the reason; it is most itself, most exalted in its work, most sustained in the power, depth, height and beauty of its achievement when it is least touched by, least mixed with any control of the mere intellectuality and least often drops from its heights of vision and inspiration into reliance upon the always mechanical process of intellectual construction. Art-creation which accepts the canons of the reason and works within the limits laid down by it, may be great, beautiful and powerful; for genius can preserve its power even when it labours in shackles and refuses to put forth all its resources: but when it proceeds by means of the intellect, it constructs, but does not create. It may construct well and with a good and faultless workmanship, but its success is formal and not of the spirit, a success of technique and not the embodiment of the imperishable truth of beauty seized in its inner reality, its divine delight, its appeal to a supreme source of ecstasy, Ananda.

There have been periods of artistic creation, ages of reason, in which the rational and intellectual tendency has prevailed in poetry and art; there have even been nations which in their great formative periods of art and literature have set up reason and a meticulous taste as the sovereign powers of their aesthetic activity. At their best these periods have achieved work of a certain greatness, but predominantly of an intellectual greatness and perfection of technique rather than achievements of a supreme inspired and revealing beauty; indeed their very aim has been not the discovery of the deeper truth of beauty, but truth of ideas and truth of reason, a critical rather than a true creative aim. Their leading object has been an intellectual criticism of life and nature elevated by a consummate poetical rhythm and diction rather than a revelation of God and man and life and

nature in inspired forms of artistic beauty. But great art is not satisfied with representing the intellectual truth of things, which is always their superficial or exterior truth; it seeks for a deeper and original truth which escapes the eye of the mere sense or the mere reason, the soul in them, the unseen reality which is not that of their form and process but of their spirit. This it seizes and expresses by form and idea, but a significant form, which is not merely a faithful and just or a harmonious reproduction of outward Nature, and a revelatory idea, not the idea which is merely correct, elegantly right or fully satisfying to the reason and taste. Always the truth it seeks is first and foremost the truth of beauty,—not, again, the formal beauty alone or the beauty of proportion and right process which is what the sense and the reason seek, but the soul of beauty which is hidden from the ordinary eye and the ordinary mind and revealed in its fullness only to the unsealed vision of the poet and artist in man who can seize the secret significances of the universal poet and artist, the divine creator who dwells as their soul and spirit in the forms he has created.

The art-creation which lays a supreme stress on reason and taste and on perfection and purity of a technique constructed in obedience to the canons of reason and taste, claimed for itself the name of classical art; but the claim, like the too trenchant distinction on which it rests, is of doubtful validity. The spirit of the real, the great classical art and poetry is to bring out what is universal and subordinate individual expression to universal truth and beauty, just as the spirit of romantic art and poetry is to bring out what is striking and individual and this it often does so powerfully or with so vivid an emphasis as to throw into the background of its creation the universal, on which yet all true art romantic or classical builds and fills in its forms. In truth, all great art has carried in it both a classical and a romantic as well as a realistic element,—understanding realism in the sense of the prominent bringing out of the external truth of things, not the perverse inverted romanticism of the “real” which brings into exaggerated prominence the ugly, common or morbid and puts that forward as the whole truth of life. The

type of art to which a great creative work belongs is determined by the prominence it gives to one element and the subdual of the others into subordination to its reigning spirit. But classical art also works by a large vision and inspiration, not by the process of the intellect. The lower kind of classical art and literature,—if classical it be and not rather, as it often is, pseudo-classical, intellectually imitative of the external form and process of the classical,—may achieve work of considerable, though a much lesser power, but of an essentially inferior scope and nature; for to that inferiority it is self-condemned by its principle of intellectual construction. Almost always it speedily degenerates into the formal or academic, empty of real beauty, void of life and power, imprisoned in its slavery to form and imagining that when a certain form has been followed, certain canons of construction satisfied, certain rhetorical rules or technical principles obeyed, all has been achieved. It ceases to be art and becomes a cold and mechanical workmanship.

This predominance given to reason and taste first and foremost, sometimes even almost alone, in the creation and appreciation of beauty arises from a temper of mind which is critical rather than creative; and in regard to creation its theory falls into a capital error. All artistic work in order to be perfect must indeed have in the very act of creation the guidance of an inner power of discrimination constantly selecting and rejecting in accordance with a principle of truth and beauty which remains always faithful to a harmony, a proportion, an intimate relation of the form to the idea; there is at the same time an exact fidelity of the idea to the spirit, nature and inner body of the thing of beauty which has been revealed to the soul and the mind, its *svarūpa* and *svabhāva*. Therefore this discriminating inner sense rejects all that is foreign, superfluous, otiose, all that is a mere diversion distractive and deformative, excessive or defective, while it selects and finds sovereignly all that can bring out the full truth, the utter beauty, the inmost power. But this discrimination is not that of the critical intellect, nor is the harmony, proportion, relation it observes that which can be fixed by any set law of the critical reason; it exists in the

very nature and truth of the thing itself, the creation itself, in its secret inner law of beauty and harmony which can be seized by vision, not by intellectual analysis. The discrimination which works in the creator is therefore not an intellectual self-criticism or an obedience to rules imposed on him from outside by any intellectual canons, but itself creative, intuitive, a part of the vision, involved in and inseparable from the act of creation. It comes as part of that influx of power and light from above which by its divine enthusiasm lifts the faculties into their intense suprarational working. When it fails, when it is betrayed by the lower executive instruments rational or infrarational,—and this happens when these cease to be passive and insist on obtruding their own demands or vagaries,—the work is flawed and a subsequent act of self-criticism becomes necessary. But in correcting his work the artist who attempts to do it by rule and intellectual process, uses a false or at any rate an inferior method and cannot do his best. He ought rather to call to his aid the intuitive critical vision and embody it in a fresh act of inspired creation or re-creation after bringing himself back by its means into harmony with the light and law of his original creative initiation. The critical intellect has no direct or independent part in the means of the inspired creator of beauty.

In the appreciation of beauty it has a part, but it is not even there the supreme judge or law-giver. The business of the intellect is to analyse the elements, parts, external processes, apparent principles of that which it studies and explain their relations and workings; in doing this it instructs and enlightens the lower mentality which has, if left to itself, the habit of doing things or seeing what is done and taking all for granted without proper observation and fruitful understanding. But as with truth of religion, so with the highest and deepest truth of beauty, the intellectual reason cannot seize its inner sense and reality, not even the inner truth of its apparent principles and processes, unless it is aided by a higher insight not its own. As it cannot give a method, process or rule by which beauty can or ought to be created, so also it cannot give to the appreciation of beauty that deeper insight which it needs; it can only help to remove

the dullness and vagueness of the habitual perceptions and conceptions of the lower mind which prevent it from seeing beauty or which give it false and crude aesthetic habits: it does this by giving to the mind an external idea and rule of the elements of the thing it has to perceive and appreciate. What is farther needed is the awakening of a certain vision, an insight and an intuitive response in the soul. Reason which studies always from outside, cannot give this inner and more intimate contact; it has to aid itself by a more direct insight springing from the soul itself and to call at every step on the intuitive mind to fill up the gap of its own deficiencies.

We see this in the history of the development of literary and artistic criticism. In its earliest stages the appreciation of beauty is instinctive, natural, inborn, a response of the aesthetic sensitiveness of the soul which does not attempt to give any account of itself to the thinking intelligence. When the rational intelligence applies itself to this task, it is not satisfied with recording faithfully the nature of the response and the thing it has felt, but it attempts to analyse, to lay down what is necessary in order to create a just aesthetic gratification, it prepares a grammar of technique, an artistic law and canon of construction, a sort of mechanical rule of process for the creation of beauty, a fixed code or Shastra. This brings in the long reign of academic criticism superficial, technical, artificial, governed by the false idea that technique, of which alone critical reason can give an entirely adequate account, is the most important part of creation and that to every art there can correspond an exhaustive science which will tell us how the thing is done and give us the whole secret and process of its doing. A time comes when the creator of beauty revolts and declares the charter of his own freedom, generally in the shape of a new law or principle of creation, and this freedom once vindicated begins to widen itself and to carry with it the critical reason out of all its familiar bounds. A more developed appreciation emerges which begins to seek for new principles of criticism, to search for the soul of the work itself and explain the form in relation to the soul or to study the creator himself or the spirit, nature and ideas of the

age he lived in and so to arrive at a right understanding of his work. The intellect has begun to see that its highest business is not to lay down laws for the creator of beauty, but to help us to understand himself and his work, not only its form and elements but the mind from which it sprang and the impressions its effects create in the mind that receives. Here criticism is on its right road, but on a road to a consummation in which the rational understanding is overpassed and a higher faculty opens, suprarational in its origin and nature.

For the conscious appreciation of beauty reaches its height of enlightenment and enjoyment not by analysis of the beauty enjoyed or even by a right and intelligent understanding of it,—these things are only a preliminary clarifying of our first unenlightened sense of the beautiful,—but by an exaltation of the soul in which it opens itself entirely to the light and power and joy of the creation. The soul of beauty in us identifies itself with the soul of beauty in the thing created and feels in appreciation the same divine intoxication and uplifting which the artist felt in creation. Criticism reaches its highest point when it becomes the record, account, right description of this response; it must become itself inspired, intuitive, revealing. In other words, the action of the intuitive mind must complete the action of the rational intelligence and it may even wholly replace it and do more powerfully the peculiar and proper work of the intellect itself; it may explain more intimately to us the secret of the form, the strands of the process, the inner cause, essence, mechanism of the defects and limitations of the work as well as of its qualities. For the intuitive intelligence when it has been sufficiently trained and developed, can take up always the work of the intellect and do it with a power and light and insight greater and surer than the power and light of the intellectual judgment in its widest scope. There is an intuitive discrimination which is more keen and precise in its sight than the reasoning intelligence.

What has been said of great creative art, that being the form in which normally our highest and intensest aesthetic satisfaction is achieved, applies to all beauty, beauty in Nature, beauty in life as well as beauty in art. We find that in the end the place

of reason and the limits of its achievement are precisely of the same kind in regard to beauty as in regard to religion. It helps to enlighten and purify the aesthetic instincts and impulses, but it cannot give them their highest satisfaction or guide them to a complete insight. It shapes and fulfils to a certain extent the aesthetic intelligence, but it cannot justly pretend to give the definitive law for the creation of beauty or for the appreciation and enjoyment of beauty. It can only lead the aesthetic instinct, impulse, intelligence towards a greatest possible conscious satisfaction, but not to it; it has in the end to hand them over to a higher faculty which is in direct touch with the suprarational and in its nature and workings exceeds the intellect.

And for the same reason, because that which we are seeking through beauty is in the end that which we are seeking through religion, the Absolute, the Divine. The search for beauty is only in its beginning a satisfaction in the beauty of form, the beauty which appeals to the physical senses and the vital impressions, impulsions, desires. It is only in the middle a satisfaction in the beauty of the ideas seized, the emotions aroused, the perception of perfect process and harmonious combination. Behind them the soul of beauty in us desires the contact, the revelation, the uplifting delight of an absolute beauty in all things which it feels to be present, but which neither the senses and instincts by themselves can give, though they may be its channels,—for it is suprasensuous,—nor the reason and intelligence, though they too are a channel,—for it is suprarational, supra-intellectual,—but to which through all these veils the soul itself seeks to arrive. When it can get the touch of this universal, absolute beauty, this soul of beauty, this sense of its revelation in any slightest or greatest thing, the beauty of a flower, a form, the beauty and power of a character, an action, an event, a human life, an idea, a stroke of the brush or the chisel or a scintillation of the mind, the colours of a sunset or the grandeur of the tempest, it is then that the sense of beauty in us is really, powerfully, entirely satisfied. It is in truth seeking, as in religion, for the Divine, the All-Beautiful in man, in nature, in life, in thought, in art; for God is Beauty and Delight hidden in the variation of his masks and

forms. When, fulfilled in our growing sense and knowledge of beauty and delight in beauty and our power for beauty, we are able to identify ourselves in soul with this Absolute and Divine in all the forms and activities of the world and shape an image of our inner and our outer life in the highest image we can perceive and embody of the All-Beautiful, then the aesthetic being in us who was born for this end, has fulfilled himself and risen to his divine consummation. To find highest beauty is to find God; to reveal, to embody, to create, as we say, highest beauty is to bring out of our souls the living image and power of God.

Chapter XV

The Suprarational Good

WE BEGIN to see, through the principle and law of our religious being, through the principle and law of our aesthetic being, the universality of a principle and law which is that of all being and which we must therefore hold steadily in view in regard to all human activities. It rests on a truth on which the sages have always agreed, though by the intellectual thinker it may be constantly disputed. It is the truth that all active being is a seeking for God, a seeking for some highest self and deepest Reality secret within, behind and above ourselves and things, a seeking for the hidden Divinity: the truth which we glimpse through religion, lies concealed behind all life; it is the great secret of life, that which it is in labour to discover and to make real to its self-knowledge.

The seeking for God is also, subjectively, the seeking for our highest, truest, fullest, largest self. It is the seeking for a Reality which the appearances of life conceal because they only partially express it or because they express it from behind veils and figures, by oppositions and contraries, often by what seem to be perversions and opposites of the Real. It is the seeking for something whose completeness comes only by a concrete and all-occupying sense of the Infinite and Absolute; it can be established in its integrality only by finding a value of the infinite in all finite things and by the attempt — necessary, inevitable, however impossible or paradoxical it may seem to the normal reason — to raise all relativities to their absolutes and to reconcile their differences, oppositions and contraries by elevation and sublimation to some highest term in which all these are unified. Some perfect highest term there is by which all our imperfect lower terms can be justified and their discords harmonised if once we can induce them to be its conscious expressions, to exist not for themselves but for That, as contributory values of that highest

Truth, fractional measures of that highest and largest common measure. A One there is in which all the entangled discords of this multiplicity of separated, conflicting, intertwining, colliding ideas, forces, tendencies, instincts, impulses, aspects, appearances which we call life, can find the unity of their diversity, the harmony of their divergences, the justification of their claims, the correction of their perversions and aberrations, the solution of their problems and disputes. Knowledge seeks for that in order that Life may know its own true meaning and transform itself into the highest and most harmonious possible expression of a divine Reality. All seeks for that, each power feels out for it in its own way: the infrarational gropes for it blindly along the line of its instincts, needs, impulses; the rational lays for it its trap of logic and order, follows out and gathers together its diversities, analyses them in order to synthetise; the suprarational gets behind and above things and into their inmost parts, there to touch and lay hands on the Reality itself in its core and essence and enlighten all its infinite detail from that secret centre.

This truth comes most easily home to us in Religion and in Art, in the cult of the spiritual and in the cult of the beautiful, because there we get away most thoroughly from the unrestful pressure of the outward appearances of life, the urgent siege of its necessities, the deafening clamour of its utilities. There we are not compelled at every turn to make terms with some gross material claim, some vulgar but inevitable necessity of the hour and the moment. We have leisure and breathing-time to seek the Real behind the apparent: we are allowed to turn our eyes either away from the temporary and transient or through the temporal itself to the eternal; we can draw back from the limitations of the immediately practical and re-create our souls by the touch of the ideal and the universal. We begin to shake off our chains, we get rid of life in its aspect of a prison-house with Necessity for our jailer and utility for our constant taskmaster; we are admitted to the liberties of the soul; we enter God's infinite kingdom of beauty and delight or we lay hands on the keys of our absolute self-finding and open ourselves to the possession or the adoration of the Eternal. There lies the immense value of Religion, the

immense value of Art and Poetry to the human spirit; it lies in their immediate power for inner truth, for self-enlargement, for liberation.

But in other spheres of life, in the spheres of what by an irony of our ignorance we call especially practical life,—although, if the Divine be our true object of search and realisation, our normal conduct in them and our current idea of them is the very opposite of practical,—we are less ready to recognise the universal truth. We take a long time to admit it even partially in theory, we are seldom ready at all to follow it in practice. And we find this difficulty because there especially, in all our practical life, we are content to be the slaves of an outward Necessity and think ourselves always excused when we admit as the law of our thought, will and action the yoke of immediate and temporary utilities. Yet even there we must arrive eventually at the highest truth. We shall find out in the end that our daily life and our social existence are not things apart, are not another field of existence with another law than the inner and ideal. On the contrary, we shall never find out their true meaning or resolve their harsh and often agonising problems until we learn to see in them a means towards the discovery and the individual and collective expression of our highest and, because our highest, therefore our truest and fullest self, our largest most imperative principle and power of existence. All life is only a lavish and manifold opportunity given us to discover, realise, express the Divine.

It is in our ethical being that this truest truth of practical life, its real and highest practicality becomes most readily apparent. It is true that the rational man has tried to reduce the ethical life like all the rest to a matter of reason, to determine its nature, its law, its practical action by some principle of reason, by some law of reason. He has never really succeeded and he never can really succeed; his appearances of success are mere pretences of the intellect building elegant and empty constructions with words and ideas, mere conventions of logic and vamped-up syntheses, in sum, pretentious failures which break down at the first strenuous touch of reality. Such was that extraordinary system

of utilitarian ethics discovered in the nineteenth century—the great century of science and reason and utility—by one of its most positive and systematic minds and now deservedly discredited. Happily, we need now only smile at its shallow pretentious errors, its substitution of a practical, outward and occasional test for the inner, subjective and absolute motive of ethics, its reduction of ethical action to an impossibly scientific and quite impracticable jugglery of moral mathematics, attractive enough to the reasoning and logical mind, quite false and alien to the whole instinct and intuition of the ethical being. Equally false and impracticable are other attempts of the reason to account for and regulate its principle and phenomena,—the hedonistic theory which refers all virtue to the pleasure and satisfaction of the mind in good or the sociological which supposes ethics to be no more than a system of formulas of conduct generated from the social sense and a ruled direction of the social impulses and would regulate its action by that insufficient standard. The ethical being escapes from all these formulas: it is a law to itself and finds its principle in its own eternal nature which is not in its essential character a growth of evolving mind, even though it may seem to be that in its earthly history, but a light from the ideal, a reflection in man of the Divine.

Not that all these errors have not each of them a truth behind their false constructions; for all errors of the human reason are false representations, a wrong building, effective misconstructions of the truth or of a side or a part of the truth. Utility is a fundamental principle of existence and all fundamental principles of existence are in the end one; therefore it is true that the highest good is also the highest utility. It is true also that, not any balance of the greatest good of the greatest number, but simply the good of others and most widely the good of all is one ideal aim of our outgoing ethical practice; it is that which the ethical man would like to effect, if he could only find the way and be always sure what is the real good of all. But this does not help to regulate our ethical practice, nor does it supply us with its inner principle whether of being or of action, but only produces one of the many considerations by which we can feel our way along

the road which is so difficult to travel. Good, not utility, must be the principle and standard of good; otherwise we fall into the hands of that dangerous pretender expediency, whose whole method is alien to the ethical. Moreover, the standard of utility, the judgment of utility, its spirit, its form, its application must vary with the individual nature, the habit of mind, the outlook on the world. Here there can be no reliable general law to which all can subscribe, no set of large governing principles such as it is sought to supply to our conduct by a true ethics. Nor can ethics at all or ever be a matter of calculation. There is only one safe rule for the ethical man, to stick to his principle of good, his instinct for good, his vision of good, his intuition of good and to govern by that his conduct. He may err, but he will be on his right road in spite of all stumblings, because he will be faithful to the law of his nature. The saying of the Gita is always true; better is the law of one's own nature though ill-performed, dangerous is an alien law however speciously superior it may seem to our reason. But the law of nature of the ethical being is the pursuit of good; it can never be the pursuit of utility.

Neither is its law the pursuit of pleasure high or base, nor self-satisfaction of any kind, however subtle or even spiritual. It is true, here too, that the highest good is both in its nature and inner effect the highest bliss. Ananda, delight of being, is the spring of all existence and that to which it tends and for which it seeks openly or covertly in all its activities. It is true too that in virtue growing, in good accomplished there is great pleasure and that the seeking for it may well be always there as a subconscious motive to the pursuit of virtue. But for practical purposes this is a side aspect of the matter; it does not constitute pleasure into a test or standard of virtue. On the contrary, virtue comes to the natural man by a struggle with his pleasure-seeking nature and is often a deliberate embracing of pain, an edification of strength by suffering. We do not embrace that pain and struggle for the pleasure of the pain and the pleasure of the struggle; for that higher strenuous delight, though it is felt by the secret spirit in us, is not usually or not at first conscious in the conscient normal part of our being which is the field of the struggle. The action

of the ethical man is not motived by even an inner pleasure, but by a call of his being, the necessity of an ideal, the figure of an absolute standard, a law of the Divine.

In the outward history of our ascent this does not at first appear clearly, does not appear perhaps at all: there the evolution of man in society may seem to be the determining cause of his ethical evolution. For ethics only begins by the demand upon him of something other than his personal preference, vital pleasure or material self-interest; and this demand seems at first to work on him through the necessity of his relations with others, by the exigencies of his social existence. But that this is not the core of the matter, is shown by the fact that the ethical demand does not always square with the social demand, nor the ethical standard always coincide with the social standard. On the contrary, the ethical man is often called upon to reject and do battle with the social demand, to break, to move away from, to reverse the social standard. His relations with others and his relations with himself are both of them the occasions of his ethical growth; but that which determines his ethical being is his relations with God, the urge of the Divine upon him whether concealed in his nature or conscious in his higher self or inner genius. He obeys an inner ideal, not an outer standard; he answers to a divine law in his being, not to a social claim or a collective necessity. The ethical imperative comes not from around, but from within him and above him.

It has been felt and said from of old that the laws of right, the laws of perfect conduct are the laws of the gods, eternal beyond, laws that man is conscious of and summoned to obey. The age of reason has scouted this summary account of the matter as a superstition or a poetical imagination which the nature and history of the world contradict. But still there is a truth in this ancient superstition or imagination which the rational denial of it misses and the rational confirmations of it, whether Kant's categorical imperative or another, do not altogether restore. If man's conscience is a creation of his evolving nature, if his conceptions of ethical law are mutable and depend on his stage of evolution, yet at the root of them there is something constant in

all their mutations which lies at the very roots of his own nature and of world-nature. And if Nature in man and the world is in its beginnings infra-ethical as well as infrarational, as it is at its summit supra-ethical as well as suprarational, yet in that infra-ethical there is something which becomes in the human plane of being the ethical, and that supra-ethical is itself a consummation of the ethical and cannot be reached by any who have not trod the long ethical road. Below hides that secret of good in all things which the human being approaches and tries to deliver partially through ethical instinct and ethical idea; above is hidden the eternal Good which exceeds our partial and fragmentary ethical conceptions.

Our ethical impulses and activities begin like all the rest in the infrarational and take their rise from the subconscious. They arise as an instinct of right, an instinct of obedience to an ununderstood law, an instinct of self-giving in labour, an instinct of sacrifice and self-sacrifice, an instinct of love, of self-subordination and of solidarity with others. Man obeys the law at first without any inquiry into the why and the wherefore; he does not seek for it a sanction in the reason. His first thought is that it is a law created by higher powers than himself and his race and he says with the ancient poet that he knows not whence these laws sprang, but only that they are and endure and cannot with impunity be violated. What the instincts and impulses seek after, the reason labours to make us understand, so that the will may come to use the ethical impulses intelligently and turn the instincts into ethical ideas. It corrects man's crude and often erring misprisions of the ethical instinct, separates and purifies his confused associations, shows as best it can the relations of his often clashing moral ideals, tries to arbitrate and compromise between their conflicting claims, arranges a system and many-sided rule of ethical action. And all this is well, a necessary stage of our advance; but in the end these ethical ideas and this intelligent ethical will which it has tried to train to its control, escape from its hold and soar up beyond its province. Always, even when enduring its rein and curb, they have that inborn tendency.

For the ethical being like the rest is a growth and a seeking towards the absolute, the divine, which can only be attained securely in the suprarational. It seeks after an absolute purity, an absolute right, an absolute truth, an absolute strength, an absolute love and self-giving, and it is most satisfied when it can get them in absolute measure, without limit, curb or compromise, divinely, infinitely, in a sort of godhead and transfiguration of the ethical being. The reason is chiefly concerned with what it best understands, the apparent process, the machinery, the outward act, its result and effect, its circumstance, occasion and motive; by these it judges the morality of the action and the morality of the doer. But the developed ethical being knows instinctively that it is an inner something which it seeks and the outward act is only a means of bringing out and manifesting within ourselves by its psychological effects that inner absolute and eternal entity. The value of our actions lies not so much in their apparent nature and outward result as in their help towards the growth of the Divine within us. It is difficult, even impossible to justify upon outward grounds the absolute justice, absolute right, absolute purity, love or selflessness of an action or course of action; for action is always relative, it is mixed and uncertain in its results, perplexed in its occasions. But it is possible to relate the inner being to the eternal and absolute good, to make our sense and will full of it so as to act out of its impulsion or its intuitions and inspirations. That is what the ethical being labours towards and the higher ethical man increasingly attains to in his inner efforts.

In fact ethics is not in its essence a calculation of good and evil in the action or a laboured effort to be blameless according to the standards of the world,—those are only crude appearances,—it is an attempt to grow into the divine nature. Its parts of purity are an aspiration towards the inalienable purity of God's being; its parts of truth and right are a seeking after conscious unity with the law of the divine knowledge and will; its parts of sympathy and charity are a movement towards the infinity and universality of the divine love; its parts of strength and manhood are an edification of the divine strength and power. That is the

heart of its meaning. Its high fulfilment comes when the being of the man undergoes this transfiguration; then it is not his actions that standardise his nature but his nature that gives value to his actions; then he is no longer laboriously virtuous, artificially moral, but naturally divine. Actively, too, he is fulfilled and consummated when he is not led or moved either by the infrarational impulses or the rational intelligence and will, but inspired and piloted by the divine knowledge and will made conscious in his nature. And that can only be done, first by communication of the truth of these things through the intuitive mind as it purifies itself progressively from the invasion of egoism, self-interest, desire, passion and all kinds of self-will, finally through the suprarational light and power, no longer communicated but present and in possession of his being. Such was the supreme aim of the ancient sages who had the wisdom which rational man and rational society have rejected because it was too high a truth for the comprehension of the reason and for the powers of the normal limited human will too bold and immense, too infinite an effort.

Therefore it is with the cult of Good, as with the cult of Beauty and the cult of the spiritual. Even in its first instincts it is already an obscure seeking after the divine and absolute; it aims at an absolute satisfaction, it finds its highest light and means in something beyond the reason, it is fulfilled only when it finds God, when it creates in man some image of the divine Reality. Rising from its infrarational beginnings through its intermediate dependence on the reason to a suprarational consummation, the ethical is like the aesthetic and the religious being of man a seeking after the Eternal.

Chapter XVI

The Suprarational Ultimate of Life

IN ALL the higher powers of his life man may be said to be seeking, blindly enough, for God. To get at the Divine and Eternal in himself and the world and to harmonise them, to put his being and his life in tune with the Infinite reveals itself in these parts of his nature as his concealed aim and his destiny. He sets out to arrive at his highest and largest and most perfect self, and the moment he at all touches upon it, this self in him appears to be one with some great Soul and Self of Truth and Good and Beauty in the world to which we give the name of God. To get at this as a spiritual presence is the aim of religion, to grow into harmony with its eternal nature of right, love, strength and purity is the aim of ethics, to enjoy and mould ourselves into the harmony of its eternal beauty and delight is the aim and consummation of our aesthetic need and nature, to know and to be according to its eternal principles of truth is the end of science and philosophy and of all our insistent drive towards knowledge.

But all this seems to be something above our normal and usual being; it is something into which we strive to grow, but it does not seem to be the normal stuff, the natural being or atmosphere of the individual and the society in their ordinary consciousness and their daily life. That life is practical and not idealistic; it is concerned not with good, beauty, spiritual experience, the higher truth, but with interests, physical needs, desires, vital necessities. This is real to it, all the rest is a little shadowy; this belongs to its ordinary labour, all the rest to its leisure; this to the stuff of which it is made, all the rest to its parts of ornament and dispensable improvement. To all that rest society gives a place, but its heart is not there. It accepts ethics as a bond and an influence, but it does not live for ethical good; its real gods are vital need and utility and the desires of the body. If

it governs its life partly by ethical laws because otherwise vital need, desire, utility in seeking their own satisfaction through many egoistic individuals would clash among themselves and destroy their own aims, it does not feel called upon to make its life entirely ethical. It concerns itself still less with beauty; even if it admits things beautiful as an embellishment and an amusement, a satisfaction and pastime of the eye and ear and mind, nothing moves it imperatively to make its life a thing of beauty. It allows religion a fixed place and portion, on holy days, in the church or temple, at the end of life when age and the approach of death call the attention forcibly away from this life to other life, at fixed times in the week or the day when it thinks it right for a moment to pause in the affairs of the world and remember God: but to make the whole of life a religion, a remembering of God and a seeking after him, is a thing that is not really done even in societies which like the Indian erect spirituality as their aim and principle. It admits philosophy in a still more remote fashion; and if nowadays it eagerly seeks after science, that is because science helps prodigiously the satisfaction of its vital desires, needs and interests: but it does not turn to seek after an entirely scientific life any more than after an entirely ethical life. A more complete effort in any one of these directions it leaves to the individual, to the few, and to individuals of a special type, the saint, the ethical man, the artist, the thinker, the man of religion; it gives them a place, does some homage to them, assigns some room to the things they represent, but for itself it is content to follow mainly after its own inherent principle of vital satisfaction, vital necessity and utility, vital efficiency.

The reason is that here we get to another power of our being which is different from the ethical, aesthetic, rational and religious,—one which, even if we recognise it as lower in the scale, still insists on its own reality and has not only the right to exist but the right to satisfy itself and be fulfilled. It is indeed the primary power, it is the base of our existence upon earth, it is that which the others take as their starting-point and their foundation. This is the life-power in us, the vitalistic, the dynamic nature. Its whole principle and aim is to be, to assert

its existence, to increase, to expand, to possess and to enjoy: its native terms are growth of being, pleasure and power. Life itself here is Being at labour in Matter to express itself in terms of conscious force; human life is the human being at labour to impress himself on the material world with the greatest possible force and intensity and extension. His primary insistent aim must be to live and make for himself a place in the world, for himself and his species, secondly, having made it to possess, produce and enjoy with an ever-widening scope, and finally to spread himself over all the earth-life and dominate it; this is and must be his first practical business. That is what the Darwinians have tried to express by their notion of the struggle for life. But the struggle is not merely to last and live, but to increase, enjoy and possess: its method includes and uses not only a principle and instinct of egoism, but a concomitant principle and instinct of association. Human life is moved by two equally powerful impulses, one of individualistic self-assertion, the other of collective self-assertion; it works by strife, but also by mutual assistance and united effort: it uses two diverse convergent forms of action, two motives which seem to be contradictory but are in fact always coexistent, competitive endeavour and cooperative endeavour. It is from this character of the dynamism of life that the whole structure of human society has come into being, and it is upon the sustained and vigorous action of this dynamism that the continuance, energy and growth of all human societies depends. If this life-force in them fails and these motive-powers lose in vigour, then all begins to languish, stagnate and finally move towards disintegration.

The modern European idea of society is founded upon the primary and predominant part played by this vital dynamism in the formation and maintenance of society; for the European, ever since the Teutonic mind and temperament took possession of western Europe, has been fundamentally the practical, dynamic and kinetic man, vitalistic in the very marrow of his thought and being. All else has been the fine flower of his life and culture, this has been its root and stalk, and in modern times this truth of his temperament, always there, has come aggressively to the

surface and triumphed over the traditions of Christian piety and Latinistic culture. This triumphant emergence and lead of the vital man and his motives has been the whole significance of the great economic and political civilisation of the nineteenth century. Life in society consists, for the practical human instincts, in three activities, the domestic and social life of man,—social in the sense of his customary relations with others in the community both as an individual and as a member of one family among many,—his economic activities as a producer, wealth-getter and consumer and his political status and action. Society is the organisation of these three things and, fundamentally, it is for the practical human being nothing more. Learning and science, culture, ethics, aesthetics, religion are assigned their place as aids to life, for its guidance and betterment, for its embellishment, for the consolation of its labours, difficulties and sorrows, but they are no part of its very substance, do not figure among its essential objects. Life itself is the only object of living.

The ancients held a different, indeed a diametrically opposite view. Although they recognised the immense importance of the primary activities, in Asia the social most, in Europe the political,—as every society must which at all means to live and flourish,—yet these were not to them primary in the higher sense of the word; they were man's first business, but not his chief business. The ancients regarded this life as an occasion for the development of the rational, the ethical, the aesthetic, the spiritual being. Greece and Rome laid stress on the three first alone, Asia went farther, made these also subordinate and looked upon them as stepping-stones to a spiritual consummation. Greece and Rome were proudest of their art, poetry and philosophy and cherished these things as much as or even more than their political liberty or greatness. Asia too exalted these three powers and valued inordinately her social organisation, but valued much more highly, exalted with a much greater intensity of worship her saints, her religious founders and thinkers, her spiritual heroes. The modern world has been proudest of its economic organisation, its political liberty, order and progress, the mechanism, comfort and ease of its social and domestic life,

its science, but science most in its application to practical life, most for its instruments and conveniences, its railways, telegraphs, steamships and its other thousand and one discoveries, countless inventions and engines which help man to master the physical world. That marks the whole difference in the attitude.

On this a great deal hangs; for if the practical and vitalistic view of life and society is the right one, if society merely or principally exists for the maintenance, comfort, vital happiness and political and economic efficiency of the species, then our idea that life is a seeking for God and for the highest self and that society too must one day make that its principle cannot stand. Modern society, at any rate in its self-conscious aim, is far enough from any such endeavour; whatever may be the splendour of its achievement, it acknowledges only two gods, life and practical reason organised under the name of science. Therefore on this great primary thing, this life-power and its manifestations, we must look with especial care to see what it is in its reality as well as what it is in its appearance. Its appearance is familiar enough; for of that is made the very stuff and present form of our everyday life. Its main ideals are the physical good and vitalistic well-being of the individual and the community, the entire satisfaction of the desire for bodily health, long life, comfort, luxury, wealth, amusement, recreation, a constant and tireless expenditure of the mind and the dynamic life-force in remunerative work and production and, as the higher flame-spires of this restless and devouring energy, creations and conquests of various kinds, wars, invasions, colonisation, discovery, commercial victory, travel, adventure, the full possession and utilisation of the earth. All this life still takes as its cadre the old existing forms, the family, the society, the nation and it has two impulses, individualistic and collective.

The primary impulse of life is individualistic and makes family, social and national life a means for the greater satisfaction of the vital individual. In the family the individual seeks for the satisfaction of his vital instinct of possession, as well as for the joy of companionship, and for the fulfilment of his other vital instinct of self-reproduction. His gains are the

possession of wife, servants, house, wealth, estates, the reproduction of much of himself in the body and mind of his progeny and the prolongation of his activities, gains and possessions in the life of his children; incidentally he enjoys the vital and physical pleasures and the more mental pleasures of emotion and affection to which the domestic life gives scope. In society he finds a less intimate but a larger expansion of himself and his instincts. A wider field of companionship, interchange, associated effort and production, errant or gregarious pleasure, satisfied emotion, stirred sensation and regular amusement are the advantages which attach him to social existence. In the nation and its constituent parts he finds a means for the play of a remoter but still larger sense of power and expansion. If he has the force, he finds there fame, pre-eminence, leadership or at a lower pitch the sense of an effective action on a small or a large scale, in a reduced or a magnified field of public action; if he cannot have this, still he can feel a share of some kind, a true portion or fictitious image of participation, in the pride, power and splendour of a great collective activity and vital expansion. In all this there is primarily at work the individualist principle of the vital instinct in which the competitive side of that movement of our nature associates with the cooperative but predominates over it. Carried to an excess this predominance creates the ideal of the arriviste, to whom family, society and nation are not so much a sympathetic field as a ladder to be climbed, a prey to be devoured, a thing to be conquered and dominated. In extreme cases the individualist turn isolates itself from the companion motive, reverts to a primitive anti-social feeling and creates the nomad, the adventurer, the ranger of wilds, or the pure solitary,—solitary not from any intellectual or spiritual impulse, but because society, once an instrument, has become a prison and a burden, an oppressive cramping of his expansion, a denial of breathing-space and elbow-room. But these cases grow rarer, now that the ubiquitous tentacles of modern society take hold everywhere; soon there will be no place of refuge left for either the nomad or the solitary, not even perhaps Saharan deserts or the secure remotenesses of the Himalayas. Even, it may be, the

refuge of an inner seclusion may be taken from us by a collectivist society intent to make its pragmatic, economic, dynamic most of every individual "cell" of the organism.

For this growing collectivist or cooperative tendency embodies the second instinct of the vital or practical being in man. It shows itself first in the family ideal by which the individual subordinates himself and finds his vital satisfaction and practical account, not in his own predominant individuality, but in the life of a larger vital ego. This ideal played a great part in the old aristocratic views of life; it was there in the ancient Indian idea of the *kula* and the *kuladharma*, and in later India it was at the root of the joint-family system which made the strong economic base of mediaeval Hinduism. It has taken its grossest Vaishya form in the ideal of the British domestic Philistine, the idea of the human individual born here to follow a trade or profession, to marry and procreate a family, to earn his living, to succeed reasonably if not to amass an efficient or ostentatious wealth, to enjoy for a space and then die, thus having done the whole business for which he came into the body and performed all his essential duty in life,—for this apparently was the end unto which man with all his divine possibilities was born! But whatever form it may take, however this grossness may be refined or toned down, whatever ethical or religious conceptions may be superadded, always the family is an essentially practical, vitalistic and economic creation. It is simply a larger vital ego, a more complex vital organism that takes up the individual and englobes him in a more effective competitive and cooperative life unit. The family like the individual accepts and uses society for its field and means of continuance, of vital satisfaction and well-being, of aggrandisement and enjoyment. But this life unit also, this multiple ego can be induced by the cooperative instinct in life to subordinate its egoism to the claims of the society and trained even to sacrifice itself at need on the communal altar. For the society is only a still larger vital competitive and cooperative ego that takes up both the individual and the family into a more complex organism and uses them for the collective satisfaction of its vital needs, claims, interests, aggrandisement,

well-being, enjoyment. The individual and family consent to this exploitation for the same reason that induced the individual to take on himself the yoke of the family, because they find their account in this wider vital life and have the instinct in it of their own larger growth, security and satisfaction. The society, still more than the family, is essentially economic in its aims and in its very nature. That accounts for the predominantly economic and materialistic character of modern ideas of Socialism; for these ideas are the full rationalistic flowering of this instinct of collective life. But since the society is one competitive unit among many of its kind, and since its first relations with the others are always potentially hostile, even at the best competitive and not cooperative, and have to be organised in that view, a political character is necessarily added to the social life, even predominates for a time over the economic and we have the nation or State. If we give their due value to these fundamental characteristics and motives of collective existence, it will seem natural enough that the development of the collective and cooperative idea of society should have culminated in a huge, often a monstrous overgrowth of the vitalistic, economic and political ideal of life, society and civilisation.

What account are the higher parts of man's being, those finer powers in him that more openly tend to the growth of his divine nature, to make with this vital instinct or with its gigantic modern developments? Obviously, their first impulse must be to take hold of them and dominate and transform all this crude life into their own image; but when they discover that here is a power apart, as persistent as themselves, that it seeks a satisfaction *per se* and accepts their impress to a certain extent, but not altogether and, as it were, unwillingly, partially, unsatisfactorily, — what then? We often find that ethics and religion especially, when they find themselves in a constant conflict with the vital instincts, the dynamic life-power in man, proceed to an attitude of almost complete hostility and seek to damn them in idea and repress them in fact. To the vital instinct for wealth and well-being they oppose the ideal of a chill and austere poverty; to the vital instinct for pleasure the ideal not only of self-denial, but of

absolute mortification; to the vital instinct for health and ease the ascetic's contempt, disgust and neglect of the body; to the vital instinct for incessant action and creation the ideal of calm and inaction, passivity, contemplation; to the vital instinct for power, expansion, domination, rule, conquest the ideal of humility, self-abasement, submission, meek harmlessness, docility in suffering; to the vital instinct of sex on which depends the continuance of the species, the ideal of an unproductive chastity and celibacy; to the social and family instinct the anti-social ideal of the ascetic, the monk, the solitary, the world-shunning saint. Commencing with discipline and subordination they proceed to complete mortification, which means when translated the putting to death of the vital instincts, and declare that life itself is an illusion to be shed from the soul or a kingdom of the flesh, the world and the devil,—accepting thus the claim of the unenlightened and undisciplined life itself that it is not, was never meant to be, can never become the kingdom of God, a high manifestation of the Spirit.

Up to a certain point this recoil has its uses and may easily even, by *tapasyā*, by the law of energy increasing through compression, develop for a time a new vigour in the life of the society, as happened in India in the early Buddhist centuries. But beyond a certain point it tends, not really to kill, for that is impossible, but to discourage along with the vital instincts the indispensable life-energy of which they are the play and renders them in the end inert, feeble, narrow, unelastic, incapable of energetic reaction to force and circumstance. That was the final result in India of the agelong pressure of Buddhism and its supplanter and successor, Illusionism. No society wholly or too persistently and pervasively dominated by this denial of the life dynamism can flourish and put forth its possibilities of growth and perfection. For from dynamic it becomes static and from the static position it proceeds to stagnation and degeneration. Even the higher being of man, which finds its account in a vigorous life dynamism, both as a fund of force to be transmuted into its own loftier energies and as a potent channel of connection with the outer life, suffers in the end by this failure and contraction. The ancient Indian

ideal recognised this truth and divided life into four essential and indispensable divisions, *artha*, *kāma*, *dharma*, *mokṣa*, vital interests, satisfaction of desires of all kinds, ethics and religion, and liberation or spirituality, and it insisted on the practice and development of all. Still it tended not only to put the last forward as the goal of all the rest, which it is, but to put it at the end of life and its habitat in another world of our being, rather than here in life as a supreme status and formative power on the physical plane. But this rules out the idea of the kingdom of God on earth, the perfectibility of society and of man in society, the evolution of a new and diviner race, and without one or other of these no universal ideal can be complete. It provides a temporary and occasional, but not an inherent justification for life; it holds out no illuminating fulfilment either for its individual or its collective impulse.

Let us then look at this vital instinct and life dynamism in its own being and not merely as an occasion for ethical or religious development and see whether it is really rebellious in its very nature to the Divine. We can see at once that what we have described is the first stage of the vital being, the infrarational, the instinctive; this is the crude character of its first native development and persists even when it is trained by the growing application to it of the enlightening reason. Evidently it is in this natural form a thing of the earth, gross, earthy, full even of hideous uglinesses and brute blunders and jarring discords; but so also is the infrarational stage in ethics, in aesthetics, in religion. It is true too that it presents a much more enormous difficulty than these others, more fundamentally and obstinately resists elevation, because it is the very province of the infrarational, a first formulation of consciousness out of the Inconscient, nearest to it in the scale of being. But still it has too, properly looked at, its rich elements of power, beauty, nobility, good, sacrifice, worship, divinity; here too are high-reaching gods, masked but still resplendent. Until recently, and even now, reason, in the garb no longer of philosophy, but of science, has increasingly proposed to take up all this physical and vital life and perfect it by the sole power of rationalism, by

a knowledge of the laws of Nature, of sociology and physiology and biology and health, by collectivism, by State education, by a new psychological education and a number of other kindred means. All this is well in its own way and in its limits, but it is not enough and can never come to a truly satisfying success. The ancient attempt of reason in the form of a high idealistic, rational, aesthetic, ethical and religious culture achieved only an imperfect discipline of the vital man and his instincts, sometimes only a polishing, a gloss, a clothing and mannerising of the original uncouth savage. The modern attempt of reason in the form of a broad and thorough rational, utilitarian and efficient instruction and organisation of man and his life is not succeeding any better for all its insistent but always illusory promise of more perfect results in the future. These endeavours cannot indeed be truly successful if our theory of life is right and if this great mass of vital energism contains in itself the imprisoned suprarational, if it has, as it then must have, the instinctive reaching out for something divine, absolute and infinite which is concealed in its blind strivings. Here too reason must be overpassed or surpass itself and become a passage to the Divine.

The first mark of the suprarational, when it intervenes to take up any portion of our being, is the growth of absolute ideals; and since life is Being and Force and the divine state of being is unity and the Divine in force is God as Power taking possession, the absolute vital ideals must be of that nature. Nowhere are they wanting. If we take the domestic and social life of man, we find hints of them there in several forms; but we need only note, however imperfect and dim the present shapes, the strivings of love at its own self-finding, its reachings towards its absolute — the absolute love of man and woman, the absolute maternal or paternal, filial or fraternal love, the love of friends, the love of comrades, love of country, love of humanity. These ideals of which the poets have sung so persistently, are not a mere glamour and illusion, however the egoisms and discords of our instinctive, infrarational way of living may seem to contradict them. Always crossed by imperfection or opposite vital movements, they are still divine possibilities and can be made

a first means of our growth into a spiritual unity of being with being. Certain religious disciplines have understood this truth, have taken up these relations boldly and applied them to our soul's communion with God; and by a converse process they can, lifted out of their present social and physical formulas, become for us, not the poor earthly things they are now, but deep and beautiful and wonderful movements of God in man fulfilling himself in life. All the economic development of life itself takes on at its end the appearance of an attempt to get rid of the animal squalor and bareness which is what obligatory poverty really means, and to give to man the divine ease and leisure of the gods. It is pursued in a wrong way, no doubt, and with many ugly circumstances, but still the ideal is darkly there. Politics itself, that apparent game of strife and deceit and charlatanism, can be a large field of absolute idealisms. What of patriotism,—never mind the often ugly instincts from which it starts and which it still obstinately preserves,—but in its aspects of worship, self-giving, discipline, self-sacrifice? The great political ideals of man, monarchy, aristocracy, democracy, apart from the selfishnesses they serve and the rational and practical justifications with which they arm themselves, have had for their soul an ideal, some half-seen truth of the absolute and have carried with them a worship, a loyalty, a loss of self in the idea which have made men ready to suffer and die for them. War and strife themselves have been schools of heroism; they have preserved the heroic in man, they have created the *kṣatriyāḥ tyaktajīvitāḥ* of the Sanskrit epic phrase, the men of power and courage who have abandoned their bodily life for a cause; for without heroism man cannot grow into the Godhead; courage, energy and strength are among the very first principles of the divine nature in action. All this great vital, political, economic life of man with its two powers of competition and cooperation is stumbling blindly forward towards some realisation of power and unity,—in two divine directions, therefore. For the Divine in life is Power possessed of self-mastery, but also of mastery of His world, and man and mankind too move towards conquest of their world, their environment. And again the Divine in

fulfilment here is and must be oneness, and the ideal of human unity however dim and far off is coming slowly into sight. The competitive nation-units are feeling, at times, however feebly as yet, the call to cast themselves into a greater unified cooperative life of the human race.

No doubt all is still moving, however touched by dim lights from above, on a lower half rational half infrarational level, clumsily, coarsely, in ignorance of itself and as yet with little nobility of motive. All is being worked out very crudely by the confused clash of life-forces and the guidance of ideas that are half-lights of the intellect, and the means proposed are too mechanical and the aims too material; they miss the truth that the outer life-result can only endure if it is founded on inner realities. But so life in the past has moved always and must at first move. For life organises itself at first round the ego-motive and the instinct of ego-expansion is the earliest means by which men have come into contact with each other; the struggle for possession has been the first crude means towards union, the aggressive assertion of the smaller self the first step towards a growth into the larger self. All has been therefore a half-ordered confusion of the struggle for life corrected by the need and instinct of association, a struggle of individuals, clans, tribes, parties, nations, ideas, civilisations, cultures, ideals, religions, each affirming itself, each compelled into contact, association, strife with the others. For while Nature imposes the ego as a veil behind which she labours out the individual manifestation of the spirit, she also puts a compulsion on it to grow in being until it can at last expand or merge into a larger self in which it meets, harmonises with itself, comprehends in its own consciousness, becomes one with the rest of existence. To assist in this growth Life-Nature throws up in itself ego-enlarging, ego-exceeding, even ego-destroying instincts and movements which combat and correct the smaller self-affirming instincts and movements,—she enforces on her human instrument impulses of love, sympathy, self-denial, self-effacement, self-sacrifice, altruism, the drive towards universality in mind and heart and life, glimmerings of an obscure unanimism that has not yet found thoroughly its

own true light and motive-power. Because of this obscurity these powers, unable to affirm their own absolute, to take the lead or dominate, obliged to compromise with the demands of the ego, even to become themselves a form of egoism, are impotent also to bring harmony and transformation to life. Instead of peace they seem to bring rather a sword; for they increase the number and tension of conflict of the unreconciled forces, ideas, impulses of which the individual human consciousness and the life of the collectivity are the arena. The ideal and practical reason of man labours to find amidst all this the right law of life and action; it strives by a rule of moderation and accommodation, by selection and rejection or by the dominance of some chosen ideas or powers to reduce things to harmony, to do consciously what Nature through natural selection and instinct has achieved in her animal kinds, an automatically ordered and settled form and norm of their existence. But the order, the structure arrived at by the reason is always partial, precarious and temporary. It is disturbed by a pull from below and a pull from above. For these powers that life throws up to help towards the growth into a larger self, a wider being, are already reflections of something that is beyond reason, seeds of the spiritual, the absolute. There is the pressure on human life of an Infinite which will not allow it to rest too long in any formulation,—not at least until it has delivered out of itself that which shall be its own self-exceeding and self-fulfilment.

This process of life through a first obscure and confused effort of self-finding is the inevitable result of its beginnings; for life has begun from an involution of the spiritual truth of things in what seems to be its opposite. Spiritual experience tells us that there is a Reality which supports and pervades all things as the Cosmic Self and Spirit, can be discovered by the individual even here in the terrestrial embodiment as his own self and spirit, and is, at its summits and in its essence, an infinite and eternal self-existent Being, Consciousness and Bliss of existence. But what we seem to see as the source and beginning of the material universe is just the contrary — it wears to us the aspect of a Void, an infinite of Non-Existence, an indeterminate Inconscient, an

insensitive blissless Zero out of which everything has yet to come. When it begins to move, evolve, create, it puts on the appearance of an inconscient Energy which delivers existence out of the Void in the form of an infinitesimal fragmentation, the electron—or perhaps some still more impalpable minute unit, a not yet discovered, hardly discoverable infinitesimal,—then the atom, the molecule, and out of this fragmentation builds up a formed and concrete universe in the void of its Infinite. Yet we see that this unconscious Energy does at every step the works of a vast and minute Intelligence fixing and combining every possible device to prepare, manage and work out the paradox and miracle of Matter and the awakening of a life and a spirit in Matter; existence grows out of the Void, consciousness emerges and increases out of the Inconscient, an ascending urge towards pleasure, happiness, delight, divine bliss and ecstasy is inexplicably born out of an insensitive Nihil. These phenomena already betray the truth, which we discover when we grow aware in our depths, that the Inconscient is only a mask and within it is the Upanishad's "Conscient in unconscious things". In the beginning, says the Veda, was the ocean of inconsciousness and out of it That One arose into birth by his greatness,—by the might of his self-manifesting Energy.

But the Inconscient, if a mask, is an effective mask of the Spirit; it imposes on the evolving life and soul the law of a difficult emergence. Life and consciousness, no less than Matter, obey in their first appearance the law of fragmentation. Life organises itself physically round the plasm, the cell, psychologically round the small separative fragmentary ego. Consciousness itself has to concentrate its small beginnings in a poor surface formation and hide behind the veil of this limited surface existence the depths and infinities of its own being. It has to grow slowly in an external formulation till it is ready to break the crust between this petty outer figure of ourselves, which we think to be the whole, and the concealed self within us. Even the spiritual being seems to obey this law of fragmentation and manifest as a unit in the whole a spark of itself that evolves into an individual psyche. It is this little ego, this fragmented consciousness, this concealed

soul-spark on which is imposed the task of meeting and striving with the forces of the universe, entering into contact with all that seems to it not itself, increasing under the pressure of inner and outer Nature till it can become one with all existence. It has to grow into self-knowledge and world-knowledge, to get within itself and discover that it is a spiritual being, to get outside of itself and discover its larger truth as the cosmic Individual, to get beyond itself and know and live in some supreme Being, Consciousness and Bliss of existence. For this immense task it is equipped only with the instruments of its original Ignorance. Its limited being is the cause of all the difficulty, discord, struggle, division that mars life. The limitation of its consciousness, unable to dominate or assimilate the contacts of the universal Energy, is the cause of all its suffering, pain and sorrow. Its limited power of consciousness formulated in an ignorant will unable to grasp or follow the right law of its life and action is the cause of all its error, wrongdoing and evil. There is no other true cause; for all apparent causes are themselves circumstance and result of this original sin of the being. Only when it rises and widens out of this limited separative consciousness into the oneness of the liberated Spirit, can it escape from these results of its growth out of the Inconscience.

If we see this as the truth behind Life, we can understand at once why it has had to follow its present curve of ignorant self-formulation. But also we see what through it all it is obscurely seeking, trying to grasp and form, feeling out for in its own higher impulses and deepest motives, and why these are in it — useless, perturbing and chimerical if it were only an animal product of inconscient Nature,— these urgings towards self-discovery, mastery, unity, freedom from its lower self, spiritual release. Evolving out of its first involved condition in Matter and in plant life, effecting a first imperfect organised consciousness in the animal it arrives in man, the mental being, at the possibility of a new, a conscious evolution which will bring it to its goal and at a certain stage of his development it wakes in him the overmastering impulse to pass on from mental to spiritual being. Life cannot arrive at its secret ultimates by following its

first infrarational motive forces of instinct and desire; for all here is a groping and seeking without finding, a field of brief satisfactions stamped with the Inconscient's seal of insufficiency and impermanence. But neither can human reason give it what it searches after; for reason can only establish half-lights and a provisional order. Therefore with man as he is the upward urge in life cannot rest satisfied always; its evolutionary impulse cannot stop short at this transitional term, this half-achievement. It has to aim at a higher scale of consciousness, deliver out of life and mind something that is still latent and inchoate.

The ultimates of life are spiritual and only in the full light of the liberated self and spirit can it achieve them. That full light is not intellect or reason, but a knowledge by inner unity and identity which is the native self-light of the fully developed spiritual consciousness and, preparing that, on the way to it, a knowledge by intimate inner contact with the truth of things and beings which is intuitive and born of a secret oneness. Life seeks for self-knowledge; it is only by the light of the spirit that it can find it. It seeks for a luminous guidance and mastery of its own movements; it is only when it finds within itself this inner self and spirit and by it or in obedience to it governs its own steps that it can have the illumined will it needs and the unerring leadership. For it is so only that the blind certitudes of the instincts and the speculative hypotheses and theories and the experimental and inferential certitudes of reason can be replaced by the seeing spiritual certitudes. Life seeks the fulfilment of its instincts of love and sympathy, its yearnings after accord and union; but these are crossed by opposing instincts and it is only the spiritual consciousness with its realised abiding oneness that can abolish these oppositions. Life seeks for full growth of being, but it can attain to it only when the limited being has found in itself its own inmost soul of existence and around it its own widest self of cosmic consciousness by which it can feel the world and all being in itself and as itself. Life seeks for power; it is only the power of the spirit and the power of this conscious oneness that can give it mastery of its self and its world. It seeks for pleasure, happiness, bliss; but the infrarational forms

of these things are stricken with imperfection, fragmentariness, impermanence and the impact of their opposites. Moreover infrarational life still bears some stamp of the Inconscient in an underlying insensitiveness, a dullness of fibre, a weakness of vibratory response,— it cannot attain to true happiness or bliss and what it can obtain of pleasure it cannot support for long or bear or keep any extreme intensity of these things. Only the spirit has the secret of an unmixed and abiding happiness or ecstasy, is capable of a firm tenseness of vibrant response to it, can achieve and justify a spiritual pleasure or joy of life as one form of the infinite and universal delight of being. Life seeks a harmonious fulfilment of all its powers, now divided and in conflict, all its possibilities, parts, members; it is only in the consciousness of the one self and spirit that that is found, for there they arrive at their full truth and their perfect agreement in the light of the integral Self-existence.

There is then a suprarational ultimate of Life no less than a suprarational Truth, Good and Beauty. The endeavour to reach it is the spiritual meaning of this seeking and striving Life-nature.

Chapter XVII

Religion as the Law of Life

SINCE the infinite, the absolute and transcendent, the universal, the One is the secret summit of existence and to reach the spiritual consciousness and the Divine the ultimate goal and aim of our being and therefore of the whole development of the individual and the collectivity in all its parts and all its activities, reason cannot be the last and highest guide; culture, as it is understood ordinarily, cannot be the directing light or find out the regulating and harmonising principle of all our life and action. For reason stops short of the Divine and only compromises with the problems of life, and culture in order to attain the Transcendent and Infinite must become spiritual culture, something much more than an intellectual, aesthetic, ethical and practical training. Where then are we to find the directing light and the regulating and harmonising principle? The first answer which will suggest itself, the answer constantly given by the Asiatic mind, is that we shall find it directly and immediately in religion. And this seems a reasonable and at first sight a satisfying solution; for religion is that instinct, idea, activity, discipline in man which aims directly at the Divine, while all the rest seem to aim at it only indirectly and reach it with difficulty after much wandering and stumbling in the pursuit of the outward and imperfect appearances of things. To make all life religion and to govern all activities by the religious idea would seem to be the right way to the development of the ideal individual and ideal society and the lifting of the whole life of man into the Divine.

A certain pre-eminence of religion, the overshadowing or at least the colouring of life, an overtopping of all the other instincts and fundamental ideas by the religious instinct and the religious idea is, we may note, not peculiar to Asiatic civilisations, but has always been more or less the normal state of the human mind

and of human societies, or if not quite that, yet a notable and prominent part of their complex tendencies, except in certain comparatively brief periods of their history, in one of which we find ourselves today and are half turning indeed to emerge from it but have not yet emerged. We must suppose then that in this leading, this predominant part assigned to religion by the normal human collectivity there is some great need and truth of our natural being to which we must always after however long an infidelity return. On the other hand, we must recognise the fact that in a time of great activity, of high aspiration, of deep sowing, of rich fruit-bearing, such as the modern age with all its faults and errors has been, a time especially when humanity got rid of much that was cruel, evil, ignorant, dark, odious, not by the power of religion, but by the power of the awakened intelligence and of human idealism and sympathy, this predominance of religion has been violently attacked and rejected by that portion of humanity which was for that time the standard-bearer of thought and progress, Europe after the Renascence, modern Europe.

This revolt in its extreme form tried to destroy religion altogether, boasted indeed of having killed the religious instinct in man,—a vain and ignorant boast, as we now see, for the religious instinct in man is most of all the one instinct in him that cannot be killed, it only changes its form. In its more moderate movements the revolt put religion aside into a corner of the soul by itself and banished its intermischance in the intellectual, aesthetic, practical life and even in the ethical; and it did this on the ground that the intermischance of religion in science, thought, politics, society, life in general had been and must be a force for retardation, superstition, oppressive ignorance. The religionist may say that this accusation was an error and an atheistic perversity, or he may say that a religious retardation, a pious ignorance, a contented static condition or even an orderly stagnation full of holy thoughts of the Beyond is much better than a continuous endeavour after greater knowledge, greater mastery, more happiness, joy, light upon this transient earth. But the catholic thinker cannot accept such a plea; he is obliged to

see that so long as man has not realised the divine and the ideal in his life,— and it may well be even when he has realised it, since the divine is the infinite,— progress and not unmoving status is the necessary and desirable law of his life,— not indeed any breathless rush after novelties, but a constant motion towards a greater and greater truth of the spirit, the thought and the life not only in the individual, but in the collectivity, in the communal endeavour, in the turn, ideals, temperament, make of the society, in its strivings towards perfection. And he is obliged too to see that the indictment against religion, not in its conclusion, but in its premiss had something, had even much to justify it,— not that religion in itself must be, but that historically and as a matter of fact the accredited religions and their hierarchs and exponents have too often been a force for retardation, have too often thrown their weight on the side of darkness, oppression and ignorance, and that it has needed a denial, a revolt of the oppressed human mind and heart to correct these errors and set religion right. And why should this have been if religion is the true and sufficient guide and regulator of all human activities and the whole of human life?

We need not follow the rationalistic or atheistic mind through all its aggressive indictment of religion. We need not for instance lay a too excessive stress on the superstitions, aberrations, violences, crimes even, which Churches and cults and creeds have favoured, admitted, sanctioned, supported or exploited for their own benefit, the mere hostile enumeration of which might lead one to echo the cry of the atheistic Roman poet, "To such a mass of ills could religion persuade mankind." As well might one cite the crimes and errors which have been committed in the name of liberty or of order as a sufficient condemnation of the ideal of liberty or the ideal of social order. But we have to note the fact that such a thing was possible and to find its explanation. We cannot ignore for instance the blood-stained and fiery track which formal external Christianity has left furrowed across the mediaeval history of Europe almost from the days of Constantine, its first hour of secular triumph, down to very recent times, or the sanguinary comment which

such an institution as the Inquisition affords on the claim of religion to be the directing light and regulating power in ethics and society, or religious wars and wide-spread State persecutions on its claim to guide the political life of mankind. But we must observe the root of this evil, which is not in true religion itself, but in its infrarational parts, not in spiritual faith and aspiration, but in our ignorant human confusion of religion with a particular creed, sect, cult, religious society or Church. So strong is the human tendency to this error that even the old tolerant Paganism slew Socrates in the name of religion and morality, feebly persecuted non-national faiths like the cult of Isis or the cult of Mithra and more vigorously what it conceived to be the subversive and anti-social religion of the early Christians; and even in still more fundamentally tolerant Hinduism with all its spiritual broadness and enlightenment it led at one time to the milder mutual hatred and occasional though brief-lived persecution of Buddhist, Jain, Shaiva, Vaishnava.

The whole root of the historic insufficiency of religion as a guide and control of human society lies there. Churches and creeds have, for example, stood violently in the way of philosophy and science, burned a Giordano Bruno, imprisoned a Galileo, and so generally misconducted themselves in this matter that philosophy and science had in self-defence to turn upon Religion and rend her to pieces in order to get a free field for their legitimate development; and this because men in the passion and darkness of their vital nature had chosen to think that religion was bound up with certain fixed intellectual conceptions about God and the world which could not stand scrutiny, and therefore scrutiny had to be put down by fire and sword; scientific and philosophical truth had to be denied in order that religious error might survive. We see too that a narrow religious spirit often oppresses and impoverishes the joy and beauty of life, either from an intolerant asceticism or, as the Puritans attempted it, because they could not see that religious austerity is not the whole of religion, though it may be an important side of it, is not the sole ethico-religious approach to God, since love, charity, gentleness, tolerance, kindliness are also and even more divine,

and they forgot or never knew that God is love and beauty as well as purity. In politics religion has often thrown itself on the side of power and resisted the coming of larger political ideals, because it was itself, in the form of a Church, supported by power and because it confused religion with the Church, or because it stood for a false theocracy, forgetting that true theocracy is the kingdom of God in man and not the kingdom of a Pope, a priesthood or a sacerdotal class. So too it has often supported a rigid and outworn social system, because it thought its own life bound up with social forms with which it happened to have been associated during a long portion of its own history and erroneously concluded that even a necessary change there would be a violation of religion and a danger to its existence. As if so mighty and inward a power as the religious spirit in man could be destroyed by anything so small as the change of a social form or so outward as a social readjustment! This error in its many shapes has been the great weakness of religion as practised in the past and the opportunity and justification for the revolt of the intelligence, the aesthetic sense, the social and political idealism, even the ethical spirit of the human being against what should have been its own highest tendency and law.

Here then lies one secret of the divergence between the ancient and the modern, the Eastern and Western ideal, and here also one clue to their reconciliation. Both rest upon a certain strong justification and their quarrel is due to a misunderstanding. It is true in a sense that religion should be the dominant thing in life, its light and law, but religion as it should be and is in its inner nature, its fundamental law of being, a seeking after God, the cult of spirituality, the opening of the deepest life of the soul to the indwelling Godhead, the eternal Omnipresence. On the other hand, it is true that religion when it identifies itself only with a creed, a cult, a Church, a system of ceremonial forms, may well become a retarding force and there may therefore arise a necessity for the human spirit to reject its control over the varied activities of life. There are two aspects of religion, true religion and religionism. True religion is spiritual religion, that which seeks to live in the spirit, in what is beyond the

intellect, beyond the aesthetic and ethical and practical being of man, and to inform and govern these members of our being by the higher light and law of the spirit. Religionism, on the contrary, entrenches itself in some narrow pietistic exaltation of the lower members or lays exclusive stress on intellectual dogmas, forms and ceremonies, on some fixed and rigid moral code, on some religio-political or religio-social system. Not that these things are altogether negligible or that they must be unworthy or unnecessary or that a spiritual religion need disdain the aid of forms, ceremonies, creeds or systems. On the contrary, they are needed by man because the lower members have to be exalted and raised before they can be fully spiritualised, before they can directly feel the spirit and obey its law. An intellectual formula is often needed by the thinking and reasoning mind, a form or ceremony by the aesthetic temperament or other parts of the infrarational being, a set moral code by man's vital nature in their turn towards the inner life. But these things are aids and supports, not the essence; precisely because they belong to the rational and infrarational parts, they can be nothing more and, if too blindly insisted on, may even hamper the suprarational light. Such as they are, they have to be offered to man and used by him, but not to be imposed on him as his sole law by a forced and inflexible domination. In the use of them toleration and free permission of variation is the first rule which should be observed. The spiritual essence of religion is alone the one thing supremely needful, the thing to which we have always to hold and subordinate to it every other element or motive.

But here comes in an ambiguity which brings in a deeper source of divergence. For by spirituality religion seems often to mean something remote from earthly life, different from it, hostile to it. It seems to condemn the pursuit of earthly aims as a trend opposed to the turn to a spiritual life and the hopes of man on earth as an illusion or a vanity incompatible with the hope of man in heaven. The spirit then becomes something aloof which man can only reach by throwing away the life of his lower members. Either he must abandon this nether life after a certain point, when it has served its purpose, or must persistently

discourage, mortify and kill it. If that be the true sense of religion, then obviously religion has no positive message for human society in the proper field of social effort, hope and aspiration or for the individual in any of the lower members of his being. For each principle of our nature seeks naturally for perfection in its own sphere and, if it is to obey a higher power, it must be because that power gives it a greater perfection and a fuller satisfaction even in its own field. But if perfectibility is denied to it and therefore the aspiration to perfection taken away by the spiritual urge, then it must either lose faith in itself and the power to pursue the natural expansion of its energies and activities or it must reject the call of the spirit in order to follow its own bend and law, *dharma*. This quarrel between earth and heaven, between the spirit and its members becomes still more sterilising if spirituality takes the form of a religion of sorrow and suffering and austere mortification and the gospel of the vanity of things; in its exaggeration it leads to such nightmares of the soul as that terrible gloom and hopelessness of the Middle Ages in their worst moment when the one hope of mankind seemed to be in the approaching and expected end of the world, an inevitable and desirable Pralaya. But even in less pronounced and intolerant forms of this pessimistic attitude with regard to the world, it becomes a force for the discouragement of life and cannot, therefore, be a true law and guide for life. All pessimism is to that extent a denial of the Spirit, of its fullness and power, an impatience with the ways of God in the world, an insufficient faith in the divine Wisdom and Will that created the world and for ever guide it. It admits a wrong notion about that supreme Wisdom and Power and therefore cannot itself be the supreme wisdom and power of the spirit to which the world can look for guidance and for the uplifting of its whole life towards the Divine.

The Western recoil from religion, that minimising of its claim and insistence by which Europe progressed from the mediaeval religious attitude through the Renascence and the Reformation to the modern rationalistic attitude, that making of the ordinary earthly life our one preoccupation, that labour

to fulfil ourselves by the law of the lower members, divorced from all spiritual seeking, was an opposite error, the contrary ignorant extreme, the blind swing of the pendulum from a wrong affirmation to a wrong negation. It is an error because perfection cannot be found in such a limitation and restriction; for it denies the complete law of human existence, its deepest urge, its most secret impulse. Only by the light and power of the highest can the lower be perfectly guided, uplifted and accomplished. The lower life of man is in form undivine, though in it there is the secret of the divine, and it can only be divinised by finding the higher law and the spiritual illumination. On the other hand, the impatience which condemns or despairs of life or discourages its growth because it is at present undivine and is not in harmony with the spiritual life, is an equal ignorance, *andham tamah*. The world-shunning monk, the mere ascetic may indeed well find by this turn his own individual and peculiar salvation, the spiritual recompense of his renunciation and Tapasya, as the materialist may find by his own exclusive method the appropriate rewards of his energy and concentrated seeking; but neither can be the true guide of mankind and its law-giver. The monastic attitude implies a fear, an aversion, a distrust of life and its aspirations, and one cannot wisely guide that with which one is entirely out of sympathy, that which one wishes to minimise and discourage. The sheer ascetic spirit, if it directed life and human society, could only prepare it to be a means for denying itself and getting away from its own motives. An ascetic guidance might tolerate the lower activities, but only with a view to persuade them in the end to minimise and finally cease from their own action. But a spirituality which draws back from life to envelop it without being dominated by it does not labour under this disability. The spiritual man who can guide human life towards its perfection is typified in the ancient Indian idea of the Rishi, one who has lived fully the life of man and found the word of the supra-intellectual, supramental, spiritual truth. He has risen above these lower limitations and can view all things from above, but also he is in sympathy with their effort and can view them from within; he has the complete inner

knowledge and the higher surpassing knowledge. Therefore he can guide the world humanly as God guides it divinely, because like the Divine he is in the life of the world and yet above it.

In spirituality, then, understood in this sense, we must seek for the directing light and the harmonising law, and in religion only in proportion as it identifies itself with this spirituality. So long as it falls short of this, it is one human activity and power among others, and, even if it be considered the most important and the most powerful, it cannot wholly guide the others. If it seeks always to fix them into the limits of a creed, an unchangeable law, a particular system, it must be prepared to see them revolting from its control; for although they may accept this impress for a time and greatly profit by it, in the end they must move by the law of their being towards a freer activity and an untrammelled movement. Spirituality respects the freedom of the human soul, because it is itself fulfilled by freedom; and the deepest meaning of freedom is the power to expand and grow towards perfection by the law of one's own nature, *dharma*. This liberty it will give to all the fundamental parts of our being. It will give that freedom to philosophy and science which ancient Indian religion gave,— freedom even to deny the spirit, if they will,— as a result of which philosophy and science never felt in ancient India any necessity of divorcing themselves from religion, but grew rather into it and under its light. It will give the same freedom to man's seeking for political and social perfection and to all his other powers and aspirations. Only it will be vigilant to illuminate them so that they may grow into the light and law of the spirit, not by suppression and restriction, but by a self-searching, self-controlled expansion and a many-sided finding of their greatest, highest and deepest potentialities. For all these are potentialities of the spirit.

Chapter XVIII

The Infrarational Age of the Cycle

IN SPIRITUALITY then would lie our ultimate, our only hope for the perfection whether of the individual or of the communal man; not the spirit which for its separate satisfaction turns away from the earth and her works, but that greater spirit which surpasses and yet accepts and fulfils them. A spirituality that would take up into itself man's rationalism, aestheticism, ethicism, vitalism, corporeality, his aspiration towards knowledge, his attraction towards beauty, his need of love, his urge towards perfection, his demand for power and fullness of life and being, a spirituality that would reveal to these ill-accorded forces their divine sense and the conditions of their godhead, reconcile them all to each other, illumine to the vision of each the way which they now tread in half-lights and shadows, in blindness or with a deflected sight, is a power which even man's too self-sufficient reason can accept or may at least be brought one day to accept as sovereign and to see in it its own supreme light, its own infinite source. For that reveals itself surely in the end as the logical ultimate process, the inevitable development and consummation of all for which man is individually and socially striving. A satisfying evolution of the nascent spirituality still raw and inchoate in the race is the possibility to which an age of subjectivism is a first glimmer of awakening or towards which it shows a first profound potentiality of return. A deeper, wider, greater, more spiritualised subjective understanding of the individual and communal self and its life and a growing reliance on the spiritual light and the spiritual means for the final solution of its problems are the only way to a true social perfection. The free rule, that is to say, the predominant lead, control and influence of the developed spiritual man — not the half-spiritualised priest, saint or prophet or the raw religionist — is our hope for a divine guidance of the race. A spiritualised

society can alone bring about a reign of individual harmony and communal happiness; or, in words which, though liable to abuse by the reason and the passions, are still the most expressive we can find, a new kind of theocracy, the kingdom of God upon earth, a theocracy which shall be the government of mankind by the Divine in the hearts and minds of men.

Certainly, this will not come about easily, or, as men have always vainly hoped from each great new turn and revolution of politics and society, by a sudden and at once entirely satisfying change and magical transformation. The advance, however it comes about, will be indeed of the nature of a miracle, as are all such profound changes and immense developments; for they have the appearance of a kind of realised impossibility. But God works all his miracles by an evolution of secret possibilities which have been long prepared, at least in their elements, and in the end by a rapid bringing of all to a head, a throwing together of the elements so that in their fusion they produce a new form and name of things and reveal a new spirit. Often the decisive turn is preceded by an apparent emphasising and raising to their extreme of things which seem the very denial, the most uncompromising opposite of the new principle and the new creation. Such an evolution of the elements of a spiritualised society is that which a subjective age makes at least possible, and if at the same time it raises to the last height of active power things which seem the very denial of such a potentiality, that need be no index of a practical impossibility of the new birth, but on the contrary may be the sign of its approach or at the lowest a strong attempt at achievement. Certainly, the whole effort of a subjective age may go wrong; but this happens oftenest when by the insufficiency of its materials, a great crudeness of its starting-point and a hasty shallowness or narrow intensity of its inlook into itself and things it is foredoomed to a fundamental error of self-knowledge. It becomes less likely when the spirit of the age is full of freedom, variety and a many-sided seeking, a persistent effort after knowledge and perfection in all the domains of human activity; that can well convert itself into an intense and yet flexible straining after the infinite and the divine on many

sides and in many aspects. In such circumstances, though a full advance may possibly not be made, a great step forward can be predicted.

We have seen that there are necessarily three stages of the social evolution or, generally, of the human evolution in both individual and society. Our evolution starts with an infrarational stage in which men have not yet learned to refer their life and action in its principles and its forms to the judgment of the clarified intelligence; for they still act principally out of their instincts, impulses, spontaneous ideas, vital intuitions or obey a customary response to desire, need and circumstance,—it is these things that are canalised or crystallised in their social institutions. Man proceeds by various stages out of these beginnings towards a rational age in which his intelligent will more or less developed becomes the judge, arbiter and presiding motive of his thought, feeling and action, the moulder, destroyer and re-creator of his leading ideas, aims and intuitions. Finally, if our analysis and forecast are correct, the human evolution must move through a subjective towards a suprarational or spiritual age in which he will develop progressively a greater spiritual, supra-intellectual and intuitive, perhaps in the end a more than intuitive, a gnostic consciousness. He will be able to perceive a higher divine end, a divine sanction, a divine light of guidance for all he seeks to be, think, feel and do, and able, too, more and more to obey and live in this larger light and power. That will not be done by any rule of infrarational religious impulse and ecstasy, such as characterised or rather darkly illumined the obscure confusion and brute violence of the Middle Ages, but by a higher spiritual living for which the clarities of the reason are a necessary preparation and into which they too will be taken up, transformed, brought to their invisible source.

These stages or periods are much more inevitable in the psychological evolution of mankind than the Stone and other Ages marked out by Science in his instrumental culture, for they depend not on outward means or accidents, but on the very nature of his being. But we must not suppose that they are naturally exclusive and absolute in their nature, or complete in

their tendency or fulfilment when they come, or rigidly marked off from each other in their action or their time. For they not only arise out of each other, but may be partially developed in each other and they may come to coexist in different parts of the earth at the same time. But, especially, since man as a whole is always a complex being, even man savage or degenerate, he cannot be any of these things exclusively or absolutely,—so long as he has not exceeded himself, has not developed into the superman, has not, that is to say, spiritualised and divinised his whole being. At his animal worst he is still some kind of thinking or reflecting animal: even the infrarational man cannot be utterly infrarational, but must have or tend to have some kind of play more or less evolved or involved of the reason and a more or less crude suprarational element, a more or less disguised working of the spirit. At his lucid mental best, he is still not a pure mental being, a pure intelligence; even the most perfect intellectual is not and cannot be wholly or merely rational,—there are vital urgings that he cannot exclude, visits or touches of a light from above that are not less suprarational because he does not recognise their source. No god, but at his highest a human being touched with a ray of the divine influence, man's very spirituality, however dominant, must have, while he is still this imperfectly evolved human, its rational and infrarational tendencies and elements. And as with the psychological life of individuals, so must it be with the ages of his communal existence; these may be marked off from each other by the predominant play of one element, its force may overpower the others or take them into itself or make some compromise, but an exclusive play seems to be neither intended nor possible.

Thus an infrarational period of human and social development need not be without its elements, its strong elements of reason and of spirituality. Even the savage, whether he be primitive or degenerate man, has some coherent idea of this world and the beyond, a theory of life and a religion. To us with our more advanced rationality his theory of life may seem incoherent, because we have lost its point of view and its principle of mental associations. But it is still an act of reason, and

within its limits he is capable of a sufficient play of thought both ideative and practical, as well as a clear ethical idea and motive, some aesthetic notions and an understood order of society poor and barbarous to our view, but well enough contrived and put together to serve the simplicity of its objects. Or again we may not realise the element of reason in a primitive theory of life or of spirituality in a barbaric religion, because it appears to us to be made up of symbols and forms to which a superstitious value is attached by these undeveloped minds. But this is because the reason at this stage has an imperfect and limited action and the element of spirituality is crude or undeveloped and not yet self-conscious; in order to hold firmly their workings and make them real and concrete to his mind and spirit primitive man has to give them shape in symbols and forms to which he clings with a barbaric awe and reverence, because they alone can embody for him his method of self-guidance in life. For the dominant thing in him is his infrarational life of instinct, vital intuition and impulse, mechanical custom and tradition, and it is that to which the rest of him has to give some kind of primary order and first glimmerings of light. The unrefined reason and unenlightened spirit in him cannot work for their own ends; they are bond-slaves of his infrarational nature.

At a higher stage of development or of a return towards a fuller evolution,—for the actual savage in humanity is perhaps not the original primitive man, but a relapse and reversion towards primitiveness,—the infrarational stage of society may arrive at a very lofty order of civilisation. It may have great intuitions of the meaning or general intention of life, admirable ideas of the arrangement of life, a harmonious, well-adapted, durable and serviceable social system, an imposing religion which will not be without its profundities, but in which symbol and ceremonial will form the largest portion and for the mass of man will be almost the whole of religion. In this stage pure reason and pure spirituality will not govern the society or move large bodies of men, but will be represented, if at all, by individuals at first few, but growing in number as these two powers increase in their purity and vigour and attract more and more votaries.

This may well lead to an age, if the development of reason is strongest, of great individual thinkers who seize on some idea of life and its origins and laws and erect that into a philosophy, of critical minds standing isolated above the mass who judge life, not yet with a luminous largeness, a minute flexibility of understanding or a clear and comprehensive profundity, but still with power of intelligence, insight, acuteness, perhaps even a pre-eminent social thinker here and there who, taking advantage of some crisis or disturbance, is able to get the society to modify or reconstruct itself on the basis of some clearly rational and intelligent principle. Such an age seems to be represented by the traditions of the beginnings of Greek civilisation, or rather the beginnings of its mobile and progressive period. Or if spirituality predominates, there will be great mystics capable of delving into the profound and still occult psychological possibilities of our nature who will divine and realise the truth of the self and spirit in man and, even though they keep these things secret and imparted only to a small number of initiates, may yet succeed in deepening with them the crude forms of the popular life. Even such a development is obscurely indicated in the old traditions of the mysteries. In prehistoric India we see it take a peculiar and unique turn which determined the whole future trend of the society and made Indian civilisation a thing apart and of its own kind in the history of the human race. But these things are only a first beginning of light in the midst of a humanity which is still infrarational as well as infra-spiritual and, even when it undergoes the influence of these precursors, responds only obscurely to their inspirations and without any clearly intelligent or awakened spiritual reception of what they impart or impose. It still turns everything into infrarational form and disfiguring tradition and lives spiritually by ill-understood ceremonial and disguising symbol. It feels obscurely the higher things, tries to live them in its own stumbling way, but it does not yet understand; it cannot lay hold either on the intellectual form or the spiritual heart of their significance.

As reason and spirituality develop, they begin to become a larger and more diffused force, less intense perhaps, but wider

and more effective on the mass. The mystics become the sowers of the seed of an immense spiritual development in which whole classes of society and even men from all classes seek the light, as happened in India in the age of the Upanishads. The solitary individual thinkers are replaced by a great number of writers, poets, thinkers, rhetoricians, sophists, scientific inquirers, who pour out a profuse flood of acute speculation and inquiry stimulating the thought-habit and creating even in the mass a generalised activity of the intelligence,—as happened in Greece in the age of the sophists. The spiritual development, arising uncurbed by reason in an infrarational society, has often a tendency to outrun at first the rational and intellectual movement. For the greatest illuminating force of the infrarational man, as he develops, is an inferior intuition, an instinctively intuitional sight arising out of the force of life in him, and the transition from this to an intensity of inner life and the growth of a deeper spiritual intuition which outleaps the intellect and seems to dispense with it, is an easy passage in the individual man. But for humanity at large this movement cannot last; the mind and intellect must develop to their fullness so that the spirituality of the race may rise securely upward upon a broad basis of the developed lower nature in man, the intelligent mental being. Therefore we see that the reason in its growth either does away with the distinct spiritual tendency for a time, as in ancient Greece, or accepts it but spins out around its first data and activities a vast web of the workings of the intelligence, so that, as in India, the early mystic seer is replaced by the philosopher-mystic, the religious thinker and even the philosopher pure and simple.

For a time the new growth and impulse may seem to take possession of a whole community as in Athens or in old Aryan India. But these early dawns cannot endure in their purity, so long as the race is not ready. There is a crystallisation, a lessening of the first impetus, a new growth of infrarational forms in which the thought or the spirituality is overgrown with inferior accretions or it is imbedded in the form and may even die in it, while the tradition of the living knowledge, the loftier life and activity remains the property of the higher classes or a highest

class. The multitude remains infrarational in its habit of mind, though perhaps it may still keep in capacity an enlivened intelligence or a profound or subtle spiritual receptiveness as its gain from the past. So long as the hour of the rational age has not arrived, the irrational period of society cannot be left behind; and that arrival can only be when not a class or a few but the multitude has learned to think, to exercise its intelligence actively — it matters not at first however imperfectly — upon their life, their needs, their rights, their duties, their aspirations as human beings. Until then we have as the highest possible development a mixed society, infrarational in the mass, but saved for civilisation by a higher class whose business it is to seek after the reason and the spirit, to keep the gains of mankind in these fields, to add to them, to enlighten and raise with them as much as possible the life of the whole.

At this point we see that Nature in her human mass tends to move forward slowly on her various lines of active mind and life towards a greater application of reason and spirituality which shall at last bring near the possibility of a rational and, eventually, a spiritual age of mankind. Her difficulties proceed from two sides. First, while she originally developed thought and reason and spirituality by exceptional individuals, now she develops them in the mass by exceptional communities or nations, — at least in the relative sense of a nation governed, led and progressively formed and educated by its intellectually or spiritually cultured class or classes. But the exceptional nation touched on its higher levels by a developed reason or spirituality or both, as were Greece and later Rome in ancient Europe, India, China and Persia in ancient Asia, is surrounded or neighboured by enormous masses of the old infrarational humanity and endangered by this menacing proximity; for until a developed science comes in to redress the balance, the barbarian has always a greater physical force and unexhausted native power of aggression than the cultured peoples. At this stage the light and power of civilisation always collapses in the end before the attack of the outer darkness. Then ascending Nature has to train the conquerors more or less slowly, with long difficulty

and much loss and delay to develop among themselves what their incursion has temporarily destroyed or impaired. In the end humanity gains by the process; a greater mass of the nations is brought in, a larger and more living force of progress is applied, a starting-point is reached from which it can move to richer and more varied gains. But a certain loss is always the price of this advance.

But even within the communities themselves reason and spirituality at this stage are always hampered and endangered by existing in a milieu and atmosphere not their own. The élite, the classes in charge of these powers, are obliged to throw them into forms which the mass of human ignorance they lead and rule will accept, and both reason and spirituality tend to be stifled by these forms, to get stereotyped, fossilised, void of life, bound up from their natural play. Secondly, since they are after all part of the mass, these higher enlightened elements are themselves much under the influence of their infrarational parts and do not, except in individuals, arrive at the entirely free play of the reason or the free light of the spirit. Thirdly, there is always the danger of these elements gravitating downward to the ignorance below or even collapsing into it. Nature guards herself by various devices for maintaining the tradition of intellectual and spiritual activity in the favoured classes; here she makes it a point of honour for them to preserve and promote the national culture, there she establishes a preservative system of education and discipline. And in order that these things may not degenerate into mere traditionalism, she brings in a series of intellectual or spiritual movements which by their shock revivify the failing life and help to bring about a broadening and an enlarging and to drive the dominant reason or spirituality deeper down into the infrarational mass. Each movement indeed tends to petrify after a shorter or longer activity, but a fresh shock, a new wave arrives in time to save and regenerate. Finally, she reaches the point when, all immediate danger of relapse overcome, she can proceed to her next decisive advance in the cycle of social evolution. This must take the form of an attempt to universalise first of all the habit of reason and the application of the intelligence

and intelligent will to life. Thus is instituted the rational age of human society, the great endeavour to bring the power of the reason and intelligence to bear on all that we are and do and to organise in their light and by their guiding force the entire existence of the race.

Chapter XIX

The Curve of the Rational Age

THE PRESENT age of mankind may be characterised from this point of view of a graded psychological evolution of the race as a more and more rapidly accelerated attempt to discover and work out the right principle and secure foundations of a rational system of society. It has been an age of progress; but progress is of two kinds, adaptive, with a secure basis in an unalterable social principle and constant change only in the circumstances and machinery of its application to suit fresh ideas and fresh needs, or else radical, with no long-secure basis, but instead a constant root questioning of the practical foundations and even the central principle of the established society. The modern age has resolved itself into a constant series of radical progressions.

This series seems to follow always a typical course, first a luminous seed-time and a period of enthusiastic effort and battle, next a partial victory and achievement and a brief era of possession, then disillusionment and the birth of a new idea and endeavour. A principle of society is put forward by the thinker, seizes on the general mind and becomes a social gospel; brought immediately or by rapid stages into practice, it dethrones the preceding principle and takes its place as the foundation of the community's social or political life. This victory won, men live for a time in the enthusiasm or, when the enthusiasm sinks, in the habit of their great achievement. After a little they begin to feel less at ease with the first results and are moved to adapt, to alter constantly, to develop more or less restlessly the new system,—for it is the very nature of the reason to observe, to be open to novel ideas, to respond quickly to new needs and possibilities and not to repose always in the unquestioning acceptance of every habit and old association. Still men do not yet think of questioning their social principle or imagine that

it will ever need alteration, but are intent only to perfect its forms and make its application more thorough, its execution more sincere and effective. A time, however, arrives when the reason becomes dissatisfied and sees that it is only erecting a mass of new conventions and that there has been no satisfying change; there has been a shifting of stresses, but the society is not appreciably nearer to perfection. The opposition of the few thinkers who have already, perhaps almost from the first, started to question the sufficiency of the social principle, makes itself felt and is accepted by increasing numbers; there is a movement of revolt and the society starts on the familiar round to a new radical progression, a new revolution, the reign of a more advanced social principle.

This process has to continue until the reason can find a principle of society or else a combination and adjustment of several principles which will satisfy it. The question is whether it will ever be satisfied or can ever rest from questioning the foundation of established things,—unless indeed it sinks back into a sleep of tradition and convention or else goes forward by a great awakening to the reign of a higher spirit than its own and opens into a suprarational or spiritual age of mankind. If we may judge from the modern movement, the progress of the reason as a social renovator and creator, if not interrupted in its course, would be destined to pass through three successive stages which are the very logic of its growth, the first individualistic and increasingly democratic with liberty for its principle, the second socialistic, in the end perhaps a governmental communism with equality and the State for its principle, the third—if that ever gets beyond the stage of theory—anarchistic in the higher sense of that much-abused word, either a loose voluntary cooperation or a free communalism with brotherhood or comradeship and not government for its principle. It is in the transition to its third and consummating stage, if or whenever that comes, that the power and sufficiency of the reason will be tested; it will then be seen whether the reason can really be the master of our nature, solve the problems of our interrelated and conflicting egoisms and bring about within itself a perfect principle of society or

must give way to a higher guide. For till this third stage has its trial, it is Force that in the last resort really governs. Reason only gives to Force the plan of its action and a system to administer.

We have already seen that it is individualism which opens the way to the age of reason and that individualism gets its impulse and its chance of development because it follows upon an age of dominant conventionalism. It is not that in the pre-individualistic, pre-rational ages there were no thinkers upon society and the communal life of man; but they did not think in the characteristic method of the logical reason, critical, all-observing, all-questioning, and did not proceed on the constructive side by the carefully mechanising methods of the highly rationalised intelligence when it passes from the reasoned perception of a truth to the endeavour after its pure, perfect and universal orderly application. Their thought and their building of life were much less logical than spontaneously intelligent, organic and intuitive. Always they looked upon life as it was and sought to know its secret by keen discernment, intuition and insight; symbols embodying the actual and ideal truth of life and being, types setting them in an arrangement and psychological order, institutions giving them a material fixity in their effectuation by life, this was the form in which they shaped their attempt to understand and mentalise life, to govern life by mind, but mind in its spontaneously intuitive or its reflectively seeing movements before they have been fixed into the geometrical patterns of the logical intelligence.

But reason seeks to understand and interpret life by one kind of symbol only, the idea; it generalises the facts of life according to its own strongly cut ideative conceptions so that it may be able to master and arrange them, and having hold of an idea it looks for its largest general application. And in order that these ideas may not be a mere abstraction divorced from the realised or realisable truth of things, it has to be constantly comparing them with facts. It has to be always questioning facts so that it may find the ideas by which they can be more and more adequately explained, ordered and managed, and it has always to be questioning ideas in order, first, to see whether

they square with actual facts and, secondly, whether there are not new facts to suit which they must be modified or enlarged or which can be evolved out of them. For reason lives not only in actual facts, but in possibilities, not only in realised truths, but in ideal truths; and the ideal truth once seen, the impulse of the idealising intelligence is to see too whether it cannot be turned into a fact, cannot be immediately or rapidly realised in life. It is by this inherent characteristic that the age of reason must always be an age of progress.

So long as the old method of mentalising life served its purpose, there was no necessity for men in the mass to think out their way of life by the aid of the reason. But the old method ceased to serve its purpose as soon as the symbols, types, institutions it created became conventions so imprisoning truth that there was no longer a force of insight sufficient to deliver the hidden reality from its artificial coatings. Man may for a time, for a long time even, live by the mere tradition of things whose reality he has lost, but not permanently; the necessity of questioning all his conventions and traditions arises, and by that necessity reason gets her first real chance of an entire self-development. Reason can accept no tradition merely for the sake of its antiquity or its past greatness: it has to ask, first, whether the tradition contains at all any still living truth and, secondly, whether it contains the best truth available to man for the government of his life. Reason can accept no convention merely because men are agreed upon it: it has to ask whether they are right in their agreement, whether it is not an inert and false acquiescence. Reason cannot accept any institution merely because it serves some purpose of life: it has to ask whether there are not greater and better purposes which can be best served by new institutions. There arises the necessity of a universal questioning, and from that necessity arises the idea that society can only be perfected by the universal application of the rational intelligence to the whole of life, to its principle as to its details, to its machinery and to the powers that drive the machine.

This reason which is to be universally applied, cannot be the reason of a ruling class; for in the present imperfection of

the human race that always means in practice the fettering and misapplication of reason degraded into a servant of power to maintain the privileges of the ruling class and justify the existing order. It cannot be the reason of a few pre-eminent thinkers; for, if the mass is infrarational, the application of their ideas becomes in practice disfigured, ineffective, incomplete, speedily altered into mere form and convention. It must be the reason of each and all seeking for a basis of agreement. Hence arises the principle of individualistic democracy, that the reason and will of every individual in the society must be allowed to count equally with the reason and will of every other in determining its government, in selecting the essential basis and in arranging the detailed ordering of the common life. This must be, not because the reason of one man is as good as the reason of any other, but because otherwise we get back inevitably to the rule of a predominant class which, however modified by being obliged to consider to some extent the opinion of the ruled, must exhibit always the irrational vice of reason subordinated to the purposes of power and not flexibly used for its own proper and ideal ends. Secondly, each individual must be allowed to govern his life according to the dictates of his own reason and will so far as that can be done without impinging on the same right in others. This is a necessary corollary of the primary principle on which the age of reason founds its initial movement. It is sufficient for the first purposes of the rational age that each man should be supposed to have sufficient intelligence to understand views which are presented and explained to him, to consider the opinions of his fellows and to form in consultation with them his own judgment. His individual judgment so formed and by one device or another made effective is the share he contributes to the building of the total common judgment by which society must be ruled, his little brick in appearance insignificant and yet indispensable to the imposing whole. And it is sufficient also for the first ideal of the rational age that this common judgment should be effectively organised only for the indispensable common ends of the society, while in all else men must be left free to govern their own life according to their own reason and will.

and find freely its best possible natural adjustment with the lives of others. In this way by the practice of the free use of reason men can grow into rational beings and learn to live by common agreement a liberal, a vigorous, a natural and yet rationalised existence.

In practice it is found that these ideas will not hold for a long time. For the ordinary man is not yet a rational being; emerging from a long infrarational past, he is not naturally able to form a reasonable judgment, but thinks either according to his own interests, impulses and prejudices or else according to the ideas of others more active in intelligence or swift in action who are able by some means to establish an influence over his mind. Secondly, he does not yet use his reason in order to come to an agreement with his fellows, but rather to enforce his own opinions by struggle and conflict with the opinions of others. Exceptionally he may utilise his reason for the pursuit of truth, but normally it serves for the justification of his impulses, prejudices and interests, and it is these that determine or at least quite discolour and disfigure his ideals, even when he has learned at all to have ideals. Finally, he does not use his freedom to arrive at a rational adjustment of his life with the life of others; his natural tendency is to enforce the aims of his life even at the expense of or, as it is euphemistically put, in competition with the life of others. There comes thus to be a wide gulf between the ideal and the first results of its practice. There is here a disparity between fact and idea that must lead to inevitable disillusionment and failure.

The individualistic democratic ideal brings us at first in actual practice to the more and more precarious rule of a dominant class in the name of democracy over the ignorant, numerous and less fortunate mass. Secondly, since the ideal of freedom and equality is abroad and cannot any longer be stifled, it must lead to the increasing effort of the exploited masses to assert their down-trodden right and to turn, if they can, this pseudo-democratic falsehood into the real democratic truth; therefore, to a war of classes. Thirdly, it develops inevitably as part of its process a perpetual strife of parties, at first few and simple in

composition, but afterwards as at the present time an impotent and sterilising chaos of names, labels, programmes, war-cries. All lift the banner of conflicting ideas or ideals, but all are really fighting out under that flag a battle of conflicting interests. Finally, individualistic democratic freedom results fatally in an increasing stress of competition which replaces the ordered tyrannies of the infrarational periods of humanity by a sort of ordered conflict. And this conflict ends in the survival not of the spiritually, rationally or physically fittest, but of the most fortunate and vitally successful. It is evident enough that, whatever else it may be, this is not a rational order of society; it is not at all the perfection which the individualistic reason of man had contemplated as its ideal or set out to accomplish.

The natural remedy for the first defects of the individualistic theory in practice would seem to be education; for if man is not by nature, we may hope at least that he can be made by education and training something like a rational being. Universal education, therefore, is the inevitable second step of the democratic movement in its attempt to rationalise human society. But a rational education means necessarily three things, first, to teach men how to observe and know rightly the facts on which they have to form a judgment; secondly, to train them to think fruitfully and soundly; thirdly, to fit them to use their knowledge and their thought effectively for their own and the common good. Capacity of observation and knowledge, capacity of intelligence and judgment, capacity of action and high character are required for the citizenship of a rational order of society; a general deficiency in any of these difficult requisites is a sure source of failure. Unfortunately,—even if we suppose that any training made available to the millions can ever be of this rare character,—the actual education given in the most advanced countries has not had the least relation to these necessities. And just as the first defects and failures of democracy have given occasion to the enemy to blaspheme and to vaunt the superiority or even the quite imaginary perfection of the ideal past, so also the first defects of its great remedy, education, have led many superior minds to deny the efficacy of education and its power

to transform the human mind and driven them to condemn the democratic ideal as an exploded fiction.

Democracy and its panacea of education and freedom have certainly done something for the race. To begin with, the people are, for the first time in the historical period of history, erect, active and alive, and where there is life, there is always a hope of better things. Again, some kind of knowledge and with it some kind of active intelligence based on knowledge and strengthened by the habit of being called on to judge and decide between conflicting issues and opinions in all sorts of matters have been much more generalised than was formerly possible. Men are being progressively trained to use their minds, to apply intelligence to life, and that is a great gain. If they have not yet learned to think for themselves or to think soundly, clearly and rightly, they are at least more able now to choose with some kind of initial intelligence, however imperfect as yet it may be, the thought they shall accept and the rule they shall follow. Equal educational equipment and equal opportunity of life have by no means been acquired; but there is a much greater equalisation than was at all possible in former states of society. But here a new and enormous defect has revealed itself which is proving fatal to the social idea which engendered it. For given even perfect equality of educational and other opportunity,—and that does not yet really exist and cannot in the individualistic state of society,—to what purpose or in what manner is the opportunity likely to be used? Man, the half infrarational being, demands three things for his satisfaction, power, if he can have it, but at any rate the use and reward of his faculties and the enjoyment of his desires. In the old societies the possibility of these could be secured by him to a certain extent according to his birth, his fixed status and the use of his capacity within the limits of his hereditary status. That basis once removed and no proper substitute provided, the same ends can only be secured by success in a scramble for the one power left, the power of wealth. Accordingly, instead of a harmoniously ordered society there has been developed a huge organised competitive system, a frantically rapid and one-sided development of industrialism and, under the garb of democracy,

an increasing plutocratic tendency that shocks by its ostentatious grossness and the magnitudes of its gulfs and distances. These have been the last results of the individualistic ideal and its democratic machinery, the initial bankruptcies of the rational age.

The first natural result has been the transition of the rational mind from democratic individualism to democratic socialism. Socialism, labouring under the disadvantageous accident of its birth in a revolt against capitalism, an uprising against the rule of the successful bourgeois and the plutocrat, has been compelled to work itself out by a war of classes. And, worse still, it has started from an industrialised social system and itself taken on at the beginning a purely industrial and economic appearance. These are accidents that disfigure its true nature. Its true nature, its real justification is the attempt of the human reason to carry on the rational ordering of society to its fulfilment, its will to get rid of this great parasitical excrescence of unbridled competition, this giant obstacle to any decent ideal or practice of human living. Socialism sets out to replace a system of organised economic battle by an organised order and peace. This can no longer be done on the old lines, an artificial or inherited inequality brought about by the denial of equal opportunity and justified by the affirmation of that injustice and its result as an eternal law of society and of Nature. That is a falsehood which the reason of man will no longer permit. Neither can it be done, it seems, on the basis of individual liberty; for that has broken down in the practice. Socialism therefore must do away with the democratic basis of individual liberty, even if it professes to respect it or to be marching towards a more rational freedom. It shifts at first the fundamental emphasis to other ideas and fruits of the democratic ideal, and it leads by this transference of stress to a radical change in the basic principle of a rational society. Equality, not a political only, but a perfect social equality, is to be the basis. There is to be equality of opportunity for all, but also equality of status for all, for without the last the first cannot be secured; even if it were established, it could not endure. This equality again is impossible if personal, or at least inherited

right in property is to exist, and therefore socialism abolishes — except at best on a small scale — the right of personal property as it is now understood and makes war on the hereditary principle. Who then is to possess the property? It can only be the community as a whole. And who is to administer it? Again, the community as a whole. In order to justify this idea, the socialistic principle has practically to deny the existence of the individual or his right to exist except as a member of the society and for its sake. He belongs entirely to the society, not only his property, but himself, his labour, his capacities, the education it gives him and its results, his mind, his knowledge, his individual life, his family life, the life of his children. Moreover, since his individual reason cannot be trusted to work out naturally a right and rational adjustment of his life with the life of others, it is for the reason of the whole community to arrange that too for him. Not the reasoning minds and wills of the individuals, but the collective reasoning mind and will of the community has to govern. It is this which will determine not only the principles and all the details of the economic and political order, but the whole life of the community and of the individual as a working, thinking, feeling cell of this life, the development of his capacities, his actions, the use of the knowledge he has acquired, the whole ordering of his vital, his ethical, his intelligent being. For so only can the collective reason and intelligent will of the race overcome the egoism of individualistic life and bring about a perfect principle and rational order of society in a harmonious world.

It is true that this inevitable character of socialism is denied or minimised by the more democratic socialists; for the socialistic mind still bears the impress of the old democratic ideas and cherishes hopes that betray it often into strange illogicalities. It assures us that it will combine some kind of individual freedom, a limited but all the more true and rational freedom, with the rigours of the collectivist idea. But it is evidently these rigours to which things must tend if the collectivist idea is to prevail and not to stop short and falter in the middle of its course. If it proves itself thus wanting in logic and courage, it may very

well be that it will speedily or in the end be destroyed by the foreign element it tolerates and perish without having sounded its own possibilities. It will pass perhaps, unless guided by a rational wisdom which the human mind in government has not yet shown, after exceeding even the competitive individualistic society in its cumbrous incompetence.¹ But even at its best the collectivist idea contains several fallacies inconsistent with the real facts of human life and nature. And just as the idea of individualistic democracy found itself before long in difficulties on that account because of the disparity between life's facts and the mind's idea, difficulties that have led up to its discredit and approaching overthrow, the idea of collectivist democracy too may well find itself before long in difficulties that must lead to its discredit and eventual replacement by a third stage of the inevitable progression. Liberty protected by a State in which all are politically equal, was the idea that individualistic democracy attempted to elaborate. Equality, social and political equality enforced through a perfect and careful order by a State which is the organised will of the whole community, is the idea on which socialistic democracy stakes its future. If that too fails to make good, the rational and democratic Idea may fall back upon a third form of society founding an essential rather than formal liberty and equality upon fraternal comradeship in a free community, the ideal of intellectual as of spiritual Anarchism.²

In fact the claim to equality like the thirst for liberty is

¹ These hesitations of social democracy, its uneasy mental poise between two opposing principles, socialistic regimentation and democratic liberty, may be the root cause of the failure of socialism to make good in so many countries even when it had every chance on its side and its replacement by the more vigorous and ruthlessly logical forces of Communism and Fascism. On the other hand, in the northernmost countries of Europe a temporising, reformist, practical Socialism compromising between the right regulation of the communal life and the freedom of the individual has to some extent made good; but it is still doubtful whether it will be allowed to go to the end of its road. If it has that chance, it is still to be seen whether the drive of the idea and the force it carries in it for complete self-effectuation will not prevail in the end over the spirit of compromise.

² In the theory of communism State socialism is only a passage; a free classless Stateless communal life is the eventual ideal. But it is not likely that the living State machine once in power with all that are interested in its maintenance would let go its prey or allow itself to be abolished without a struggle.

individualistic in its origin,—it is not native or indispensable to the essence of the collectivist ideal. It is the individual who demands liberty for himself, a free movement for his mind, life, will, action; the collectivist trend and the State idea have rather the opposite tendency, they are self-compelled to take up more and more the compulsory management and control of the mind, life, will, action of the community — and the individual's as part of it—until personal liberty is pressed out of existence. But similarly it is the individual who demands for himself equality with all others; when a class demands, it is still the individual multiplied claiming for himself and all who are of his own grade, political or economic status an equal place, privilege or opportunity with those who have acquired or inherited a superiority of status. The social Reason conceded first the claim to liberty, but in practice (whatever might have been the theory) it admitted only so much equality—equality before the law, a helpful but not too effective political equality of the vote—as was necessary to ensure a reasonable freedom for all. Afterwards when the injustices and irrationalities of an unequalised competitive freedom, the enormity of the gulls it created, became apparent, the social Reason shifted its ground and tried to arrive at a more complete communal justice on the basis of a political, economic, educational and social equality as complete as might be; it has laboured to make a plain level on which all can stand together. Liberty in this change has had to undergo the former fate of equality; for only so much liberty—perhaps or for a time—could survive as can be safely allowed without the competitive individual getting enough room for his self-assertive growth to upset or endanger the equalitarian basis. But in the end the discovery cannot fail to be made that an artificial equality has also its irrationalities, its contradictions of the collective good, its injustices even and its costly violations of the truth of Nature. Equality like individualistic liberty may turn out to be not a panacea but an obstacle in the way of the best management and control of life by the collective reason and will of the community.

But if both equality and liberty disappear from the human scene, there is left only one member of the democratic trinity,

brotherhood or, as it is now called, comradeship, that has some chance of survival as part of the social basis. This is because it seems to square better with the spirit of collectivism; we see accordingly the idea of it if not the fact still insisted on in the new social systems, even those in which both liberty and equality are discarded as noxious democratic chimeras. But comradeship without liberty and equality can be nothing more than the like association of all—individuals, functional classes, guilds, syndicates, soviets or any other units—in common service to the life of the nation under the absolute control of the collectivist State. The only liberty left at the end would be the “freedom” to serve the community under the rigorous direction of the State authority; the only equality would be an association of all alike in a Spartan or Roman spirit of civic service with perhaps a like status, theoretically equal at least for all functions; the only brotherhood would be the sense of comradeship in devoted dedication to the organised social Self, the State. In fact the democratic trinity, stripped of its godhead, would fade out of existence; the collectivist ideal can very well do without them, for none of them belong to its grain and very substance.

This is indeed already the spirit, the social reason—or rather the social gospel—of the totalitarianism whose swelling tide threatens to engulf all Europe and more than Europe. Totalitarianism of some kind seems indeed to be the natural, almost inevitable destiny, at any rate the extreme and fullest outcome of Socialism or, more generally, of the collectivist idea and impulse. For the essence of Socialism, its justifying ideal, is the governance and strict organisation of the total life of the society as a whole and in detail by its own conscious reason and will for the best good and common interest of all, eliminating exploitation by individual or class, removing internal competition, haphazard confusion and waste, enforcing and perfecting coordination, assuring the best functioning and a sufficient life for all. If a democratic polity and machinery best assure such a working, as was thought at first, it is this that will be chosen and the result will be Social Democracy. That ideal still holds sway in northern Europe and it may there yet have a chance of proving that a

successful collectivist rationalisation of society is quite possible. But if a non-democratic polity and machinery are found to serve the purpose better, then there is nothing inherently sacrosanct for the collectivist mind in the democratic ideal; it can be thrown on the rubbish-heap where so many other exploded sanctities have gone. Russian communism so discarded with contempt democratic liberty and attempted for a time to substitute for the democratic machine a new sovietic structure, but it has preserved the ideal of a proletarian equality for all in a classless society. Still its spirit is a rigorous totalitarianism on the basis of the "dictatorship of the proletariat", which amounts in fact to the dictatorship of the Communist party in the name or on behalf of the proletariat. Non-proletarian totalitarianism goes farther and discards democratic equality no less than democratic liberty; it preserves classes — for a time only, it may be, — but as a means of social functioning, not as a scale of superiority or a hierarchic order. Rationalisation is no longer the turn; its place is taken by a revolutionary mysticism which seems to be the present drive of the Time Spirit.

This is a symptom that can have a considerable significance. In Russia the Marxist system of Socialism has been turned almost into a gospel. Originally a rationalistic system worked out by a logical thinker and discoverer and systematiser of ideas, it has been transformed by the peculiar turn of the Russian mind into something like a social religion, a collectivist *mystique*, an inviolable body of doctrines with all denial or departure treated as a punishable heresy, a social cult enforced by the intolerant piety and enthusiasm of a converted people. In Fascist countries the swing away from Rationalism is marked and open; a surface vital subjectivism has taken its place and it is in the name of the national soul and its self-expression and manifestation that the leaders and prophets teach and violently enforce their totalitarian *mystique*. The essential features are the same in Russia and in Fascist countries, so that to the eye of the outsider their deadly quarrel seems to be a blood-feud of kinsmen fighting for the inheritance of their slaughtered parents — Democracy and the Age of Reason. There is the seizure of the life of the community

by a dominant individual leader, Führer, Dux, dictator, head of a small active minority, the Nazi, Fascist or Communist party, and supported by a militarised partisan force; there is a rapid crystallisation of the social, economic, political life of the people into a new rigid organisation effectively controlled at every point; there is the compulsory casting of thought, education, expression, action, into a set iron mould, a fixed system of ideas and life-motives, with a fierce and ruthless, often a sanguinary repression of all that denies and differs; there is a total unprecedented compression of the whole communal existence so as to compel a maximum efficiency and a complete unanimity of mind, speech, feeling, life.

If this trend becomes universal, it is the end of the Age of Reason, the suicide or the execution — by decapitation or lethal pressure, *peine forte et dure*, — of the rational and intellectual expansion of the human mental being. Reason cannot do its work, act or rule if the mind of man is denied freedom to think or freedom to realise its thought by action in life. But neither can a subjective age be the outcome; for the growth of subjectivism also cannot proceed without plasticity, without movement of self-search, without room to move, expand, develop, change. The result is likely to be rather the creation of a tenebrous No Man's Land where obscure mysticisms, materialistic, vitalistic or mixed, clash and battle for the mastery of human life. But this consummation is not certain; chaos and confusion still reign and all hangs in the balance. Totalitarian mysticism may not be able to carry out its menace of occupying the globe, may not even endure. Spaces of the earth may be left where a rational idealism can still survive. The terrible compression now exercised on the national mind and life may lead to an explosion from within or, on the other hand, having fulfilled its immediate aim may relax and give way in calmer times to a greater plasticity which will restore to the human mind or soul a more natural line of progress, a freer field for their self-expanding impulse.

In that case the curve of the Age of Reason, now threatened with an abrupt cessation, may prolong and complete itself; the subjective turn of the human mind and life, avoiding a premature

plunge into any general external action before it has found itself, may have time and freedom to evolve, to seek out its own truth, its own lines and so become ready to take up the spiral of the human social evolution where the curve of the Age of Reason naturally ends by its own normal evolution and make ready the ways of a deeper spirit.

Chapter XX

The End of the Curve of Reason

THE RATIONAL collectivist idea of society has at first sight a powerful attraction. There is behind it a great truth, that every society represents a collective being and in it and by it the individual lives and he owes to it all that he can give it. More, it is only by a certain relation to the society, a certain harmony with this greater collective self that he can find the complete use for his many developed or developing powers and activities. Since it is a collective being, it must, one would naturally suppose, have a discoverable collective reason and will which should find more and more its right expression and right working if it is given a conscious and effective means of organised self-expression and execution. And this collective will and intelligence, since it is according to the original idea that of all in a perfect equality, might naturally be trusted to seek out and work out its own good where the ruling individual and class would always be liable to misuse their power for quite other ends. The right organisation of social life on a basis of equality and comradeship ought to give each man his proper place in society, his full training and development for the common ends, his due share of work, leisure and reward, the right value of his life in relation to the collective being, society. Moreover it would be a place, share, value regulated by the individual and collective good and not an exaggerated or a depressed value brought to him fortuitously by birth or fortune, purchased by wealth or won by a painful and wasteful struggle. And certainly the external efficiency of the community, the measured, ordered and economical working of its life, its power for production and general well-being must enormously increase, as even the quite imperfect development of collective action in the recent past has shown, in a well-organised and concentrated State.

If it be objected that to bring about this result in its completeness the liberty of the individual will have to be destroyed or reduced to an almost vanishing quantity, it might be answered that the right of the individual to any kind of egoistic freedom as against the State which represents the mind, the will, the good and interest of the whole community, *sarvam brahma*, is a dangerous fiction, a baneful myth. Individual liberty of life and action — even if liberty of thought and speech is for a time conceded, though this too can hardly remain unimpaired when once the socialistic State has laid its grip firmly on the individual, — may well mean in practice an undue freedom given to his infra-rational parts of nature, and is not that precisely the thing in him that has to be thoroughly controlled, if not entirely suppressed, if he is to become a reasonable being leading a reasonable life? This control can be most wisely and effectively carried out by the collective reason and will of the State which is larger, better, more enlightened than the individual's; for it profits, as the average individual cannot do, by all the available wisdom and aspiration in the society. Indeed, the enlightened individual may well come to regard this collective reason and will as his own larger mind, will and conscience and find in a happy obedience to it a strong delivery from his own smaller and less rational self and therefore a more real freedom than any now claimed by his little separate ego. It used already to be argued that the disciplined German obeying the least gesture of the policeman, the State official, the military officer was really the freest, happiest and most moral individual in all Europe and therefore in the whole world. The same reasoning in a heightened form might perhaps be applied to the drilled felicities of Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany. The State, educating and governing the individual, undertakes to intellectualise, ethicise, practicalise and generally perfect him and to see to it that he remains, whether he will or no, always and in all things — strictly on the lines approved by the State — intellectual, ethical, practical and thoroughly perfect.

The pity of it is that this excellent theory, quite as much as the individualist theory that ran before it, is sure to stumble over a discrepancy between its set ideas and the actual facts

of human nature; for it ignores the complexity of man's being and all that that complexity means. And especially it ignores the soul of man and its supreme need of freedom, of the control also of his lower members, no doubt,—for that is part of the total freedom towards which he is struggling,—but of a growing self-control, not a mechanical regulation by the mind and will of others. Obedience too is a part of its perfection,—but a free and natural obedience to a true guiding power and not to a mechanised government and rule. The collective being is a fact; all mankind may be regarded as a collective being: but this being is a soul and life, not merely a mind or a body. Each society develops into a sort of sub-soul or group-soul of this humanity and develops also a general temperament, character, type of mind, evolves governing ideas and tendencies that shape its life and its institutions. But the society has no discoverable common reason and will belonging alike to all its members; for the group-soul rather works out its tendencies by a diversity of opinions, a diversity of wills, a diversity of life, and the vitality of the group-life depends largely upon the working of this diversity, its continuity, its richness. Since that is so, government by the organised State must mean always government by a number of individuals,—whether that number be in theory the minority or the majority makes in the end little fundamental difference. For even when it is the majority that nominally governs, in fact it is always the reason and will of a comparatively few effective men—and not really any common reason and will of all—that rules and regulates things with the consent of the half-hypnotised mass.¹ There is no reason to suppose that the immediate socialisation of the State would at all alter, the mass of men not being yet thoroughly rationalised and developed minds, this practical necessity of State government.

¹ This truth has come out with a startling force of self-demonstration in Communist Russia and National Socialist Germany,—not to speak of other countries. The vehement reassertion of humanity's need of a King crowned or uncrowned—Dictator, Leader, Duce or Führer—and a ruling and administering oligarchy has been the last outcome of a century and a half of democracy as it has been too the first astonishing result of the supposed rise of the proletariat to power.

In the old infrarational societies, at least in their inception, what governed was not the State, but the group-soul itself evolving its life organised into customary institutions and self-regulations to which all had to conform; for the rulers were only its executors and instruments. This entailed indeed a great subjection of the individual to the society, but it was not felt, because the individualistic idea was yet unborn and such diversities as arose were naturally provided for in one way or another, — in some cases by a remarkable latitude of social variation which government by the State tends more and more to suppress. As State government develops, we have a real suppression or oppression of the minority by the majority or the majority by the minority, of the individual by the collectivity, finally, of all by the relentless mechanism of the State. Democratic liberty tried to minimise this suppression; it left a free play for the individual and restricted as much as might be the role of the State. Collectivism goes exactly to the opposite extreme; it will leave no sufficient elbow-room to the individual free-will, and the more it rationalises the individual by universal education of a highly developed kind, the more this suppression will be felt, — unless indeed all freedom of thought is negated and the minds of all are forced into a single standardised way of thinking.

Man needs freedom of thought and life and action in order that he may grow, otherwise he will remain fixed where he was, a stunted and static being. If his individual mind and reason are ill-developed, he may consent to grow, as does the infrarational mind, in the group-soul, in the herd, in the mass, with that subtle half-conscious general evolution common to all in the lower process of Nature. As he develops individual reason and will, he needs and society must give him room for an increasing play of individual freedom and variation, at least so far as that does not develop itself to the avoidable harm of others and of society as a whole. Given a full development and free play of the individual mind, the need of freedom will grow with the immense variation which this development must bring with it, and if only a free play in thought and reason is allowed, but the free play of the intelligent will in life and action is inhibited by the excessive regulation

of the life, then an intolerable contradiction and falsity will be created. Men may bear it for a time in consideration of the great and visible new benefits of order, economic development, means of efficiency and the scientific satisfaction of the reason which the collectivist arrangement of society will bring; but when its benefits become a matter of course and its defects become more and more realised and prominent, dissatisfaction and revolt are sure to set in in the clearest and most vigorous minds of the society and propagate themselves throughout the mass. This intellectual and vital dissatisfaction may very well take under such circumstances the form of anarchistic thought, because that thought appeals precisely to this need of free variation in the internal life and its outward expression which will be the source of revolt, and anarchistic thought must be necessarily subversive of the socialistic order. The State can only combat it by an education adapted to its fixed forms of life, an education that will seek to drill the citizen in a fixed set of ideas, aptitudes, propensities as was done in the old infrarational order of things and by the suppression of freedom of speech and thinking so as to train and compel all to be of one mind, one sentiment, one opinion, one feeling; but this remedy will be in a rational society self-contradictory, ineffective, or if effective, then worse than the evil it seeks to combat. On the other hand, if from the first freedom of thought is denied, that means the end of the Age of Reason and of the ideal of a rational society. Man the mental being disallowed the use — except in a narrow fixed groove — of his mind and mental will, will stop short in his growth and be even as the animal and as the insect a stationary species.

This is the central defect through which a socialistic State is bound to be convicted of insufficiency and condemned to pass away before the growth of a new ideal. Already the pressure of the State organisation on the life of the individual has reached a point at which it is ceasing to be tolerable. If it continues to be what it is now, a government of the life of the individual by the comparatively few and not, as it pretends, by a common will and reason, if, that is to say, it becomes patently undemocratic or remains pseudo-democratic, then it will be this falsity

through which anarchistic thought will attack its existence. But the innermost difficulty would not disappear even if the socialistic State became really democratic, really the expression of the free reasoned will of the majority in agreement. Any true development of that kind would be difficult indeed and has the appearance of a chimera: for collectivism pretends to regulate life not only in its few fundamental principles and its main lines, as every organised society must tend to do, but in its details, it aims at a thoroughgoing scientific regulation, and an agreement of the free reasoned will of millions in all the lines and most of the details of life is a contradiction in terms. Whatever the perfection of the organised State, the suppression or oppression of individual freedom by the will of the majority or of a minority would still be there as a cardinal defect vitiating its very principle. And there would be something infinitely worse. For a thoroughgoing scientific regulation of life can only be brought about by a thoroughgoing mechanisation of life. This tendency to mechanisation is the inherent defect of the State idea and its practice. Already that is the defect upon which both intellectual anarchistic thought and the insight of the spiritual thinker have begun to lay stress, and it must immensely increase as the State idea rounds itself into a greater completeness in practice. It is indeed the inherent defect of reason when it turns to govern life and labours by quelling its natural tendencies to put it into some kind of rational order.

Life differs from the mechanical order of the physical universe with which the reason has been able to deal victoriously just because it is mechanical and runs immutably in the groove of fixed cosmic habits. Life, on the contrary, is a mobile, progressive and evolving force,— a force that is the increasing expression of an infinite soul in creatures and, as it progresses, becomes more and more aware of its own subtle variations, needs, diversities. The progress of Life involves the development and interlocking of an immense number of things that are in conflict with each other and seem often to be absolute oppositions and contraries. To find amid these oppositions some principle or standing-ground of unity, some workable lever of reconciliation

which will make possible a larger and better development on a basis of harmony and not of conflict and struggle, must be increasingly the common aim of humanity in its active life-evolution, if it at all means to rise out of life's more confused, painful and obscure movement, out of the compromises made by Nature with the ignorance of the Life-mind and the nescience of Matter. This can only be truly and satisfactorily done when the soul discovers itself in its highest and completest spiritual reality and effects a progressive upward transformation of its life-values into those of the spirit; for there they will all find their spiritual truth and in that truth their standing-ground of mutual recognition and reconciliation. The spiritual is the one truth of which all others are the veiled aspects, the brilliant disguises or the dark disfigurements, and in which they can find their own right form and true relation to each other. This is a work the reason cannot do. The business of the reason is intermediate: it is to observe and understand this life by the intelligence and discover for it the direction in which it is going and the laws of its self-development on the way. In order that it may do its office, it is obliged to adopt temporarily fixed view-points none of which is more than partially true and to create systems none of which can really stand as the final expression of the integral truth of things. The integral truth of things is truth not of the reason but of the spirit.

In the realm of thought that does not matter; for as there the reason does not drive at practice, it is able with impunity to allow the most opposite view-points and systems to exist side by side, to compare them, seek for reconciliations, synthetise in the most various ways, change constantly, enlarge, elevate; it is free to act without thinking at every point of immediate practical consequences. But when the reason seeks to govern life, it is obliged to fix its view-point, to crystallise its system; every change becomes or at least seems a thing doubtful, difficult and perilous, all the consequences of which cannot be foreseen, while the conflict of view-points, principles, systems leads to strife and revolution and not to a basis of harmonious development. The reason mechanises in order to arrive at fixity of conduct and

practice amid the fluidity of things; but while mechanism is a sufficient principle in dealing with physical forces, because it is in harmony with the law or dharma of physical Nature, it can never truly succeed in dealing with conscious life, because there it is contrary to the law of life, its highest dharma. While, then, the attempt at a rational ordering of society is an advance upon the comparative immobility and slow subconscious or half-conscious evolution of infrarational societies and the confusedly mixed movement of semi-rational societies, it can never arrive at perfection by its own methods, because reason is neither the first principle of life, nor can be its last, supreme and sufficient principle.

The question remains whether anarchistic thought supervening upon the collectivistic can any more successfully find a satisfying social principle. For if it gets rid of mechanism, the one practical means of a rationalising organisation of life, on what will it build and with what can it create? It may be contended as against the anarchistic objection that the collectivist period is, if not the last and best, at least a necessary stage in social progress. For the vice of individualism is that in insisting upon the free development and self-expression of the life and the mind or the life-soul in the individual, it tends to exaggerate the egoism of the mental and vital being and prevent the recognition of unity with others on which alone a complete self-development and a harmless freedom can be founded. Collectivism at least insists upon that unity by entirely subordinating the life of the isolated ego to the life of the greater group-ego, and its office may be thus to stamp upon the mentality and life-habits of the individual the necessity of unifying his life with the life of others. Afterwards, when again the individual asserts his freedom, as some day he must, he may have learned to do it on the basis of this unity and not on the basis of his separate egoistic life. This may well be the intention of Nature in human society in its movement towards a collectivist principle of social living. Collectivism may itself in the end realise this aim if it can modify its own dominant principle far enough to allow for a free individual development on the basis of unity and a closely harmonised common existence.

But to do that it must first spiritualise itself and transform the very soul of its inspiring principle: it cannot do it on the basis of the logical reason and a mechanically scientific ordering of life.

Anarchistic thought, although it has not yet found any sure form, cannot but develop in proportion as the pressure of society on the individual increases, since there is something in that pressure which unduly oppresses a necessary element of human perfection. We need not attach much importance to the grosser vitalistic or violent anarchism which seeks forcibly to react against the social principle or claims the right of man to "live his own life" in the egoistic or crudely vitalistic sense. But there is a higher, an intellectual anarchistic thought which in its aim and formula recovers and carries to its furthest logical conclusions a very real truth of nature and of the divine in man. In its revolt against the opposite exaggeration of the social principle, we find it declaring that all government of man by man by the power of compulsion is an evil, a violation, a suppression or deformation of a natural principle of good which would otherwise grow and prevail for the perfection of the human race. Even the social principle in itself is questioned and held liable for a sort of fall in man from a natural to an unnatural and artificial principle of living.

The exaggeration and inherent weakness of this exclusive idea are sufficiently evident. Man does not actually live as an isolated being, nor can he grow by an isolated freedom. He grows by his relations with others and his freedom must exercise itself in a progressive self-harmonising with the freedom of his fellow-beings. The social principle therefore, apart from the forms it has taken, would be perfectly justified, if by nothing else, then by the need of society as a field of relations which afford to the individual his occasion for growing towards a greater perfection. We have indeed the old dogma that man was originally innocent and perfect; the conception of the first ideal state of mankind as a harmonious felicity of free and natural living in which no social law or compulsion existed because none was needed, is as old as the Mahabharata. But even this theory has to recognise a downward lapse of man from his natural perfection. The fall

was not brought about by the introduction of the social principle in the arrangement of his life, but rather the social principle and the governmental method of compulsion had to be introduced as a result of the fall. If, on the contrary, we regard the evolution of man not as a fall from perfection but a gradual ascent, a growth out of the infrarational status of his being, it is clear that only by a social compulsion on the vital and physical instincts of his infrarational egoism, a subjection to the needs and laws of the social life, could this growth have been brought about on a large scale. For in their first crudeness the infrarational instincts do not correct themselves quite voluntarily without the pressure of need and compulsion, but only by the erection of a law other than their own which teaches them finally to erect a yet greater law within for their own correction and purification. The principle of social compulsion may not have been always or perhaps ever used quite wisely,—it is a law of man's imperfection, imperfect in itself, and must always be imperfect in its method and result: but in the earlier stages of his evolution it was clearly inevitable, and until man has grown out of the causes of its necessity, he cannot be really ready for the anarchistic principle of living.

But it is at the same time clear that the more the outer law is replaced by an inner law, the nearer man will draw to his true and natural perfection. And the perfect social state must be one in which governmental compulsion is abolished and man is able to live with his fellow-man by free agreement and cooperation. But by what means is he to be made ready for this great and difficult consummation? Intellectual anarchism relies on two powers in the human being of which the first is the enlightenment of his reason; the mind of man, enlightened, will claim freedom for itself, but will equally recognise the same right in others. A just equation will of itself emerge on the ground of a true, self-found and unperverted human nature. This might conceivably be sufficient, although hardly without a considerable change and progress in man's mental powers, if the life of the individual could be lived in a predominant isolation with only a small number of points of necessary contact with the lives of others. Actually, our existence is closely knit with the existences around

us and there is a common life, a common work, a common effort and aspiration without which humanity cannot grow to its full height and wideness. To ensure coordination and prevent clash and conflict in this constant contact another power is needed than the enlightened intellect. Anarchistic thought finds this power in a natural human sympathy which, if it is given free play under the right conditions, can be relied upon to ensure natural cooperation: the appeal is to what the American poet calls the love of comrades, to the principle of fraternity, the third and most neglected term of the famous revolutionary formula. A free equality founded upon spontaneous cooperation, not on governmental force and social compulsion, is the highest anarchistic ideal.

This would seem to lead us either towards a free cooperative communism, a unified life where the labour and property of all is there for the benefit of all, or else to what may better be called communalism, the free consent of the individual to live in a society where the just freedom of his individuality will be recognised, but the surplus of his labour and acquisitions will be used or given by him without demur for the common good under a natural cooperative impulse. The severest school of anarchism rejects all compromise with communism. It is difficult to see how a Stateless Communism which is supposed to be the final goal of the Russian ideal, can operate on the large and complex scale necessitated by modern life. And indeed it is not clear how even a free communalism could be established or maintained without some kind of governmental force and social compulsion or how it could fail to fall away in the end either on one side into a rigorous collectivism or on the other to struggle, anarchy and disruption. For the logical mind in building its social idea takes no sufficient account of the infrarational element in man, the vital egoism to which the most active and effective part of his nature is bound: that is his most constant motive and it defeats in the end all the calculations of the idealising reason, undoes its elaborate systems or accepts only the little that it can assimilate to its own need and purpose. If that strong element, that ego-force in him is too much overshadowed, cowed and depressed,

too much rationalised, too much denied an outlet, then the life of man becomes artificial, top-heavy, poor in the sap of vitality, mechanical, uncreative. And on the other hand, if it is not suppressed, it tends in the end to assert itself and derange the plans of the rational side of man, because it contains in itself powers whose right satisfaction or whose final way of transformation reason cannot discover.

If Reason were the secret highest law of the universe or if man the mental being were limited by mentality, it might be possible for him by the power of the reason to evolve out of the dominance of infrarational Nature which he inherits from the animal. He could then live securely in his best human self as a perfected rational and sympathetic being, balanced and well-ordered in all parts, the sattvic man of Indian philosophy; that would be his summit of possibility, his consummation. But his nature is rather transitional; the rational being is only a middle term of Nature's evolution. A rational satisfaction cannot give him safety from the pull from below nor deliver him from the attraction from above. If it were not so, the ideal of intellectual Anarchism might be more feasible as well as acceptable as a theory of what human life might be in its reasonable perfection; but, man being what he is, we are compelled in the end to aim higher and go farther.

A spiritual or spiritualised anarchism might appear to come nearer to the real solution or at least touch something of it from afar. As it expresses itself at the present day, there is much in it that is exaggerated and imperfect. Its seers seem often to preach an impossible self-abnegation of the vital life and an asceticism which instead of purifying and transforming the vital being, seeks to suppress and even kill it; life itself is impoverished or dried up by this severe austerity in its very springs. Carried away by a high-reaching spirit of revolt, these prophets denounce civilisation as a failure because of its vitalistic exaggerations, but set up an opposite exaggeration which might well cure civilisation of some of its crying faults and uglinesses, but would deprive us also of many real and valuable gains. But apart from these excesses of a too logical thought and a one-sided impulsion,

apart from the inability of any “ism” to express the truth of the spirit which exceeds all such compartments, we seem here to be near to the real way out, to the discovery of the saving motive-force. The solution lies not in the reason, but in the soul of man, in its spiritual tendencies. It is a spiritual, an inner freedom that can alone create a perfect human order. It is a spiritual, a greater than the rational enlightenment that can alone illumine the vital nature of man and impose harmony on its self-seekings, antagonisms and discords. A deeper brotherhood, a yet unfound law of love is the only sure foundation possible for a perfect social evolution, no other can replace it. But this brotherhood and love will not proceed by the vital instincts or the reason where they can be met, baffled or deflected by opposite reasonings and other discordant instincts. Nor will it found itself in the natural heart of man where there are plenty of other passions to combat it. It is in the soul that it must find its roots; the love which is founded upon a deeper truth of our being, the brotherhood or, let us say,—for this is another feeling than any vital or mental sense of brotherhood, a calmer more durable motive-force,—the spiritual comradeship which is the expression of an inner realisation of oneness. For so only can egoism disappear and the true individualism of the unique godhead in each man found itself on the true communism of the equal godhead in the race; for the Spirit, the inmost self, the universal Godhead in every being is that whose very nature of diverse oneness it is to realise the perfection of its individual life and nature in the existence of all, in the universal life and nature.

This is a solution to which it may be objected that it puts off the consummation of a better human society to a far-off date in the future evolution of the race. For it means that no machinery invented by the reason can perfect either the individual or the collective man; an inner change is needed in human nature, a change too difficult to be ever effected except by the few. This is not certain; but in any case, if this is not the solution, then there is no solution, if this is not the way, then there is no way for the human kind. Then the terrestrial evolution must pass beyond man as it has passed beyond the animal and a greater race must

come that will be capable of the spiritual change, a form of life must be born that is nearer to the divine. After all there is no logical necessity for the conclusion that the change cannot begin at all because its perfection is not immediately possible. A decisive turn of mankind to the spiritual ideal, the beginning of a constant ascent and guidance towards the heights may not be altogether impossible, even if the summits are attainable at first only by the pioneer few and far-off to the tread of the race. And that beginning may mean the descent of an influence that will alter at once the whole life of mankind in its orientation and enlarge for ever, as did the development of his reason and more than any development of the reason, its potentialities and all its structure.

Chapter XXI

The Spiritual Aim and Life

A SOCIETY founded upon spirituality will differ in two essential points from the normal human society which begins from and ends with the lower nature. The normal human society starts from the gregarious instinct modified by a diversity and possible antagonism of interests, from an association and clash of egos, from a meeting, combination, conflict of ideas, tendencies and principles; it tries first to patch up an accommodation of converging interests and a treaty of peace between discords, founded on a series of implied contracts, natural or necessary adjustments which become customs of the aggregate life, and to these contracts as they develop it gives the name of social law. By establishing, as against the interests which lead to conflict, the interests which call for association and mutual assistance, it creates or stimulates sympathies and habits of helpfulness that give a psychological support and sanction to its mechanism of law, custom and contract. It justifies the mass of social institutions and habitual ways of being which it thus creates by the greater satisfaction and efficiency of the physical, the vital and the mental life of man, in a word, by the growth and advantages of civilisation. A good many losses have indeed to be written off as against these gains, but those are to be accepted as the price we must pay for civilisation.

The normal society treats man essentially as a physical, vital and mental being. For the life, the mind, the body are the three terms of existence with which it has some competence to deal. It develops a system of mental growth and efficiency, an intellectual, aesthetic and moral culture. It evolves the vital side of human life and creates an ever-growing system of economic efficiency and vital enjoyment, and this system becomes more and more rich, cumbrous and complex as civilisation develops. Depressing by its mental and vital overgrowth the natural vigour

of the physical and animal man, it tries to set the balance right by systems of physical culture, a cumbrous science of habits and remedies intended to cure the ills it has created and as much amelioration as it can manage of the artificial forms of living that are necessary to its social system. In the end, however, experience shows that society tends to die by its own development, a sure sign that there is some radical defect in its system, a certain proof that its idea of man and its method of development do not correspond to all the reality of the human being and to the aim of life which that reality imposes.

There is then a radical defect somewhere in the process of human civilisation; but where is its seat and by what issue shall we come out of the perpetual cycle of failure? Our civilised development of life ends in an exhaustion of vitality and a refusal of Nature to lend her support any further to a continued advance upon these lines; our civilised mentality, after disturbing the balance of the human system to its own greater profit, finally discovers that it has exhausted and destroyed that which fed it and loses its power of healthy action and productiveness. It is found that civilisation has created many more problems than it can solve, has multiplied excessive needs and desires the satisfaction of which it has not sufficient vital force to sustain, has developed a jungle of claims and artificial instincts in the midst of which life loses its way and has no longer any sight of its aim. The more advanced minds begin to declare civilisation a failure and society begins to feel that they are right. But the remedy proposed is either a halt or even a retrogression, which means in the end more confusion, stagnation and decay, or a reversion to "Nature" which is impossible or can only come about by a cataclysm and disintegration of society; or even a cure is aimed at by carrying artificial remedies to their acme, by more and more Science, more and more mechanical devices, a more scientific organisation of life, which means that the engine shall replace life, the arbitrary logical reason substitute itself for complex Nature and man be saved by machinery. As well say that to carry a disease to its height is the best way to its cure.

It may be suggested on the contrary and with some chance

of knocking at the right door that the radical defect of all our systems is their deficient development of just that which society has most neglected, the spiritual element, the soul in man which is his true being. Even to have a healthy body, a strong vitality and an active and clarified mind and a field for their action and enjoyment, carries man no more than a certain distance; afterwards he flags and tires for want of a real self-finding, a satisfying aim for his action and progress. These three things do not make the sum of a complete manhood; they are means to an ulterior end and cannot be made for ever an aim in themselves. Add a rich emotional life governed by a well-ordered ethical standard, and still there is the savour of something left out, some supreme good which these things mean, but do not in themselves arrive at, do not discover till they go beyond themselves. Add a religious system and a widespread spirit of belief and piety, and still you have not found the means of social salvation. All these things human society has developed, but none of them has saved it from disillusionment, weariness and decay. The ancient intellectual cultures of Europe ended in disruptive doubt and sceptical impotence, the pieties of Asia in stagnation and decline. Modern society has discovered a new principle of survival, progress, but the aim of that progress it has never discovered, — unless the aim is always more knowledge, more equipment, convenience and comfort, more enjoyment, a greater and still greater complexity of the social economy, a more and more cumbrously opulent life. But these things must lead in the end where the old led, for they are only the same thing on a larger scale; they lead in a circle, that is to say, nowhere: they do not escape from the cycle of birth, growth, decay and death, they do not really find the secret of self-prolongation by constant self-renewal which is the principle of immortality, but only seem for a moment to find it by the illusion of a series of experiments each of which ends in disappointment. That so far has been the nature of modern progress. Only in its new turn inwards, towards a greater subjectivity now only beginning, is there a better hope; for by that turning it may discover that the real truth of man is to be found in his soul. It is not indeed certain that a subjective

age will lead us there, but it gives us the possibility, can turn in that direction, if used rightly, the more inward movement.

It will be said that this is an old discovery and that it governed the old societies under the name of religion. But that was only an appearance. The discovery was there, but it was made for the life of the individual only, and even for him it looked beyond the earth for its fulfilment and at earth only as the place of his preparation for a solitary salvation or release from the burden of life. Human society itself never seized on the discovery of the soul as a means for the discovery of the law of its own being or on a knowledge of the soul's true nature and need and its fulfilment as the right way of terrestrial perfection. If we look at the old religions in their social as apart from their individual aspect, we see that the use society made of them was only of their most unspiritual or at any rate of their less spiritual parts. It made use of them to give an august, awful and would-be eternal sanction to its mass of customs and institutions; it made of them a veil of mystery against human questioning and a shield of darkness against the innovator. So far as it saw in religion a means of human salvation and perfection, it laid hands upon it at once to mechanise it, to catch the human soul and bind it on the wheels of a socio-religious machinery, to impose on it in the place of spiritual freedom an imperious yoke and an iron prison. It saddled upon the religious life of man a Church, a priesthood and a mass of ceremonies and set over it a pack of watchdogs under the name of creeds and dogmas, dogmas which one had to accept and obey under pain of condemnation to eternal hell by an eternal judge beyond, just as one had to accept and to obey the laws of society on pain of condemnation to temporal imprisonment or death by a mortal judge below. This false socialisation of religion has been always the chief cause of its failure to regenerate mankind.

For nothing can be more fatal to religion than for its spiritual element to be crushed or formalised out of existence by its outward aids and forms and machinery. The falsehood of the old social use of religion is shown by its effects. History has exhibited more than once the coincidence of the greatest religious fervour

and piety with darkest ignorance, with an obscure squalor and long vegetative stagnancy of the mass of human life, with the unquestioned reign of cruelty, injustice and oppression, or with an organisation of the most ordinary, unaspiring and unraised existence hardly relieved by some touches of intellectual or half-spiritual light on the surface,— the end of all this a widespread revolt that turned first of all against the established religion as the key-stone of a regnant falsehood, evil and ignorance. It is another sign when the too scrupulously exact observation of a socio-religious system and its rites and forms, which by the very fact of this misplaced importance begin to lose their sense and true religious value, becomes the law and most prominent aim of religion rather than any spiritual growth of the individual and the race. And a great sign too of this failure is when the individual is obliged to flee from society in order to find room for his spiritual growth; when, finding human life given over to the unregenerated mind, life and body and the place of spiritual freedom occupied by the bonds of form, by Church and Shastra, by some law of the Ignorance, he is obliged to break away from all these to seek for growth into the spirit in the monastery, on the mountain-top, in the cavern, in the desert and the forest. When there is that division between life and the spirit, sentence of condemnation is passed upon human life. Either it is left to circle in its routine or it is decried as worthless and unreal, a vanity of vanities, and loses that confidence in itself and inner faith in the value of its terrestrial aims, *śraddhā*, without which it cannot come to anything. For the spirit of man must strain towards the heights; when it loses its tension of endeavour, the race must become immobile and stagnant or even sink towards darkness and the dust. Even where life rejects the spirit or the spirit rejects life, there may be a self-affirmation of the inner being; there may even be a glorious crop of saints and hermits in a forcing-soil of spirituality, but unless the race, the society, the nation is moved towards the spiritualisation of life or moves forward led by the light of an ideal, the end must be littleness, weakness and stagnation. Or the race has to turn to the intellect for rescue, for some hope or new ideal, and arrive by a circle

through an age of rationalism at a fresh effort towards the re-statement of spiritual truth and a new attempt to spiritualise human life.

The true and full spiritual aim in society will regard man not as a mind, a life and a body, but as a soul incarnated for a divine fulfilment upon earth, not only in heavens beyond, which after all it need not have left if it had no divine business here in the world of physical, vital and mental nature. It will therefore regard the life, mind and body neither as ends in themselves, sufficient for their own satisfaction, nor as mortal members full of disease which have only to be dropped off for the rescued spirit to flee away into its own pure regions, but as first instruments of the soul, the yet imperfect instruments of an unseized diviner purpose. It will believe in their destiny and help them to believe in themselves, but for that very reason in their highest and not only in their lowest or lower possibilities. Their destiny will be, in its view, to spiritualise themselves so as to grow into visible members of the spirit, lucid means of its manifestation, themselves spiritual, illumined, more and more conscious and perfect. For, accepting the truth of man's soul as a thing entirely divine in its essence, it will accept also the possibility of his whole being becoming divine in spite of Nature's first patent contradictions of this possibility, her darkened denials of this ultimate certitude, and even with these as a necessary earthly starting-point. And as it will regard man the individual, it will regard too man the collectivity as a soul-form of the Infinite, a collective soul myriadly embodied upon earth for a divine fulfilment in its manifold relations and its multitudinous activities. Therefore it will hold sacred all the different parts of man's life which correspond to the parts of his being, all his physical, vital, dynamic, emotional, aesthetic, ethical, intellectual, psychic evolution, and see in them instruments for a growth towards a diviner living. It will regard every human society, nation, people or other organic aggregate from the same standpoint, sub-souls, as it were, means of a complex manifestation and self-fulfilment of the Spirit, the divine Reality, the conscious Infinite in man upon earth. The possible godhead of man because he is inwardly

of one being with God will be its one solitary creed and dogma.

But it will not seek to enforce even this one uplifting dogma by any external compulsion upon the lower members of man's natural being; for that is *nigraha*, a repressive contraction of the nature which may lead to an apparent suppression of the evil, but not to a real and healthy growth of the good; it will rather hold up this creed and ideal as a light and inspiration to all his members to grow into the godhead from within themselves, to become freely divine. Neither in the individual nor in the society will it seek to imprison, wall in, repress, impoverish, but to let in the widest air and the highest light. A large liberty will be the law of a spiritual society and the increase of freedom a sign of the growth of human society towards the possibility of true spiritualisation. To spiritualise in this sense a society of slaves, slaves of power, slaves of authority, slaves of custom, slaves of dogma, slaves of all sorts of imposed laws which they live under rather than live by them, slaves internally of their own weakness, ignorance and passions from whose worst effect they seek or need to be protected by another and external slavery, can never be a successful endeavour. They must shake off their fetters first in order to be fit for a higher freedom. Not that man has not to wear many a yoke in his progress upward; but only the yoke which he accepts because it represents, the more perfectly the better, the highest inner law of his nature and its aspiration, will be entirely helpful to him. The rest buy their good results at a heavy cost and may retard as much as or even more than they accelerate his progress.

The spiritual aim will recognise that man as he grows in his being must have as much free space as possible for all its members to grow in their own strength, to find out themselves and their potentialities. In their freedom they will err, because experience comes through many errors, but each has in itself a divine principle and they will find it out, disengage its presence, significance and law as their experience of themselves deepens and increases. Thus true spirituality will not lay a yoke upon science and philosophy or compel them to square their conclusions with any statement of dogmatic religious or even of assured

spiritual truth, as some of the old religions attempted, vainly, ignorantly, with an unspiritual obstinacy and arrogance. Each part of man's being has its own dharma which it must follow and will follow in the end, put on it what fetters you please. The dharma of science, thought and philosophy is to seek for truth by the intellect dispassionately, without prepossession and prejudgment, with no other first propositions than the law of thought and observation itself imposes. Science and philosophy are not bound to square their observations and conclusions with any current ideas of religious dogma or ethical rule or aesthetic prejudice. In the end, if left free in their action, they will find the unity of Truth with Good and Beauty and God and give these a greater meaning than any dogmatic religion or any formal ethics or any narrower aesthetic idea can give us. But meanwhile they must be left free even to deny God and good and beauty if they will, if their sincere observation of things so points them. For all these rejections must come round in the end of their circling and return to a larger truth of the things they refuse. Often we find atheism both in individual and society a necessary passage to deeper religious and spiritual truth: one has sometimes to deny God in order to find him; the finding is inevitable at the end of all earnest scepticism and denial.

The same law holds good in Art; the aesthetic being of man rises similarly on its own curve towards its diviner possibilities. The highest aim of the aesthetic being is to find the Divine through beauty; the highest Art is that which by an inspired use of significant and interpretative form unseals the doors of the spirit. But in order that it may come to do this greatest thing largely and sincerely, it must first endeavour to see and depict man and Nature and life for their own sake, in their own characteristic truth and beauty; for behind these first characters lies always the beauty of the Divine in life and man and Nature and it is through their just transformation that what was at first veiled by them has to be revealed. The dogma that Art must be religious or not be at all, is a false dogma, just as is the claim that it must be subservient to ethics or utility or scientific truth or philosophic ideas. Art may make use of these things as elements,

but it has its own *svadharma*, essential law, and it will rise to the widest spirituality by following out its own natural lines with no other yoke than the intimate law of its own being.

Even with the lower nature of man, though here we are naturally led to suppose that compulsion is the only remedy, the spiritual aim will seek for a free self-rule and development from within rather than a repression of his dynamic and vital being from without. All experience shows that man must be given a certain freedom to stumble in action as well as to err in knowledge so long as he does not get from within himself his freedom from wrong movement and error; otherwise he cannot grow. Society for its own sake has to coerce the dynamic and vital man, but coercion only chains up the devil and alters at best his form of action into more mitigated and civilised movements; it does not and cannot eliminate him. The real virtue of the dynamic and vital being, the Life Purusha, can only come by his finding a higher law and spirit for his activity within himself; to give him that, to illuminate and transform and not to destroy his impulse is the true spiritual means of regeneration.

Thus spirituality will respect the freedom of the lower members, but it will not leave them to themselves; it will present to them the truth of the spirit in themselves, translated into their own fields of action, presented in a light which illumines all their activities and shows them the highest law of their own freedom. It will not, for instance, escape from scientific materialism by a barren contempt for physical life or a denial of Matter, but pursue rather the sceptical mind into its own affirmations and denials and show it there the Divine. If it cannot do that, it is proved that it is itself unenlightened or deficient, because one-sided, in its light. It will not try to slay the vitality in man by denying life, but will rather reveal to life the divine in itself as the principle of its own transformation. If it cannot do that, it is because it has itself not yet wholly fathomed the meaning of the creation and the secret of the Avatar.

The spiritual aim will seek to fulfil itself therefore in a fullness of life and man's being in the individual and the race which will be the base for the heights of the spirit,— the base becoming

in the end of one substance with the peaks. It will not proceed by a scornful neglect of the body, nor by an ascetic starving of the vital being and an utmost barenness or even squalor as the rule of spiritual living, nor by a puritanic denial of art and beauty and the aesthetic joy of life, nor by a neglect of science and philosophy as poor, negligible or misleading intellectual pursuits,—though the temporary utility even of these exaggerations as against the opposite excesses need not be denied; it will be all things to all, but in all it will be at once their highest aim and meaning and the most all-embracing expression of themselves in which all they are and seek for will be fulfilled. It will aim at establishing in society the true inner theocracy, not the false theocracy of a dominant Church or priesthood, but that of the inner Priest, Prophet and King. It will reveal to man the divinity in himself as the Light, Strength, Beauty, Good, Delight, Immortality that dwells within and build up in his outer life also the kingdom of God which is first discovered within us. It will show man the way to seek for the Divine in every way of his being, *sarvabhāvena*,¹ and so find it and live in it, that however—even in all kinds of ways—he lives and acts, he shall live and act in that,² in the Divine, in the Spirit, in the eternal Reality of his being.

¹ Gita.

² Gita. *Sarvathā vartamāno'pi sa yogī mayi vartate.*

Chapter XXII

The Necessity of the Spiritual Transformation

OUR NORMAL conduct of life, whether the individual or the social, is actually governed by the balance between two complementary powers,—first, an implicit will central to the life and inherent in the main power of its action and, secondly, whatever modifying will can come in from the Idea in mind—for man is a mental being—and operate through our as yet imperfect mental instruments to give this life force a conscious orientation and a conscious method. Life normally finds its own centre in our vital and physical being, in its cravings and its needs, in its demand for persistence, growth, expansion, enjoyment, in its reachings after all kinds of power and possession and activity and splendour and largeness. The first self-direction of this Life-Force, its first orderings of method are instinctive and either entirely or very largely subconscious and magnificently automatic: the ease, spontaneity, fine normality, beauty, self-satisfaction, abundant vital energy and power of the subhuman life of Nature up to the animal is due to its entire obedience to this instinctive and automatic urge. It is a vague sense of this truth and of the very different and in this respect inferior character of human life that makes the thinker, when dissatisfied with our present conditions, speak of a life according to Nature as the remedy for all our ills. An attempt to find such a rule in the essential nature of man has inspired many revolutionary conceptions of ethics and society and individual self-development down to the latest of the kind, the strangely inspired vitalistic philosophy of Nietzsche. The common defect of these conceptions is to miss the true character of man and the true law of his being, his Dharma.

Nietzsche's idea that to develop the superman out of our

present very unsatisfactory manhood is our real business, is in itself an absolutely sound teaching. His formulation of our aim, "to become ourselves", "to exceed ourselves", implying, as it does, that man has not yet found all his true self, his true nature by which he can successfully and spontaneously live, could not be bettered. But then the question of questions is there, what is our self, and what is our real nature? What is that which is growing in us, but into which we have not yet grown? It is something divine, is the answer, a divinity Olympian, Apollonian, Dionysiac, which the reasoning and consciously willing animal, man, is labouring more or less obscurely to become. Certainly, it is all that; but in what shall we find the seed of that divinity and what is the poise in which the superman, once self-found, can abide and be secure from lapse into this lower and imperfect manhood? Is it the intellect and will, the double-aspected *buddhi* of the Indian psychological system? But this is at present a thing so perplexed, so divided against itself, so uncertain of everything it gains, up to a certain point indeed magically creative and efficient but, when all has been said and done, in the end so splendidly futile, so at war with and yet so dependent upon and subservient to our lower nature, that even if in it there lies concealed some seed of the entire divinity, it can hardly itself be the seed and at any rate gives us no such secure and divine poise as we are seeking. Therefore we say, not the intellect and will, but that supreme thing in us yet higher than the Reason, the spirit, here concealed behind the coatings of our lower nature, is the secret seed of the divinity and will be, when discovered and delivered, luminous above the mind, the wide ground upon which a divine life of the human being can be with security founded.

When we speak of the superman, we speak evidently of something abnormal or supernormal to our present nature, so much so that the very idea of it becomes easily alarming and repugnant to our normal humanity. The normal human does not desire to be called out from its constant mechanical round to scale what may seem to it impossible heights and it loves still less the prospect of being exceeded, left behind and dominated,

— although the object of a true supermanhood is not exceeding and domination for its own sake but precisely the opening of our normal humanity to something now beyond itself that is yet its own destined perfection. But mark that this thing which we have called normal humanity, is itself something abnormal in Nature, something the like and parity of which we look around in vain to discover; it is a rapid freak, a sudden miracle. Abnormality in Nature is no objection, no necessary sign of imperfection, but may well be an effort at a much greater perfection. But this perfection is not found until the abnormal can find its own secure normality, the right organisation of its life in its own kind and power and on its own level. Man is an abnormal who has not found his own normality, — he may imagine he has, he may appear to be normal in his own kind, but that normality is only a sort of provisional order; therefore, though man is infinitely greater than the plant or the animal, he is not perfect in his own nature like the plant and the animal. This imperfection is not a thing to be at all deplored, but rather a privilege and a promise, for it opens out to us an immense vista of self-development and self-exceeding. Man at his highest is a half-god who has risen up out of the animal Nature and is splendidly abnormal in it, but the thing which he has started out to be, the whole god, is something so much greater than what he is that it seems to him as abnormal to himself as he is to the animal. This means a great and arduous labour of growth before him, but also a splendid crown of his race and his victory. A kingdom is offered to him beside which his present triumphs in the realms of mind or over external Nature will appear only as a rough hint and a poor beginning.

What precisely is the defect from which all his imperfection springs? We have already indicated it, — that has indeed been the general aim of the preceding chapters, — but it is necessary to state it now more succinctly and precisely. We see that at first sight man seems to be a double nature, an animal nature of the vital and physical being which lives according to its instincts, impulses, desires, its automatic orientation and method, and with that a half-divine nature of the self-conscious intellectual, ethical, aesthetic, intelligently emotional, intelligently dynamic

being who is capable of finding and understanding the law of his own action and consciously using and bettering it, a reflecting mind that understands Nature, a will that uses, elevates, perfects Nature, a sense that intelligently enjoys Nature. The aim of the animal part of us is to increase vital possession and enjoyment; the aim of the semi-divine part of us is also to grow, possess and enjoy, but first to possess and enjoy intelligently, aesthetically, ethically, by the powers of the mind much more than by the powers of the life and body, and, secondly, to possess and enjoy, not so much the vital and physical except in so far as that is necessary as a foundation and starting-point, a preliminary necessity or condition, a standing-ground and basis, but things intellectual, ethical and aesthetic, and to grow not so much in the outward life, except in so far as that is necessary to the security, ease and dignity of our human existence, but in the true, the good and the beautiful. This is the manhood of man, his unique distinction and abnormality in the norm of this inconscient material Nature.

This means that man has developed a new power of being, — let us call it a new soul-power, with the premiss that we regard the life and the body also as a soul-power, — and the being who has done that is under an inherent obligation not only to look at the world and revalue all in it from this new elevation, but to compel his whole nature to obey this power and in a way reshape itself in its mould, and even to reshape, so far as he can, his environmental life into some image of this greater truth and law. In doing this lies his *svadharma*, his true rule and way of being, the way of his perfection and his real happiness. Failing in this, he fails in the aim of his nature and his being, and has to begin again until he finds the right path and arrives at a successful turning-point, a decisive crisis of transformation. Now this is precisely what man has failed to do. He has effected something, he has passed a certain stage of his journey. He has laid some yoke of the intellectual, ethical, aesthetic rule on his vital and physical parts and made it impossible for himself to be content with or really to be the mere human animal. But more he has not been able to do successfully. The transformation of his life into the image of the true, the good and the beautiful seems

as far off as ever; if ever he comes near to some imperfect form of it,— and even then it is only done by a class or by a number of individuals with some reflex action on the life of the mass,— he slides back from it in a general decay of his life, or else stumbles on from it into some bewildering upheaval out of which he comes with new gains indeed but also with serious losses. He has never arrived at any great turning-point, any decisive crisis of transformation.

The main failure, the root of the whole failure indeed, is that he has not been able to shift upward what we have called the implicit will central to his life, the force and assured faith inherent in its main power of action. His central will of life is still situated in his vital and physical being, its drift is towards vital and physical enjoyment, enlightened indeed and checked to a certain extent in its impulses by the higher powers, but enlightened only and very partially, not transformed,— checked, not dominated and uplifted to a higher plane. The higher life is still only a thing superimposed on the lower, a permanent intruder upon our normal existence. The intruder interferes constantly with the normal life, scolds, encourages, discourages, lectures, manipulates, readjusts, lifts up only to let fall, but has no power to transform, alchemise, re-create. Indeed it does not seem itself quite to know where all this effort and uneasy struggle is meant to lead us,— sometimes it thinks, to a quite tolerable human life on earth, the norm of which it can never successfully fix, and sometimes it imagines our journey is to another world whither by a religious life or else an edifying death it will escape out of all this pother and trouble of mortal being. Therefore these two elements live together in a continual, a mutual perplexity, made perpetually uneasy, uncomfortable and ineffectual by each other, somewhat like an ill-assorted wife and husband, always at odds and yet half in love with or at least necessary to each other, unable to beat out a harmony, yet condemned to be joined in an unhappy leash until death separates them. All the uneasiness, dissatisfaction, disillusionment, weariness, melancholy, pessimism of the human mind comes from man's practical failure to solve the riddle and the difficulty of his double nature.

We have said that this failure is due to the fact that this higher power is only a mediator, and that thoroughly to transform the vital and physical life in its image is perhaps not possible, but at any rate not the intention of Nature in us. It may be urged perhaps that after all individuals have succeeded in effecting some figure of transformation, have led entirely ethical or artistic or intellectual lives, even shaped their life by some ideal of the true, the good and the beautiful, and whatever the individual has done, the race too may and should eventually succeed in doing; for the exceptional individual is the future type, the forerunner. But to how much did their success really amount? Either they impoverished the vital and physical life in them in order to give play to one element of their being, lived a one-sided and limited existence, or else they arrived at a compromise by which, while the higher life was given great prominence, the lower was still allowed to graze in its own field under the eye more or less strict or the curb more or less indulgent of the higher power or powers: in itself, in its own instincts and demands it remained unchanged. There was a dominance, but not a transformation.

Life cannot be entirely rational, cannot conform entirely to the ethical or the aesthetic or the scientific and philosophic mentality; mind is not the destined archangel of the transformation. All appearances to the contrary are always a *trompe l'oeil*, an intellectual, aesthetic or ethical illusion. Dominated, repressed life may be, but it reserves its right; and though individuals or a class may establish this domination for a time and impose some simulacrum of it upon the society, Life in the end circumvents the intelligence; it gets strong elements in it—for always there are traitor elements at work—to come over to its side and re-establishes its instincts, recovers its field; or if it fails in this, it has its revenge in its own decay which brings about the decay of the society, the disappointment of the perennial hope. So much so, that there are times when mankind perceives this fact and, renouncing the attempt to dominate the life-instinct, determines to use the intelligence for its service and to give it light in its own field instead of enslaving it to a higher but chimerical ideal.

Such a period was the recent materialistic age, when the intellect of man seemed decided to study thoroughly Life and Matter, to admit only that, to recognise mind only as an instrument of Life and Matter, and to devote all its knowledge to a tremendous expansion of the vital and physical life, its practicality, its efficiency, its comfort and the splendid ordering of its instincts of production, possession and enjoyment. That was the character of the materialistic, commercial, economic age of mankind, a period in which the ethical mind persisted painfully, but with decreasing self-confidence, an increasing self-questioning and a tendency to yield up the fortress of the moral law to the life-instinct, the aesthetic instinct and intelligence flourished as a rather glaring exotic ornament, a sort of rare orchid in the button-hole of the vital man, and reason became the magnificent servant of Life and Matter. The titanic development of the vital Life which followed, is ending as the Titans always end; it lit its own funeral pyre in the conflagration of a world-war, its natural upshot, a struggle between the most "efficient" and "civilised" nations for the possession and enjoyment of the world, of its wealth, its markets, its available spaces, an inflated and plethoric commercial expansion, largeness of imperial size and rule. For that is what the great war signified and was in its real origin, because that was the secret or the open intention of all pre-war diplomacy and international politics; and if a nobler idea was awakened at least for a time, it was only under the scourge of Death and before the terrifying spectre of a gigantic mutual destruction. Even so the awakening was by no means complete, nor everywhere quite sincere, but it was there and it was struggling towards birth even in Germany, once the great protagonist of the vitalistic philosophy of life. In that awakening lay some hope of better things. But for the moment at least the vitalistic aim has once more raised its head in a new form and the hope has dimmed in a darkness and welter in which only the eye of faith can see chaos preparing a new cosmos.

The first result of this imperfect awakening seemed likely to be a return to an older ideal, with a will to use the reason and the ethical mind better and more largely in the ordering

of individual, of national and of international life. But such an attempt, though well enough as a first step, cannot be the real and final solution; if our effort ends there, we shall not arrive. The solution lies, we have said, in an awakening to our real, because our highest self and nature,—that hidden self which we are not yet, but have to become and which is not the strong and enlightened vital Will hymned by Nietzsche, but a spiritual self and spiritual nature that will use the mental being which we already are, but the mental being spiritualised, and transform by a spiritual ideality the aim and action of our vital and physical nature. For this is the formula of man in his highest potentiality, and safety lies in tending towards our highest and not in resting content with an inferior potentiality. To follow after the highest in us may seem to be to live dangerously, to use again one of Nietzsche's inspired expressions, but by that danger comes victory and security. To rest in or follow after an inferior potentiality may seem safe, rational, comfortable, easy, but it ends badly, in some futility or in a mere circling, down the abyss or in a stagnant morass. Our right and natural road is towards the summits.

We have then to return to the pursuit of an ancient secret which man, as a race, has seen only obscurely and followed after lamely, has indeed understood only with his surface mind and not in its heart of meaning,—and yet in following it lies his social no less than his individual salvation,—the ideal of the kingdom of God, the secret of the reign of the Spirit over mind and life and body. It is because they have never quite lost hold of this secret, never disowned it in impatience for a lesser victory, that the older Asiatic nations have survived so persistently and can now, as if immortal, raise their faces towards a new dawn; for they have fallen asleep, but they have not perished. It is true that they have for a time failed in life, where the European nations who trusted to the flesh and the intellect have succeeded; but that success, speciously complete but only for a time, has always turned into a catastrophe. Still Asia had failed in life, she had fallen in the dust, and even if the dust in which she was lying was sacred, as the modern poet of Asia has declared,—

though the sacredness may be doubted, — still the dust is not the proper place for man, nor is to lie prostrate in it his right human attitude. Asia temporarily failed not because she followed after things spiritual, as some console themselves by saying, — as if the spirit could be at all a thing of weakness or a cause of weakness, — but because she did not follow after the spirit sufficiently, did not learn how entirely to make it the master of life. Her mind either made a gulf and a division between life and the Spirit or else rested in a compromise between them and accepted as final socio-religious systems founded upon that compromise. So to rest is perilous; for the call of the Spirit more than any other demands that we shall follow it always to the end, and the end is neither a divorce and departure nor a compromise, but a conquest of all by the spirit and that reign of the seekers after perfection which, in the Hindu religious symbol, the last Avatar comes to accomplish.

This truth it is important to note, for mistakes made on the path are often even more instructive than the mistakes made by a turning aside from the path. As it is possible to superimpose the intellectual, ethical or aesthetic life or the sum of their motives upon the vital and physical nature, to be satisfied with a partial domination or a compromise, so it is possible to superimpose the spiritual life or some figure of strength or ascendancy of spiritual ideas and motives on the mental, vital and physical nature and either to impoverish the latter, to impoverish the vital and physical existence and even to depress the mental as well in order to give the spiritual an easier domination, or else to make a compromise and leave the lower being to its pasture on condition of its doing frequent homage to the spiritual existence, admitting to a certain extent, greater or less, its influence and formally acknowledging it as the last state and the finality of the human being. This is the most that human society has ever done in the past, and though necessarily that must be a stage of the journey, to rest there is to miss the heart of the matter, the one thing needful. Not a humanity leading its ordinary life, what is now its normal round, touched by spiritual influences, but a humanity aspiring whole-heartedly to a law that is now abnormal

to it until its whole life has been elevated into spirituality, is the steep way that lies before man towards his perfection and the transformation that it has to achieve.

The secret of the transformation lies in the transference of our centre of living to a higher consciousness and in a change of our main power of living. This will be a leap or an ascent even more momentous than that which Nature must at one time have made from the vital mind of the animal to the thinking mind still imperfect in our human intelligence. The central will implicit in life must be no longer the vital will in the life and the body, but the spiritual will of which we have now only rare and dim intimations and glimpses. For now it comes to us hardly disclosed, weakened, disguised in the mental Idea; but it is in its own nature supramental and it is its supramental power and truth that we have somehow to discover. The main power of our living must be no longer the inferior vital urge of Nature which is already accomplished in us and can only whirl upon its rounds about the ego-centre, but that spiritual force of which we sometimes hear and speak but have not yet its inmost secret. For that is still retired in our depths and waits for our transcendence of the ego and the discovery of the true individual in whose universality we shall be united with all others. To transfer from the vital being, the instrumental reality in us, to the spirit, the central reality, to elevate to that height our will to be and our power of living is the secret which our nature is seeking to discover. All that we have done hitherto is some half-successful effort to transfer this will and power to the mental plane; our highest endeavour and labour has been to become the mental being and to live in the strength of the idea. But the mental idea in us is always intermediary and instrumental; always it depends on something other than it for its ground of action and therefore although it can follow for a time after its own separate satisfaction, it cannot rest for ever satisfied with that alone. It must either gravitate downwards and outwards towards the vital and physical life or it must elevate itself inwards and upwards towards the spirit.

And that must be why in thought, in art, in conduct, in life

we are always divided between two tendencies, one idealistic, the other realistic. The latter very easily seems to us more real, more solidly founded, more in touch with actualities because it relies upon a reality which is patent, sensible and already accomplished; the idealistic easily seems to us something unreal, fantastic, unsubstantial, nebulous, a thing more of thoughts and words than of live actualities, because it is trying to embody a reality not yet accomplished. To a certain extent we are perhaps right; for the ideal, a stranger among the actualities of our physical existence, is in fact a thing unreal until it has either in some way reconciled itself to the imperfections of our outer life or else has found the greater and purer reality for which it is seeking and imposed it on our outer activities; till then it hangs between two worlds and has conquered neither the upper light nor the nether darkness. Submission to the actual by a compromise is easy; discovery of the spiritual truth and the transformation of our actual way of living is difficult: but it is precisely this difficult thing that has to be done, if man is to find and fulfil his true nature. Our idealism is always the most rightly human thing in us, but as a mental idealism it is a thing ineffective. To be effective it has to convert itself into a spiritual realism which shall lay its hands on the higher reality of the spirit and take up for it this lower reality of our sensational, vital and physical nature.

This upward transference of our will to be and our power of life we have, then, to make the very principle of our perfection. That will, that power must choose between the domination of the vital part in us and the domination of the spirit. Nature can rest in the round of vital being, can produce there a sort of perfection, but that is the perfection of an arrested development satisfied with its own limits. This she can manage in the plant and the animal, because the life and the body are there at once the instrument and the aim; they do not look beyond themselves. She cannot do it in man because here she has shot up beyond her physical and vital basis; she has developed in him the mind which is an outflowering of the life towards the light of the Spirit, and the life and the body are now instrumental and no longer

their own aim. Therefore the perfection of man cannot consist in pursuing the unillumined round of the physical life. Neither can it be found in the wider rounds of the mental being; for that also is instrumental and tends towards something else beyond it, something whose power indeed works in it, but whose larger truth is superconscious to its present intelligence, supramental. The perfection of man lies in the unfolding of the ever-perfect Spirit.

The lower perfection of Nature in the plant and the animal comes from an instinctive, an automatic, a subconscious obedience in each to the vital truth of its own being. The higher perfection of the spiritual life will come by a spontaneous obedience of spiritualised man to the truth of his own realised being, when he has become himself, when he has found his own real nature. For this spontaneity will not be instinctive and subconscious, it will be intuitive and fully, integrally conscious. It will be a glad obedience to a spontaneous principle of spiritual light, to the force of a unified and integralised highest truth, largest beauty, good, power, joy, love, oneness. The object of this force acting in life will and must be as in all life growth, possession, enjoyment, but a growth which is a divine manifestation, a possession and enjoyment spiritual and of the spirit in things,— an enjoyment that will use, but will not depend on the mental, vital and physical symbols of our living. Therefore this will not be a limited perfection of arrested development dependent on the repetition of the same forms and the same round of actions, any departure from which becomes a peril and a disturbance. It will be an illimitable perfection capable of endless variation in its forms,— for the ways of the Spirit are countless and endless,— but securely the same in all variations, one but multitudinously infinite.

Therefore, too, this perfection cannot come by the mental idea dealing with the Spirit as it deals with life. The idea in mind seizing upon the central will in Spirit and trying to give this higher force a conscious orientation and method in accordance with the ideas of the intellect is too limited, too darkened, too poor a force to work this miracle. Still less can it come if we chain

the spirit to some fixed mental idea or system of religious cult, intellectual truth, aesthetic norm, ethical rule, practical action, way of vital and physical life, to a particular arrangement of forms and actions and declare all departure from that a peril and a disturbance or a deviation from spiritual living. That was the mistake made in Asia and the cause of its arrested development and decline; for this is to subject the higher to the lower principle and to bind down the self-disclosing Spirit to a provisional and imperfect compromise with mind and the vital nature. Man's true freedom and perfection will come when the spirit within bursts through the forms of mind and life and, winging above to its own gnostic fiery height of ether, turns upon them from that light and flame to seize them and transform into its own image.

In fact, as we have seen, the mind and the intellect are not the key-power of our existence. For they can only trace out a round of half-truths and uncertainties and revolve in that unsatisfying circle. But concealed in the mind and life, in all the action of the intellectual, the aesthetic, the ethical, the dynamic and practical, the emotional, sensational, vital and physical being, there is a power that sees by identity and intuition and gives to all these things such truth and such certainty and stability as they are able to compass. Obscurely we are now beginning to see something of this behind all our science and philosophy and all our other activities. But so long as this power has to work for the mind and life and not for itself, to work in their forms and not by its own spontaneous light, we cannot make any great use of this discovery, cannot get the native benefit of this inner Daemon. Man's road to spiritual supermanhood will be open when he declares boldly that all he has yet developed, including the intellect of which he is so rightly and yet so vainly proud, are now no longer sufficient for him, and that to uncase, discover, set free this greater Light within shall be henceforward his pervading preoccupation. Then will his philosophy, art, science, ethics, social existence, vital pursuits be no longer an exercise of mind and life, done for themselves, carried in a circle, but a means for the discovery of a greater Truth behind mind and life and for

the bringing of its power into our human existence. We shall be on the right road to become ourselves, to find our true law of perfection, to live our true satisfied existence in our real being and divine nature.

Chapter XXIII

Conditions for the Coming of a Spiritual Age

A CHANGE of this kind, the change from the mental and vital to the spiritual order of life, must necessarily be accomplished in the individual and in a great number of individuals before it can lay any effective hold upon the community. The Spirit in humanity discovers, develops, builds its formations first in the individual man: it is through the progressive and formative individual that it offers the discovery and the chance of a new self-creation to the mind of the race. For the communal mind holds things subconsciously at first or, if consciously, then in a confused chaotic manner: it is only through the individual mind that the mass can arrive at a clear knowledge and creation of the thing it held in its subconscious self. Thinkers, historians, sociologists who belittle the individual and would like to lose him in the mass or think of him chiefly as a cell, an atom, have got hold only of the obscurer side of the truth of Nature's workings in humanity. It is because man is not like the material formations of Nature or like the animal, because she intends in him a more and more conscious evolution, that individuality is so much developed in him and so absolutely important and indispensable. No doubt what comes out in the individual and afterwards moves the mass, must have been there already in the universal Mind and the individual is only an instrument for its manifestation, discovery, development: but he is an indispensable instrument and an instrument not merely of subconscious Nature, not merely of an instinctive urge that moves the mass, but more directly of the Spirit of whom that Nature is itself the instrument and the matrix of his creations. All great changes therefore find their first clear and effective power and their direct shaping force in the mind and spirit of an

individual or of a limited number of individuals. The mass follows, but unfortunately in a very imperfect and confused fashion which often or even usually ends in the failure or distortion of the thing created. If it were not so, mankind could have advanced on its way with a victorious rapidity instead of with the lumbering hesitations and soon exhausted rushes that seem to be all of which it has yet been capable.

Therefore if the spiritual change of which we have been speaking is to be effected, it must unite two conditions which have to be simultaneously satisfied but are most difficult to bring together. There must be the individual and the individuals who are able to see, to develop, to re-create themselves in the image of the Spirit and to communicate both their idea and its power to the mass. And there must be at the same time a mass, a society, a communal mind or at the least the constituents of a group-body, the possibility of a group-soul which is capable of receiving and effectively assimilating, ready to follow and effectively arrive, not compelled by its own inherent deficiencies, its defect of preparation to stop on the way or fall back before the decisive change is made. Such a simultaneity has never yet happened, although the appearance of it has sometimes been created by the ardour of a moment. That the combination must happen some day is a certainty, but none can tell how many attempts will have to be made and how many sediments of spiritual experience will have to be accumulated in the subconscious mentality of the communal human being before the soil is ready. For the chances of success are always less powerful in a difficult upward effort affecting the very roots of our nature than the numerous possibilities of failure. The initiator himself may be imperfect, may not have waited to become entirely the thing that he has seen. Even the few who have the apostolate in their charge may not have perfectly assimilated and shaped it in themselves and may hand on the power of the Spirit still farther diminished to the many who will come after them. The society may be intellectually, vitally, ethically, temperamentally unready, with the result that the final acceptance of the spiritual idea by the society may be also the beginning of its debasement

and distortion and of the consequent departure or diminution of the Spirit. Any or all of these things may happen, and the result will be, as has so often happened in the past, that even though some progress is made and an important change effected, it will not be the decisive change which can alone re-create humanity in a diviner image.

What then will be that state of society, what that readiness of the common mind of man which will be most favourable to this change, so that even if it cannot at once effectuate itself, it may at least make for its ways a more decisive preparation than has been hitherto possible? For that seems the most important element, since it is that, it is the unpreparedness, the unfitness of the society or of the common mind of man which is always the chief stumbling-block. It is the readiness of this common mind which is of the first importance; for even if the condition of society and the principle and rule that govern society are opposed to the spiritual change, even if these belong almost wholly to the vital, to the external, the economic, the mechanical order, as is certainly the way at present with human masses, yet if the common human mind has begun to admit the ideas proper to the higher order that is in the end to be, and the heart of man has begun to be stirred by aspirations born of these ideas, then there is a hope of some advance in the not distant future. And here the first essential sign must be the growth of the subjective idea of life,—the idea of the soul, the inner being, its powers, its possibilities, its growth, its expression and the creation of a true, beautiful and helpful environment for it as the one thing of first and last importance. The signals must be there that are precursors of a subjective age in humanity's thought and social endeavour.

These ideas are likely first to declare their trend in philosophy, in psychological thinking, in the arts, poetry, painting, sculpture, music, in the main idea of ethics, in the application of subjective principles by thinkers to social questions, even perhaps, though this is a perilous effort, to politics and economics, that hard refractory earthy matter which most resists all but a gross utilitarian treatment. There will be new unexpected

departures of science or at least of research,—since to such a turn in its most fruitful seekings the orthodox still deny the name of science. Discoveries will be made that thin the walls between soul and matter; attempts there will be to extend exact knowledge into the psychological and psychic realms with a realisation of the truth that these have laws of their own which are other than the physical, but not the less laws because they escape the external senses and are infinitely plastic and subtle. There will be a labour of religion to reject its past heavy weight of dead matter and revivify its strength in the fountains of the spirit. These are sure signs, if not of the thing to be, at least of a great possibility of it, of an effort that will surely be made, another endeavour perhaps with a larger sweep and a better equipped intelligence capable not only of feeling but of understanding the Truth that is demanding to be heard. Some such signs we can see at the present time although they are only incipient and sporadic and have not yet gone far enough to warrant a confident certitude. It is only when these groping beginnings have found that for which they are seeking, that it can be successfully applied to the remoulding of the life of man. Till then nothing better is likely to be achieved than an inner preparation and, for the rest, radical or revolutionary experiments of a doubtful kind with the details of the vast and cumbrous machinery under which life now groans and labours.

A subjective age may stop very far short of spirituality; for the subjective turn is only a first condition, not the thing itself, not the end of the matter. The search for the Reality, the true self of man, may very easily follow out the natural order described by the Upanishad in the profound analogue of the seekings of Bhrigu, son of Varuna. For first the seeker found the ultimate reality to be Matter and the physical, the material being, the external man our only self and spirit. Next he fixed on life as the Reality and the vital being as the self and spirit; in the third essay he penetrated to Mind and the mental being; only afterwards could he get beyond the superficial subjective through the supramental Truth-Consciousness to the eternal, the blissful, the ever creative Reality of which these are the sheaths.

But humanity may not be as persistent or as plastic as the son of Varuna, the search may stop short anywhere. Only if it is intended that he shall now at last arrive and discover, will the Spirit break each insufficient formula as soon as it has shaped itself and compel the thought of man to press forward to a larger discovery and in the end to the largest and most luminous of all. Something of the kind has been happening, but only in a very external way and on the surface. After the material formula which governed the greater part of the nineteenth century had burdened man with the heaviest servitude to the machinery of the outer material life that he has ever yet been called upon to bear, the first attempt to break through, to get to the living reality in things and away from the mechanical idea of life and living and society, landed us in that surface vitalism which had already begun to govern thought before the two formulas inextricably locked together lit up and flung themselves on the lurid pyre of the world-war. The vital *élan* has brought us no deliverance, but only used the machinery already created with a more feverish insistence, a vehement attempt to live more rapidly, more intensely, an inordinate will to act and to succeed, to enlarge the mere force of living or to pile up a gigantic efficiency of the collective life. It could not have been otherwise even if this vitalism had been less superficial and external, more truly subjective. To live, to act, to grow, to increase the vital force, to understand, utilise and fulfil the intuitive impulse of life are not things evil in themselves: rather they are excellent things, if rightly followed and rightly used, that is to say, if they are directed to something beyond the mere vitalistic impulse and are governed by that within which is higher than Life. The Life-power is an instrument, not an aim; it is in the upward scale the first great subjective supraphysical instrument of the Spirit and the base of all action and endeavour. But a Life-power that sees nothing beyond itself, nothing to be served except its own organised demands and impulses, will be very soon like the force of steam driving an engine without the driver or an engine in which the locomotive force has made the driver its servant and not its controller. It can only add the uncontrollable impetus

of a high-crested or broad-based Titanism, or it may be even a nether flaming demonism, to the Nature forces of the material world with the intellect as its servant, an impetus of measureless unresting creation, appropriation, expansion which will end in something violent, huge and “colossal”, foredoomed in its very nature to excess and ruin, because light is not in it nor the soul’s truth nor the sanction of the gods and their calm eternal will and knowledge.

But beyond the subjectivism of the vital self there is the possibility of a mental subjectivism which would at first perhaps, emerging out of the predominant vitalism and leaning upon the already realised idea of the soul as a soul of Life in action but correcting it, appear as a highly mentalised pragmatism. This first stage is foreshadowed in an increasing tendency to rationalise entirely man and his life, to govern individual and social existence by an ordered scientific plan based upon his discovery of his own and of life’s realities. This attempt is bound to fail because reason and rationality are not the whole of man or of life, because reason is only an intermediate interpreter, not the original knower, creator and master of our being or of cosmic existence. It can besides only mechanise life in a more intelligent way than in the past; to do that seems to be all that the modern intellectual leaders of the race can discover as the solution of the heavy problem with which we are impaled. But it is conceivable that this tendency may hereafter rise to the higher idea of man as a mental being, a soul in mind that must develop itself individually and collectively in the life and body through the play of an ever-expanding mental existence. This greater idea would realise that the elevation of the human existence will come not through material efficiency alone or the complex play of his vital and dynamic powers, not solely by mastering through the aid of the intellect the energies of physical Nature for the satisfaction of the life-instincts, which can only be an intensification of his present mode of existence, but through the greatening of his mental and psychic being and a discovery, bringing forward and organisation of his subliminal nature and its forces, the utilisation of a larger mind and a larger life waiting

for discovery within us. It would see in life an opportunity for the joy and power of knowledge, for the joy and power of beauty, for the joy and power of the human will mastering not only physical Nature, but vital and mental Nature. It might discover her secret yet undreamed-of mind-powers and life-powers and use them for a freer liberation of man from the limitations of his shackled bodily life. It might arrive at new psychic relations, a more sovereign power of the idea to realise itself in the act, inner means of overcoming the obstacles of distance and division which would cast into insignificance even the last miraculous achievements of material Science. A development of this kind is far enough away from the dreams of the mass of men, but there are certain pale hints and presages of such a possibility and ideas which lead to it are already held by a great number who are perhaps in this respect the yet unrecognised vanguard of humanity. It is not impossible that behind the confused morning voices of the hour a light of this kind, still below the horizon, may be waiting to ascend with its splendours.

Such a turn of human thought, effort, ideas of life, if it took hold of the communal mind, would evidently lead to a profound revolution throughout the whole range of human existence. It would give it from the first a new tone and atmosphere, a loftier spirit, wider horizons, a greater aim. It might easily develop a science which would bring the powers of the physical world into a real and not only a contingent and mechanical subjection and open perhaps the doors of other worlds. It might develop an achievement of Art and Beauty which would make the greatness of the past a comparatively little thing and would save the world from the astonishingly callous reign of utilitarian ugliness that even now afflicts it. It would open up a closer and freer interchange between human minds and, it may well be hoped, a kindlier interchange between human hearts and lives. Nor need its achievements stop here, but might proceed to greater things of which these would be only the beginnings. This mental and psychic subjectivism would have its dangers, greater dangers even than those that attend a vitalistic subjectivism, because its powers of action also would be greater, but it would have what

vitalistic subjectivism has not and cannot easily have, the chance of a detecting discernment, strong safeguards and a powerful liberating light.

Moving with difficulty upward from Matter to spirit, this is perhaps a necessary stage of man's development. This was one principal reason of the failure of past attempts to spiritualise mankind, that they endeavoured to spiritualise at once the material man by a sort of rapid miracle, and though that can be done, the miracle is not likely to be of an enduring character if it overleaps the stages of his ascent and leaves the intervening levels untrodden and therefore unmastered. The endeavour may succeed with individuals,—Indian thought would say with those who have made themselves ready in a past existence,—but it must fail with the mass. When it passes beyond the few, the forceful miracle of the spirit flags; unable to transform by inner force, the new religion—for that is what it becomes—tries to save by machinery, is entangled in the mechanical turning of its own instruments, loses the spirit and perishes quickly or decays slowly. That is the fate which overtakes all attempts of the vitalistic, the intellectual and mental, the spiritual endeavour to deal with material man through his physical mind chiefly or alone; the endeavour is overpowered by the machinery it creates and becomes the slave and victim of the machine. That is the revenge which our material Nature, herself mechanical, takes upon all such violent endeavours; she waits to master them by their concessions to her own law. If mankind is to be spiritualised, it must first in the mass cease to be the material or the vital man and become the psychic and the true mental being. It may be questioned whether such a mass progress or conversion is possible; but if it is not, then the spiritualisation of mankind as a whole is a chimera.

From this point of view it is an excellent thing, a sign of great promise, that the wheel of civilisation has been following its past and present curve upward from a solid physical knowledge through a successive sounding of higher and higher powers that mediate between Matter and Spirit. The human intellect in modern times has been first drawn to exhaust the possibilities

of materialism by an immense dealing with life and the world upon the basis of Matter as the sole reality, Matter as the Eternal, Matter as the Brahman, *annam brahma*. Afterwards it had begun to turn towards the conception of existence as the large pulsation of a great evolving Life, the creator of Matter, which would have enabled it to deal with our existence on the basis of Life as the original reality, Life as the great Eternal, *prāṇo brahma*. And already it has in germ, in preparation a third conception, the discovery of a great self-expressing and self-finding inner Mind other than our surface mentality as a master-power of existence, and that should lead towards a rich attempt to deal with our possibilities and our ways of living on the basis of Mind as the original reality, the great Eternal, *mano brahma*. It would also be a sign of promise if these conceptions succeeded each other with rapidity, with a large but swift evocation of the possibilities of each level; for that would show that there is a readiness in our subconscious Nature and that we need not linger in each stage for centuries.

But still a subjective age of mankind must be an adventure full of perils and uncertainties as are all great adventures of the race. It may wander long before it finds itself or may not find itself at all and may swing back to a new repetition of the cycle. The true secret can only be discovered if in the third stage, in an age of mental subjectivism, the idea becomes strong of the mind itself as no more than a secondary power of the Spirit's working and of the Spirit as the great Eternal, the original and, in spite of the many terms in which it is both expressed and hidden, the sole reality, *ayam ātmā brahma*. Then only will the real, the decisive endeavour begin and life and the world be studied, known, dealt with in all directions as the self-finding and self-expression of the Spirit. Then only will a spiritual age of mankind be possible.

To attempt any adequate discussion of what that would mean, and in an inadequate discussion there is no fruit, is beyond our present scope; for we should have to examine a knowledge which is rare and nowhere more than initial. It is enough to say that a spiritual human society would start from and try to realise three essential truths of existence which all Nature seems to be

an attempt to hide by their opposites and which therefore are as yet for the mass of mankind only words and dreams, God, freedom, unity. Three things which are one, for you cannot realise freedom and unity unless you realise God, you cannot possess freedom and unity unless you possess God, possess at once your highest Self and the Self of all creatures. The freedom and unity which otherwise go by that name, are simply attempts of our subjection and our division to get away from themselves by shutting their eyes while they turn somersaults around their own centre. When man is able to see God and to possess him, then he will know real freedom and arrive at real unity, never otherwise. And God is only waiting to be known, while man seeks for him everywhere and creates images of the Divine, but all the while truly finds, effectively erects and worships images only of his own mind-ego and life-ego. When this ego pivot is abandoned and this ego-hunt ceases, then man gets his first real chance of achieving spirituality in his inner and outer life. It will not be enough, but it will be a commencement, a true gate and not a blind entrance.

A spiritualised society would live like its spiritual individuals, not in the ego, but in the spirit, not as the collective ego, but as the collective soul. This freedom from the egoistic standpoint would be its first and most prominent characteristic. But the elimination of egoism would not be brought about, as it is now proposed to bring it about, by persuading or forcing the individual to immolate his personal will and aspirations and his precious and hard-won individuality to the collective will, aims and egoism of the society, driving him like a victim of ancient sacrifice to slay his soul on the altar of that huge and shapeless idol. For that would be only the sacrifice of the smaller to the larger egoism, larger only in bulk, not necessarily greater in quality or wider or nobler, since a collective egoism, result of the united egoisms of all, is as little a god to be worshipped, as flawed and often an uglier and more barbarous fetish than the egoism of the individual. What the spiritual man seeks is to find by the loss of the ego the self which is one in all and perfect and complete in each and by living in that to grow into the

image of its perfection,—individually, be it noted, though with an all-embracing universality of his nature and its conscious circumference. It is said in the old Indian writings that while in the second age, the age of Power, Vishnu descends as the King, and in the third, the age of compromise and balance, as the legislator or codifier, in the age of the Truth he descends as Yajna, that is to say, as the Master of works and sacrifice manifest in the heart of his creatures. It is this kingdom of God within, the result of the finding of God not in a distant heaven but within ourselves, of which the state of society in an age of the Truth, a spiritual age, would be the result and the external figure.

Therefore a society which was even initially spiritualised would make the revealing and finding of the divine Self in man the supreme, even the guiding aim of all its activities, its education, its knowledge, its science, its ethics, its art, its economical and political structure. As it was to some imperfect extent in the ancient Vedic times with the cultural education of the higher classes, so it would be then with all education. It would embrace all knowledge in its scope, but would make the whole trend and aim and the permeating spirit not mere worldly efficiency, though that efficiency would not be neglected, but this self-developing and self-finding and all else as its powers. It would pursue the physical and psychic sciences not in order merely to know the world and Nature in her processes and to use them for material human ends, but still more to know through and in and under and over all things the Divine in the world and the ways of the Spirit in its masks and behind them. It would make it the aim of ethics not to establish a rule of action whether supplementary to the social law or partially corrective of it, the social law that is after all only the rule, often clumsy and ignorant, of the biped pack, the human herd, but to develop the divine nature in the human being. It would make it the aim of Art not merely to present images of the subjective and objective world, but to see them with the significant and creative vision that goes behind their appearances and to reveal the Truth and Beauty of which things visible to us and invisible are the forms, the masks or the symbols and significant figures.

A spiritualised society would treat in its sociology the individual, from the saint to the criminal, not as units of a social problem to be passed through some skilfully devised machinery and either flattened into the social mould or crushed out of it, but as souls suffering and entangled in a net and to be rescued, souls growing and to be encouraged to grow, souls grown and from whom help and power can be drawn by the lesser spirits who are not yet adult. The aim of its economics would be not to create a huge engine of production, whether of the competitive or the cooperative kind, but to give to men—not only to some but to all men each in his highest possible measure—the joy of work according to their own nature and free leisure to grow inwardly, as well as a simply rich and beautiful life for all. In its politics it would not regard the nations within the scope of their own internal life as enormous State machines regulated and armoured with man living for the sake of the machine and worshipping it as his God and his larger self, content at the first call to kill others upon its altar and to bleed there himself so that the machine may remain intact and powerful and be made ever larger, more complex, more cumbrous, more mechanically efficient and entire. Neither would it be content to maintain these nations or States in their mutual relations as noxious engines meant to discharge poisonous gas upon each other in peace and to rush in times of clash upon each other's armed hosts and unarmed millions, full of belching shot and men missioned to murder like war-planes or hostile tanks in a modern battle-field. It would regard the peoples as group-souls, the Divinity concealed and to be self-discovered in its human collectivities, group-souls meant like the individual to grow according to their own nature and by that growth to help each other, to help the whole race in the one common work of humanity. And that work would be to find the divine Self in the individual and the collectivity and to realise spiritually, mentally, vitally, materially its greatest, largest, richest and deepest possibilities in the inner life of all and their outer action and nature.

For it is into the Divine within them that men and mankind have to grow; it is not an external idea or rule that has to be

imposed on them from without. Therefore the law of a growing inner freedom is that which will be most honoured in the spiritual age of mankind. True it is that so long as man has not come within measurable distance of self-knowledge and has not set his face towards it, he cannot escape from the law of external compulsion and all his efforts to do so must be vain. He is and always must be, so long as that lasts, the slave of others, the slave of his family, his caste, his clan, his Church, his society, his nation; and he cannot but be that and they too cannot help throwing their crude and mechanical compulsion on him, because he and they are the slaves of their own ego, of their own lower nature. We must feel and obey the compulsion of the Spirit if we would establish our inner right to escape other compulsion: we must make our lower nature the willing slave, the conscious and illumined instrument or the ennobled but still self-subjected portion, consort or partner of the divine Being within us, for it is that subjection which is the condition of our freedom, since spiritual freedom is not the egoistic assertion of our separate mind and life but obedience to the Divine Truth in ourself and our members and in all around us. But we have, even so, to remark that God respects the freedom of the natural members of our being and that he gives them room to grow in their own nature so that by natural growth and not by self-extinction they may find the Divine in themselves. The subjection which they finally accept, complete and absolute, must be a willing subjection of recognition and aspiration to their own source of light and power and their highest being. Therefore even in the unregenerated state we find that the healthiest, the truest, the most living growth and action is that which arises in the largest possible freedom and that all excess of compulsion is either the law of a gradual atrophy or a tyranny varied or cured by outbreaks of rabid disorder. And as soon as man comes to know his spiritual self, he does by that discovery, often even by the very seeking for it, as ancient thought and religion saw, escape from the outer law and enter into the law of freedom.

A spiritual age of mankind will perceive this truth. It will not try to make man perfect by machinery or keep him straight

by tying up all his limbs. It will not present to the member of the society his higher self in the person of the policeman, the official and the corporal, nor, let us say, in the form of a socialistic bureaucracy or a Labour Soviet. Its aim will be to diminish as soon and as far as possible the need of the element of external compulsion in human life by awakening the inner divine compulsion of the spirit within and all the preliminary means it will use will have that for its aim. In the end it will employ chiefly if not solely the spiritual compulsion which even the spiritual individual can exercise on those around him,—and how much more should a spiritual society be able to do it,—that which awakens within us in spite of all inner resistance and outer denial the compulsion of the Light, the desire and the power to grow through one's own nature into the Divine. For the perfectly spiritualised society will be one in which, as is dreamed by the spiritual anarchist, all men will be deeply free, and it will be so because the preliminary condition will have been satisfied. In that state each man will be not a law to himself, but *the* law, the divine Law, because he will be a soul living in the Divine Reality and not an ego living mainly if not entirely for its own interest and purpose. His life will be led by the law of his own divine nature liberated from the ego.

Nor will that mean a breaking up of all human society into the isolated action of individuals; for the third word of the Spirit is unity. The spiritual life is the flower not of a featureless but a conscious and diversified oneness. Each man has to grow into the Divine Reality within himself through his own individual being, therefore is a certain growing measure of freedom a necessity of the being as it develops and perfect freedom the sign and the condition of the perfect life. But also, the Divine whom he thus sees in himself, he sees equally in all others and as the same Spirit in all. Therefore too is a growing inner unity with others a necessity of his being and perfect unity the sign and condition of the perfect life. Not only to see and find the Divine in oneself, but to see and find the Divine in all, not only to seek one's own individual liberation or perfection, but to seek the liberation and perfection of others is the complete law of the spiritual being. If

the divinity sought were a separate godhead within oneself and not the one Divine, or if one sought God for oneself alone, then indeed the result might be a grandiose egoism, the Olympian egoism of a Goethe or the Titanic egoism imagined by Nietzsche, or it might be the isolated self-knowledge or asceticism of the ivory tower or the Stylites pillar. But he who sees God in all, will serve freely God in all with the service of love. He will, that is to say, seek not only his own freedom, but the freedom of all, not only his own perfection, but the perfection of all. He will not feel his individuality perfect except in the largest universality, nor his own life to be full life except as it is one with the universal life. He will not live either for himself or for the State and society, for the individual ego or the collective ego, but for something much greater, for God in himself and for the Divine in the universe.

The spiritual age will be ready to set in when the common mind of man begins to be alive to these truths and to be moved or desire to be moved by this triple or triune Spirit. That will mean the turning of the cycle of social development which we have been considering out of its incomplete repetitions on a new upward line towards its goal. For having set out, according to our supposition, with a symbolic age, an age in which man felt a great Reality behind all life which he sought through symbols, it will reach an age in which it will begin to live in that Reality, not through the symbol, not by the power of the type or of the convention or of the individual reason and intellectual will, but in our own highest nature which will be the nature of that Reality fulfilled in the conditions—not necessarily the same as now—of terrestrial existence. This is what the religions have seen with a more or less adequate intuition, but most often as in a glass darkly, that which they called the kingdom of God on earth,—his kingdom within in man's spirit and therefore, for the one is the material result of the effectivity of the other, his kingdom without in the life of the peoples.

Chapter XXIV

The Advent and Progress of the Spiritual Age

IF A subjective age, the last sector of a social cycle, is to find its outlet and fruition in a spiritualised society and the emergence of mankind on a higher evolutionary level, it is not enough that certain ideas favourable to that turn of human life should take hold of the general mind of the race, permeate the ordinary motives of its thought, art, ethics, political ideals, social effort, or even get well into its inner way of thinking and feeling. It is not enough even that the idea of the kingdom of God on earth, a reign of spirituality, freedom and unity, a real and inner equality and harmony—and not merely an outward and mechanical equalisation and association—should become definitely an ideal of life; it is not enough that this ideal should be actively held as possible, desirable, to be sought and striven after, it is not enough even that it should come forward as a governing preoccupation of the human mind. That would evidently be a very great step forward,—considering what the ideals of mankind now are, an enormous step. It would be the necessary beginning, the indispensable mental environment for a living renovation of human society in a higher type. But by itself it might only bring about a half-hearted or else a strong but only partially and temporarily successful attempt to bring something of the manifest spirit into human life and its institutions. That is all that mankind has ever attempted on this line in the past. It has never attempted to work out thoroughly even that little, except in the limits of a religious order or a peculiar community, and even there with such serious defects and under such drastic limitations as to make the experiment nugatory and without any bearing on human life. If we do not get beyond the mere holding of the ideal and its general influence in human life, this little is

all that mankind will attempt in the future. More is needed; a general spiritual awakening and aspiration in mankind is indeed the large necessary motive-power, but the effective power must be something greater. There must be a dynamic re-creating of individual manhood in the spiritual type.

For the way that humanity deals with an ideal is to be satisfied with it as an aspiration which is for the most part left only as an aspiration, accepted only as a partial influence. The ideal is not allowed to mould the whole life, but only more or less to colour it; it is often used even as a cover and a plea for things that are diametrically opposed to its real spirit. Institutions are created which are supposed, but too lightly supposed to embody that spirit and the fact that the ideal is held, the fact that men live under its institutions is treated as sufficient. The holding of an ideal becomes almost an excuse for not living according to the ideal; the existence of its institutions is sufficient to abrogate the need of insisting on the spirit that made the institutions. But spirituality is in its very nature a thing subjective and not mechanical; it is nothing if it is not lived inwardly and if the outward life does not flow out of this inward living. Symbols, types, conventions, ideas are not sufficient. A spiritual symbol is only a meaningless ticket, unless the thing symbolised is realised in the spirit. A spiritual convention may lose or expel its spirit and become a falsehood. A spiritual type may be a temporary mould into which spiritual living may flow, but it is also a limitation and may become a prison in which it fossilises and perishes. A spiritual idea is a power, but only when it is both inwardly and outwardly creative. Here we have to enlarge and to deepen the pragmatic principle that truth is what we create, and in this sense first, that it is what we create within us, in other words, what we become. Undoubtedly, spiritual truth exists eternally beyond independent of us in the heavens of the spirit; but it is of no avail for humanity here, it does not become truth of earth, truth of life until it is lived. The divine perfection is always there above us; but for man to become divine in consciousness and act and to live inwardly and outwardly the divine life is what is meant by spirituality; all

lesser meanings given to the word are inadequate fumblings or impostures.

This, as the subjective religions recognise, can only be brought about by an individual change in each human life. The collective soul is there only as a great half-subconscious source of the individual existence; if it is to take on a definite psychological form or a new kind of collective life, that can only come by the shaping growth of its individuals. As will be the spirit and life of the individuals constituting it, so will be the realised spirit of the collectivity and the true power of its life. A society that lives not by its men but by its institutions, is not a collective soul, but a machine; its life becomes a mechanical product and ceases to be a living growth. Therefore the coming of a spiritual age must be preceded by the appearance of an increasing number of individuals who are no longer satisfied with the normal intellectual, vital and physical existence of man, but perceive that a greater evolution is the real goal of humanity and attempt to effect it in themselves, to lead others to it and to make it the recognised goal of the race. In proportion as they succeed and to the degree to which they carry this evolution, the yet unrealised potentiality which they represent will become an actual possibility of the future.

A great access of spirituality in the past has ordinarily had for its result the coming of a new religion of a special type and its endeavour to impose itself upon mankind as a new universal order. This, however, was always not only a premature but a wrong crystallisation which prevented rather than helped any deep and serious achievement. The aim of a spiritual age of mankind must indeed be one with the essential aim of subjective religions, a new birth, a new consciousness, an upward evolution of the human being, a descent of the spirit into our members, a spiritual reorganisation of our life; but if it limits itself by the old familiar apparatus and the imperfect means of a religious movement, it is likely to register another failure. A religious movement brings usually a wave of spiritual excitement and aspiration that communicates itself to a large number of individuals and there is as a result a temporary uplifting

and an effective formation, partly spiritual, partly ethical, partly dogmatic in its nature. But the wave after a generation or two or at most a few generations begins to subside; the formation remains. If there has been a very powerful movement with a great spiritual personality as its source, it may leave behind a central influence and an inner discipline which may well be the starting-point of fresh waves; but these will be constantly less powerful and enduring in proportion as the movement gets farther and farther away from its source. For meanwhile in order to bind together the faithful and at the same time to mark them off from the unregenerated outer world, there will have grown up a religious order, a Church, a hierarchy, a fixed and unprogressive type of ethical living, a set of crystallised dogmas, ostentatious ceremonials, sanctified superstitions, an elaborate machinery for the salvation of mankind. As a result spirituality is increasingly subordinated to intellectual belief, to outward forms of conduct and to external ritual, the higher to the lower motives, the one thing essential to aids and instruments and accidents. The first spontaneous and potent attempt to convert the whole life into spiritual living yields up its place to a set system of belief and ethics touched by spiritual emotion; but finally even that saving element is dominated by the outward machinery, the sheltering structure becomes a tomb. The Church takes the place of the spirit and a formal subscription to its creed, rituals and order is the thing universally demanded; spiritual living is only practised by the few within the limits prescribed by their fixed creed and order. The majority neglect even that narrow effort and are contented to replace by a careful or negligent piety the call to a deeper life. In the end it is found that the spirit in the religion has become a thin stream choked by sands; at the most brief occasional floodings of its dry bed of conventions still prevent it from becoming a memory in the dead chapters of Time.

The ambition of a particular religious belief and form to universalise and impose itself is contrary to the variety of human nature and to at least one essential character of the Spirit. For the nature of the Spirit is a spacious inner freedom and a large unity into which each man must be allowed to grow according

to his own nature. Again—and this is yet another source of inevitable failure—the usual tendency of these credal religions is to turn towards an afterworld and to make the regeneration of the earthly life a secondary motive; this tendency grows in proportion as the original hope of a present universal regeneration of mankind becomes more and more feeble. Therefore while many new spiritual waves with their strong special motives and disciplines must necessarily be the forerunners of a spiritual age, yet their claims must be subordinated in the general mind of the race and of its spiritual leaders to the recognition that all motives and disciplines are valid and yet none entirely valid since they are means and not the one thing to be done. The one thing essential must take precedence, the conversion of the whole life of the human being to the lead of the spirit. The ascent of man into heaven is not the key, but rather his ascent here into the spirit and the descent also of the spirit into his normal humanity and the transformation of this earthly nature. For that and not some post mortem salvation is the real new birth for which humanity waits as the crowning movement of its long obscure and painful course.

Therefore the individuals who will most help the future of humanity in the new age will be those who will recognise a spiritual evolution as the destiny and therefore the great need of the human being. Even as the animal man has been largely converted into a mentalised and at the top a highly mentalised humanity, so too now or in the future an evolution or conversion—it does not greatly matter which figure we use or what theory we adopt to support it—of the present type of humanity into a spiritualised humanity is the need of the race and surely the intention of Nature; that evolution or conversion will be their ideal and endeavour. They will be comparatively indifferent to particular belief and form and leave men to resort to the beliefs and forms to which they are naturally drawn. They will only hold as essential the faith in this spiritual conversion, the attempt to live it out and whatever knowledge—the form of opinion into which it is thrown does not so much matter—can be converted into this living. They will especially not make the mistake of thinking that this change can be effected by

machinery and outward institutions; they will know and never forget that it has to be lived out by each man inwardly or it can never be made a reality for the kind. They will adopt in its heart of meaning the inward view of the East which bids man seek the secret of his destiny and salvation within; but also they will accept, though with a different turn given to it, the importance which the West rightly attaches to life and to the making the best we know and can attain the general rule of all life. They will not make society a shadowy background to a few luminous spiritual figures or a rigidly fenced and earth-bound root for the growth of a comparatively rare and sterile flower of ascetic spirituality. They will not accept the theory that the many must necessarily remain for ever on the lower ranges of life and only a few climb into the free air and the light, but will start from the standpoint of the great spirits who have striven to regenerate the life of the earth and held that faith in spite of all previous failure. Failures must be originally numerous in everything great and difficult, but the time comes when the experience of past failures can be profitably used and the gate that so long resisted opens. In this as in all great human aspirations and endeavours, an *a priori* declaration of impossibility is a sign of ignorance and weakness, and the motto of the aspirant's endeavour must be the *solvitur ambulando* of the discoverer. For by the doing the difficulty will be solved. A true beginning has to be made; the rest is a work for Time in its sudden achievements or its long patient labour.

The thing to be done is as large as human life, and therefore the individuals who lead the way will take all human life for their province. These pioneers will consider nothing as alien to them, nothing as outside their scope. For every part of human life has to be taken up by the spiritual,—not only the intellectual, the aesthetic, the ethical, but the dynamic, the vital, the physical; therefore for none of these things or the activities that spring from them will they have contempt or aversion, however they may insist on a change of the spirit and a transmutation of the form. In each power of our nature they will seek for its own proper means of conversion; knowing that the Divine is concealed in all, they will hold that all can be made the

spirit's means of self-finding and all can be converted into its instruments of divine living. And they will see that the great necessity is the conversion of the normal into the spiritual mind and the opening of that mind again into its own higher reaches and more and more integral movement. For before the decisive change can be made, the stumbling intellectual reason has to be converted into the precise and luminous intuitive, until that again can rise into higher ranges to overmind and supermind or gnosis. The uncertain and stumbling mental will has to rise towards the sure intuitive and into a higher divine and gnostic will, the psychic sweetness, fire and light of the soul behind the heart, *hrdaye guhāyām*, has to alchemise our crude emotions and the hard egoisms and clamant desires of our vital nature. All our other members have to pass through a similar conversion under the compelling force and light from above. The leaders of the spiritual march will start from and use the knowledge and the means that past effort has developed in this direction, but they will not take them as they are without any deep necessary change or limit themselves by what is now known or cleave only to fixed and stereotyped systems or given groupings of results, but will follow the method of the Spirit in Nature. A constant rediscovery and new formulation and larger synthesis in the mind, a mighty remoulding in its deeper parts because of a greater enlarging Truth not discovered or not well fixed before, is that Spirit's way with our past achievement when he moves to the greatnesses of the future.

This endeavour will be a supreme and difficult labour even for the individual, but much more for the race. It may well be that, once started, it may not advance rapidly even to its first decisive stage; it may be that it will take long centuries of effort to come into some kind of permanent birth. But that is not altogether inevitable, for the principle of such changes in Nature seems to be a long obscure preparation followed by a swift gathering up and precipitation of the elements into the new birth, a rapid conversion, a transformation that in its luminous moment figures like a miracle. Even when the first decisive change is reached, it is certain that all humanity will not be

able to rise to that level. There cannot fail to be a division into those who are able to live on the spiritual level and those who are only able to live in the light that descends from it into the mental level. And below these too there might still be a great mass influenced from above but not yet ready for the light. But even that would be a transformation and a beginning far beyond anything yet attained. This hierarchy would not mean as in our present vital living an egoistic domination of the undeveloped by the more developed, but a guidance of the younger by the elder brothers of the race and a constant working to lift them up to a greater spiritual level and wider horizons. And for the leaders too this ascent to the first spiritual levels would not be the end of the divine march, a culmination that left nothing more to be achieved on earth. For there would be still yet higher levels within the supramental realm, as the old Vedic poets knew when they spoke of the spiritual life as a constant ascent,—

*brahmānas tvā śatakrato
ud vamśam iva yemire;
yat sānoḥ sānum āruhat,
bhūri aspaṣṭa kartvam,—*

The priests of the word climb thee like a ladder, O hundred-powered. As one ascends from peak to peak, there is made clear the much that has still to be done.

But once the foundation has been secured, the rest develops by a progressive self-unfolding and the soul is sure of its way. As again it is phrased by the ancient Vedic singers,—

*abhyavasthāḥ pra jāyante,
pra vavrer vavriś ciketa;
upasthe mātūr vi caste,—*

State is born upon state; covering after covering becomes conscious of knowledge; in the lap of the Mother the soul sees.

This at least is the highest hope, the possible destiny that opens out before the human view, and it is a possibility which

the progress of the human mind seems on the way to redevelop. If the light that is being born increases, if the number of individuals who seek to realise the possibility in themselves and in the world grows large and they get nearer the right way, then the Spirit who is here in man, now a concealed divinity, a developing light and power, will descend more fully as the Avatar of a yet unseen and unguessed Godhead from above into the soul of mankind and into the great individualities in whom the light and power are the strongest. There will then be fulfilled the change that will prepare the transition of human life from its present limits into those larger and purer horizons; the earthly evolution will have taken its grand impetus upward and accomplished the revealing step in a divine progression of which the birth of thinking and aspiring man from the animal nature was only an obscure preparation and a far-off promise.

The Ideal of Human Unity

Preface to the First Edition

The chapters of this book were written in a serial form in the pages of the monthly review, *Arya*, and from the necessity of speedy publication have been reprinted as they stood without the alterations which would have been necessary to give them a greater unity of treatment. They reflect the rapidly changing phases of ideas, facts and possibilities which emerged in the course of the European conflict. The earlier chapters were written when Russia was still an Empire and an autocracy, the later parts after the Russian revolution and when the war had come nearer to its end, but the dramatic circumstances of the issue, in itself inevitable, could not be foreseen. The reader may guide himself in regard to the references to contemporary conditions by observing that the first four chapters cover the close of the year 1915, the next twelve 1916, the seventeenth to the twenty-eighth 1917, while the remaining seven extend to July 1918. The rapid change of circumstances reflected will serve to bring home the swiftness of the evolution by which what was a hesitating idea and a doubtful possibility at the commencement has become a settled necessity awaiting speedy formulation.

Subsequent events have rendered certain speculations and balancings out of date, for they have been solved by the logic of events. Austria is a name of the past, the Empire of the Hohenzollerns has disappeared like a dream of the night, all Europe between the Rhine and the Volga is republican. Finally, most important of all, the League of Nations has now been decided upon, the American idea having triumphed at least in principle, and is in travail of formation. But the main suggestions put forward in the book remain unaffected, or rather acquire a more pressing actuality. The two great difficulties which attend the incipience of this first stage of loose world-union will still be, first, the difficulty of bringing into one system the few great

Empires remaining, few but immensely increased in power, influence and the extent of their responsibilities, and the greatly increased swarm of free nations which the force of events or the Power guiding them rather than the will of nations and Governments has brought into being, and the approaching struggle between Labour and Capitalism. The former is only a difficulty and embarrassment, though it may become serious if it turns into a conflict between the imperialistic and the nationalistic ideas or reproduces in the international scheme the strife of the old oligarchic and democratic tendencies in a new form, a question between control of the world-system by the will and influence of a few powerful imperial States and the free and equal control by all, small nations and great, European and American and Asiatic peoples. The second is a danger which may even lead to disintegration of this first attempt at unification, especially if, as seems to be the tendency, the League undertakes the policing of the world against the forces of extreme revolutionary socialism. On the other hand, the conflict may accelerate, whatever its result, the necessity and actuality of a more close and rigorous system, the incipience at least of the second stage of unification.

The main contentions advanced in these pages also remain unaffected by the course of events,—the inevitability of the unification of the life of humanity as a result of those imperative natural forces which lead always to the creation of larger and larger human aggregates, the choice of the principles which may be followed in the process, the need for preserving and bringing to fullness the principle of individual and group freedom within the human unity, and the insufficiency of formal unity without a growth of the religion of humanity which can alone make it a great psychological advance in the spiritual evolution of the race.

1919

Publisher's Note to the Second Edition

The Ideal of Human Unity first appeared in the “Arya” Vol. II, No. 2 – Vol. IV, No. 12) complete in 35 Chapters, serially from September, 1915 to July, 1918.

It was reproduced in book-form in 1919 by The Sons of India Ltd., Madras (with three Appendices, a Preface and a detailed synopsis of the Chapters. The Appendices contained articles from the “Arya” setting forth the ideals of the Review).

The present edition is a revised version; but the revision was done before the last World War. It is, however, printed almost in that form brought up-to-date by the addition of a Postscript Chapter dealing with the world conditions today.

April, 1950

The Ideal of Human Unity

Part I

Chapter I

The Turn towards Unity: Its Necessity and Dangers

THE SURFACES of life are easy to understand; their laws, characteristic movements, practical utilities are ready to our hand and we can seize on them and turn them to account with a sufficient facility and rapidity. But they do not carry us very far. They suffice for an active superficial life from day to day, but they do not solve the great problems of existence. On the other hand, the knowledge of life's profundities, its potent secrets, its great, hidden, all-determining laws is exceedingly difficult to us. We have found no plummet that can fathom these depths; they seem to us a vague, indeterminate movement, a profound obscurity from which the mind recoils willingly to play with the fret and foam and facile radiances of the surface. Yet it is these depths and their unseen forces that we ought to know if we would understand existence; on the surface we get only Nature's secondary rules and practical bye-laws which help us to tide over the difficulties of the moment and to organise empirically without understanding them her continual transitions.

Nothing is more obscure to humanity or less seized by its understanding, whether in the power that moves it or the sense of the aim towards which it moves, than its own communal and collective life. Sociology does not help us, for it only gives us the general story of the past and the external conditions under which communities have survived. History teaches us nothing; it is a confused torrent of events and personalities or a kaleidoscope of changing institutions. We do not seize the real sense of all this change and this continual streaming forward of human life in the channels of Time. What we do seize are current or recurrent phenomena, facile generalisations, partial ideas. We talk of democracy, aristocracy and autocracy,

collectivism and individualism, imperialism and nationalism, the State and the commune, capitalism and labour; we advance hasty generalisations and make absolute systems which are positively announced today only to be abandoned perforce tomorrow; we espouse causes and ardent enthusiasms whose triumph turns to an early disillusionment and then forsake them for others, perhaps for those that we have taken so much trouble to destroy. For a whole century mankind thirsts and battles after liberty and earns it with a bitter expense of toil, tears and blood; the century that enjoys without having fought for it turns away as from a puerile illusion and is ready to renounce the depreciated gain as the price of some new good. And all this happens because our whole thought and action with regard to our collective life is shallow and empirical; it does not seek for, it does not base itself on a firm, profound and complete knowledge. The moral is not the vanity of human life, of its ardours and enthusiasms and of the ideals it pursues, but the necessity of a wiser, larger, more patient search after its true law and aim.

Today the ideal of human unity is more or less vaguely making its way to the front of our consciousness. The emergence of an ideal in human thought is always the sign of an intention in Nature, but not always of an intention to accomplish; sometimes it indicates only an attempt which is predestined to temporary failure. For Nature is slow and patient in her methods. She takes up ideas and half carries them out, then drops them by the wayside to resume them in some future era with a better combination. She tempts humanity, her thinking instrument, and tests how far it is ready for the harmony she has imagined; she allows and incites man to attempt and fail, so that he may learn and succeed better another time. Still the ideal, having once made its way to the front of thought, must certainly be attempted, and this ideal of human unity is likely to figure largely among the determining forces of the future; for the intellectual and material circumstances of the age have prepared and almost impose it, especially the scientific discoveries which have made our earth so small that its vastest kingdoms seem now no more than the provinces of a single country.

But this very commodity of the material circumstances may bring about the failure of the ideal; for when material circumstances favour a great change, but the heart and mind of the race are not really ready—especially the heart—failure may be predicted, unless indeed men are wise in time and accept the inner change along with the external readjustment. But at present the human intellect has been so much mechanised by physical Science that it is likely to attempt the revolution it is beginning to envisage principally or solely through mechanical means, through social and political adjustments. Now it is not by social and political devices, or at any rate not by these chiefly or only, that the unity of the human race can be enduringly or fruitfully accomplished.

It must be remembered that a greater social or political unity is not necessarily a boon in itself; it is only worth pursuing in so far as it provides a means and a framework for a better, richer, more happy and puissant individual and collective life. But hitherto the experience of mankind has not favoured the view that huge aggregations, closely united and strictly organised, are favourable to a rich and puissant human life. It would seem rather that collective life is more at ease with itself, more genial, varied, fruitful when it can concentrate itself in small spaces and simpler organisms.

If we consider the past of humanity so far as it is known to us, we find that the interesting periods of human life, the scenes in which it has been most richly lived and has left behind it the most precious fruits, were precisely those ages and countries in which humanity was able to organise itself in little independent centres acting intimately upon each other but not fused into a single unity. Modern Europe owes two-thirds of its civilisation to three such supreme moments of human history, the religious life of the congeries of tribes which called itself Israel and, subsequently, of the little nation of the Jews, the many-sided life of the small Greek city states, the similar, though more restricted artistic and intellectual life of mediaeval Italy. Nor was any age in Asia so rich in energy, so well worth living in, so productive of the best and most enduring fruits as that heroic period of

India when she was divided into small kingdoms, many of them no larger than a modern district. Her most wonderful activities, her most vigorous and enduring work, that which, if we had to make a choice, we should keep at the sacrifice of all else, belonged to that period; the second best came afterwards in larger, but still comparatively small nations and kingdoms like those of the Pallavas, Chalukyas, Pandyas, Cholas and Cheras. In comparison she received little from the greater empires that rose and fell within her borders, the Moghul, the Gupta or the Maurya—little indeed except political and administrative organisation, some fine art and literature and a certain amount of lasting work in other kinds, not always of the best quality. Their impulse was rather towards elaborate organisation than original, stimulating and creative.

Nevertheless, in this regime of the small city state or of regional cultures there was always a defect which compelled a tendency towards large organisations. The defect was a characteristic of impermanence, often of disorder, especially of defencelessness against the onslaught of larger organisations, even of an insufficient capacity for widespread material well-being. Therefore this earlier form of collective life tended to disappear and give place to the organisation of nations, kingdoms and empires.

And here we notice, first, that it is the groupments of smaller nations which have had the most intense life and not the huge States and colossal empires. Collective life diffusing itself in too vast spaces seems to lose intensity and productiveness. Europe has lived in England, France, the Netherlands, Spain, Italy, the small States of Germany—all her later civilisation and progress evolved itself there, not in the huge mass of the Holy Roman or the Russian Empire. We see a similar phenomenon in the social and political field when we compare the intense life and activity of Europe in its many nations acting richly upon each other, rapidly progressing by quick creative steps and sometimes by bounds, with the great masses of Asia, her long periods of immobility in which wars and revolutions seem to be small, temporary and usually unproductive episodes, her centuries of

religious, philosophic and artistic reveries, her tendency towards an increasing isolation and a final stagnancy of the outward life.

Secondly, we note that in this organisation of nations and kingdoms those which have had the most vigorous life have gained it by a sort of artificial concentration of the vitality into some head, centre or capital, London, Paris, Rome. By this device Nature, while acquiring the benefits of a larger organisation and more perfect unity, preserves to some extent that equally precious power of fruitful concentration in a small space and into a closely packed activity which she had possessed in her more primitive system of the city state or petty kingdom. But this advantage was purchased by the condemnation of the rest of the organisation, the district, the provincial town, the village to a dull, petty and somnolent life in strange contrast with the vital intensity of the *urbs* or metropolis.

The Roman Empire is the historic example of an organisation of unity which transcended the limits of the nation, and its advantages and disadvantages are there perfectly typified. The advantages are admirable organisation, peace, widespread security, order and material well-being; the disadvantage is that the individual, the city, the region sacrifice their independent life and become mechanical parts of a machine; life loses its colour, richness, variety, freedom and victorious impulse towards creation. The organisation is great and admirable, but the individual dwindles and is overpowered and overshadowed; and eventually by the smallness and feebleness of the individual the huge organism inevitably and slowly loses even its great conservative vitality and dies of an increasing stagnation. Even while outwardly whole and untouched, the structure has become rotten and begins to crack and dissolve at the first shock from outside. Such organisations, such periods are immensely useful for conservation, even as the Roman Empire served to consolidate the gains of the rich centuries that preceded it. But they arrest life and growth.

We see, then, what is likely to happen if there were a social, administrative and political unification of mankind, such as some have begun to dream of nowadays. A tremendous

organisation would be needed under which both individual and regional life would be crushed, dwarfed, deprived of their necessary freedom like a plant without rain and wind and sunlight, and this would mean for humanity, after perhaps one first outburst of satisfied and joyous activity, a long period of mere conservation, increasing stagnancy and ultimately decay.

Yet the unity of mankind is evidently a part of Nature's eventual scheme and must come about. Only it must be under other conditions and with safeguards which will keep the race intact in the roots of its vitality, richly diverse in its oneness.

Chapter II

The Imperfection of Past Aggregates

THE WHOLE process of Nature depends on a balancing and a constant tendency to harmony between two poles of life, the individual whom the whole or aggregate nourishes and the whole or aggregate which the individual helps to constitute. Human life forms no exception to the rule. Therefore the perfection of human life must involve the elaboration of an as yet unaccomplished harmony between these two poles of our existence, the individual and the social aggregate. The perfect society will be that which most entirely favours the perfection of the individual; the perfection of the individual will be incomplete if it does not help towards the perfect state of the social aggregate to which he belongs and eventually to that of the largest possible human aggregate, the whole of a united humanity.

For the gradual process of Nature introduces a complication which prevents the individual from standing in a pure and direct relation to the totality of mankind. Between himself and this too immense whole there erect themselves partly as aids, partly as barriers to the final unity the lesser aggregates which it has been necessary to form in the progressive stages of human culture. For the obstacles of space, the difficulties of organisation and the limitations of the human heart and brain have necessitated the formation first of small, then of larger and yet larger aggregates so that he may be gradually trained by a progressive approach till he is ready for the final universality. The family, the commune, the clan or tribe, the class, the city state or congeries of tribes, the nation, the empire are so many stages in this progress and constant enlargement. If the smaller aggregates were destroyed as soon as the larger are successfully formed, this graduation would result in no complexity; but Nature does not follow this course. She seldom destroys entirely the types she has once made or only destroys that for which there is no longer any utility;

the rest she keeps in order to serve her need or her passion for variety, richness, multiformity and only effaces the dividing lines or modifies the characteristics and relations sufficiently to allow of the larger unity she is creating. Therefore at every step humanity is confronted with various problems which arise not only from the difficulty of accord between the interests of the individual and those of the immediate aggregate, the community, but between the need and interests of the smaller integralities and the growth of that larger whole which is to ensphere them all.

History has preserved for us scattered instances of this travail, instances of failure and success which are full of instruction. We see the struggle towards the aggregation of tribes among the Semitic nations, Jew and Arab, surmounted in the one after a scission into two kingdoms which remained a permanent source of weakness to the Jewish nation, overcome only temporarily in the other by the sudden unifying force of Islam. We see the failure of clan life to combine into an organised national existence in the Celtic races, a failure entire in Ireland and Scotland and only surmounted through the crushing out of clan life by a foreign rule and culture, overcome only at the last moment in Wales. We see the failure of the city states and small regional peoples to fuse themselves in the history of Greece, the signal success of a similar struggle of Nature in the development of Roman Italy. The whole past of India for the last two thousand years and more has been the attempt, unavailing in spite of many approximations to success, to overcome the centrifugal tendency of an extraordinary number and variety of disparate elements, the family, the commune, the clan, the caste, the small regional state or people, the large linguistic unit, the religious community, the nation within the nation. We may perhaps say that here Nature tried an experiment of unparalleled complexity and potential richness, accumulating all possible difficulties in order to arrive at the most opulent result. But in the end the problem proved insoluble or, at least, was not solved and Nature had to resort to her usual *deus ex machina* denouement, the instrumentality of a foreign rule.

But even when the nation is sufficiently organised,—the

largest unit yet successfully developed by Nature,—entire unity is not always achieved. If no other elements of discord remain, yet the conflict of classes is always possible. And the phenomenon leads us to another rule of this gradual development of Nature in human life which we shall find of very considerable importance when we come to the question of a realisable human unity. The perfection of the individual in a perfected society or eventually in a perfected humanity—understanding perfection always in a relative and progressive sense—is the inevitable aim of Nature. But the progress of all the individuals in a society does not proceed *pari passu*, with an equal and equable march. Some advance, others remain stationary—absolutely or relatively,—others fall back. Consequently the emergence of a dominant class is inevitable within the aggregate itself, just as in the constant clash between the aggregates the emergence of dominant nations is inevitable. That class will predominate which develops most perfectly the type Nature needs at the time for her progress or, it may be, for her retrogression. If she demands power and strength of character, a dominant aristocracy emerges; if knowledge and science, a dominant literary or savant class; if practical ability, ingenuity, economy and efficient organisation, a dominant bourgeoisie or Vaishya class, usually with the lawyer at the head; if diffusion rather than concentration of general well-being and a close organisation of toil, then even the domination of an artisan class is not impossible.

But this phenomenon, whether of dominant classes or dominant nations, can never be more than a temporary necessity; for the final aim of Nature in human life cannot be the exploitation of the many by the few or even of the few by the many, can never be the perfection of some at the cost of the abject submergence and ignorant subjection of the bulk of humanity; these can only be transient devices. Therefore we see that such dominations bear always in them the seed of their own destruction. They must pass either by the ejection or destruction of the exploiting element or else by a fusion and equalisation. We see in Europe and America that the dominant Brahmin and the dominant Kshatriya have been either abolished or are on the point of subsidence into

equality with the general mass. Two rigidly separate classes alone remain, the dominant propertied class and the labourer, and all the most significant movements of the day have for their purpose the abolition of this last superiority. In this persistent tendency, Europe has obeyed one great law of Nature's progressive march, her trend towards a final equality. Absolute equality is surely neither intended nor possible, just as absolute uniformity is both impossible and utterly undesirable; but a fundamental equality which will render the play of true superiority and difference inoffensive, is essential to any conceivable perfectibility of the human race.

Therefore, the perfect counsel for a dominant minority is always to recognise in good time the right hour for its abdication and for the imparting of its ideals, qualities, culture, experience to the rest of the aggregate or to as much of it as is prepared for that progress. Where this is done, the social aggregate advances normally and without disruption or serious wound or malady; otherwise a disordered progress is imposed upon it, for Nature will not suffer human egoism to baffle for ever her fixed intention and necessity. Where the dominant classes successfully avoid her demand upon them, the worst of destinies is likely to overtake the social aggregate,—as in India where the final refusal of the Brahmin and other privileged classes to call up the bulk of the nation as far as possible to their level, their fixing of an unbridgeable gulf of superiority between themselves and the rest of society, has been a main cause of eventual decline and degeneracy. For where her aims are frustrated, Nature inevitably withdraws her force from the offending unit till she has brought in and used other and external means to reduce the obstacle to a nullity.

But even if the unity within is made as perfect as social, administrative and cultural machinery can make it, the question of the individual still remains. For these social units or aggregates are not like the human body in which the component cells are capable of no separate life apart from the aggregate. The human individual tends to exist in himself and to exceed the limits of the family, the clan, the class, the nation; and even,

that self-sufficiency on one side, that universality on the other are the essential elements of his perfection. Therefore, just as the systems of social aggregation which depend on the domination of a class or classes over others must change or dissolve, so the social aggregates which stand in the way of this perfection of the individual and seek to coerce him within their limited mould and into the rigidity of a narrow culture or petty class or national interest, must find their term and their day of change or destruction under the irresistible impulsion of progressing Nature.

Chapter III

The Group and the Individual

IT IS a constant method of Nature, when she has two elements of a harmony to reconcile, to proceed at first by a long continued balancing in which she sometimes seems to lean entirely on one side, sometimes entirely to the other, at others to correct both excesses by a more or less successful temporary adjustment and moderating compromise. The two elements appear then as opponents necessary to each other who therefore labour to arrive at some conclusion of their strife. But as each has its egoism and that innate tendency of all things which drives them not only towards self-preservation but towards self-assertion in proportion to their available force, they seek each to arrive at a conclusion in which itself shall have the maximum part and dominate utterly if possible or even swallow up entirely the egoism of the other in its own egoism. Thus the progress towards harmony accomplishes itself by a strife of forces and seems often to be no effort towards concord or mutual adjustment at all, but rather towards a mutual devouring. In effect, the swallowing up, not of one by the other, but of each by the other, so that both shall live entirely in the other and as the other, is our highest ideal of oneness. It is the last ideal of love at which strife tries ignorantly to arrive; for by strife one can only arrive at an adjustment of the two opposite demands, not at a stable harmony, a compromise between two conflicting egoisms and not the fusing of them into each other. Still, strife does lead to an increasing mutual comprehension which eventually makes the attempt at real oneness possible.

In the relations between the individual and the group, this constant tendency of Nature appears as the strife between two equally deep-rooted human tendencies, individualism and collectivism. On one side is the engrossing authority, perfection and development of the State, on the other the distinctive freedom,

perfection and development of the individual man. The State idea, the small or the vast living machine, and the human idea, the more and more distinct and luminous Person, the increasing God, stand in perpetual opposition. The size of the State makes no difference to the essence of the struggle and need make none to its characteristic circumstances. It was the family, the tribe or the city, the *polis*; it became the clan, the caste and the class, the *kula*, the *gens*. It is now the nation. Tomorrow or the day after it may be all mankind. But even then the question will remain poised between man and humanity, between the self-liberating Person and the engrossing collectivity.

If we consult only the available facts of history and sociology, we must suppose that our race began with the all-engrossing group to which the individual was entirely subservient and that increasing individuality is a circumstance of human growth, a fruit of increasing conscious Mind. Originally, we may suppose, man was altogether gregarious, association his first necessity for survival; since survival is the first necessity of all being, the individual could be nothing but an instrument for the strength and safety of the group, and if we add to strength and safety growth, efficiency, self-assertion as well as self-preservation, this is still the dominant idea of all collectivism. This turn is a necessity born of circumstance and environment. Looking more into fundamental things we perceive that in Matter uniformity is the sign of the group; free variation and individual development progress with the growth of Life and Mind. If then we suppose man to be an evolution of mental being in Matter and out of Matter, we must assume that he begins with uniformity and subservience of the individual and proceeds towards variety and freedom of the individual. The necessity of circumstance and environment and the inevitable law of his fundamental principles of being would then point to the same conclusion, the same process of his historic and prehistoric evolution.

But there is also the ancient tradition of humanity, which it is never safe to ignore or treat as mere fiction, that the social state was preceded by another, free and unsocial. According to modern scientific ideas, if such a state ever existed, and that

is far from certain, it must have been not merely unsocial but anti-social; it must have been the condition of man as an isolated animal, living as the beast of prey, before he became in the process of his development an animal of the pack. But the tradition is rather that of a golden age in which he was freely social without society. Not bound by laws or institutions but living by natural instinct or free knowledge, he held the right law of his living in himself and needed neither to prey on his fellows nor to be restrained by the iron yoke of the collectivity. We may say, if we will, that here poetic or idealistic imagination played upon a deep-seated race-memory; early civilised man read his growing ideal of a free, unorganised, happy association into his race-memory of an unorganised, savage and anti-social existence. But it is also possible that our progress has not been a development in a straight line, but in cycles, and that in those cycles there have been periods of at least partial realisation in which men did become able to live according to the high dream of philosophic Anarchism, associated by the inner law of love and light and right being, right thinking, right action and not coerced to unity by kings and parliaments, laws and policings and punishments with all that tyrant unease, petty or great oppression and repression and ugly train of selfishness and corruption which attend the forced government of man by man. It is even possible that our original state was an instinctive animal spontaneity of free and fluid association and that our final ideal state will be an enlightened, intuitive spontaneity of free and fluid association. Our destiny may be the conversion of an original animal association into a community of the gods. Our progress may be a devious round leading from the easy and spontaneous uniformity and harmony which reflects Nature to the self-possessed unity which reflects the Divine.

However that may be, history and sociology tell us only — outside the attempts of religious or other idealisms to arrive either at a free solitude or a free association — of man as an individual in the more or less organised group. And in the group there are always two types. One asserts the State idea at the expense of the individual,— ancient Sparta, modern Germany;

another asserts the supremacy of the State, but seeks at the same time to give as much freedom, power and dignity as is consistent with its control to the individuals who constitute it,—ancient Athens, modern France. But to these two has been added a third type in which the State abdicates as much as possible to the individual, boldly asserts that it exists for his growth and to assure his freedom, dignity, successful manhood, experiments with a courageous faith whether after all it is not the utmost possible liberty, dignity and manhood of the individual which will best assure the well-being, strength and expansion of the State. Of this type England has been until recently the great exemplar,—England rendered free, prosperous, energetic, invincible by nothing else but the strength of this idea within her, blessed by the Gods with unexampled expansion, empire and good fortune because she has not feared at any time to obey this great tendency and take the risks of this great endeavour and even often to employ it beyond the limits of her own insular egoism. Unfortunately, that egoism, the defects of the race and the exaggerated assertion of a limited idea, which is the mark of our human ignorance, have prevented her from giving it the noblest and richest possible expression or to realise by it other results which the more strictly organised States have attained or are attaining. And in consequence we find the collective or State idea breaking down the old English tradition and it is possible that before long the great experiment will have come to an end in a lamentable admission of failure by the adoption of that Germanic “discipline” and “efficient” organisation towards which all civilised humanity seems now to be tending. One may well ask oneself whether it was really necessary, whether, by a more courageous faith enlightened by a more flexible and vigilant intelligence, all the desirable results might not have been attained by a new and freer method that would yet keep intact the *dharma* of the race.

We must, again, note one other fact in connection with the claim of the State to suppress the individual in its own interest, that it is quite immaterial to the principle what form the State may assume. The tyranny of the absolute king over all and

the tyranny of the majority over the individual — which really converts itself by the paradox of human nature into a hypnotised oppression and repression of the majority by itself — are forms of one and the same tendency. Each, when it declares itself to be the State with its absolute "*L'état, c'est moi*", is speaking a profound truth even while it bases that truth upon a falsehood. The truth is that each really is the self-expression of the State in its characteristic attempt to subordinate to itself the free will, the free action, the power, dignity and self-assertion of the individuals constituting it. The falsehood lies in the underlying idea that the State is something greater than the individuals constituting it and can with impunity to itself and to the highest hope of humanity arrogate this oppressive supremacy.

In modern times the State idea has after a long interval fully reasserted itself and is dominating the thought and action of the world. It supports itself on two motives; one appeals to the external interest of the race, the other to its highest moral tendencies. It demands that individual egoism shall immolate itself to a collective interest; it claims that man shall live not for himself but for the whole, the group, the community. It asserts that the hope of the good and progress of humanity lies in the efficiency and organisation of the State. Its way to perfection lies through the ordering by the State of all the economic and vital arrangements of the individual and the group, the "mobilisation", to use a specious expression the war has set in vogue, of the intellect, capacity, thought, emotion, life of the individual, of all that he is and has, by the State in the interest of all. Pushed to its ultimate conclusion, this means the socialistic ideal in full force and towards that conclusion humanity seems to be heading with a remarkable rapidity. The State idea is rushing towards possession with a great motor force and is prepared to crush under its wheels everything that conflicts with its force or asserts the right of other human tendencies. And yet the two ideas on which it bases itself are full of that fatal mixture of truth and falsehood which pursues all our human claims and assertions. It is necessary to apply to them the solvent of a searching and unbiased thought which refuses to be cheated by words, if we

are not to describe helplessly another circle of illusion before we return to the deep and complex truth of Nature which should rather be our light and guide.

Chapter IV

The Inadequacy of the State Idea

WHAT, after all, is this State idea, this idea of the organised community to which the individual has to be immolated? Theoretically, it is the subordination of the individual to the good of all that is demanded; practically, it is his subordination to a collective egoism, political, military, economic, which seeks to satisfy certain collective aims and ambitions shaped and imposed on the great mass of the individuals by a smaller or larger number of ruling persons who are supposed in some way to represent the community. It is immaterial whether these belong to a governing class or emerge as in modern States from the mass partly by force of character, but much more by force of circumstances; nor does it make any essential difference that their aims and ideals are imposed nowadays more by the hypnotism of verbal persuasion than by overt and actual force. In either case, there is no guarantee that this ruling class or ruling body represents the best mind of the nation or its noblest aims or its highest instincts.

Nothing of the kind can be asserted of the modern politician in any part of the world; he does not represent the soul of a people or its aspirations. What he does usually represent is all the average pettiness, selfishness, egoism, self-deception that is about him and these he represents well enough as well as a great deal of mental incompetence and moral conventionality, timidity and pretence. Great issues often come to him for decision, but he does not deal with them greatly; high words and noble ideas are on his lips, but they become rapidly the claptrap of a party. The disease and falsehood of modern political life is patent in every country of the world and only the hypnotised acquiescence of all, even of the intellectual classes, in the great organised sham, cloaks and prolongs the malady, the acquiescence that men yield to everything that is habitual and makes the present atmosphere

of their lives. Yet it is by such minds that the good of all has to be decided, to such hands that it has to be entrusted, to such an agency calling itself the State that the individual is being more and more called upon to give up the government of his activities. As a matter of fact, it is in no way the largest good of all that is thus secured, but a great deal of organised blundering and evil with a certain amount of good which makes for real progress, because Nature moves forward always in the midst of all stumblings and secures her aims in the end more often in spite of man's imperfect mentality than by its means.

But even if the governing instrument were better constituted and of a higher mental and moral character, even if some way could be found to do what ancient civilisations by their enforcement of certain high ideals and disciplines tried to do with their ruling classes, still the State would not be what the State idea pretends that it is. Theoretically, it is the collective wisdom and force of the community made available and organised for the general good. Practically, what controls the engine and drives the train is so much of the intellect and power available in the community as the particular machinery of State organisation will allow to come to the surface; but it is also caught in the machinery and hampered by it and hampered as well by the large amount of folly and selfish weakness that comes up in the emergence. Doubtless, this is the best that can be done under the circumstances, and Nature, as always, utilises it for the best. But things would be much worse if there were not a field left for a less trammelled individual effort doing what the State cannot do, deploying and using the sincerity, energy, idealism of the best individuals to attempt that which the State has not the wisdom or courage to attempt, getting that done which a collective conservatism and imbecility would either leave undone or actively suppress and oppose. It is this energy of the individual which is the really effective agent of collective progress. The State sometimes comes in to aid it and then, if its aid does not mean undue control, it serves a positively useful end. As often it stands in the way and then serves either as a brake upon progress or supplies the necessary amount of organised opposition and friction

always needed to give greater energy and a more complete shape to the new thing which is in process of formation. But what we are now tending towards is such an increase of organised State power and such a huge, irresistible and complex State activity as will either eliminate free individual effort altogether or leave it dwarfed and cowed into helplessness. The necessary corrective to the defects, limitations and inefficiency of the State machine will disappear.

The organised State is neither the best mind of the nation nor is it even the sum of the communal energies. It leaves out of its organised action and suppresses or unduly depresses the working force and thinking mind of important minorities, often of those which represent that which is best in the present and that which is developing for the future. It is a collective egoism much inferior to the best of which the community is capable. What that egoism is in its relation to other collective egoisms we know, and its ugliness has recently been forced upon the vision and the conscience of mankind. The individual has usually something at least like a soul, and at any rate he makes up for the deficiencies of the soul by a system of morality and an ethical sense, and for the deficiencies of these again by the fear of social opinion or, failing that, a fear of the communal law which he has ordinarily either to obey or at least to circumvent; and even the difficulty of circumventing is a check on all except the most violent or the most skilful. But the State is an entity which, with the greatest amount of power, is the least hampered by internal scruples or external checks. It has no soul or only a rudimentary one. It is a military, political and economic force; but it is only in a slight and undeveloped degree, if at all, an intellectual and ethical being. And unfortunately the chief use it makes of its undeveloped intellect is to blunt by fictions, catchwords and recently by State philosophies, its ill-developed ethical conscience. Man within the community is now at least a half-civilised creature, but his international existence is still primitive. Until recently the organised nation in its relations with other nations was only a huge beast of prey with appetites which sometimes slept when gorged or discouraged by events,

but were always its chief reason for existence. Self-protection and self-expansion by the devouring of others were its *dharma*. At the present day there is no essential improvement; there is only a greater difficulty in devouring. A “sacred egoism” is still the ideal of nations, and therefore there is neither any true and enlightened consciousness of human opinion to restrain the predatory State nor any effective international law. There is only the fear of defeat and the fear, recently, of a disastrous economic disorganisation; but experience after experience has shown that these checks are ineffective.

In its inner life this huge State egoism was once little better than in its outer relations.¹ Brutal, rapacious, cunning, oppressive, intolerant of free action, free speech and opinion, even of freedom of conscience in religion, it preyed upon individuals and classes within as upon weaker nations outside. Only the necessity of keeping alive and rich and strong in a rough sort of way the community on which it lived made its action partially and crudely beneficent. In modern times there has been much improvement in spite of deterioration in certain directions. The State now feels the necessity of justifying its existence by organising the general economic and animal well-being of the community and even of all individuals. It is beginning to see the necessity of assuring the intellectual and, indirectly, the moral development of the whole community. This attempt of the State to grow into an intellectual and moral being is one of the most interesting phenomena of modern civilisation. Even the necessity of intellectualising and moralising it in its external relations has been enforced upon the conscience of mankind by the European catastrophe. But the claim of the State to absorb all free individual activities, a claim which it increasingly makes as it grows more clearly conscious of its new ideals and its possibilities, is, to say the least of it, premature and, if satisfied, will surely end in a check to human progress, a comfortably

¹ I am speaking of the intermediate age between ancient and modern times. In ancient times the State had, in some countries at least, ideals and a conscience with regard to the community, but very little in its dealings with other States.

organised stagnancy such as overtook the Graeco-Roman world after the establishment of the Roman Empire.

The call of the State to the individual to immolate himself on its altar and to give up his free activities into an organised collective activity is therefore something quite different from the demand of our highest ideals. It amounts to the giving up of the present form of individual egoism into another, a collective form, larger but not superior, rather in many ways inferior to the best individual egoism. The altruistic ideal, the discipline of self-sacrifice, the need of a growing solidarity with our fellows and a growing collective soul in humanity are not in dispute. But the loss of self in the State is not the thing that these high ideals mean, nor is it the way to their fulfilment. Man must learn not to suppress and mutilate but to fulfil himself in the fulfilment of mankind, even as he must learn not to mutilate or destroy but to complete his ego by expanding it out of its limitations and losing it in something greater which it now tries to represent. But the deglutition of the free individual by a huge State machine is quite another consummation. The State is a convenience, and a rather clumsy convenience, for our common development; it ought never to be made an end in itself.

The second claim of the State idea that this supremacy and universal activity of the organised State machine is the best means of human progress, is also an exaggeration and a fiction. Man lives by the community; he needs it to develop himself individually as well as collectively. But is it true that a State-governed action is the most capable of developing the individual perfectly as well as of serving the common ends of the community? It is not true. What is true is that it is capable of providing the cooperative action of the individuals in the community with all necessary conveniences and of removing from it disabilities and obstacles which would otherwise interfere with its working. Here the real utility of the State ceases. The non-recognition of the possibilities of human cooperation was the weakness of English individualism; the turning of a utility for cooperative action into an excuse for rigid control by the State is the weakness of the Teutonic idea of collectivism. When the State attempts to

take up the control of the cooperative action of the community, it condemns itself to create a monstrous machinery which will end by crushing out the freedom, initiative and various growth of the human being.

The State is bound to act crudely and in the mass; it is incapable of that free, harmonious and intelligently or instinctively varied action which is proper to organic growth. For the State is not an organism; it is a machinery, and it works like a machine, without tact, taste, delicacy or intuition. It tries to manufacture, but what humanity is here to do is to grow and create. We see this flaw in State-governed education. It is right and necessary that education should be provided for all and in providing for it the State is eminently useful; but when it controls the education, it turns it into a routine, a mechanical system in which individual initiative, individual growth and true development as opposed to a routine instruction become impossible. The State tends always to uniformity, because uniformity is easy to it and natural variation is impossible to its essentially mechanical nature; but uniformity is death, not life. A national culture, a national religion, a national education may still be useful things provided they do not interfere with the growth of human solidarity on the one side and individual freedom of thought and conscience and development on the other; for they give form to the communal soul and help it to add its quota to the sum of human advancement; but a State education, a State religion, a State culture are unnatural violences. And the same rule holds good in different ways and to a different extent in other directions of our communal life and its activities.

The business of the State, so long as it continues to be a necessary element in human life and growth, is to provide all possible facilities for cooperative action, to remove obstacles, to prevent all really harmful waste and friction,—a certain amount of waste and friction is necessary and useful to all natural action,—and, removing avoidable injustice, to secure for every individual a just and equal chance of self-development and satisfaction to the extent of his powers and in the line of his nature. So far the aim in modern socialism is right and good. But

all unnecessary interference with the freedom of man's growth is or can be harmful. Even cooperative action is injurious if, instead of seeking the good of all compatibly with the necessities of individual growth,— and without individual growth there can be no real and permanent good of all,— it immolates the individual to a communal egoism and prevents so much free room and initiative as is necessary for the flowering of a more perfectly developed humanity. So long as humanity is not full-grown, so long as it needs to grow and is capable of a greater perfectibility, there can be no static good of all; nor can there be any progressive good of all independent of the growth of the individuals composing the all. All collectivist ideals which seek unduly to subordinate the individual, really envisage a static condition, whether it be a present status or one it soon hopes to establish, after which all attempt at serious change would be regarded as an offence of impatient individualism against the peace, just routine and security of the happily established communal order. Always it is the individual who progresses and compels the rest to progress; the instinct of the collectivity is to stand still in its established order. Progress, growth, realisation of wider being give his greatest sense of happiness to the individual; status, secure ease to the collectivity. And so it must be as long as the latter is more a physical and economic entity than a self-conscious collective soul.

It is therefore quite improbable that in the present conditions of the race a healthy unity of mankind can be brought about by State machinery, whether it be by a grouping of powerful and organised States enjoying carefully regulated and legalised relations with each other or by the substitution of a single World-State for the present half chaotic half ordered comity of nations,— be the form of that World-State a single empire like the Roman or a federated unity. Such an external or administrative unity may be intended in the near future of mankind in order to accustom the race to the idea of a common life, to its habit, to its possibility, but it cannot be really healthy, durable or beneficial over all the true line of human destiny unless something be developed more profound, internal and real. Otherwise the

experience of the ancient world will be repeated on a larger scale and in other circumstances. The experiment will break down and give place to a new reconstructive age of confusion and anarchy. Perhaps this experience also is necessary for mankind; yet it ought to be possible for us now to avoid it by subordinating mechanical means to our true development through a moralised and even a spiritualised humanity united in its inner soul and not only in its outward life and body.

Chapter V

Nation and Empire: Real and Political Unities

THE PROBLEM of the unification of mankind resolves itself into two distinct difficulties. There is the doubt whether the collective egoisms already created in the natural evolution of humanity can at this time be sufficiently modified or abolished and whether even an external unity in some effective form can be securely established. And there is the doubt whether, even if any such external unity can be established, it will not be at the price of crushing both the free life of the individual and the free play of the various collective units already created in which there is a real and active life and substituting a State organisation which will mechanise human existence. Apart from these two uncertainties there is a third doubt whether a really living unity can be achieved by a mere economic, political and administrative unification and whether it ought not to be preceded by at least the strong beginnings of a moral and spiritual oneness. It is the first question that must be taken first in the logical order.

At the present stage of human progress the nation is the living collective unit of humanity. Empires exist, but they are as yet only political and not real units; they have no life from within and owe their continuance to a force imposed on their constituent elements or else to a political convenience felt or acquiesced in by the constituents and favoured by the world outside. Austria was long the standing example of such an empire; it was a political convenience favoured by the world outside, acquiesced in until recently by its constituent elements and maintained by the force of the central Germanic element incarnated in the Hapsburg dynasty,—of late with the active aid of its Magyar partner. If the political convenience of an empire of

this kind ceases, if the constituent elements no longer acquiesce and are drawn more powerfully by a centrifugal force, if at the same time the world outside no longer favours the combination, then force alone remains as the one agent of an artificial unity. There arose indeed a new political convenience which the existence of Austria served even after it suffered from this tendency of dissolution, but that was the convenience of the Germanic idea which made it an inconvenience to the rest of Europe and deprived it of the acquiescence of important constituent elements which were drawn towards other combinations outside the Austrian formula. From that moment the existence of the Austrian Empire was in jeopardy and depended, not on any inner necessity, but first on the power of the Austro-Magyar partnership to crush down the Slav nations within it and, secondly, on the continued power and dominance of Germany and the Germanic idea in Europe, that is to say, on force alone. And although in Austria the weakness of the imperial form of unity was singularly conspicuous and its conditions exaggerated, still those conditions are the same for all empires which are not at the same time national units. It was not so long ago that most political thinkers perceived at least the strong possibility of an automatic dissolution of the British Empire by the self-detachment of the colonies, in spite of the close links of race, language and origin that should have bound them to the mother country. This was because the political convenience of imperial unity, though enjoyed by the colonies, was not sufficiently appreciated by them and, on the other hand, there was no living principle of national oneness. The Australians and Canadians were beginning to regard themselves as new separate nations rather than as limbs of an extended British nationality. Things are now changed in both respects, a wider formula has been discovered, and the British Empire is for the moment proportionately stronger.

Nevertheless, it may be asked, why should this distinction be made of the political and the real unit when name, kind and form are the same? It must be made because it is of the greatest utility to a true and profound political science and involves the most important consequences. When an empire like

Austria, a non-national empire, is broken to pieces, it perishes for good; there is no innate tendency to recover the outward unity, because there is no real inner oneness; there is only a politically manufactured aggregate. On the other hand, a real national unity broken up by circumstances will always preserve a tendency to recover and reassert its oneness. The Greek Empire has gone the way of all empires, but the Greek nation, after many centuries of political non-existence, again possesses its separate body, because it has preserved its separate ego and therefore really existed under the covering rule of the Turk. So has it been with all the races under the Turkish yoke, because that powerful suzerainty, stern as it was in many respects, never attempted to obliterate their national characteristics or substitute an Ottoman nationality. These nations have revived and have reconstituted or are attempting to reconstitute themselves in the measure in which they have preserved their real national sense. The Serbian national idea attempted to recover and has recovered all territory in which the Serb exists or predominates. Greece attempted to reconstitute herself in her mainland, islands and Asiatic colonies, but could not reconstitute the old Greece because many parts had become Bulgarian, Albanian and Turk and no longer Hellenic. Italy became an external unity again after so many centuries because, though no longer a State, she never ceased to be a single people.

This truth of a real unity is so strong that even nations which never in the past realised an outward unification, to which Fate and circumstance and their own selves have been adverse, nations which have been full of centrifugal forces and easily overpowered by foreign intrusions, have yet always developed a centripetal force as well and arrived inevitably at organised oneness. Ancient Greece clung to her separatist tendencies, her self-sufficient city or regional states, her little mutually repellent autonomies; but the centripetal force was always there manifested in leagues, associations of States, suzerainties like the Spartan and Athenian. It realised itself in the end, first, imperfectly and temporarily by the Macedonian overrule, then, by a strange enough development, through the evolution of the

Eastern Roman world into a Greek and Byzantine Empire, and it has again revived in modern Greece. And we have seen in our own day Germany, constantly disunited since ancient times, develop at last to portentous issues its innate sense of oneness formidably embodied in the Empire of the Hohenzollerns and persistent after its fall in a federal Republic. Nor would it at all be surprising to those who study the working of forces and not merely the trend of outward circumstances, if one yet far-off result of the war were to be the fusion of the one Germanic element still left outside, the Austro-German, into the Germanic whole, although possibly in some other embodiment than Prussian hegemony or Hohenzollern Empire.¹ In both these historic instances, as in so many others, the unification of Saxon England, mediaeval France, the formation of the United States of America, it was a real unity, a psychologically distinct unit which tended at first ignorantly by the subconscious necessity of its being and afterwards with a sudden or gradual awakening to the sense of political oneness, towards an inevitable external unification. It is a distinct group-soul which is driven by inward necessity and uses outward circumstances to constitute for itself an organised body.

But the most striking example in history is the evolution of India. Nowhere else have the centrifugal forces been so strong, numerous, complex, obstinate. The mere time taken by the evolution has been prodigious; the disastrous vicissitudes through which it has had to work itself out have been appalling. And yet through it all the inevitable tendency has worked constantly, pertinaciously, with the dull, obscure, indomitable, relentless obstinacy of Nature when she is opposed in her instinctive purposes by man, and finally, after a struggle enduring through millenniums, has triumphed. And, as usually happens when she is thus opposed by her own mental and human material, it is the most adverse circumstances that the subconscious worker has

¹ This possibility realised itself for a time, but by means and under circumstances which made the revival of Austrian national sentiment and a separate national existence inevitable.

turned into her most successful instruments. The beginnings of the centripetal tendency in India go back to the earliest times of which we have record and are typified in the ideal of the Samrat or Chakravarti Raja and the military and political use of the Aswamedha and Rajasuya sacrifices. The two great national epics might almost have been written to illustrate this theme; for the one recounts the establishment of a unifying *dharmaṛājya* or imperial reign of justice, the other starts with an idealised description of such a rule pictured as once existing in the ancient and sacred past of the country. The political history of India is the story of a succession of empires, indigenous and foreign, each of them destroyed by centrifugal forces, but each bringing the centripetal tendency nearer to its triumphant emergence. And it is a significant circumstance that the more foreign the rule, the greater has been its force for the unification of the subject people. This is always a sure sign that the essential nation-unit is already there and that there is an indissoluble national vitality necessitating the inevitable emergence of the organised nation. In this instance, we see that the conversion of the psychological unity on which nationhood is based into the external organised unity by which it is perfectly realised, has taken a period of more than two thousand years and is not yet complete.² And yet, since the essentiality of the thing was there, not even the most formidable difficulties and delays, not even the most persistent incapacity for union in the people, not even the most disintegrating shocks from outside have prevailed against the obstinate subconscious necessity. And this is only the extreme illustration of a general law.

It will be useful to dwell a little upon this aid lent by foreign rule to the process of nation-making and see how it works. History abounds with illustrations. But in some cases the phenomenon of foreign domination is momentary and imperfect, in others long-enduring and complete, in others often repeated in various forms. In some instances the foreign element is rejected,

² But it must be remembered that France, Germany, modern Italy took each a thousand or two thousand years and more to form and set into a firm oneness.

its use once over, in others it is absorbed, in others accepted with more or less assimilation for a longer or briefer period as a ruling caste. The principle is the same, but it is worked variously by Nature according to the needs of the particular case. There is none of the modern nations in Europe which has not had to pass through a phase more or less prolonged, more or less complete, of foreign domination in order to realise its nationality. In Russia and England it was the domination of a foreign conquering race which rapidly became a ruling caste and was in the end assimilated and absorbed, in Spain the succession of the Roman, Goth and Moor, in Italy the overlordship of the Austrian, in the Balkans³ the long suzerainty of the Turk, in Germany the transient yoke of Napoleon. But in all cases the essential has been a shock or a pressure which would either waken a loose psychological unity to the necessity of organising itself from within or would crush out, dispirit or deprive of power, vitality and reality the more obstinate factors of disunion. In some cases even an entire change of name, culture and civilisation has been necessary, as well as a more or less profound modification of the race. Notably has this happened in the formation of French nationality. The ancient Gallic people, in spite of or perhaps because of its Druidic civilisation and early greatness, was more incapable of organising a firm political unity than even the ancient Greeks or the old Indian kingdoms and republics. It needed the Roman rule and Latin culture, the superimposition of a Teutonic ruling caste and finally the shock of the temporary and partial English conquest to found the unequalled unity of modern France. Yet though name, civilisation and all else seem to have changed, the French nation of today is still and has always remained the old Gallic nation with its Basque, Gaelic, Armorican and other ancient elements modified by the Frank and Latin admixture.

Thus the nation is a persistent psychological unit which

³ Here there was no single people to be united but many separate peoples which had each to recover their separate independence or, in some cases, a coalition of kindred peoples.

Nature has been busy developing throughout the world in the most various forms and educating into physical and political unity. Political unity is not the essential factor; it may not yet be realised and yet the nation persists and moves inevitably towards its realisation; it may be destroyed and yet the nation persists and travails and suffers but refuses to be annihilated. In former times the nation was not always a real and vital unit; the tribe, the clan, the commune, the regional people were the living groups. Those unities which in the attempt at national evolution destroyed these older living groups without arriving at a vital nationhood disappeared once the artificial or political unit was broken. But now the nation stands as the one living group-unit of humanity into which all others must merge or to which they must become subservient. Even old persistent race unities and cultural unities are powerless against it. The Catalonian in Spain, the Breton and Provençal and Alsatian in France, the Welsh in England may cherish the signs of their separate existence; but the attraction of the greater living unity of the Spanish, the French, the British nation has been too powerful to be injured by these persistences. The nation in modern times is practically indestructible, unless it dies from within. Poland, torn asunder and crushed under the heel of three powerful empires, ceased to exist; the Polish nation survived and is once more reconstituted. Alsace after forty years of the German yoke remained faithful to her French nationhood in spite of her affinities of race and language with the conqueror. All modern attempts to destroy by force or break up a nation are foolish and futile, because they ignore this law of the natural evolution. Empires are still perishable political units; the nation is immortal. And so it will remain until a greater living unit can be found into which the nation idea can merge in obedience to a superior attraction.

And then the question arises whether the empire is not precisely that destined unit in course of evolution. The mere fact that at present not the empire, but the nation is the vital unity can be no bar to a future reversal of the relations. Obviously, in order that they may be reversed the empire must cease to be a mere political and become rather a psychological entity.

But there have been instances in the evolution of the nation in which the political unity preceded and became a basis for the psychological as in the union of Scotch, English and Welsh to form the British nation. There is no insurmountable reason why a similar evolution should not take place on a larger scale and an imperial unity be substituted for a national unity. Nature has long been in travail of the imperial grouping, long casting about to give it a greater force of permanence, and the emergence of the conscious imperial ideal all over the earth and its attempts, though still crude, violent and blundering, to substitute itself for the national, may not irrationally be taken as the precursory sign of one of those rapid leaps and transitions by which she so often accomplishes what she has long been gradually and tentatively preparing. This then is the possibility we have next to consider before we examine the established phenomenon of nationhood in relation to the ideal of human unity. Two different ideals and therefore two different possibilities were precipitated much nearer to realisation by the European conflict,—a federation of free nations and, on the other hand, the distribution of the earth into a few great empires or imperial hegemonies. A practical combination of the two ideas became the most tangible possibility of the not distant future. It is necessary to pause and consider whether, one element of this possible combination being already a living unit, the other also could not under certain circumstances be converted into a living unit and the combination, if realised, made the foundation of an enduring new order of things. Otherwise it could be no more than a transient device without any possibility of a stable permanence.

Chapter VI

Ancient and Modern Methods of Empire

ACLEAR distinction must be made between two political aggregates which go equally in current language by the name of empire. For there is the homogeneous national and there is the heterogeneous composite empire. In a sense, all empires are composites, at any rate if we go back to their origins; but in practice there is a difference between the imperial aggregate in which the component elements are not divided from each other by a strong sense of their separate existence in the whole and the imperial aggregate in which this psychological basis of separation is still in vigour. Japan before the absorption of Formosa and Korea was a national whole and an empire only in the honorific sense of the word; after that absorption it became a real and a composite empire. Germany again would have been a purely national empire if it had not burdened itself with three minor acquisitions, Alsace, Poland and Schleswig-Holstein which were not united to it by the sense of German nationality but only by military force. Let us suppose this Teutonic aggregate to have lost its foreign elements and at most have acquired instead the Teutonic provinces of Austria. Then we should have had an example of a homogeneous aggregate which would yet be an empire in the true and not merely in the honorific sense of the word; for that would be a composite of homogeneous Teutonic nations or, as we may conveniently call them, sub-nations, which would not naturally harbour any sentiment of separatism, but rather, drawn always to a natural unity, would form easily and inevitably a psychological and not merely a political unit.

But this form in its purity is now difficult to find. The United States are the example of such an aggregate, although from the

accident of their rule by a periodically elected President and not a hereditary monarch we do not associate the type with the idea of an empire at all. Still if the imperial aggregate is to be changed from a political to a psychological unit, it would seem that it must be done by reproducing *mutatis mutandis* something of the system of the United States, a system in which each element could preserve a sufficient local State independence and separate power of legislative and executive action and yet be part of an inseparable greater aggregate. This could be effected most easily where the elements are fairly homogeneous as it would be in a federation of Great Britain and her colonies.

A tendency to large homogeneous aggregations has shown itself recently in political thought, as in the dream of a Pan-Germanic empire, a great Russian and Pan-Slavic empire or the Pan-Islamic idea of a united Mahomedan world.¹ But these tendencies are usually associated with the control by this homogeneous aggregate over other elements heterogeneous to it under the old principle of military and political compulsion, the retention by Russia of Asiatic nations under her sway,² the seizure by Germany of wholly or partially non-Germanic countries and provinces, the control by the Caliphate of non-Moslem subjects.³ Even if these anomalies were absent, the actual arrangement of the world would lend itself with difficulty to a remodelling of empire on a racial or cultural basis. Vast aggregates of this kind would find enclaves in their dominion inhabited by elements wholly heterogeneous to them or mixed. Quite apart therefore from the resistance and refusal of kindred nations to renounce their cherished nationality and fuse themselves in combinations of this kind, there would be this incompatibility of mixed or heterogeneous factors, recalcitrant to the idea and the culture

¹ All three have been broken by the effects of revolution and war, but, if the nation idea dwindled, the last might still at some future date revive: the second, if Communism destroyed the national idea, may still be a possibility.

² This has been modified by the substitution of a Soviet Union claiming to unite these Asiatic peoples voluntarily with Russia: but one is not quite sure whether this is a permanent reality or only a temporary apparent phenomenon.

³ These two empires have now disappeared and there seems to be no possibility of their revival.

that sought to absorb them. Thus a Pan-Slavonic empire would necessitate the control of the Balkan Peninsula by Russia as the premier Slav State; but such a scheme would have to meet not only the independent Serbian nationality and the imperfect Slavism of the Bulgar but the quite incompatible Rumanian, Greek and Albanian elements. Thus it does not appear that this tendency towards vast homogeneous aggregates, although it has for some time played an important part in the world's history and is not exhausted or finally baffled, is ever likely to be the eventual solution; for even if it triumphed, it would have to meet in a greater or less degree the difficulties of the heterogeneous type. The true problem of empire therefore still remains, how to transform the artificial political unity of a heterogeneous empire, heterogeneous in racial composition, language and culture, into a real and psychological unity.

History gives us only one great and definite example of an attempt to solve this problem on this large scale and with antecedent conditions which could at all afford any guidance for the vast heterogeneous modern empires, those of Russia, England,⁴ France to which the problem is now offered. The old Chinese empire of the five nations, admirably organised, was not a case in point; for all its constituent parts were Mongolian in race and presented no formidable cultural difficulties. But the imperial Roman had to face essentially the same problems as the moderns minus one or two very important complications and he solved them up to a certain point with a masterly success. His empire endured through several centuries and, though often threatened with disruption, yet by its inner principle of unity and by its overpowering centripetal attraction triumphed over all disruptive tendencies. Its one failure was the bisection into the Eastern and Western Empires which hastened its final ending. Still when that end came it was not by a disruption from within but simply by the decaying of its centre of life. And it was not till

⁴ This empire has so altered its form into that of a free Commonwealth that the objection is no longer relevant; there is no longer an old-world empire but a free Commonwealth and a number of subject peoples moving rapidly towards self-government.

this central life faded that the pressure of the barbarian world without, to which its ruin is wrongly attributed, could prevail over its magnificent solidarity.

The Roman effected his sway by military conquest and military colonisation; but once that conquest was assured, he was not content with holding it together as an artificial political unity, nor did he trust solely to that political convenience of a good, efficient and well-organised government economically and administratively beneficent which made it at first acceptable to the conquered peoples. He had too sure a political instinct to be so easily satisfied; for it is certain that if he had stopped short there, the empire would have broken up at a much earlier date. The peoples under his sway would have preserved their sense of separate nationality and, once accustomed to Roman efficiency and administrative organisation, would inevitably have tended to the separate enjoyment of these advantages as independent organised nations. It was this sense of separate nationality which the Roman rule succeeded in blotting out wherever it established its own dominant influence. And this was done not by the stupid expedient of a brutal force after the Teutonic fashion, but by a peaceful pressure. Rome first compounded with the one rival culture that was superior in certain respects to her own and accepted it as part of her own cultural existence and even as its most valuable part; she created a Graeco-Roman civilisation, left the Greek tongue to spread and secure it in the East, but introduced it everywhere else by the medium of the Latin language and a Latin education and succeeded in peacefully overcoming the decadent or inchoate cultures of Gaul and her other conquered provinces. But since even this process might not have been sufficient to abolish all separatist tendency, she not only admitted her Latinised subjects to the highest military and civil offices and even to the imperial purple, so that within less than a century after Augustus, first an Italian Gaul and then an Iberian Spaniard held the name and power of the Caesars, but she proceeded rapidly enough to deprive of all vitality and then even nominally to abolish all the grades of civic privilege with which she had started and extended the full Roman citizen-

ship to all her subjects, Asiatic, European and African, without distinction.

The result was that the whole empire became psychologically and not only politically a single Graeco-Roman unity. Not only superior force or the recognition of Roman peace and good government, but all the desires, associations, pride, cultural affinities of the provinces made them firmly attached to the maintenance of the empire. Every attempt of provincial ruler or military chief to start provincial empires for their own benefit failed because it found no basis, no supporting tendency, no national sentiment and no sense of either material or any other advantage to be gained by the change in the population on whom the successful continuity of the attempt had to depend. So far the Roman succeeded; where he failed, it was due to the essential vice of his method. By crushing out, however peacefully, the living cultures or the incipient individuality of the peoples he ruled, he deprived these peoples of their sources of vitality, the roots of their force. No doubt he removed all positive causes of disruption and secured a passive force of opposition to all disruptive change; but his empire lived only at the centre and when that centre tended to become exhausted, there was no positive and abounding life throughout the body from which it could be replenished. In the end Rome could not even depend on a supply of vigorous individuals from the peoples whose life she had pressed out under the weight of a borrowed civilisation; she had to draw on the frontier barbarians. And when she fell to pieces, it was these barbarians and not the old peoples resurgent who became her heirs. For their barbarism was at least a living force and a principle of life, but the Graeco-Roman civilisation had become a principle of death. All the living forces were destroyed by whose contact it could have modified and renewed its own force. In the end it had itself to be destroyed in its form and its principle resown in the virgin field of the vital and vigorous culture of mediaeval Europe. What the Roman had not the wisdom to do by his organised empire,—for even the profoundest and surest political instinct is not wisdom,—had to be done by Nature herself in the loose but living unity of mediaeval Christendom.

The example of Rome has haunted the political imagination of Europe ever since. Not only has it been behind the Holy Roman Empire of Charlemagne and Napoleon's gigantic attempt and the German dream of a world-empire governed by Teutonic efficiency and Teutonic culture, but all the imperial nations, including France and England, have followed to a certain extent in its footsteps. But, significantly enough, every attempt at renewing the Roman success has failed. The modern nations have not been able to follow Rome completely in the lines she had traced out or if they tried to follow, have clashed against different conditions and either collapsed or been obliged to call a halt. It is as if Nature had said, "That experiment has been carried once to its logical consequences and once is enough. I have made new conditions; find you new means or at least mend and add to the old where they were deficient or went astray."

The European nations have extended their empires by the old Roman method of military conquest and colonisation, abandoning for the most part the pre-Roman principle of simple overlordship or hegemony which was practised by the Assyrian and Egyptian kings, the Indian States and the Greek cities. But this principle also has been sometimes used in the shape of the protectorate to prepare the more normal means of occupation. The colonies have not been of the pure Roman, but of a mixed Carthaginian and Roman type. Official and military, enjoying like the Roman colonies superior civic rights to the indigenous population, they have been at the same time and far more commercial colonies of exploitation. The nearest to the Roman type has been the English settlement in Ulster, while the German system in Poland developed under modern conditions the old Roman principle of expropriation. But these are exceptions, not the rule.

The conquered territory once occupied and secure, the modern nations have found themselves brought up short by a difficulty which they have not been able to surmount as the Romans surmounted it,—the difficulty of uprooting the indigenous culture and with it the indigenous sense of separateness. All these empires have at first carried with them the idea of imposing

their culture along with the flag, first simply as an instinct of the conqueror and as a necessary adjunct to the fact of political domination and a security for its permanence, but latterly with the conscious intention of extending, as it is somewhat pharisaically put, the benefits of civilisation to the “inferior” races. It cannot be said that the attempt has anywhere been very prosperous. It was tried with considerable thoroughness and ruthlessness in Ireland, but although the Irish speech was stamped out except in the wilds of Connaught and all distinctive signs of the old Irish culture disappeared, the outraged nationality simply clung to whatever other means of distinctiveness it could find, however exiguous, its Catholic religion, its Celtic race and nationhood, and even when it became Anglicised, refused to become English. The removal or slackening of the foreign pressure has resulted in a violent recoil, an attempt to revive the Gaelic speech, to reconstitute the old Celtic spirit and culture. The German failed to Prussianise Poland or even his own kin who speak his own language, the Alsatians. The Finn remained unconquerably Finnish in Russia. The mild Austrian methods left the Austrian Pole as Polish as his oppressed brother in German Posen. Accordingly there began to rise everywhere a growing sense of the inutility of the endeavour and the necessity of leaving the soul of the subject nation free, confining the action of the sovereign State to the enforcement of new administrative and economic conditions with as much social and cultural change as may be freely accepted or may come about by education and the force of circumstances.

The German, indeed, new and inexperienced in imperial methods, clung to the old Roman idea of assimilation which he sought to execute both by Roman and by un-Roman means. He showed even a tendency to go back beyond the Caesars of old to the methods of the Jew in Canaan and the Saxon in eastern Britain, methods of expulsion and massacre. But since he was after all modernised and had some sense of economic necessity and advantage, he could not carry out this policy with any thoroughness or in times of peace. Still he insisted on the old Roman method, sought to substitute German speech and culture for the indigenous and, as he could not do it by peaceful

pressure, he tried it by force. An attempt of this kind is bound to fail; instead of bringing about the psychological unity at which it aims, it succeeds only in accentuating the national spirit and plants a rooted and invincible hatred which is dangerous to the empire and may even destroy it if the opposed elements are not too small in number and weak in force. And if this effacing of heterogeneous cultures is impossible in Europe where the differences are only variations of a common type and there are only small and weak elements to overcome, it is obviously out of the question for those empires which have to deal with great Asiatic and African masses rooted for many centuries in an old and well-formed national culture. If a psychological unity has to be created, it must be by other means.

The impact of different cultures upon each other has not ceased but has rather been accentuated by the conditions of the modern world. But the nature of the impact, the ends towards which it moves and the means by which the ends can most successfully be worked out, are profoundly altered. The earth is in travail now of one common, large and flexible civilisation for the whole human race into which each modern and ancient culture shall bring its contribution and each clearly defined human aggregate shall introduce its necessary element of variation. In the working out of this aim, there must necessarily be some struggle for survival. The fittest to survive will be here all that can best serve the tendencies Nature is working out in humanity,—not only the tendencies of the hour, but the reviving tendencies of the past and the yet inchoate tendencies of the future. And it will be too all that can best help as liberating and combining forces, best make for adaptation and adjustment and for deliverance of the hidden sense of the great Mother in her strivings. But success in this struggle is worst and not best served by military violence or political pressure. German culture for good or ill was making rapid conquests throughout the world before the rulers of Germany were ill-advised enough to rouse the latent force of opposing ideals by armed violence. And even now that which is essential in it, the State idea and the organisation of the life of the community by the State which is common both to

German imperialism and to German socialism, is far more likely to succeed by the defeat of the former in the war than it could have done by its victory in a brute struggle.

This change in the movement and orientation of the world's tendencies points to a law of interchange and adaptation and to the emergence of a new birth out of the meeting of many elements. Only those imperial aggregates are likely to succeed and eventually endure which recognise the new law and shape their organisation to accord with it. Immediate victories of an opposite kind may indeed be gained and violence done to the law; but such present successes are won, as history has repeatedly shown, at the cost of a nation's whole future. The recognition of the new truth had already commenced as a result of increased communication and the widening of knowledge. The value of variations had begun to be acknowledged and the old arrogant claims of this or that culture to impose itself and crush out all others were losing their force and self-confidence when the old outworn creed suddenly leaped up armed with the German sword to vindicate itself, if it might, before it perished. The only result has been to give added force and clear recognition to the truth it sought to deny. The importance even of the smallest States, Belgium, Serbia,⁵ as cultural units in the European whole has been lifted almost to the dignity of a creed. The recognition of the value of Asiatic cultures, confined formerly to the thinker, scholar and artist, has now been brought into the popular mind by association on the battle-field. The theory of "inferior" races, an inferiority and superiority measured by approximation to one's own form of culture, has received what may well turn out to have been its death-blow. The seeds of a new order of things are being rapidly sown in the conscious mentality of the race.

This new turn of the impact of cultures shows itself most clearly where the European and the Asiatic meet. French culture in Northern Africa, English culture in India cease at once to be French or English and become simply the common European civilisation in face of the Asiatic; it is no longer an imperial

⁵ Now Yugoslavia.

domination intent to secure itself by assimilation, but continent parleying with continent. The political motive sinks into insignificance; the world-motive takes its place. And in this confrontation it is no longer a self-confident European civilisation that offers its light and good to the semi-barbarous Asiatic and the latter that gratefully accepts a beneficent transformation. Even adaptable Japan, after the first enthusiasm of acceptance, has retained all that is fundamental in her culture, and everywhere else the European current has met the opposition of an inner voice and force which cries halt to its victorious impetus.⁶ The East is on the whole, in spite of certain questionings and scruples, willing and, where not wholly willing, forced by circumstances and the general tendency of mankind to accept the really valuable parts of modern European culture, its science, its curiosity, its ideal of universal education and uplift, its abolition of privilege, its broadening, liberalising, democratic tendency, its instinct of freedom and equality, its call for the breaking down of narrow and oppressive forms, for air, space, light. But at a certain point the East refuses to proceed farther and that is precisely in the things which are deepest, most essential to the future of mankind, the things of the soul, the profound things of the mind and temperament. Here again all points not to substitution and conquest, but to mutual understanding and interchange, mutual adaptation and new formation.

The old idea is not entirely dead and will not die without a last struggle. There are still those who dream of a Christianised India, the English tongue permanently dominating if not replacing the indigenous languages, or the acceptance of European social forms and manners as the necessary precondition for an equal status between a European and Asiatic. But they are those who belong in spirit to a past generation and cannot value the signs of the hour which point to a new era. Christianity, for instance, has only succeeded where it could apply its one or two

⁶ There has been a recrudescence of the Europeanising turn in Turkey and in China reinforced by the influence of Bolshevik Russia. Wherever there is a retardatory orthodoxy to overcome, this movement is likely to appear, but only as a passing phase.

features of distinct superiority, the readiness to stoop and uplift the fallen and oppressed where the Hindu bound in the forms of caste would not touch nor succour, its greater swiftness to give relief where it is needed, in a word, the active compassion and helpfulness which it inherited from its parent Buddhism. Where it could not apply this lever, it has failed totally and even this lever it may easily lose; for the soul of India reawakened by the new impact is beginning to recover its lost tendencies. The social forms of the past are changing where they are unsuited to the new political and economic conditions and ideals or incompatible with the increasing urge towards freedom and equality; but there is no sign that anything but a new Asiatic society broadened and liberalised will emerge from this travail. The signs everywhere are the same; the forces everywhere work in the same sense. Neither France nor England has the power — and they are fast or slowly losing the desire — to destroy and replace the Islamic culture in Africa or the Indian in India. All they can do is to give what they have of value to be assimilated according to the needs and the inner spirit of the older nations.

It was necessary to dwell on this question because it is vital to the future of Imperialism. The replacement of the local by the imperial culture and as far as possible by the speech of the conqueror was essential to the old imperial theory, but the moment that becomes out of question and the very desire of it has to be renounced as impracticable, the old Roman model of empire ceases to be of any avail for the solution of the problem. Something of the Roman lesson remains valid, — those features especially that are essential to the very essence of imperialism and the meaning of empire; but a new model is demanded. That new model has already begun to evolve in obedience to the requirements of the age; it is the model of the federal or else the confederate empire. The problem we have to consider narrows itself down to this, is it possible to create a securely federated empire of vast extent and composed of heterogeneous races and cultures? And granting that in this direction lies the future, how can such an empire so artificial in appearance be welded into a natural and psychological unit?

Chapter VII

The Creation of the Heterogeneous Nation

THE PROBLEM of a federal empire founded on the sole foundation that is firm and secure, the creation of a true psychological unity,—an empire that has to combine heterogeneous elements,—resolves itself into two different factors, the question of the form and the question of the reality which the form is intended to serve. The former is of great practical importance, but the latter alone is vital. A form of unity may render possible, may favour or even help actively to create the corresponding reality, but it can never replace it. And, as we have seen, the true reality is in this order of Nature the psychological, since the mere physical fact of political and administrative union may be nothing more than a temporary and artificial creation destined to collapse irretrievably as soon as its immediate usefulness is over or the circumstances that favoured its continuance are radically or even seriously altered. The first question, then, that we have to consider is what this reality may be which it is intended to create in the form of a federal empire; and especially we have to consider whether it is to be merely an enlargement of the nation-type, the largest successful human aggregate yet evolved by Nature, or a new type of aggregate which is to exceed and must tend to supersede the nation, as that has replaced the tribe, the clan and the city or regional state.

The first natural idea of the human mind in facing such a problem is to favour the idea which most flatters and seems to continue its familiar notions. For the human mind is, in the mass, averse to a radical change of conception. It accepts change most easily when its reality is veiled by the continuation of a habitual form of things or else by a ceremonial, legal, intellectual or sentimental fiction. It is such a fiction that some think to

create as a bridge from the nation-idea to the empire-idea of political unity. That which unites men most securely now is the physical unity of a common country to live in and defend, a common economic life dependent on that geographical oneness and the sentiment of the motherland which grows up around the physical and economic fact and either creates a political and administrative unity or keeps it to a secure permanence once it has been created. Let us then extend this powerful sentiment by a fiction; let us demand of the heterogeneous constituents of the empire that each shall regard not his own physical motherland but the empire as the mother or at least, if he clings to the old sentiment, learn to regard the empire first and foremost as the greater mother. A variation of this idea is the French notion of the mother country, France; all the other possessions of the empire, although in English phraseology they would rather be classed as dependencies in spite of the large share of political rights conceded to them, are to be regarded as colonies of the mother country, grouped together in idea as France beyond the seas and educated to centre their national sentiments around the greatness, glory and loveliness of France the common mother. It is a notion natural to the Celtic-Latin temperament, though alien to the Teutonic, and it is supported by a comparative weakness of race and colour prejudice and by that remarkable power of attraction and assimilation which the French share with all the Celtic nations.

The power, the often miraculous power of such fictions ought not for a moment to be ignored. They constitute Nature's most common and effective method when she has to deal with her own ingrained resistance to change in her mentalised animal, man. Still, there are conditions without which a fiction cannot succeed. It must in the first place be based on a plausible superficial resemblance. It must lead to a realisable fact strong enough either to replace the fiction itself or eventually to justify it. And this realisable fact must progressively realise itself and not remain too long in the stage of the formless nebula. There was a time when these conditions were less insistently necessary, a time when the mass of men were more imaginative,

unsophisticated, satisfied with a sentiment or an appearance; but as the race advances, it becomes more mentally alive, self-conscious, critical and quick to seize dissonances between fact and pretension. Moreover, the thinker is abroad; his words are listened to and understood to an extent unprecedented in the known history of mankind: and the thinker tends to become more and more an inquisitor, a critic, an enemy of fictions.

Is then this fiction based upon a realisable parallel,—in other words, is it true that the true imperial unity when realised will be only an enlarged national unity? or, if not, what is the realisable fact which this fiction is intended to prepare? There have been plenty of instances in history of the composite nation and, if this parallel is to be accepted as effective, it is such a composite nation on a large scale which it is the business of the federal empire to create. We must, therefore, cast a glance at the most typical instances of the successful composite nation and see how far the parallel applies and whether there are difficulties in the way which point rather to the necessity of a new evolution than to the variation of an old success. To have a just idea of the difficulties may help us to see how they can be overcome.

The instance most before our eyes both of the successfully evolved composite or heterogeneous nation and of the fortunately evolving heterogeneous empire is that of the British nation in the past and the British Empire in the present,—successfully, but, fortunately, with a qualification; for it is subject to the perils of a mass of problems yet unsolved.¹ The British nation has been composed of an English-speaking Anglo-Norman England, a Welsh-speaking Cymric Wales, a half-Saxon, half-Gaelic English-speaking Scotland and, very imperfectly, very partially, of a Gaelic Ireland with a mainly Anglo-Scotch colony that held it indeed by force to the united body but was never able to compel a true union. Ireland was, until recently, the element of failure in this formation and it is only now and under another form and other circumstances than its other members that

¹ It must be remembered that this was written some decades ago and circumstances and the Empire itself have wholly changed; the problem, as it was then, no longer poses itself.

some kind of unity with the whole, still precarious and with the empire, not with the British nation, is becoming possible, although even yet it has hardly begun to be real.² What were the determining circumstances of this general success and this partial failure and what light do they shed on the possibilities of the larger problem?

In building up her human aggregates, Nature has followed in general principle the same law that she observes in her physical aggregates. She has provided first a natural body, next, a common life and vital interest for the constituents of the body, last, a conscious mind or sense of unity and a centre or governing organ through which that common ego-sense can realise itself and act. There must be in her ordinary process either a common bond of descent or past association that will enable like to adhere to like and distinguish itself from unlike and a common habitation, a country so disposed that all who inhabit within its natural boundaries are under a sort of geographical necessity to unite. In earlier times when communities were less firmly rooted to the soil, the first of these conditions was the more important. In settled modern communities the second predominates; but the unity of the race, pure or mixed—for it need not have been one in its origin—remains a factor of importance, and strong disparity and difference may easily create serious difficulties in the way of the geographical necessity imposing itself with any permanence. In order that it may impose itself, there must be a considerable force of the second natural condition, that is to say, a necessity of economic unity or habit of common sustenance and a necessity of political unity or habit of common vital organisation for survival, functioning and aggrandisement. And in order that this second condition may fulfil itself in complete force, there must be nothing to depress or destroy the third in its creation or its continuance. Nothing must be done which will have the result of emphasising disunity in sentiment or perpetuating the feeling of separateness from the totality of the

² This was written when Home Rule seemed to be a possible solution; the failure has now become a settled fact and Ireland has become the independent Republic of Ireland.

rest of the organism; for that will tend to make the centre or governing organ psychologically unrepresentative of the whole and therefore not a true centre of its ego-sense. But we must remember that separatism is not the same thing as particularism which may well coexist with unity; it is the sentiment of the impossibility of true union that separates, not the mere fact of difference.

The geographical necessity of union was obviously present in the forming of the British nation; the conquest of Wales and Ireland and the union with Scotland were historical events which merely represented the working of this necessity; but the unity of race and past association were wholly absent and had with greater or less difficulty to be created. It was effected successfully with Wales and Scotland in a greater or less lapse of time, not at all with Ireland. Geographical necessity is only a relative force; it can be overridden by a powerful sentiment of disunion when nothing is done effectively to dissolve the disintegrating impulsion. Even when the union has been politically effected, it tends to be destroyed, especially when there is within the geographical unity a physical barrier or line of division sufficiently strong to be the base of conflicting economic interests,—as in that which divides Belgium and Holland, Sweden and Norway, Ireland and Great Britain. In the case of Ireland, the British rulers not only did nothing to bridge over or dissolve this line of economic division and counteract the sentiment of a separate body, a separate physical country, in the Irish mind, but by a violent miscalculation of cause and effect they emphasised both in the strongest possible manner.

In the first place, the economic life and prosperity of Ireland were deliberately crushed in the interests of British trade and commerce. After that it was of little use to bring about, by means which one shrinks from scrutinising, the political “union” of the two islands in a common legislature, a common governing organ; for that governing organ was not a centre of psychological unity. Where the most vital interests were not only different but in conflict, it could only represent the continued control and assertion of the interests of the “predominant partner” and the

continued subjection and denial of the interests of the foreign body bound by legislative fetters to the larger mass but not united through a real fusion. The famine which depopulated Ireland while England thrived and prospered was Nature's terrible testimony to the sinister character of this "union" which was not unity but the sharpest opposition of the most essential interests. The Irish movements of Home Rule and separatism were the natural and inevitable expression of Ireland's will to survive; they amounted to nothing more than the instinct of self-preservation divining and insisting on the one obvious means of self-preservation.

In human life economic interests are those which are, ordinarily, violated with the least impunity; for they are bound up with the life itself and the persistent violation of them, if it does not destroy the oppressed organism, provokes necessarily the bitterest revolt and ends in one of Nature's inexorable retaliations. But in the third order of the natural conditions also British statesmanship in Ireland committed an equally radical mistake in its attempt to get rid by violence of all elements of Irish particularism. Wales like Ireland was acquired by conquest, but no such elaborate attempt was made to assimilate it; after the first unease that follows a process of violence, after one or two abortive attempts at resistance, Wales was left to undergo the peaceful pressure of natural conditions and its preservation of its own race and language has been no obstacle to the gradual union of the Cymric race and the Saxon in a common British nationality. A similar non-interference, apart from the minor problem of the Highland clans, has resulted in a still more rapid fusion of the Scotch race with the English. There is now in the island of Great Britain a composite British race with a common country bound together by the community of mingled blood, by a settled past association in oneness, by geographical necessity, by a common political and economic interest, by the realisation of a common ego. The opposite process in Ireland, the attempt to substitute an artificial process where the working of natural conditions with a little help of management and conciliation would have sufficed, the application of old-world methods to a

new set of circumstances has resulted in the opposite effect. And when the error was discovered, the result of the past Karma had to be recognised and the union has had to be effected through the method demanded by Irish interests and Irish particularist sentiments, first by the offer of Home Rule and then by the creation of the Free State and not under a complete legislative union.

This result may well reach beyond itself; it may create the necessity of an eventual remodelling of the British Empire and perhaps of the whole Anglo-Celtic nation on new lines with the principle of federation at the base. For Wales and Scotland have not been fused into England with the same completeness as Breton, Alsatian, Basque and Provençal were fused into the indivisible unity of France. Although no economic interest, no pressing physical necessity demands the application of the federative principle to Wales and Scotland, yet a sufficient though minor particularist sentiment remains that may yet feel hereafter the repercussion of the Irish settlement and awake to the satisfaction and convenience of a similar recognition for the provincial separateness of these two countries. And this sentiment is bound to receive fresh strength and encouragement by the practical working out of the federative principle in the reorganisation, which one day may become inevitable, of the colonial empire hitherto governed by Great Britain on the basis of Home Rule without federation.³ The peculiar circumstances both of the national and the colonial formation and expansion of the races inhabiting the British Isles have indeed been such as to make it almost appear that this Empire has throughout been intended and prepared by Nature in her workings to be the great field of experiment for the creation of this new type in the history of human aggregates, the heterogeneous federal empire.

³ Home Rule now replaced by Dominion Status which means a confederation in fact though not yet in form.

Chapter VIII

The Problem of a Federated Heterogeneous Empire

IF THE building up of a composite nation in the British Isles was from the beginning a foregone conclusion, a geographical and economic necessity only prevented in its entire completion by the most violent and perverse errors of statesmanship, the same cannot be said of the swifter, but still gradual and almost unconscious process by which the colonial empire of Great Britain has been evolving to a point at which it can become a real unity. It was not so long ago that the eventual separation of the colonies carrying with it the evolution of Australia and Canada at least into young independent nations was considered the inevitable end of the colonial empire, its one logical and hardly regrettable conclusion.

There were sound reasons for this mental attitude. The geographical necessity of union was entirely absent; on the contrary, distance created a positive mental separation. Each colony had a clear-cut separate physical body and seemed predestined, on the lines on which human evolution was then running, to become a separate nation. The economic interests of the mother country and the colonies were disparate, aloof from each other, often opposite as was shown by the adoption by the latter of Protection as against the British policy of Free Trade. Their sole political interest in the Empire was the safety given by the British fleet and army against foreign invasion; they did not share and took no direct interest in the government of the Empire or the shaping of its destinies. Psychologically, the sole tie was a frail memory of origin and a tepid sentiment which might easily evaporate and which was combated by a definite separatist sentiment and the natural inclination of strongly

marked human groupings to make for themselves an independent life and racial type. The race origin varied, in Australia British, in South Africa predominantly Dutch, in Canada half French, half English; but in all three countries habits of life, political tendencies, a new type of character and temperament and culture, if it can be so called, were being developed which were as the poles asunder from the old British culture, temperament, habits of life and social and political tendencies. On the other hand, the mother country derived no tangible political, military or economic advantage from these offshoots, only the prestige which the possession of an empire in itself could give her. On both sides, therefore, all the circumstances pointed to an eventual peaceful separation which would leave England only the pride of having been the mother of so many new nations.

Owing to the drawing together of the world by physical Science, the resulting tendency towards larger aggregates, changed political world conditions and the profound political, economic and social changes towards which Great Britain has been moving, all the conditions now are altered and it is easy to see that the fusion of the colonial empire into a great federated commonwealth or something that can plausibly go by that name is practically inevitable. There are difficulties in the way,—economic difficulties, to begin with; for, as we have seen, geographical separation does tend towards a divergence, often an opposition of economic interests, and an imperial Zollverein, natural enough between the States of the German Empire or a Central European Confederation such as was planned by one side in the great war, would be an artificial creation as between widely separated countries and would need constant vigilance and tender handling; yet, at the same time, political unity tends to demand economic union as its natural concomitant and seems to itself hardly complete without it. Political and other difficulties also there are which may yet become manifest and destroy the imperial formation if the practical process of unification is rashly and unwisely handled; but none of these need be insuperable or even a real stumbling-block. The race difficulty which

was at one time serious and menacing in South Africa and is not yet eliminated, need not be more formidable than in Canada; for in both countries there is the English element which, whether a majority or minority, can by friendly union or fusion attach the foreign element to the Empire. Nor is there any such powerful outside attraction or clash of formed cultures or incompatible temperaments as made so difficult the real union of the Austrian Empire.

All that is needed is that England should continue to handle the problem with a right instinct and not commit anything like her fatal American blunder or the mistake she committed but fortunately receded from in South Africa. She has to keep it always in mind that her possible destiny is not that of a dominant country compelling all the parts of her dominions to uniformity with her or to perpetual subordination, but that of the centre of a great confederation of States and nations coalescing by her attraction into a new supra-national unity. Here the first condition is that she must scrupulously respect the free internal life and will, the social, cultural, economic tendencies of the colonies while giving them an equal part with herself in the management of the great common questions of the Empire. She herself can be nothing more in the future of such a new type of aggregate than a political and cultural centre, the clamp or nodus of the union. Given this orientation of the governing mind in England, nothing short of some unforeseen cataclysm can prevent the formation of an empire-unit in which Home Rule with a loose British suzerainty will be replaced by Federation with Home Rule as its basis.¹

But the problem becomes much more difficult when the question of the other two great constituent parts of the Empire arises, Egypt and India,—so difficult that the first temptation of the political mind, supported by a hundred prejudices and existing interests, was naturally to leave the problem alone and

¹ All this, provided the Empire continues to be victorious and prosper; provided, too, Britain's foreign policy does not make the obligations of federated unity too irksome to the smaller members.

create a federated colonial empire with these two great countries as subject dependencies.² It is obvious that such a solution could not last and, if obstinately persisted in, would lead to the most undesirable results, if not to eventual disaster. The renascence of India is as inevitable as the rising of tomorrow's sun, and the renascence of a great nation of three hundred millions with so peculiar a temperament, such unique traditions and ideas of life, so powerful an intelligence and so great a mass of potential energies cannot but be one of the most formidable phenomena of the modern world. It is evident that the new federated empire-unit cannot afford to put itself in permanent antagonism to this renascent nation of three hundred millions and that the short-sighted statesmanship of those servants of today and its interests who would stave off the inevitable issue as long as possible cannot be allowed to prevail. This has indeed been recognised in principle; the difficulty will be in the handling of the problems that will arise when the practical solution of the Indian question can no longer be put off to an uncertain future.

The nature of the difficulties in the way of a practical union between such different aggregates is sufficiently obvious. There is first that geographical separateness which has always made India a country and a people apart, even when it was unable to realise its political unity and was receiving by invasion and mutual communication of cultures the full shock of the civilisations around it. There is the mere mass of its population of three hundred millions whose fusion in any sort with the rest of the nations of the Empire would be a far other matter than the fusion of the comparatively insignificant populations of Australia, Canada and South Africa. There is the salient line of demarcation by race, colour and temperament between the European and the Asiatic. There is the age-long past, the absolute divergence of origins, indelible associations, inherent tendencies

² The question of Egypt has already been settled since the above was written, and in a sense adverse to union. India, already even then on the road to a free status, has already achieved it, although its two separating parts have figured for a time as dominions and one of them may possibly adhere for some time to that status while the other has adopted, although an independent Republic, a new formula of adhesion to the Commonwealth.

which forbid any possibility of the line of demarcation being effaced or minimised by India's acceptance of an entirely or predominantly English or European culture. All these difficulties need not necessarily mean the insolubility of the problem; on the contrary, we know that no difficulty can be presented to the human mind which the human mind, if it will, cannot solve. We will assume that in this case there will be both the will and the necessary wisdom; that British statesmanship will commit no irreparable error; that from the minor errors which it cannot fail to commit in the handling of such a problem, it will retreat in time, as has been its temperament and habit in the past; and that, accordingly, a little sooner or a little later some kind of psychological unity may possibly be created between these two widely disparate aggregates of the human race.

The question remains under what conditions this is possible and of what nature the unity will be. It is clear that the governing race must apply with a far greater scrupulosity and firm resolution the principle it has already applied elsewhere with such success and the departure from which has always after a certain stage been so detrimental to its own wider interests. It must allow, respect and even favour actively the free and separate evolution of India subject to the unity of the Empire. So long as India does not entirely govern herself, her interests must take a first place in the mind of those who do govern her, and when she has self-government, it must be of a kind which will not hamper her in her care of her own interests. She must not, for example, be forced into an imperial Zollverein which under present conditions would be disastrous to her economic future until or unless these conditions are changed by a resolute policy of stimulating and encouraging her industrial development, even though that will necessarily be prejudicial to many existing commercial interests within the Empire. No effort must be made to impose English culture or conditions upon her growing life or make them a *sine qua non* for her recognition among the free peoples of the Empire and no effort of her own to defend and develop her own culture and characteristic development must be interfered with or opposed. Her dignity, sentiments, national

aspirations must be increasingly recognised in practice as well as in principle. Given these conditions, the security of her political and economic interests and a care for her own untroubled growth might keep her in the Empire and time might be given for the rest, for the more subtle and difficult part of the process of unification to fulfil itself more or less rapidly.

The unity created could never take the form of an Indo-British empire; that is a figment of the imagination, a chimera which it would never do to hunt to the detriment of the real possibilities. The possibilities might be, first, a firm political unity secured by common interests; secondly, a sound commercial interchange and mutual industrial helpfulness on healthy lines; thirdly, a new cultural relation of the two most important sections of humanity, Europe and Asia, in which they could exchange all that is great and valuable in either as equal members of one human household; and finally, it might be hoped, in place of the common past associations of political and economic development and military glory which have chiefly helped in building up the nation-unit, the greater glory of association and close partnership in the building of a new, rich and various culture for the life of a nobler humanity. For such, surely, should be the type of the supra-national unit which is the possible next step in the progressive aggregation of humanity.

It is evident that this next step would have no reason or value except as a stage which would make possible by practical demonstration and the creation of new habits of sentiment, mental attitude and common life the unity of the whole human race in a single family. The mere creation of a big empire-unit would be a vulgar and even reactionary phenomenon if it had not this greater issue beyond it. The mere construction of a multicoloured Indo-British unity arrayed in armour of battle and divided by commercial, political and military egoism from other huge unities, Russian, French, German, American, would be a retrogression, not an advance. If at all, therefore, this kind of development is destined,—for we have only taken the instance of the British Empire as the best example of a possible new type,—then it must be as such a half-way house and with this ideal

before us that it can be accepted by the lovers of humanity who are not bound by the limitations of the old local patriotism of nation against nation. Always provided that the political and administrative means are those which are to lead us to the unity of the human race,—for on that doubtful hypothesis we are at present proceeding. The probability of such an eventual development is as yet scanty, for the temper both of Muslim and Hindu India is still overwhelmingly in the direction of independence and nothing has been done on the English side to build up the other possibility. But the possibility had still to be considered, as it is not utterly out of question that under changed conditions there might be an acceptance of virtual independence in place of a separate and isolated autonomy. If so, it would be a sign that one of Nature's steps towards the final result was leading towards this passage. This much could be said for it that if such a combination of two so disparate peoples and cultures proved to be possible, the greater question of a world-union would begin to bear a less remote appearance.³

³ Things have taken, as was practically inevitable all through, a different turn; but this part of the chapter has been left as it was because the consideration of this possibility was necessary to the theme. The failure of that possible experiment to come anywhere near realisation is an illustration of the fact that this intermediate stage in the progress towards a total world-union presents difficulties which make it almost impossible. Its place has been taken by such agglomerations as the Commonwealth, the Soviet Union and such possibilities as the proposed United States of Europe and other continental combinations such as are coming into being as between the two Americas and may some day be possible in Asia.

Chapter IX

The Possibility of a World-Empire

THE PROGRESS of the imperial idea from the artificial and constructive stage to the position of a realised psychological truth controlling the human mind with the same force and vitality which now distinguish the national idea above all other group motives, is only a possibility, not a certainty of the future. It is even no more than a vaguely nascent possibility and so long as it has not emerged from this inchoate condition in which it is at the mercy of the much folly of statesmen, the formidable passions of great human masses, the obstinate self-interest of established egoisms, we can have no surety that it will not even now die still-born. And if so, what other possibility can there be of the unification of mankind by political and administrative means? That can only come about if either the old ideal of a single world-empire be, by developments not now apparently possible, converted into an accomplished fact or if the opposite ideal of a free association of free nations overcome the hundred and one powerful obstacles which stand in the way of its practical realisation.

The idea of a world-empire imposed by sheer force is in direct opposition, as we have seen, to the new conditions which the progressive nature of things has introduced into the modern world. Nevertheless, let us isolate these new conditions from the problem and admit the theoretical possibility of a single great nation imposing its political rule and its predominant culture on the whole earth as Rome once imposed hers on the Mediterranean peoples and on Gaul and Britain. Or let us even suppose that one of the great nations might possibly succeed in overcoming all its rivals by force and diplomacy and afterwards, respecting the culture and separate internal life of its subject nations, secure its sway by the attraction of a world-peace, of beneficent administration and of an unparalleled organisation

of human knowledge and human resources for the amelioration of the present state of mankind. We have to see whether this theoretical possibility is at all likely to encounter the conditions by which it can convert itself into a practical possibility, and if we consider, we shall find that no such conditions now exist: on the contrary, all are against the realisation of such a colossal dream—it could only come about by immense changes as yet hidden in the secrecy of the future.

It is commonly supposed that the impulse which brought Germany to her recent struggle with the world was rooted in even such a dream of empire. How far there was any such conscious intention in her directing minds is a question open to some doubt; but it is certain that, if she had prevailed in the war as she had first expected, the situation created would inevitably have led her to this greater endeavour. For she would have enjoyed a dominant position such as no nation has yet possessed during the known period of the world's history; and the ideas which have recently governed the German intellect, the idea of her mission, her race superiority, the immeasurable excellence of her culture, her science, her organisation of life and her divine right to lead the earth and to impose on it her will and her ideals, these with the all-grasping spirit of modern commercialism would have inevitably impelled her to undertake universal domination as a divinely given task. The fact that a modern nation and indeed the nation most advanced in that efficiency, that scientific utilisation of Science, that spirit of organisation, State help and intelligent dealing with national and social problems and ordering of economic well-being which Europe understands by the word civilisation,—the fact that such a nation should be possessed and driven by such ideas and impulses is certainly a proof that the old gods are not dead, the old ideal of dominant Force conquering, governing and perfecting the world is still a vital reality and has not let go its hold on the psychology of the human race. Nor is there any certainty that the recent war has killed these forces and this ideal; for the war was decided by force meeting force, by organisation triumphing over organisation, by the superior or

at any rate the more fortunate utilisation of those very weapons which constituted the real strength of the great aggressive Teutonic Power. The defeat of Germany by her own weapons could not of itself kill the spirit then incarnate in Germany; it may well lead merely to a new incarnation of it, perhaps in some other race or empire, and the whole battle would then have to be fought over again. So long as the old gods are alive, the breaking or depression of the body which they animate is a small matter, for they know well how to transmigrate. Germany overthrew the Napoleonic spirit in France in 1813 and broke the remnants of her European leadership in 1870; the same Germany became the incarnation of that which it had overthrown. The phenomenon is easily capable of renewal on a more formidable scale.

Nor was the failure of Germany any more a proof of the impossibility of this imperial dream than the previous failure of Napoleon. For the Teutonic combination lacked all the necessary conditions except one for the success of so vast an aim. It had the strongest military, scientific and national organisation which any people has yet developed, but it lacked the gigantic driving impulse which could alone bring an attempt so colossal to fruition, the impulse which France possessed in a much greater degree in the Napoleonic era. It lacked the successful diplomatic genius which creates the indispensable conditions of success. It lacked the companion force of sea-power which is even more necessary than military superiority to the endeavour of world-domination, and by its geographical position and the encircling position of its enemies it was especially open to all the disadvantages which must accompany the mastery of the seas by its natural adversary. The combination of overwhelming sea-power with overwhelming land-power¹ can alone bring so vast an enterprise into the domain of real possibility; Rome itself could only hope for something like a world-empire when it had destroyed the superior maritime force of Carthage. Yet so entirely did German statesmanship miscalculate the problem

¹ But now also, in a far greater degree, overwhelming air-power.

that it entered into the struggle with the predominant maritime Power of the world already ranked in the coalition of its enemies. Instead of concentrating its efforts against this one natural adversary, instead of utilising the old hostility of Russia and France against England, its maladroit and brutal diplomacy had already leagued these former enemies against itself; instead of isolating England, it had succeeded only in isolating itself and the manner in which it began and conducted the war still farther separated it morally and gave an added force to the physical isolation effected by the British blockade. In its one-sided pursuit of a great military concentration of Central Europe and Turkey, it had even wantonly alienated the one maritime Power which might have been on its side.

It is conceivable that the imperial enterprise may be renewed at some future date in the world's history by a nation or by statesmen better situated, better equipped, gifted with a subtler diplomatic genius, a nation as much favoured by circumstances, temperament and fortune as was Rome in the ancient world. What then would be the necessary conditions for its success? In the first place, its aim would have small chances of prospering if it could not repeat that extraordinary good luck by which Rome was enabled to meet its possible rivals and enemies one by one and avoid a successful coalition of hostile forces. What possibility is there of such a fortunate progress in a world so alert and instructed as the modern where everything is known, spied on, watched by jealous eyes and active minds under the conditions of modern publicity and swift world-wide communication? The mere possession of a dominant position is enough to set the whole world on its guard and concentrate its hostility against the Power whose secret ambitions it instinctively feels. Therefore such a fortunate succession would only seem to be possible if, in the first place, it were carried out half unconsciously without any fixed and visible ambition on the part of the advancing Power to awaken the general jealousy and, secondly, by a series of favouring occurrences which would lead so near to the desired end that it would be within the grasp before those who could still prevent it had awakened to its possibility.

If, for instance, there were a series of struggles between the four or five great Powers now dominating the world, each of which left the aggressor broken without hope of recovery and without any new Power arising to take its place, it is conceivable that at the end one of them would be left in a position of such natural predominance gained without any deliberate aggression, gained at least apparently in resisting the aggression of others as to put world-empire naturally into its grasp. But with the present conditions of life, especially with the ruinous nature of modern war, such a succession of struggles, quite natural and possible in former times, seems to be beyond the range of actual possibilities.

We must then assume that the Power moving towards world-domination would at some time find inevitably a coalition formed against it by almost all the Powers capable of opposing it and this with the sympathy of the world at their back. Given even the happiest diplomacy, such a moment seems inevitable. It must then possess such a combined and perfectly organised military and naval predominance as to succeed in this otherwise unequal struggle. But where is the modern empire that can hope to arrive at such a predominance? Of those that already exist Russia might well arrive one day at an overwhelming military power to which the present force of Germany would be a trifle; but that it should combine with this force by land a corresponding sea-power is unthinkable. England has enjoyed hitherto an overwhelming naval predominance which it might so increase under certain conditions as to defy the world in arms;² but it could not even with conscription and the aid of all its colonies compass anything like a similar force by land,—unless indeed it created conditions under which it could utilise all the military possibilities of India. Even then we have only to think of the formidable masses and powerful empires that it must be prepared to meet and we shall see that the creation of this double predominance is a contingency which the facts themselves show to be, if not chimerical, at least highly improbable.

² This is no longer true since the enormous increase of the American Navy.

Given even largely superior numbers on the side of its possible enemies, a nation might conceivably prevail over the coalition of its opponents by a superior science and a more skilful use of its resources. Germany relied on its superior science for the successful issue of its enterprise; and the principle on which it proceeded was sound. But in the modern world Science is a common possession and even if one nation steals such a march on the others as to leave them in a position of great inferiority at the beginning, yet experience has shown that given a little time,—and a powerful coalition is not likely to be crushed at the first blow,—the lost ground can be rapidly made up or at least methods of defence developed which will largely neutralise the advantage gained. For success, therefore, we should have to suppose the development by the ambitious nation or empire of a new science or new discoveries not shared by the rest which would place it in something like the position of superiority over greater numbers which Cortez and Pizarro enjoyed over the Aztecs and Peruvians. The superiority of discipline and organisation which gave the advantage to the ancient Romans or to the Europeans in India is no longer sufficient for so vast a purpose.

We see, therefore, that the conditions for the successful pursuit of world-empire are such that we need hardly take this mode of unification as within the bounds of practical possibility. That it may again be attempted, is possible; that it will fail, may almost be prophesied. At the same time, we have to take into account the surprises of Nature, the large field we have to allow to the unexpected in her dealings with us. Therefore we cannot pronounce this consummation an absolute impossibility. On the contrary, if that be her intention, she will suddenly or gradually create the necessary means and conditions. But even if it were to come about, the empire so created would have so many forces to contend with that its maintenance would be more difficult than its creation, and either its early collapse would bring the whole problem again into the field for a better solution or else it would have, by stripping itself of the elements of force and domination which inspired its attempt, to contradict the essential aim of its great effort. That, however, belongs to another side of our

subject which we must postpone for the moment. At present we may say that if the gradual unification of the world by the growth of great heterogeneous empires forming true psychological unities is only a vague and nascent possibility, its unification by a single forceful imperial domination has passed or is passing out of the range of possibilities and can only come about by a new development of the unexpected out of the infinite surprises of Nature.

Chapter X

The United States of Europe

WE HAVE had to dwell so long upon the possibilities of the Empire-group because the evolution of the imperial State is a dominating phenomenon of the modern world; it governs the political tendencies of the later part of the nineteenth and earlier part of the twentieth centuries very much as the evolution of the free democratised nation governed the age which preceded ours. The dominant idea of the French Revolution was the formula of the free and sovereign people and, in spite of the cosmopolitan element introduced into the revolutionary formula by the ideal of fraternity, this idea became in fact the assertion of the free, independent, democratically self-governed nation. That ideal had not at the time of the great war wholly worked itself out even in the occidental world; for central Europe was only partly democratised and Russia had only just begun to turn its face towards the common goal; and even now there are still subject European peoples or fragments of peoples.¹ Nevertheless, with whatever imperfections, the idea of the free democratic nation had practically triumphed in all America and Europe. The peoples of Asia have equally accepted this governing ideal of the nineteenth century, and though the movements of democratic nationalism in the eastern countries, Turkey, Persia, India, China, were not fortunate in their first attempts at self-realisation, the profound and wide-spread working of the idea cannot be doubted by any careful observer. Whatever modifications may arrive, whatever new tendencies intervene, whatever reactions oppose, it could hardly then be doubted that the principal gifts of the French Revolution must remain and be universalised as permanent acquisitions, indispensable elements

¹ No longer an evident fact, although the substitution of a state of vassalage may still be there.

in the future order of the world,—national self-consciousness and self-government, freedom and enlightenment for the people and so much social equality and justice at least as is indispensable to political liberty; for with any form of fixed and rigid inequality democratic self-government is incompatible.

But before the great nineteenth-century impulse could work itself out everywhere, before even it could realise itself entirely in Europe, a new tendency has intervened and a new idea seized on the progressive mind of humanity. This is the ideal of the perfectly organised State. Fundamentally, the ideal of the perfectly organised State is socialistic and it is based on the second word of the great revolutionary formula, equality, just as the movement of the nineteenth century centered round the first, liberty. The first impulse given by the great European upheaval attained only to a certain kind of political equality. An incomplete social levelling still left untouched the one inequality and the one form of political preponderance which no competitive society can eliminate, the preponderance of the haves over the have-nots, the inequality between the more successful in the struggle of life and the less successful which is rendered inevitable by difference of capacity, unequal opportunity and the handicap of circumstance and environment. Socialism seeks to get rid of this persistent inequality by destroying the competitive form of society and substituting the cooperative. A cooperative form of human society existed formerly in the shape of the commune; but the restoration of the commune as a unit would imply practically the return to the old city state, and as this is not now possible with the larger groupings and greater complexities of modern life, the socialistic idea could only be realised through the rigorously organised national State. To eliminate poverty, not by the crude idea of equal distribution but by the holding of all property in common and its management through the organised State, to equalise opportunity and capacity as far as possible through universal education and training, again by means of the organised State, is the fundamental idea of modern Socialism. It implies an abrogation or at least a rigorous diminution of all individual liberty. Democratic Socialism still clings indeed to the

nineteenth-century ideal of political freedom; it insists on the equal right of all in the State to choose, judge and change their own governors, but all other liberty it is ready to sacrifice to its own central idea.

The progress of the socialistic idea would seem therefore to lead towards the evolution of a perfectly organised national State which would provide for and control the education and training, manage and govern all the economic activities and for that purpose as well as for the assurance of perfect efficiency, morality, well-being and social justice, order the whole or at any rate the greater part of the external and internal life of its component individuals. It would effect, in fact, by organised State control what earlier societies attempted by social pressure, rigorous rule of custom, minute code and Shastra. This was always an inherently inevitable development of the revolutionary ideal. It started to the surface at first under pressure of external danger in the government of France by the Jacobins during the Reign of Terror; it has been emerging and tending to realise itself under pressure of an inner necessity throughout the later part of the nineteenth century; it has emerged not completely but with a first rudimentary sketch of completeness by the combination of the inner and the outer necessity during the present war. What was before only an ideal towards which some imperfect initial steps alone were immediately possible, has now become a realisable programme with its entire feasibility established by a convincing though necessarily hasty and imperfect practical demonstration. It is true that in order to realise it even political liberty has had to be temporarily abolished; but this, it may be argued, is only an accident of the moment, a concession to temporary necessity. In freer conditions what was done partly and for a time by governments which the people have consented to invest with an absolute and temporarily irresponsible authority, may be done, when there is no pressure of war, wholly and permanently by the self-governing democratic State.

In that case the near future of the human group would seem to be the nation, self-governing, politically free, but aiming at perfect social and economic organisation and ready for that

purpose to hand over all individual liberty to the control of the organised national State.² As France was in the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth century the great propagandist and the experimental workshop of political liberty and equality, so Germany has been in the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century the chief propagandist and the experimental workshop of the idea of the organised State. There the theory of Socialism has taken rise and there its propaganda has been most effective, so that a large proportion of the nation committed itself to the new gospel; there also the great socialistic measures and those which have developed the control of the individual by the State for the common good and efficiency of the nation have been most thoroughly and admirably conceived and executed. It matters little that this was done by an anti-socialistic, militarist and aristocratic government; the very fact is a proof of the irresistible strength of the new tendency, and the inevitable transference of the administrative power from its past holders to the people was all that was needed to complete its triumph.

Throughout the recent decades we have seen the growth of German ideas and the increasing tendency to follow German methods of State interference and State control in other countries, even in England, the home of individualism. The defeat of Germany in the European war no more spelt the defeat of her ideals than the defeat of revolutionary and Napoleonic France by the European coalition and even the temporary triumph of the monarchic and aristocratic system prevented the spread of her new ideas over all Europe. Even if German militarism and Junkerism were destroyed, the collapse of the imperial form of government can only hasten the more thorough development and victory of that which has been working behind them and forcing them to minister to it, the great modern tendency of the perfectly organised socialistic

² This was done with a stupendous beginning of thoroughness in Bolshevik Russia, Nazi Germany, Fascist Italy, and the necessity or the choice of it threatened at one time to spread everywhere.

State, while the evident result of the war in the nations opposed to her has been to force them more rapidly towards the same ideal.

If this were all, the natural development of things aided by the frustration of the German form of imperialism would lead logically to a new ordering of the world on the basis of a system of independent but increasingly organised national States associated together more or less closely for international purposes while preserving their independent existence. Such is the ideal which has attracted the human mind as a yet distant possibility since the great revolutionary ferment set in; it is the idea of a federation of free nations, the parliament of man, the federation of the world. But the actual circumstances forbid any hope of such an ideal consummation in the near future. For the nationalistic, democratic and socialistic ideas are not alone at work in the world; imperialism is equally in the ascendant. Only a few European peoples at the present moment are nations confined to themselves; each is a nation free in itself but dominating over other human groupings who are not free or only partially free. Even little Belgium has its Congo, little Portugal its colonies, little Holland its dependencies in the eastern Archipelago; even little Balkan States have aspired to revive an "empire" and to rule over others not of their own nationality or have cherished the idea of becoming predominant in the peninsula. Mazzini's Italy has its imperialistic ventures and ambitions in Tripoli, Abyssinia, Albania, the Greek islands. This imperialistic tendency is likely to grow stronger for some time in the future rather than to weaken. The idea of a remodelling even of Europe itself on the strict principle of nationality, which captivated liberal minds in England at the beginning of the war, has not yet been made practicable and, if it were effected, there would still remain the whole of Asia and Africa as a field for the imperialistic ambitions of the Western nations and Japan. The disinterestedness that led a majority in America to decree the liberation of the Philippines and restrained the desire to take advantage of the troubles of Mexico is not possible to the mentality of the Old World, and it is doubtful how long it can stand even in America against

the rising tide of imperialistic sentiment. National egoism, the pride of domination and the desire of expansion still govern the mind of humanity, however modified they may now be in their methods by the first weak beginnings of higher motives and a better national morality, and until this spirit is radically changed, the union of the human race by a federation of free nations must remain a noble chimera.

Undoubtedly, a free association and unity must be the ultimate goal of our development and until it is realised the world must be subject to constant changes and revolutions. Every established order, because it is imperfect, because it insists on arrangements which come to be recognised as involving injustice or which stand in the way of new tendencies and forces, because it outlasts its utility and justification, must end in *malaise*, resistance and upheaval, must change itself or be changed or else lead to cataclysms such as periodically trouble our human advance. But the time has not come when the true principle of order can replace those which are artificial and imperfect. It is idle to hope for a federation of free nations until either the present inequalities between nation and nation are removed or else the whole world rises to a common culture based upon a higher moral and spiritual status than is now actual or possible. The imperial instinct being alive and dominant and stronger at present than the principle of nationalism, the evolution of great empires can hardly fail to overshadow for a time at least the tendency to the development of free nationalities. All that can be hoped is that the old artificial, merely political empire may be replaced by a truer and more moral type, and that the existing empires, driven by the necessity of strengthening themselves and by an enlightened self-interest, may come to see that the recognition of national autonomy is a wise and necessary concession to the still vital instinct of nationalism and can be used so as to strengthen instead of weakening their imperial strength and unity. In this way, while a federation of free nations is for the present impossible, a system of federated empires and free nations drawn together in a closer association than the world has yet seen is not altogether impossible; and through this and other steps some

form of political unity for mankind may at a more or less distant date be realisable.³

The war brought up many suggestions for such a closer association, but as a rule they were limited to a better ordering of the international relations of Europe. One of these was the elimination of war by a stricter international law administered by an international Court and supported by the sanction of the nations which shall be enforced by all of them against any offender. Such a solution is chimerical unless it is immediately followed up by farther and far-reaching developments. For the law given by the Court must be enforced either by an alliance of some of the stronger Powers as, for instance, the coalition of the victorious allies dominating the rest of Europe, or by a concert of all the European Powers or else by a United States of Europe or some other form of European federation. A dominating alliance of great Powers would be simply a repetition in principle of the system of Metternich and would inevitably break down after some lapse of time, while a Concert of Europe must mean, as experience has shown, the uneasy attempt of rival groupings to maintain a precarious understanding which may postpone but cannot eventually prevent fresh struggles and collisions. In such imperfect systems the law would only be obeyed so long as it was expedient, so long only as the Powers who desired new changes and readjustments not admitted by the others did not consider the moment opportune for resistance. The Law within a nation is only secure because there is a recognised authority empowered to determine it and to make the necessary changes and possessed of a sufficient force to punish all violation of its statutes. An international or an inter-European law must have the same advantages if it is to exercise anything more than a merely moral force which can be set at nought by those who are strong enough to defy it and who find an advantage in the violation. Some form of European federation, however loose, is

³ The appearance of Hitler and the colossal attempt at German world-domination have paradoxically helped by his defeat, and the reaction against him entirely altered the world circumstances: the United States of Europe is now a practical possibility and has begun to feel towards self-accomplishment.

therefore essential if the idea behind these suggestions of a new order is to be made practically effective, and once commenced, such a federation must necessarily be tightened and draw more and more towards the form of a United States of Europe.

Whether such a European unity can be formed or whether, if formed, it can be maintained and perfected against the many forces of dissolution, the many causes of quarrel which would for long try it to the breaking point, only experience can show. But it is evident that in the present state of human egoism it would, if formed, become a tremendously powerful instrument for the domination and exploitation of the rest of the world by the group of nations which are at present in the forefront of human progress. It would inevitably awaken in antagonism to it an idea of Asiatic unity and an idea of American unity, and while such continental groupings replacing the present smaller national unities might well be an advance towards the final union of all mankind, yet their realisation would mean cataclysms of a kind and scope which would dwarf the present catastrophe and in which the hopes of mankind might founder and fatally collapse rather than progress nearer to fulfilment. But the chief objection to the idea of a United States of Europe is that the general sense of humanity is already seeking to travel beyond its continental distinctions and make them subordinate to a larger human idea. A division on the continental basis might therefore be from this point of view a reactionary step of the gravest kind and might be attended with the most serious consequences to human progress.

Europe, indeed, is in this anomalous position that it is at once ripe for the Pan-European idea and at the same time under the necessity of overpassing it. The conflict of the two tendencies was curiously exemplified not so long ago by certain speculations on the nature of the recent European struggle. It was suggested that the sin of Germany in this war was due to its exaggerated egoistic idea of the nation and its disregard of the larger idea of Europe to which the nation-idea must now be subjected and subordinated. The total life of Europe must now be the all-engrossing unity, its good the paramount

consideration, and the egoism of the nation must consent to exist only as an organic part of this larger egoism. In effect, this is the acceptance after so many decades of the idea of Nietzsche who insisted that nationalism and war were anachronisms and the ideal of all enlightened minds must be not to be good patriots but good Europeans. But immediately the question arose, what then of the increasing importance of America in world politics, what of Japan and China, what of the renewed stirrings of life in Asia? The writer had therefore to draw back from his first formula and to explain that by Europe he meant not Europe but all nations that had accepted the principles of European civilisation as the basis of their polity and social organisation. This more philosophical formula has the obvious or at least the specious advantage that it brings in America and Japan and thus recognises all the actually free or dominant nations in the circle of the proposed solidarity and holds out too the hope of admission into the circle to others whenever they can prove, after the forceful manner of Japan or otherwise, that they too have come up to the European standard.

Indeed, though Europe is still strongly separate in its own conception from the rest of the world,—as was shown by the often expressed resentment of the continual existence of Turkey in Europe and the desire to put an end to this government of Europeans by Asiatics,—yet as a matter of fact it is inextricably tangled up with America and Asia. Some of the European nations have colonies in America, all have possessions and ambitions in Asia, where Japan alone is outside the shadow cast by Europe, or in Northern Africa which is culturally one with Asia. The United States of Europe would therefore mean a federation of free European nations dominant over a half-subject Asia and possessor of parts of America and there standing in uneasy proximity to nations still free and necessarily troubled, alarmed and overshadowed by this giant immiscence. The inevitable result would be in America to bring together more closely the Latin Centre and South and the English-speaking North and to emphasise immensely the Monroe Doctrine with consequences which cannot easily be foreseen, while in Asia there could be only one

of two final endings to the situation, either the disappearance of the remaining free Asiatic States or a vast Asiatic resurgence and the recoil of Europe from Asia. Such movements would be a prolongation of the old line of human development and set at nought the new cosmopolitan conditions created by modern culture and Science; but they are inevitable if the nation-idea in the West is to merge into the Europe-idea, that is to say, into the continental idea rather than into the wider consciousness of a common humanity.

If, therefore, any new supra-national order is to evolve sooner or later as a result of the present upheaval, it must be an association that will embrace Asia, Africa and America as well as Europe and it must be in its nature an organisation of international life constituted by a number of free nations such as Sweden, Norway, Denmark, the United States, the Latin republics and a number of imperial and colonising nations such as are most of the peoples of Europe. Either the latter would remain, as they now are, free in themselves but masters of subject peoples who, with the advance of time, would become more and more intolerant of the yoke imposed on them or else they would be, by an ethical advance which is as yet very far from accomplished, partly centres of free federal empires, partly nations holding in trust races yet backward and undeveloped until they arrived at the capacity of self-administration, as the United States have claimed to hold for a time the Philippines. In the former case, the unity, the order, the common law established would perpetuate and be partly founded on an enormous system of injustice and exposed to the revolts and revolutions of Nature and the great revenges by which she finally vindicates the human spirit against wrongs which she tolerates for a time as necessary incidents of human development. In the latter, there would be some chance that the new order, however far in its beginnings from the ultimate ideal of a free association of free human aggregates, might lead peacefully and by a natural unfolding of the spiritual and ethical progress of the race to such a secure, just and healthy political, social and economic foundation as might enable mankind to turn from its preoccupation with these lower

cares and begin at last that development of its higher self which is the nobler part of its potential destiny or, if not that,—for who knows whether Nature's long experiment in the human type is foredoomed to success or failure,—at least the loftiest possibility of our future which the human mind can envisage.

Chapter XI

The Small Free Unit and the Larger Concentrated Unity

IF WE consider the possibilities of a unification of the human race on political, administrative and economic lines, we see that a certain sort of unity or first step towards it appears not only to be possible, but to be more or less urgently demanded by an underlying spirit and sense of need in the race. This spirit has been created largely by increased mutual knowledge and close communication, partly by the development of wider and freer intellectual ideals and emotional sympathies in the progressive mind of the race. The sense of need is partly due to the demand for the satisfaction of these ideals and sympathies, partly to economic and other material changes which render the results of divided national life, war, commercial rivalry and consequent insecurity and peril to the complex and easily vulnerable modern social organisation more and more irksome both for the economic and political human animal and for the idealistic thinker. Partly also the new turn is due to the desire of the successful nations to possess, enjoy and exploit the rest of the world at ease without the peril incurred by their own formidable rivalries and competitions and rather by some convenient understanding and compromise among themselves. The real strength of this tendency is in its intellectual, idealistic and emotional parts. Its economic causes are partly permanent and therefore elements of strength and secure fulfilment, partly artificial and temporary and therefore elements of insecurity and weakness. The political incentives are the baser part in the amalgam; their presence may even vitiate the whole result and lead in the end to a necessary dissolution and reversal of whatever unity may be initially accomplished.

Still, a result of some kind is possible in the comparatively

near or more distant future. We can see on what lines it is likely to work itself out, if at all,—at first by a sort of understanding and initial union for the most pressing common needs, arrangements of commerce, arrangements of peace and war, arrangements for the common arbitration of disputes, arrangements for the policing of the world. These crude initial arrangements, once accepted, will naturally develop by the pressure of the governing idea and the inherent need into a closer unity and even perhaps in the long end into a common supreme government which may endure till the defects of the system established and the rise of other ideals and tendencies inconsistent with its maintenance lead either to a new radical change or to its entire dissolution into its natural elements and constituents. We have seen also that such a union is likely to take place upon the basis of the present world somewhat modified by the changes that must now inevitably take place,—international changes that are likely to be adjustments rather than the introduction of a new radical principle and social changes within the nations themselves of a much more far-reaching character. It will take place, that is to say, as between the present free nations and colonising empires, but with an internal arrangement of society and an administrative mould progressing rapidly towards a rigorous State socialism and equality by which the woman and the worker will chiefly profit. For these are the master tendencies of the hour. Certainly, no one can confidently predict that the hour will victoriously prevail over the whole future. We know not what surprises of the great human drama, what violent resurgence of the old nation-idea, what collisions, failures, unexpected results in the working out of the new social tendencies, what revolt of the human spirit against a burdensome and mechanical State collectivism, what growth and power perhaps of a gospel of philosophic anarchism missioned to reassert man's ineradicable yearning for individual liberty and free self-fulfilment, what unforeseen religious and spiritual revolutions may not intervene in the very course of this present movement of mankind and divert it to quite another denouement. The human mind has not yet reached that illumination or that sure science by which it can forecast securely even its morrow.

Let us suppose, however, that no such unexpected factor intervenes. The political unity of mankind, of a sort, may then be realised. The question still remains whether it is desirable that it should be realised thus and now, and if so, under what circumstances, with what necessary conditions in the absence of which the result gained can only be temporary as were former partial unifications of mankind. And first let us remember at what cost humanity has gained the larger unities it has already achieved in the past. The immediate past has actually created for us the nation, the natural homogeneous empire of nations kin in race and culture or united by geographical necessity and mutual attractions, and the artificial heterogeneous empire secured by conquest, maintained by force, by yoke of law, by commercial and military colonisation, but not yet welded into true psychological unities. Each of these principles of aggregation has given some actual gain or some possibility of progress to mankind at large, but each has brought with it its temporary or inherent disadvantages and inflicted some wound on the complete human ideal.

The creation of a new unity, when it proceeds by external and mechanical processes, has usually and indeed almost by a practical necessity to go through a process of internal contraction before the unit can indulge again in a new and free expansion of its inner life; for its first need and instinct is to form and secure its own existence. To enforce its unity is its predominant impulse and to that paramount need it has to sacrifice the diversity, harmonious complexity, richness of various material, freedom of inner relations without which the true perfection of life is impossible. In order to enforce a strong and sure unity it has to create a paramount centre, a concentrated State power, whether of king or military aristocracy or plutocratic class or other governing contrivance, to which the liberty and free life of the individual, the commune, the city, the region or any other lesser unit has to be subordinated and sacrificed. At the same time, there is a tendency to create a firmly mechanised and rigid state of society, sometimes a hierarchy of classes or orders in which the lower is appointed to an inferior place and duty and

bound down to a narrower life than the higher, such as the hierarchy of king, clergy, aristocracy, middle class, peasantry, servile class which replaced in Europe the rich and free existence of the city and the tribe or else a rigid caste system such as the one that replaced in India the open and natural existence of the vigorous Aryan clans. Moreover, as we have already seen, the active and stimulating participation of all or most in the full vigour of the common life, which was the great advantage of the small but free earlier communities, is much more difficult in a larger aggregate and is at first impossible. In its place, there is the concentration of the force of life into a dominant centre or at most a governing and directing class or classes, while the great mass of the community is left in a relative torpor and enjoys only a minimum and indirect share of that vitality in so far as it is allowed to filter down from above and indirectly affect the grosser, poorer and narrower life below. This at least is the phenomenon we see in the historic period of human development which preceded and led up to the creation of the modern world. In the future also the need of a concentrating and formative rigidity may be felt for the firm formation and consolidation of the new political and social forms that are taking or will take its place.

The small human communities in which all can easily take an active part and in which ideas and movements are swiftly and vividly felt by all and can be worked out rapidly and thrown into form without the need of a large and difficult organisation, turn naturally towards freedom as soon as they cease to be preoccupied with the first absorbing necessity of self-preservation. Such forms as absolute monarchy or a despotic oligarchy, an infallible Papacy or sacrosanct theocratic class cannot flourish at ease in such an environment; they lack that advantage of distance from the mass and that remoteness from exposure to the daily criticism of the individual mind on which their prestige depends and they have not, to justify them, the pressing need of uniformity among large multitudes and over vast areas which they elsewhere serve to establish and maintain. Therefore we find in Rome the monarchical regime unable to maintain itself and in Greece looked upon as an unnatural and brief usurpation, while

the oligarchical form of government, though more vigorous, could not assure to itself, except in a purely military community like Sparta, either a high and exclusive supremacy or a firm duration. The tendency to a democratic freedom in which every man had a natural part in the civic life as well as in the cultural institutions of the State, an equal voice in the determination of law and policy and as much share in their execution as could be assured to him by his right as a citizen and his capacity as an individual,—this democratic tendency was inborn in the spirit and inherent in the form of the city state. In Rome the tendency was equally present but could not develop so rapidly or fulfil itself so entirely as in Greece because of the necessities of a military and conquering State which needed either an absolute head, an *imperator*, or a small oligarchic body to direct its foreign policy and its military conduct; but even so, the democratic element was always present and the democratic tendency was so strong that it began to work and grow from almost prehistoric times even in the midst of Rome's constant struggle for self-preservation and expansion and was only suspended by such supreme struggles as the great duel with Carthage for the empire of the Mediterranean. In India the early communities were free societies in which the king was only a military head or civic chief; we find the democratic element persisting in the days of Buddha and surviving in small States in the days of Chandragupta and Megasthenes even when great bureaucratically governed monarchies and empires were finally replacing the free earlier polity. It was only in proportion as the need for a large organisation of Indian life over the whole peninsula or at least the northern part of it made itself increasingly felt that the form of absolute monarchy grew upon the country and the learned and sacerdotal caste imposed its theocratic domination over the communal mind and its rigid Shastra as the binding chain of social unity and the binding link of a national culture.

As in the political and civic, so in the social life. A certain democratic equality is almost inevitable in a small community; the opposite phenomenon of strong class distinctions and superiorities may establish itself during the military period of the clan

or tribe, but cannot long be maintained in the close intimacy of a settled city state except by artificial means such as were employed by Sparta and Venice. Even when the distinction remains, its exclusiveness is blunted and cannot deepen and intensify itself into the nature of a fixed hierarchy. The natural social type of the small community is such as we see in Athens, where not only Cleon, the tanner, exercised as strong a political influence as the highborn and wealthy Nicias and the highest offices and civic functions were open to men of all classes, but in social functions and connections also there was a free association and equality. We see a similar democratic equality, though of a different type, in the earlier records of Indian civilisation. The rigid hierarchy of castes with the pretensions and arrogance of the caste spirit was a later development; in the simpler life of old, difference or even superiority of function did not carry with it a sense of personal or class superiority: at the beginning, the most sacred religious and social function, that of the Rishi and sacrificer, seems to have been open to men of all classes and occupations. Theocracy, caste and absolute kingship grew in force *pari passu* like the Church and the monarchical power in mediaeval Europe under the compulsion of the new circumstances created by the growth of large social and political aggregates.

Societies advancing in culture under these conditions of the early Greek, Roman and Indian city states and clan-nations were bound to develop a general vividness of life and dynamic force of culture and creation which the later national aggregates were obliged to forego and could only recover after a long period of self-formation in which the difficulties attending the development of a new organism had to be met and overcome. The cultural and civic life of the Greek city, of which Athens was the supreme achievement, a life in which living itself was an education, where the poorest as well as the richest sat together in the theatre to see and judge the dramas of Sophocles and Euripides and the Athenian trader and shopkeeper took part in the subtle philosophical conversations of Socrates, created for Europe not only its fundamental political types and ideals but practically all its basic forms of intellectual, philosophical,

literary and artistic culture. The equally vivid political, juridical and military life of the single city of Rome created for Europe its types of political activity, military discipline and science, jurisprudence of law and equity and even its ideals of empire and colonisation. And in India it was that early vivacity of spiritual life of which we catch glimpses in the Vedic, Upanishadic and Buddhistic literature, which created the religions, philosophies, spiritual disciplines that have since by direct or indirect influence spread something of their spirit and knowledge over Asia and Europe. And everywhere the root of this free, generalised and widely pulsating vital and dynamic force, which the modern world is only now in some sort recovering, was amid all differences the same; it was the complete participation not of a limited class, but of the individual generally in the many-sided life of the community, the sense each had of being full of the energy of all and of a certain freedom to grow, to be himself, to achieve, to think, to create in the undammed flood of that universal energy. It is this condition, this relation between the individual and the aggregate which modern life has tried to some extent to restore in a cumbrous, clumsy and imperfect fashion but with much vaster forces of life and thought at its disposal than early humanity could command.

It is possible that, if the old city states and clan-nations could have endured and modified themselves so as to create larger free aggregates without losing their own life in the new mass, many problems might have been solved with a greater simplicity, direct vision and truth to Nature which we have now to settle in a very complex and cumbrous fashion and under peril of enormous dangers and wide-spread convulsions. But that was not to be. That early life had vital defects which it could not cure. In the case of the Mediterranean nations, two most important exceptions have to be made to the general participation of all individuals in the full civic and cultural life of the community; for that participation was denied to the slave and hardly granted at all in the narrow life conceded to the woman. In India the institution of slavery was practically absent and the woman had at first a freer and more dignified position than in Greece and

Rome; but the slave was soon replaced by the proletariat, called in India the Shudra, and the increasing tendency to deny the highest benefits of the common life and culture to the Shudra and the woman brought down Indian society to the level of its Western congeners. It is possible that these two great problems of economic serfdom and the subjection of woman might have been attacked and solved in the early community if it had lived longer, as it has now been attacked and is in process of solution in the modern State. But it is doubtful; only in Rome do we glimpse certain initial tendencies which might have turned in that direction and they never went farther than faint hints of a future possibility.

More vital was the entire failure of this early form of human society to solve the question of the interrelations between community and community. War remained their normal relation. All attempts at free federation failed, and military conquest was left as the sole means of unification. The attachment to the small aggregate in which each man felt himself to be most alive had generated a sort of mental and vital insularity which could not accommodate itself to the new and wider ideas which philosophy and political thought, moved by the urge of larger needs and tendencies, brought into the field of life. Therefore the old States had to dissolve and disappear, in India into the huge bureaucratic empires of the Gupta and the Maurya to which the Pathan, the Moghul and the Englishman succeeded, in the West into the vast military and commercial expansions achieved by Alexander, by the Carthaginian oligarchy and by the Roman republic and empire. The latter were not national but supranational unities, premature attempts at too large unifications of mankind that could not really be accomplished with any finality until the intermediate nation-unit had been fully and healthily developed.

The creation of the national aggregate was therefore reserved for the millennium that followed the collapse of the Roman Empire; and in order to solve this problem left to it, the world during that period had to recoil from many and indeed most of the gains which had been achieved for mankind by the

city states. Only after this problem was solved could there be any real effort to develop not only a firmly organised but a progressive and increasingly perfected community, not only a strong mould of social life but the free growth and completeness of life itself within that mould. This cycle we must briefly study before we can consider whether the intervention of a new effort at a larger aggregation is likely to be free from the danger of a new recoil in which the inner progress of the race will have, at least temporarily, to be sacrificed in order to concentrate effort on the development and affirmation of a massive external unity.

Chapter XII

The Ancient Cycle of Prenational Empire-Building — The Modern Cycle of Nation-Building

WE HAVE seen that the building of the true national unit was a problem of human aggregation left over by the ancient world to the mediaeval. The ancient world started from the tribe, the city state, the clan, the small regional state — all of them minor units living in the midst of other like units which were similar to them in general type, kin usually in language and most often or very largely in race, marked off at least from other divisions of humanity by a tendency towards a common civilisation and protected in that community with each other and in their diversity from others by favourable geographical circumstances. Thus Greece, Italy, Gaul, Egypt, China, Medo-Persia, India, Arabia, Israel, all began with a loose cultural and geographical aggregation which made them separate and distinct culture-units before they could become nation-units. Within that loose unity the tribe, clan or city or regional states formed in the vague mass so many points of distinct, vigorous and compact unity which felt indeed more and more powerfully the divergence and opposition of their larger cultural oneness to the outside world but could feel also and often much more nearly and acutely their own divergences, contrasts and oppositions. Where this sense of local distinctness was most acute, there the problem of national unification was necessarily more difficult and its solution, when made, tended to be more illusory.

The solution was in most cases attempted. In Egypt and Judaea it was successfully found even in that ancient cycle of historical evolution; but in the latter instance certainly, in the former probably, the full result came only by the hard discipline of subjection to a foreign yoke. Where this discipline was

lacking, where the nation-unity was in some sort achieved from within,—usually through the conquest of all the rest by one strong clan, city, regional unit such as Rome, Macedon, the mountain clans of Persia,—the new State, instead of waiting to base firmly its achievement and lay the foundations of the national unity deep and strong, proceeded at once to overshoot its immediate necessity and embark on a career of conquest. Before the psychological roots of the national unity had been driven deep, before the nation was firmly self-conscious, irresistibly possessed of its oneness and invincibly attached to it, the governing State impelled by the military impulsion which had carried it so far attempted immediately to form by the same means a larger empire-aggregate. Assyria, Macedon, Rome, Persia, later on Arabia followed all the same tendency and the same cycle. The great invasion of Europe and Western Asia by the Gaelic race and the subsequent disunion and decline of Gaul were probably due to the same phenomenon and proceeded from a still more immature and ill-formed unification than the Macedonian. All became the starting-point of great empire-movements before they had become the keystone of securely built national unities.

These empires, therefore, could not endure. Some lasted longer than others because they had laid down firmer foundations in the central nation-unity, as did Rome in Italy. In Greece Philip, the first unifier, made a rapid but imperfect sketch of unification, the celerity of which had been made possible by the previous and yet looser Spartan domination; and had he been followed by successors of a patient talent rather than by a man of vast imagination and supreme genius, this first rough practical outline might have been filled in, strengthened and an enduring work achieved. One who first founds on a large scale and rapidly, needs always as his successor a man with the talent or the genius for organisation rather than an impetus for expansion. A Caesar followed by an Augustus meant a work of massive durability; a Philip followed by an Alexander an achievement of great importance to the world by its results, but in itself a mere splendour of short-lived brilliance. Rome, to whom careful Nature denied any man of commanding genius

until she had firmly unified Italy and laid the basis of her empire, was able to build much more firmly; nevertheless, she founded that empire not as the centre and head of a great nation, but still as a dominant city using a subject Italy for the springing-board to leap upon and subjugate the surrounding world. Therefore she had to face a much more difficult problem of assimilation, that of nation-nebulæ and formed or inchoate cultures different from her own, before she had achieved and learned to apply to the new problem the art of complete and absolute unification on a smaller and easier scale, before she had welded into one living national organism, no longer Roman but Italian, the elements of difference and community offered by the Gallic, Latin, Umbrian, Oscan and Graeco-Apulian factors in ancient Italy. Therefore, although her empire endured for several centuries, it achieved temporary conservation at the cost of energy of vitality and inner vigour; it accomplished neither the nation-unit nor the durable empire-unity, and like other ancient empires it had to collapse and make room for a new era of true nation-building.

It is necessary to emphasise where the error lay. The administrative, political, economic organisation of mankind in aggregates of smaller or greater size is a work which belongs at its basis to the same order of phenomena as the creation of vital organisms in physical Nature. It uses, that is to say, primarily external and physical methods governed by the principles of physical life-energy intent on the creation of living forms, although its inner object is to deliver, to manifest and to bring into secure working a supraphysical, a psychological principle latent behind the operations of the life and the body. To build a strong and durable body and vital functioning for a distinct, powerful, well-centred and well-diffused corporate ego is its whole aim and method. In this process, as we have seen, first smaller distinct units in a larger loose unity are formed; these have a strong psychological existence and a well-developed body and vital functioning, but in the larger mass the psychological sense and the vital energy are present but unorganised and without power of definite functioning, and the body is a fluid quantity or a half-nebulous or at most a half-fluid, half-solidified mass,

a plasm rather than a body. This has in its turn to be formed and organised; a firm physical shape has to be made for it, a well-defined vital functioning and a clear psychological reality, self-consciousness and mental will-to-be.

Thus a new larger unity is formed; and this again finds itself among a number of similar unities which it looks on first as hostile and quite different from itself, then enters into a sort of community in difference with them, till again we find repeated the original phenomenon of a number of smaller distinct units in a wider loose unity. The contained units are larger and more complex than before, the containing unity is also larger and more complex than before, but the essential position is the same and a similar problem presents itself for solution. Thus in the beginning there was the phenomenon of city states and regional peoples coexisting as disunited parts of a loose geographical and cultural unity, Italy or Hellas, and there was the problem of creating the Hellenic or Italian nation. Afterwards there came instead the phenomenon of nation-units formed or in formation coexisting as disunited parts of the loose geographical and cultural unity, first, of Christendom, then, of Europe, and with it the problem of the union of this Christendom or of this Europe which, though more than once conceived by individual statesmen or political thinkers, was never achieved nor even the first steps attempted. Before its difficulties could be solved, the modern movement with its unifying forces has presented to us the new and more complex phenomenon of a number of nation-units and empire-units embedded in the loose, but growing life-interdependence and commercial close-connection of mankind, and the attendant problem of the unification of mankind already overshadows the unfulfilled dream of the unification of Europe.

In physical Nature vital organisms cannot live entirely on themselves; they live either by interchange with other vital organisms or partly by that interchange and partly by devouring others; for these are the processes of assimilation common to separated physical life. In unification of life, on the other hand, an assimilation is possible which goes beyond this alternative of either the devouring of one by another or a continued separate

distinctness which limits assimilation to a mutual reception of the energies discharged by one life upon another. There can be instead an association of units consciously subordinating themselves to a general unity which is developed in the process of their coming together. Some of these, indeed, are killed and used as material for new elements, but all cannot be so treated, all cannot be devoured by one dominant unit; for in that case there is no unification, no creation of a larger unity, no continued greater life, but only a temporary survival of the devourer by the digestion and utilisation of the energy of the devoured. In the unification of human aggregates, this then is the problem, how the component units shall be subordinated to a new unity without their death and disappearance.

The weakness of the old empire-unities created by conquest was that they tended to destroy the smaller units they assimilated, as did imperial Rome, and to turn them into food for the life of the dominant organ. Gaul, Spain, Africa, Egypt were thus killed, turned into dead matter and their energy drawn into the centre, Rome; thus the empire became a great dying mass on which the life of Rome fed for several centuries. In such a method, however, the exhaustion of the life in the subject parts must end by leaving the dominant voracious centre without any source for new storage of energy. At first the best intellectual force of the conquered provinces flowed to Rome and their vital energy poured into it a great supply of military force and governing ability, but eventually both failed and first the intellectual energy of Rome and then its military and political ability died away in the midst of the general death. Nor would Roman civilisation have lived even for so long but for the new ideas and motives it received from the East. This interchange, however, had neither the vividness nor the constant flow which marks the incoming and the return of ever new tides of thought and motives of life in the modern world and it could not really revivify the low vitality of the imperial body nor even arrest very long the process of its decay. When the Roman grasp loosened, the world which it had held so firmly constricted had been for long a huge, decorous, magnificently organised death-in-life incapable of new

origination or self-regeneration; vitality could only be restored through the inrush of the vigorous barbarian world from the plains of Germany, the steppes beyond the Danube and the deserts of Arabia. Dissolution had to precede a movement of sounder construction.

In the mediaeval period of nation-building, we see Nature mending this earlier error. When we speak indeed of the errors of Nature, we use a figure illegitimately borrowed from our human psychology and experience; for in Nature there are no errors but only the deliberate measure of her paces traced and retraced in a prefigured rhythm, of which each step has a meaning and its place in the action and reaction of her gradual advance. The crushing domination of Roman uniformity was a device, not to kill out permanently, but to discourage in their excessive separative vitality the old smaller units, so that when they revived again they might not present an insuperable obstacle to the growth of a true national unity. What the mere nation-unity may lose by not passing through this cruel discipline,—we leave aside the danger it brings of an actual death like the Assyrian or Chaldean as well as the spiritual and other gains that may accrue by avoiding it,—is shown in the example of India where the Maurya, Gupta, Andhra, Moghul empires, huge and powerful and well-organised as they were, never succeeded in passing a steam-roller over the too strongly independent life of the subordinate unities from the village community to the regional or linguistic area. It has needed the pressure of a rule neither indigenous in origin nor locally centred, the dominance of a foreign nation entirely alien in culture and morally armoured against the sympathies and attractions of India's cultural atmosphere to do in a century this work which two thousand years of a looser imperialism had failed to accomplish. Such a process implies necessarily a cruel and often dangerous pressure and breaking up of old institutions; for Nature tired of the obstinate immobility of an age-long resistance seems to care little how many beautiful and valuable things are destroyed so long as her main end is accomplished: but we may be sure that if destruction is done, it is because for that end the destruction was indispensable.

In Europe, after the Roman pressure was removed, the city state and regional nation revived as elements of a new construction; but except in one country and curiously enough in Italy itself the city state offered no real resistance to the process of national unification. We may ascribe its strong resuscitation in Italy to two circumstances, first, to the premature Roman oppression of the ancient free city-life of Italy before it had realised its full potentialities and, secondly, to its survival in seed both by the prolonged civil life of Rome itself and by the persistence in the Italian *municipia* of a sense of separate life, oppressed but never quite ground out of existence as was the separate clan-life of Gaul and Spain or the separate city-life of Greece. Thus psychologically the Italian city state neither died satisfied and fulfilled nor was broken up beyond recall; it revived in new incarnations. And this revival was disastrous to the nation-life of Italy, though an incalculable boon and advantage to the culture and civilisation of the world; for as the city-life of Greece had originally created, so the city-life of Italy recovered, renewed and gave in a new form to our modern times the art, literature, thought and science of the Graeco-Roman world. Elsewhere, the city-unit revived only in the shape of the free or half-free municipalities of mediaeval France, Flanders and Germany; and these were at no time an obstacle to unification, but rather helped to form a subconscious basis for it and in the meanwhile to prevent by rich impulses and free movement of thought and art the mediaeval tendency to intellectual uniformity, stagnation and obscuration.

The old clan-nation perished, except in countries like Ireland and Northern and Western Scotland which had not undergone the Roman pressure, and there it was as fatal to unification as the city state in Italy; it prevented Ireland from evolving an organised unity and the Highland Celts from amalgamating with the Anglo-Celtic Scotch nation until the yoke of England passed over them and did what the Roman rule would have done if it had not been stayed in its expansion by the Grampians and the Irish seas. In the rest of Western Europe, the work done by the Roman rule was so sound that even the domination of the

Western countries by the tribal nations of Germany failed to revive the old strongly marked and obstinately separative clan-nation. It created in its stead the regional kingdoms of Germany and the feudal and provincial divisions of France and Spain; but it was only in Germany, which like Ireland and the Scotch highlands had not endured the Roman yoke, that this regional life proved a serious obstacle to unification. In France it seemed for a time to prevent it, but in reality it resisted only long enough to make itself of value as an element of richness and variation in the final French unity. The unexampled perfection of that unity is a sign of the secret wisdom concealed in the prolonged process we watch through the history of France which seems to a superficial glance so miserable and distracted, so long an alternation of anarchy with feudal or monarchic despotism, so different from the gradual, steady and much more orderly development of the national life of England. But in England the necessary variation and richness of the ultimate organism was otherwise provided for by the great difference of the races that formed the new nation and by the persistence of Wales, Ireland and Scotland as separate cultural units with a subordinate self-consciousness of their own in the larger unity.

The European cycle of nation-building differs therefore from the ancient cycle which led from the regional and city state to the empire, first, in its not overshooting itself by proceeding towards a larger unification to the neglect of the necessary intermediate aggregate, secondly, in its slow and ripening progression through three successive stages by which unity was secured and yet the constituent elements not killed nor prematurely nor unduly oppressed by the instruments of unification. The first stage progressed through a long balancing of centripetal and centrifugal tendencies in which the feudal system provided a principle of order and of a loose but still organic unity. The second was a movement of unification and increasing uniformity in which certain features of the ancient imperial system of Rome were repeated, but with a less crushing force and exhausting tendency. It was marked first by the creation of a metropolitan centre which began to draw to it, like Rome, the best life-

energies of all the other parts. A second feature was the growth of an absolute sovereign authority whose function was to impose a legal, administrative, political and linguistic uniformity and centralisation on the national life. A third sign of this movement was the establishment of a governing spiritual head and body which served to impose a similar uniformity of religious thought and intellectual education and opinion. This unifying pressure too far pursued might have ended disastrously like the Roman but for a third stage of revolt and diffusion which broke or subordinated these instruments, feudalism, monarchy, Church authority as soon as their work had been done and substituted a new movement directed towards the diffusion of the national life through a strong and well-organised political, legal, social and cultural freedom and equality. Its trend has been to endeavour that as in the ancient city, so in the modern nation, all classes and all individuals should enjoy the benefits and participate in the free energy of the released national existence.

This third stage of national life enjoys the advantages of unity and sufficient uniformity created by the second and is able to safely utilise anew the possibilities of regional and city-life saved from entire destruction by the first. By these gradations of national progress, it has been made increasingly possible for our modern times to envisage, if and where it is willed or needed, the idea of a federated nation or federal empire based securely upon a fundamental and well-realised psychological unity: this indeed was already achieved in a simple type in Germany and in America. Also we can move now safely, if we will, towards a partial decentralisation through subordinate governments, communes and provincial cities which may help to cure the malady of an excessive metropolitan absorption of the best national energies and facilitate their free circulation through many centres and plexuses. At the same time, we contemplate the organised use of a State intelligently representative of the whole conscious, active, vitalised nation as a means for the perfection of the life of the individual and the community. This is the point which the development of the nation-aggregate has reached at the moment when we are again confronted either, according to future

trends, with the wider problem of the imperial aggregate or the still vaster problems created by the growing cultural unity and commercial and political interdependence of all mankind.

Chapter XIII

The Formation of the Nation-Unit — The Three Stages

THE THREE stages of development which have marked the mediaeval and modern evolution of the nation-type may be regarded as the natural process where a new form of unity has to be created out of complex conditions and heterogeneous materials by an external rather than an internal process. The external method tries always to mould the psychological condition of men into changed forms and habits under the pressure of circumstances and institutions rather than by the direct creation of a new psychological condition which would, on the contrary, develop freely and flexibly its own appropriate and serviceable social forms. In such a process there must be in the nature of things, first, some kind of looser yet sufficiently compelling order of society and common type of civilisation to serve as a framework or scaffolding within which the new edifice shall arise. Next, there must come naturally a period of stringent organisation directed towards unity and centrality of control and perhaps a general levelling and uniformity under that central direction. Last, if the new organism is not to fossilise and stereotype its life, if it is to be still a living and vigorous creation of Nature, there must come a period of free internal development as soon as the formation is assured and unity has become a mental and vital habit. This freer internal activity assured in its heart and at its basis by the formed needs, ideas and instincts of the community will no longer bring with it the peril of disorder, disruption or arrest of the secure growth and formation of the organism.

The form and principle of the first looser system must depend upon the past history and present conditions of the elements that have to be welded into the new unity. But it is

noticeable that both in Europe and Asia there was a common tendency, which we cannot trace to any close interchange of ideas and must therefore attribute to the operation of the same natural cause and necessity, towards the evolution of a social hierarchy based on a division according to four different social activities,— spiritual function, political domination and the double economic function of mercantile production and interchange and dependent labour or service. The spirit, form and equipoise worked out were very different in different parts of the world according to the bent of the community and its circumstances, but the initial principle was almost identical. The motive-force everywhere was the necessity of a large effective form of common social life marked by fixity of status through which individual and small communal interests might be brought under the yoke of a sufficient religious, political and economic unity and likeness. It is notable that Islamic civilisation, with its dominant principle of equality and brotherhood in the faith and its curious institution of a slavery which did not prevent the slave from rising even to the throne, was never able to evolve such a form of society and failed, in spite of its close contact with political and progressive Europe, to develop strong and living, well-organised and conscious nation-units even after the disruption of the empire of the Caliphs; it is only now under the pressure of modern ideas and conditions that this is being done.

But even where this preparatory stage was effectively brought into existence, the subsequent stages did not necessarily follow. The feudal period of Europe with its four orders of the clergy, the king and nobles, the bourgeoisie and the proletariat has a sufficiently close resemblance to the Indian fourfold order of the sacerdotal, military and mercantile classes and the Shudras. The Indian system took its characteristic stamp from a different order of ideas more prominently religious and ethical than political, social or economic; but still, practically, the dominant function of the system was social and economic and there seems at first sight to be no reason why it should not have followed, with whatever differences of detail, the common evolution. Japan with its great feudal order under the spiritual

and secular headship of the Mikado and afterwards the double headship of the Mikado and the Shogun evolved one of the most vigorous and self-conscious nation-units the world has seen. China with its great learned class uniting in one the Brahmin and Kshatriya functions of spiritual and secular knowledge and executive rule and its Emperor and Son of Heaven for head and type of the national unity succeeded in becoming a united nation. The different result in India, apart from other causes, was due to the different evolution of the social order. Elsewhere that evolution turned in the direction of a secular organisation and headship; it created within the nation itself a clear political self-consciousness and, as a consequence, either the subordination of the sacerdotal class to the military and administrative or else their equality or even their fusion under a common spiritual and secular head. In mediaeval India, on the contrary, it turned towards the social dominance of the sacerdotal class and the substitution of a common spiritual for a common political consciousness as the basis of the national feeling. No lasting secular centre was evolved, no great imperial or kingly head which by its prestige, power, antiquity and claim to general reverence and obedience could over-balance or even merely balance this sacerdotal prestige and predominance and create a sense of political as well as spiritual and cultural oneness.

The struggle between the Church and the monarchical State is one of the most important and vital features of the history of Europe. Had that conflict ended in an opposite result, the whole future of humanity would have been in jeopardy. As it was, the Church was obliged to renounce its claim to independence and dominance over the temporal power. Even in the nations which remained Catholic, a real independence and dominance of the temporal authority was successfully vindicated; for the King of France exercised a control over the Gallican Church and clergy which rendered all effective interference of the Pope in French affairs impossible. In Spain, in spite of the close alliance between Pope and King and the theoretical admission of the former's complete spiritual authority, it was really the temporal head who decided the ecclesiastical policy and commanded the

terrors of the Inquisition. In Italy, the immediate presence of the spiritual head of Catholicism in Rome was a great moral obstacle to the development of a politically united nation; the passionate determination of the liberated Italian people to establish its King in Rome was really a symbol of the law that a self-conscious and politically organised nation can have only one supreme and central authority admitted in its midst and that must be the secular power. The nation which has reached or is reaching this stage must either separate the religious and spiritual claim from its common secular and political life by individualising religion or else it must unite the two by the alliance of the State and the Church to uphold the single authority of the temporal head or combine the spiritual and temporal headship in one authority as was done in Japan and China and in England of the Reformation. Even in India the people which first developed some national self-consciousness not of a predominantly spiritual character were the Rajputs, especially of Mewar, to whom the Raja was in every way the head of society and of the nation; and the peoples which having achieved national self-consciousness came nearest to achieving also organised political unity were the Sikhs for whom Guru Govind Singh deliberately devised a common secular and spiritual centre in the Khalsa, and the Mahrattas who not only established a secular head, representative of the conscious nation, but so secularised themselves that, as it were, the whole people indiscriminately, Brahmin and Shudra, became for a time potentially a people of soldiers, politicians and administrators.

In other words, the institution of a fixed social hierarchy, while it seems to have been a necessary stage for the first tendencies of national formation, needed to modify itself and prepare its own dissolution if the later stages were to be rendered possible. An instrument good for a certain work and set of conditions, if it is still retained when other work has to be done and conditions change, becomes necessarily an obstacle. The direction needed was a change from the spiritual authority of one class and the political authority of another to a centralisation of the common life of the evolving nation under a secular rather than

a religious head or, if the religious tendency in the people be too strong to separate things spiritual and temporal, under a national head who shall be the fountain of authority in both departments. Especially was it necessary for the creation of a political self-consciousness, without which no separate nation-unit can be successfully formed, that the sentiments, activities, instruments proper to its creation should for a time take the lead and all others stand behind and support them. A Church or a dominant sacerdotal caste remaining within its own function cannot form the organised political unity of a nation; for it is governed by other than political and administrative considerations and cannot be expected to subordinate to them its own characteristic feelings and interests. It can only be otherwise if the religious caste or sacerdotal class become also as in Tibet the actually ruling political class of the country. In India, the dominance of a caste governed by sacerdotal, religious and partly by spiritual interests and considerations, a caste which dominated thought and society and determined the principles of the national life but did not actually rule and administer, has always stood in the way of the development followed by the more secular-minded European and Mongolian peoples. It is only now after the advent of European civilisation when the Brahmin caste has not only lost the best part of its exclusive hold on the national life but has largely secularised itself, that political and secular considerations have come into the forefront, a pervading political self-consciousness has been awakened and the organised unity of the nation, as distinct from a spiritual and cultural oneness, made possible in fact and not only as an unshaped subconscious tendency.

The second stage of the development of the nation-unit has been, then, the modification of the social structure so as to make room for a powerful and visible centre of political and administrative unity. This stage is necessarily attended by a strong tendency to the abrogation of even such liberties as a fixed social hierarchy provides and the concentration of power in the hands, usually, of a dominant if not always an absolute monarchical government. By modern democratic ideas kingship is only

tolerated either as an inoperative figure-head or a servant of the State life or a convenient centre of the executive administration, it is no longer indispensable as a real control; but the historical importance of a powerful kingship in the evolution of the nation-type, as it actually developed in mediaeval times, cannot be exaggerated. Even in liberty-loving, insular and individualistic England, the Plantagenets and Tudors were the real and active nucleus round which the nation grew into firm form and into adult strength; and in Continental countries the part played by the Capets and their successors in France, by the House of Castile in Spain and by the Romanoffs and their predecessors in Russia is still more prominent. In the last of these instances, one might almost say that without the Ivans, Peters and Catherines there would have been no Russia. And even in modern times, the almost mediaeval role played by the Hohenzollerns in the unification and growth of Germany was watched with an uneasy astonishment by the democratic peoples to whom such a phenomenon was no longer intelligible and seemed hardly to be serious. But we may note also the same phenomenon in the first period of formation of the new nations of the Balkans. The seeking for a king to centralise and assist their growth, despite all the strange comedies and tragedies which have accompanied it, becomes perfectly intelligible as a manifestation of the sense of the old necessity, not so truly necessary now¹ but felt in the subconscious minds of these peoples. In the new formation of Japan into a nation of the modern type the Mikado played a similar role; the instinct of the renovators brought him out of his helpless seclusion to meet this inner need. The attempt of a brief dictatorship in revolutionary China to convert itself into a new national monarchy may be attributed quite as much to the same feeling in a practical mind as to mere personal ambition.² It is a sense of this great role played by the kingship in centralising

¹ Now replaced by the spiritual-political headship of an almost semi-divine Leader in a Führer who incarnates in himself, as it were, the personality of the race.

² It should be noted that even the democratic idealism of the modern mind in China has been obliged to crystallise itself round the "leader", a Sun Yat Sen or Chiang Kai Shek and the force of inspiration has depended on the power of this living centre.

and shaping national life at the most critical stage of its growth which explains the tendency common in the East and not altogether absent from the history of the West to invest it with an almost sacred character; it explains also the passionate loyalty with which great national dynasties or their successors have been served even in the moment of their degeneration and downfall.

But this movement of national development, however salutary in its peculiar role, is almost fatally attended with that suppression of the internal liberties of the people which makes the modern mind so naturally though unscientifically harsh in its judgment of the old monarchical absolutism and its tendencies. For always this is a movement of concentration, stringency, uniformity, strong control and one-pointed direction; to universalise one law, one rule, one central authority is the need it has to meet, and therefore its spirit must be to enforce and centralise authority, to narrow or quite suppress liberty and free variation. In England the period of the New Monarchy from Edward IV to Elizabeth, in France the great Bourbon period from Henry IV to Louis XIV, in Spain the epoch which extends from Ferdinand to Philip II, in Russia the rule of Peter the Great and Catherine were the time in which these nations reached their maturity, formed fully and confirmed their spirit and attained to a robust organisation. And all these were periods of absolutism or of movement to absolutism and a certain foundation of uniformity or attempt to found it. This absolutism clothed already in its more primitive garb the reviving idea of the State and its right to impose its will on the life and thought and conscience of the people so as to make it one single, undivided, perfectly efficient and perfectly directed mind and body.³

It is from this point of view that we shall most intelligently understand the attempt of the Tudors and the Stuarts to impose both monarchical authority and religious uniformity on the people and seize the real sense of the religious wars in France, the Catholic monarchical rule in Spain with its atrocious method of

³ Now illustrated with an astonishing completeness in Russia, Germany and Italy—the totalitarian idea.

the Inquisition and the oppressive will of the absolute Czars in Russia to impose also an absolute national Church. The effort failed in England because after Elizabeth it no longer answered to any genuine need; for the nation was already well-formed, strong and secure against disruption from without. Elsewhere it succeeded both in Protestant and Catholic countries, or in the rare cases as in Poland where this movement could not take place or failed, the result was disastrous. Certainly, it was everywhere an outrage on the human soul, but it was not merely due to any natural wickedness of the rulers; it was an inevitable stage in the formation of the nation-unit by political and mechanical means. If it left England the sole country in Europe where liberty could progress by natural gradations, that was due, no doubt, largely to the strong qualities of the people but still more to its fortunate history and insular circumstances.

The monarchical State in this evolution crushed or subordinated the religious liberties of men and made a subservient or conciliated ecclesiastical order the priest of its divine right, Religion the handmaid of a secular throne. It destroyed the liberties of the aristocracy and left it its privileges, and these even were allowed only that it might support and buttress the power of the king. After using the bourgeoisie against the nobles, it destroyed, where it could, its real and living civic liberties and permitted only some outward forms and its parts of special right and privilege. As for the people, they had no liberties to be destroyed. Thus the monarchical State concentrated in its own activities the whole national life. The Church served it with its moral influence, the nobles with their military traditions and ability, the bourgeoisie with the talent or chicane of its lawyers and the literary genius or administrative power of its scholars, thinkers and men of inborn business capacity; the people gave taxes and served with their blood the personal and national ambitions of the monarchy. But all this powerful structure and closely-knit order of things was doomed by its very triumph and predestined to come down either with a crash or by a more or less unwilling gradual abdication before new necessities and agencies. It was tolerated and supported so long as the nation felt consciously or

subconsciously its need and justification; once that was fulfilled and ceased, there came inevitably the old questioning which, now grown fully self-conscious, could no longer be suppressed or permanently resisted. By changing the old order into a mere simulacrum the monarchy had destroyed its own base. The sacerdotal authority of the Church, once questioned on spiritual grounds, could not be long maintained by temporal means, by the sword and the law; the aristocracy keeping its privileges but losing its real functions became odious and questionable to the classes below it; the bourgeoisie conscious of its talent, irritated by its social and political inferiority, awakened by the voice of its thinkers, led the movement of revolt and appealed to the help of the populace; the masses — dumb, oppressed, suffering — rose with this new support which had been denied to them before and overturned the whole social hierarchy. Hence the collapse of the old world and the birth of a new age.

We have already seen the inner justification of this great revolutionary movement. The nation-unit is not formed and does not exist merely for the sake of existing; its purpose is to provide a larger mould of human aggregation in which the race, and not only classes and individuals, may move towards its full human development. So long as the labour of formation continues, this larger development may be held back and authority and order be accepted as the first consideration, but not when the aggregate is sure of its existence and feels the need of an inner expansion. Then the old bonds have to be burst; the means of formation have to be discarded as obstacles to growth. Liberty then becomes the watchword of the race. The ecclesiastical order which suppressed liberty of thought and new ethical and social development, has to be dispossessed of its despotic authority, so that man may be mentally and spiritually free. The monopolies and privileges of the king and aristocracy have to be destroyed, so that all may take their share of the national power, prosperity and activity. Finally, bourgeois capitalism has to be induced or forced to consent to an economic order in which suffering, poverty and exploitation shall be eliminated and the wealth of the community be more equally shared by all who help to create

it. In all directions, men have to come into their own, realise the dignity and freedom of the manhood within them and give play to their utmost capacity.

For liberty is insufficient, justice also is necessary and becomes a pressing demand; the cry for equality arises. Certainly, absolute equality is non-existent in this world; but the word was aimed against the unjust and unnecessary inequalities of the old social order. Under a just social order, there must be an equal opportunity, an equal training for all to develop their faculties and to use them, and, so far as may be, an equal share in the advantages of the aggregate life as the right of all who contribute to the existence, vigour and development of that life by the use of their capacities. As we have noted, this need might have taken the form of an ideal of free cooperation guided and helped by a wise and liberal central authority expressing the common will, but it has actually reverted to the old notion of an absolute and efficient State—no longer monarchical, ecclesiastical, aristocratic but secular, democratic and socialistic—with liberty sacrificed to the need of equality and aggregate efficiency. The psychological causes of this reversion we shall not now consider. Perhaps liberty and equality, liberty and authority, liberty and organised efficiency can never be quite satisfactorily reconciled so long as man individual and aggregate lives by egoism, so long as he cannot undergo a great spiritual and psychological change and rise beyond mere communal association to that third ideal which some vague inner sense made the revolutionary thinkers of France add to their watchwords of liberty and equality,—the greatest of all the three, though till now only an empty word on man's lips, the ideal of fraternity or, less sentimentally and more truly expressed, an inner oneness. That no mechanism social, political, religious has ever created or can create; it must take birth in the soul and rise from hidden and divine depths within.

Chapter XIV

The Possibility of a First Step towards International Unity — Its Enormous Difficulties

THE STUDY of the growth of the nation-unit under the pressure indeed of a growing inner need and idea but by the agency of political, economic and social forces, forms and instruments shows us a progress that began from a loose formation in which various elements were gathered together for unification, proceeded through a period of strong concentration and coercion in which the conscious national ego was developed, fortified and provided with a centre and instruments of its organic life, and passed on to a final period of assured separate existence and internal unity as against outside pressure in which liberty and an active and more and more equal share of all in the benefits of the national life became possible. If the unity of the human race is to be brought about by the same means and agents and in a similar fashion to that of the nation, we should expect it to follow a similar course. That is at least the most visible probability and it seems to be consistent with the natural law of all creation which starts from the loose mass, the more or less amorphous vague of forces and materials and proceeds by contraction, constriction, solidification into a firm mould in which the rich evolution of various forms of life is at last securely possible.

If we consider the actual state of the world and its immediate possibilities, we shall see that a first period of loose formation and imperfect order is inevitable. Neither the intellectual preparation of the human race nor the development of its sentiments nor the economic and political forces and conditions by which it is moved and preoccupied have reached to such a point of inner stress or external pressure as would warrant us in expecting a

total change of the basis of our life or the establishment of a complete or a real unity. There cannot as yet be even a real external unity, far less a psychological oneness. It is true that the vague sense and need of something of the kind has been growing rapidly and the object lesson of the war brought the master idea of the future out of the nascent condition in which it was no more than the generous chimera of a few pacifists or internationalist idealists. It came to be recognised that it contains in itself some force of eventual reality, and the voice of those who would cry it down as the pet notion of intellectual cranks and faddists had no longer the same volume and confidence, because it was no longer so solidly supported by the common sense of the average man, that short-sighted common sense of the material mind which consists in a strong feeling for immediate actualities and an entire blindness to the possibilities of the future. But there has as yet been no long intellectual preparation of a more and more dominant thought cast out by the intellectuals of the age to remould the ideas of common men, nor has there been any such gathering to a head of the growing revolt against present conditions as would make it possible for vast masses of men seized by the passion for an ideal and by the hope of a new happiness for mankind to break up the present basis of things and construct a new scheme of collective life. In another direction, the replacing of the individualistic basis of society by an increasing collectivism, there has been to a large extent such an intellectual preparation and gathering force of revolt; there the war has acted as a precipitative force and brought us much nearer to the possibility of a realised—not necessarily a democratic—State socialism. But there have been no such favourable preconditions for a strong movement of international unification. No great effective outburst of a massed and dynamic idealism in this direction can be reasonably predicted. The preparation may have begun, it may have been greatly facilitated and hastened by recent events, but it is still only in its first stages.

Under such conditions the ideas and schemes of the world's intellectuals who would replan the whole status of international life altogether and from its roots in the light of general principles,

are not likely to find any immediate realisation. In the absence of a general idealistic outburst of creative human hope which would make such changes possible, the future will be shaped not by the ideas of the thinker but by the practical mind of the politician which represents the average reason and temperament of the time and effects usually something much nearer the minimum than the maximum of what is possible. The average general mind of a great mass of men, while it is ready to listen to such ideas as it has been prepared to receive and is accustomed to seize on this or that notion with a partisan avidity, is yet ruled in its action not so much by its thought as by its interests, passions and prejudices. The politician and the statesman—and the world is now full of politicians but very empty of statesmen—act in accordance with this average general mind of the mass; the one is governed by it, the other has always to take it into chief account and cannot lead it where he will, unless he is one of those great geniuses and powerful personalities who unite a large mind and dynamic force of conception with an enormous power or influence over men. Moreover, the political mind has limitations of its own beyond those of the general average mind of the mass; it is even more respectful of the *status quo*, more disinclined to great adventures in which the safe footing of the past has to be abandoned, more incapable of launching out into the uncertain and the new. To do that it must either be forced by general opinion or a powerful interest or else itself fall under the spell of a great new enthusiasm diffused in the mental atmosphere of the times.

If the politician mind is left entirely to itself, we could expect no better tangible result of the greatest international convulsion on record than a rearrangement of frontiers, a redistribution of power and possessions and a few desirable or undesirable developments of international, commercial and other relations. That is one disastrous possibility leading to more disastrous convulsions—so long as the problem is not solved—against which the future of the world is by no means secure. Still, since the mind of humanity has been greatly moved and its sentiments powerfully awakened, since the sense is becoming fairly wide-

spread that the old status of things is no longer tolerable and the undesirability of an international balance reposing on a ring of national egoisms held in check only by mutual fear and hesitation, by ineffective arbitration treaties and Hague tribunals and the blundering discords of a European Concert must be now fairly clear even to the politician mind, we might expect that some serious attempt towards the beginning of a new order should be the result of the moral collapse of the old. The passions and hatreds and selfish national hopes raised by the war must certainly be a great obstacle in the way and may easily render futile or of a momentary stability any such beginning. But, if nothing else, the mere exhaustion and internal reaction produced after the relaxing of the tensity of the struggle, might give time for new ideas, feelings, forces, events to emerge which will counteract this pernicious influence.¹

Still, the most that we could at all expect must needs be very little. In the internal life of the nations, the ultimate effects of the war cannot fail to be powerful and radical, for there everything is ready, the pressure felt has been enormous and the expansion after it has been removed must be correspondingly great in its results; but in international life we can only look forward at the best to a certain minimum of radical change which, however small, might yet in itself turn out to be an irrevocable departure, a seed of sufficient vitality to ensure the inevitability of future growth. If, indeed, developments had occurred before the end of this world-wide struggle strong enough to change the general mind of Europe, to force the dwarfish thoughts of its rulers into greater depths and generate a more wide-reaching sense of the necessity for radical change than has yet been developed, more might have been hoped for; but as the great conflict drew nearer

¹ Written originally in 1916 before the end of the war. This happier possibility could not immediately materialise, but the growing insecurity, confusion and disorder have made the creation of some international system more and more imperative if modern civilisation is not to collapse in bloodshed and chaos. The result of this necessity has been first the creation of the League of Nations and afterwards the U.N.O.: neither has proved very satisfactory from the political point of view, but henceforward the existence of some such arranged centre of order has become very evidently indispensable.

to its close, no such probability emerged; the dynamic period during which in such a crisis the effective ideas and tendencies of men are formed, passed without the creation of any great and profound impulse. There were only two points on which the general mind of the peoples was powerfully affected. First, there was generated a sense of revolt against the possible repetition of this vast catastrophe; still more strongly felt was the necessity for finding means to prevent the unparalleled dislocation of the economic life of the race which was brought about by the convulsion. Therefore, it is in these two directions that some real development could be expected; for so much must be attempted if the general expectation and desire are to be satisfied and to trifle with these would be to declare the political intelligence of Europe bankrupt. That failure would convict its governments and ruling classes of moral and intellectual impotence and might well in the end provoke a general revolt of the European peoples against their existing institutions and the present blind and rudderless leadership.

There was to be expected, then, some attempt to provide a settled and effective means for the regulation and minimising of war, for the limitation of armaments, for the satisfactory disposal of dangerous disputes and especially, though this presents the greatest difficulty, for meeting that conflict of commercial aims and interests which is now the really effective, although by no means the only factor in the conditions that compel the recurrence of war. If this new arrangement contained in itself the seed of international control, if it turned out to be a first step towards a loose international formation or perhaps contained its elements or initial lines or even a first scheme to which the life of humanity could turn for a mould of growth in its reaching out to a unified existence, then, however rudimentary or unsatisfactory this arrangement might be at first, the future would carry in it an assured promise. Once begun, it would be impossible for mankind to draw back and, whatever difficulties, disappointments, struggles, reactions, checks or brutal interruptions might mark the course of this development, they would be bound to help in the end rather than hinder the final and inevitable result.

Still, it would be vain to hope that the principle of international control will be thoroughly effective at first or that this loose formation, which is likely to be in the beginning half form, half nebula, will prevent farther conflicts, explosions, catastrophes.² The difficulties are too great. The mind of the race has not as yet the necessary experience; the intellect of its ruling classes has not acquired the needed minimum of wisdom and foresight; the temperament of the peoples has not developed the indispensable instincts and sentiments. Whatever arrangement is made will proceed on the old basis of national egoisms, hungers, cupidities, self-assertions and will simply endeavour to regulate them just enough to prevent too disastrous collisions. The first means tried will necessarily be insufficient because too much respect will be paid to those very egoisms which it is sought to control. The causes of strife will remain; the temper that engenders it will live on, perhaps exhausted and subdued for a time in certain of its activities, but unexorcised; the means of strife may be controlled but will be allowed to remain. Armaments may be restricted, but will not be abolished; national armies may be limited in numbers—an illusory limitation—but they will be maintained; science will still continue to minister ingeniously to the art of collective massacre. War can only be abolished if national armies are abolished and even then with difficulty, by the development of some other machinery which humanity does not yet know how to form or, even if formed, will not for some time be able or willing perfectly to utilise. And there is no chance of national armies being abolished; for each nation distrusts all the others too much, has too many ambitions and hungers, needs to remain armed, if for nothing else, to guard its markets and keep down its dominions, colonies, subject peoples. Commercial ambitions and rivalries, political pride, dreams, longings, jealousies are not going to disappear as if by the touch of a magic wand merely because Europe has in an insane clash of

² This prediction, easy enough to make at that time, and the estimate of its causes have been fully justified by the course of events and the outbreak of a still greater, more disastrous war.

long-ripening ambitions, jealousies and hatreds decimated its manhood and flung in three years the resources of decades into the melting-pot of war. The awakening must go much deeper, lay hold upon much purer roots of action before the psychology of nations will be transmuted into that something "wondrous, rich and strange" which will eliminate war and international collisions from our distressed and stumbling human life.

National egoism remaining, the means of strife remaining, its causes, opportunities, excuses will never be wanting. The present war came because all the leading nations had long been so acting as to make it inevitable; it came because there was a Balkan imbroglio and a Near-Eastern hope and commercial and colonial rivalries in Northern Africa over which the dominant nations had been battling in peace long before one or more of them grasped at the rifle and the shell. Sarajevo and Belgium were mere determining circumstances; to get to the root causes we have to go back as far at least as Agadir and Algeciras. From Morocco to Tripoli, from Tripoli to Thrace and Macedonia, from Macedonia to Herzegovina the electric chain ran with that inevitable logic of causes and results, actions and their fruits which we call Karma, creating minor detonations on its way till it found the inflammable point and created that vast explosion which has filled Europe with blood and ruins. Possibly the Balkan question may be definitively settled, though that is far from certain; possibly the definitive expulsion of Germany from Africa may ease the situation by leaving that continent in the possession of three or four nations who are for the present allies. But even if Germany were expunged from the map and its resentments and ambitions deleted as a European factor, the root causes of strife would remain. There will still be an Asiatic question of the Near and the Far East which may take on new conditions and appearances and regroup its constituent elements, but must remain so fraught with danger that if it is stupidly settled or does not settle itself, it would be fairly safe to predict the next great human collision with Asia as either its first field or its origin. Even if that difficulty is settled, new causes of strife must necessarily develop where the spirit of national

egoism and cupidity seeks for satisfaction; and so long as it lives, satisfaction it must seek and repletion can never permanently satisfy it. The tree must bear its own proper fruit, and Nature is always a diligent gardener.

The limitation of armies and armaments is an illusory remedy. Even if there could be found an effective international means of control, it would cease to operate as soon as the clash of war actually came. The European conflict has shown that, in the course of a war, a country can be turned into a huge factory of arms and a nation convert its whole peaceful manhood into an army. England which started with a small and even insignificant armed force, was able in the course of a single year to raise millions of men and in two to train and equip them and throw them effectively into the balance. This object-lesson is sufficient to show that the limitation of armies and armaments can only lighten the national burden in peace, leaving it by that very fact more resources for the conflict, but cannot prevent or even minimise the disastrous intensity and extension of war. Nor will the construction of a stronger international law with a more effective sanction behind it be an indubitable or a perfect remedy. It is often asserted that this is what is needed; just as in the nation Law has replaced and suppressed the old barbaric method of settling disputes between individuals, families or clans by the arbitration of Might, a similar development ought to be possible in the life of nations. Perhaps in the end; but to expect it to operate successfully at once is to ignore both the real basis of the effective authority of Law and the difference between the constituents of a developed nation and the constituents of that ill-developed international comity which it is proposed to initiate.

The authority of Law in a nation or community does not really depend on any so-called "majesty" or mystic power in man-made rules and enactments. Its real sources of power are two, first, the strong interest of the majority or of a dominant minority or of the community as a whole in maintaining it and, secondly, the possession of a sole armed force, police and military, which makes that interest effective. The metaphorical

sword of justice can only act because there is a real sword behind it to enforce its decrees and its penalties against the rebel and the dissident. And the essential character of this armed force is that it belongs to nobody, to no individual or constituent group of the community except alone to the State, the king or the governing class or body in which sovereign authority is centred. Nor can there be any security if the armed force of the State is balanced or its sole effectivity diminished by the existence of other armed forces belonging to groups and individuals and free in any degree from the central control or able to use their power against the governing authority. Even so, even with this authority backed by a sole and centralised armed force, Law has not been able to prevent strife of a kind between individuals and classes because it has not been able to remove the psychological, economic and other causes of strife. Crime with its penalties is always a kind of mutual violence, a kind of revolt and civil strife and even in the best-policed and most law-abiding communities crime is still rampant. Even the organisation of crime is still possible although it cannot usually endure or fix its power because it has the whole vehement sentiment and effective organisation of the community against it. But what is more to the purpose, Law has not been able to prevent, although it has minimised, the possibility of civil strife and violent or armed discord within the organised nation. Whenever a class or an opinion has thought itself oppressed or treated with intolerable injustice, has found the Law and its armed force so entirely associated with an opposite interest that the suspension of the principle of law and an insurgence of the violence of revolt against the violence of oppression were or appeared the only remedy, it has, if it thought it had a chance of success, appealed to the ancient arbitration of Might. Even in our own days we have seen the most law-abiding of nations staggering on the verge of a disastrous civil war and responsible statesmen declaring their readiness to appeal to it if a measure disagreeable to them were enforced, even though it was passed by the supreme legislative authority with the sanction of the sovereign.

But in any loose international formation presently possible

the armed force would still be divided among its constituent groups; it would belong to them, not to any sovereign authority, superstate or federal council. The position would resemble the chaotic organisation of the feudal ages in which every prince and baron had his separate jurisdiction and military resources and could defy the authority of the sovereign if he were powerful enough or if he could command the necessary number and strength of allies among his peers. And in this case there would not be even the equivalent of a feudal sovereign — a king who, if nothing else, if not really a monarch, was at least the first among his peers with the prestige of sovereignty and some means of developing it into a strong and permanent actuality.

Nor would the matter be much improved if there were a composite armed force of control set over the nations and their separate military strength; for this composite would break apart and its elements return to their conflicting sources on the outbreak of overt strife. In the developed nation the individual is the unit and he is lost among the mass of individuals, unable safely to calculate the force he could command in a conflict, afraid of all other individuals not bound to him because he sees in them natural supporters of outraged authority; revolt is to him a most dangerous and incalculable business, even the initial conspiracy fraught at every moment with a thousand terrors and dangers that lower in terrible massed array against a small modicum of scattered chances. The soldier also is a solitary individual, afraid of all the rest, a terrible punishment suspended over him and ready to fall at the least sign of insubordination, never sure of a confident support among his fellows or, even if a little certain, not assured of any effective support from the civil population and therefore deprived of that moral force which would encourage him to defy the authority of Law and Government. And in his ordinary sentiment he belongs no longer to individual or family or class, but to the State and the country or at the very least to the machine of which he is a part. But here the constituents would be a small number of nations, some of them powerful empires, well able to look around them, measure their own force, make sure of their allies, calculate the forces against

them; the chances of success or failure would be all that they would have to consider. And the soldiers of the composite army would belong at heart to their country and not at all to the nebulous entity which controlled them.

Therefore, pending the actual evolution of an international State so constituted as to be something other than a mere loose conglomerate of nations or rather a palaver of the deputies of national governments, the reign of peace and unity dreamed of by the idealist could never be possible by these political or administrative means or, if possible, could never be secure. Even if war were eliminated, still as in the nation crime between individuals exists, or as other means such as disastrous general strikes are used in the war of classes, so here too other means of strife would be developed, much more disastrous perhaps than war. And even they would be needed and inevitable in the economy of Nature, not only to meet the psychological necessity of egoistic discord and passion and ambition, but as an outlet and an arm for the sense of injustice, of oppressed rights, of thwarted possibilities. The law is always the same, that wherever egoism is the root of action it must bear its own proper results and reactions and, however minimised and kept down they may be by an external machinery, their eventual outburst is sure and can be delayed but not prevented for ever.

It is apparent at least that no loose formation without a powerful central control could be satisfactory, effective or enduring, even if it were much less loose, much more compact than anything that seems at present likely to evolve in the near future. There must be in the nature of things a second step, a movement towards greater rigidity, constriction of national liberties and the erection of a unique central authority with a uniform control over the earth's peoples.

Chapter XV

Some Lines of Fulfilment

WHAT FAVOURED form, force, system among the many that are possible now or likely to emerge hereafter will be entrusted by the secret Will in things with the external unification of mankind, is an interesting and to those who can look beyond the narrow horizon of passing events, a fascinating subject of speculation; but unfortunately it can at present be nothing more. The very multitude of the possibilities in a period of humanity so rife with the most varied and potent forces, so fruitful of new subjective developments and objective mutations creates an impenetrable mist in which only vague forms of giants can be half glimpsed. Certain ideas suggested by the present status of forces and by past experience are all that we can permit ourselves in so hazardous a field.

We have ruled out of consideration as a practical impossibility in the present international conditions and the present state of international mentality and morality the idea of an immediate settlement on the basis of an association of free nationalities, although this would be obviously the ideal basis. For it would take as its founding motive power a harmony of the two great principles actually in presence, nationalism and internationalism. Its adoption would mean that the problem of human unity would be approached at once on a rational and a sound moral basis, a recognition, on one side, of the right of all large natural groupings of men to live and to be themselves and the enthronement of respect for national liberty as an established principle of human conduct, on the other, an adequate sense of the need for order, help, a mutual, a common participation, a common life and interests in the unified and associated human race. The ideal society or State is that in which respect for individual liberty and free growth of the personal being to his perfection is harmonised with respect for the needs, efficiency, solidarity,

natural growth and organic perfection of the corporate being, the society or nation. In an ideal aggregate of all humanity, in the international society or State, national liberty and free national growth and self-realisation ought in the same way to be progressively harmonised with the solidarity and unified growth and perfection of the human race.

Therefore, if this basic principle were admitted, there might indeed be fluctuations due to the difficulty of a perfect working combination, as in the growth of the national aggregate there has been sometimes a stress on liberty and at others a stress on efficiency and order; but since the right conditions of the problem would have been recognised from the beginning and not left to be worked out in a blind tug of war, there would be some chance of an earlier reasonable solution with much less friction and violence in the process.

But there is little chance of such an unprecedented good fortune for mankind. Ideal conditions cannot be expected, for they demand a psychological clarity, a diffused reasonableness and scientific intelligence and, above all, a moral elevation and rectitude to which neither the mass of mankind nor its leaders and rulers have yet made any approach. In their absence, not reason and justice and mutual kindliness, but the trend of forces and their practical and legal adjustment must determine the working out of this as of other problems. And just as the problem of the State and the individual has been troubled and obscured not only by the conflict between individual egoism and the corporate egoism of the society, but by the continual clash between intermediate powers, class strife, quarrels of Church and State, king and nobles, king and commons, aristocracy and demos, capitalist bourgeoisie and labour proletariat, this problem too of nation and international humanity is certain to be troubled by the claims of just such intermediate powers. To say nothing of commercial interests and combinations, cultural or racial sympathies, movements of Pan-Islamism, Pan-Slavism, Pan-Germanism, Pan-Anglo-Saxonism, with a possible Pan-Americanism and Pan-Mongolianism looming up in the future, to say nothing of yet other unborn monsters, there will

always be the great intermediate factor of Imperialism, that huge armed and dominant Titan, that must by its very nature demand its own satisfaction at the cost of every suppressed or inconvenient national unit and assert its own needs as prior to the needs of the new-born international comity. That satisfaction, presumably, it must have for a time, that demand it will be for long impossible to resist. At any rate, to ignore its claims or to imagine that they can be put aside with a spurt of the writer's pen, is to build symmetrical castles on the golden sands of an impracticable idealism.

Forces take the first place in actual effectuation; moral principles, reason, justice only so far as forces can be compelled or persuaded to admit them or, as more often happens, use them as subservient aids or inspiring battle-cries, a camouflage for their own interests. Ideas sometimes leap out as armed forces and break their way through the hedge of unideal powers; sometimes they reverse the position and make interests their subordinate helpers, a fuel for their own blaze; sometimes they conquer by martyrdom: but ordinarily they have to work not only by a half-covert pressure but by accommodation to powerful forces or must even bribe and cajole them or work through and behind them. It cannot be otherwise until the average and the aggregate man become more of an intellectual, moral and spiritual being and less predominantly the vital and emotional half-reasoning human animal. The unrealised international idea will have for some time at least to work by this secondary method and through such accommodations with the realised forces of nationalism and imperialism.

It may be questioned whether by the time that things are ready for the elaboration of a firm and settled system, the idea of a just internationalism based on respect for the principle of free nationalities may not by the efforts of the world's thinkers and intellectuals have made so much progress as to exercise an irresistible pressure on States and Governments and bring about its own acceptation in large part, if not in the entirety of its claims. The answer is that States and Governments yield usually to a moral pressure only so far as it does not compel them to

sacrifice their vital interests. No established empire will easily liberate its dependent parts or allow, unless compelled, a nation now subject to it to sit at the board of an international council as its free equal. The old enthusiasm for liberty is an ideal which made France intervene to aid the evolution of a free Italy or France and England to create a new Greek nation. The national liberties for which respect was demanded during the war even at the point of the sword—or, we should say now, even with the voice of the cannon-shell—were those already established and considered therefore to have the right still to exist. All that was proposed beyond that limit was the restoration to already existing free States of men of their own nationality still under a foreign yoke. It was proposed to realise a greater Serbia, a greater Rumania, the restoration of “unredeemed” Italy, and the return of Alsace-Lorraine to France. Autonomy under Russian sovereignty was all that was promised to Poland till the German victory over Russia altered the interest and with it the idealism of the Allies. Autonomy of a kind under an imperial sovereignty or, where that does not yet exist, under imperial “protection” or “influence” are by many considered as more practical ideas now than the restoration of national freedom. That is a sign perhaps of the obscure growth of the idea of federated empires which we have discussed as one of the possibilities of the future. National liberty as an absolute ideal has no longer the old general acceptation and creative force. Nations struggling for liberty have to depend on their own strength and enthusiasm; they can expect only a tepid or uncertain support except from enthusiastic individuals or small groups whose aid is purely vocal and ineffective. Many even of the most advanced intellectuals warmly approve of the idea of subordinate autonomy for nations now subject, but seem to look with impatience on their velleities of complete independence. Even so far has imperialism travelled on its prosperous road and the imperial aggregate impressed its figure on the freest imaginations as an accomplished power in human progress.

How much farther may not this sentiment travel under the new impulse of humanity to organise its international existence

on larger and more convenient lines! It is even possible that the impatience openly expressed by the German in his imperial days against the continued existence of small nationalities opposing their settled barrier of prescribed rights to large political and commercial combinations may, while softening its rigour, yet justify its claim in the future, may be accepted by the general sense of humanity though in a less brutal, a less arrogant and aggressively egoistic form. That is to say, there may grow up a stronger tendency in the political reason of mankind to desire, perhaps eventually to insist on the rearrangement of States in a system of large imperial combines and not on the basis of a *status quo* of mixed empires and free nationalities.¹

But even if this development does not take place or does not effect itself in time, the actually existing free and non-imperial States will find themselves included indeed in whatever international council or other system may be established, but this inclusion is likely to be very much like the position of the small nobles in mediaeval times in relation to the great feudal princes, a position rather of vassals than of equals. The war brought into relief the fact that it is only the great Powers that really count in the international scale; all others merely exist by sufferance or by protection or by alliance. So long as the world was arranged on the principle of separate nationalities, this might have been only a latent reality without actually important effects on the life of the smaller nations, but this immunity might cease when the necessity of combined action or a continual active interaction became a recognised part or the foundation of the world-system. The position of a minor State standing out against the will of large Powers or a party of Powers would be worse even than that of small neutrals in the present war or of a private company surrounded by great Trusts. It would be compelled to accept the lead of one group or another of the leviathans around it and its independent weight or action in the council of nations would be nil.

¹ If the ambitions of Italy, Germany and Japan and the Fascist idea generally had triumphed, such an order of things might have eventuated.

Undoubtedly, the right of small nations to exist and assert their interests against imperialistic aggression is still a force; it was one at least of the issues in the international collision. But the assertion of this right against the aggression of a single ambitious Power is one thing; its assertion as against any arrangement for the common interest of the nations decided upon by a majority of the great Powers would very likely in the near future be regarded in quite another light. The inconvenience of a number of small neutrals claiming to stand out and be as little affected as possible by an immense international conflict was acutely felt not only by the actual combatants who were obliged to use sometimes an indirect, sometimes a direct pressure to minimise the inconveniences, but by the smaller neutrals themselves to whom their neutrality was preferable only as a lesser evil than the burden and disaster of active participation in the struggle. In any international system, the self-assertion of these smaller liberties would probably be viewed as a petty egoism and intolerable obstacle to great common interests, or, it may be, to the decision of conflicts between great world-wide interests. It is probable indeed that in any constitution of international unity the great Powers would see to it that their voice was equal to their force and influence; but even if the constitution were outwardly democratic, yet in effect it would become an oligarchy of the great Powers. Constitutions can only disguise facts, they cannot abrogate them: for whatever ideas the form of the constitution may embody, its working is always that of the actually realised forces which can use it with effect. Most governments either have now or have passed through a democratic form, but nowhere yet has there been a real democracy; it has been everywhere the propertied and professional classes and the bourgeoisie who governed in the name of the people. So too in any international council or control it would be a few great empires that would govern in the name of humanity.

At the most, if it were otherwise, it could be only for a short time, unless some new forces came into their own which would arrest or dissolve the tendency now dominant in the world towards large imperial aggregations. The position would then

be for a time very much like that of feudal Europe while it was in abortive travail of a united Christendom,—a great criss-cross of heterogeneous, complicated, overlapping and mutually interpenetrating interests, a number of small Powers counting for something, but overshadowed and partly coerced by a few great Powers, the great Powers working out the inevitable complication of their allied, divided and contrary interests by whatever means the new world-system provided and using for that purpose whatever support of classes, ideas, tendencies, institutions they could find. There would be questions of Asiatic, African, American fiefs and markets; struggles of classes starting as national questions becoming international; Socialism, Anarchism and the remainder of the competitive age of humanity struggling together for predominance; clashes of Europeanism, Asiaticism, Americanism. And from this great tangle some result would have to be worked out. It might well be by methods very different from those with which history has made us so familiar; war might be eliminated or reduced to a rare phenomenon of civil war in the international commonwealth or confederacy; new forms of coercion, such as the commercial which we now see to be growing in frequency, might ordinarily take its place; other devices might be brought into being of which we have at present no conception. But the situation would be essentially the same for humanity in general as has confronted lesser unformed aggregates in the past and would have to progress to similar issues of success, modified realisation or failure.

The most natural simplification of the problem, though not one that looks now possible, would be the division of the world into a few imperial aggregates consisting partly of federal, partly of confederate commonwealths or empires. Although unrealisable with the present strength of national egoisms, the growth of ideas and the force of changing circumstances might some day bring about such a creation and this might lead to a closer confederacy. America seems to be turning dimly towards a better understanding between the increasingly cosmopolitan United States and the Latin republics of Central and South America which may in certain contingencies materialise itself into

a confederate inter-American State. The idea of a confederate Teutonic empire, if Germany and Austria had not been entirely broken by the result of the war, might well have realised itself in the near future; and even though they are now broken it might still realise itself in a more distant future.² Similar aggregates may emerge in the Asiatic world. Such a distribution of mankind in large natural aggregates would have the advantage of simplifying a number of difficult world-problems and with the growth of peace, mutual understanding and larger ideas might lead to a comparatively painless aggregation in a World-State.

Another possible solution is suggested by the precedent of the evolution of the nation-type out of its first loose feudal form. As there the continual clash of various forces and equipollent powers necessitated the emergence of one of them, at first only predominant among his equals, the feudal king, into the type of a centralised monarchy, so conceivably, if the empires and nations of the world failed to arrive at a peaceful solution among themselves, if the class troubles, the inter-commercial troubles, the conflict of various new ideas and tendencies resulted in a long confusion and turmoil and constant changing, there might emerge a king-nation with the mission of evolving a real and settled out of a semi-chaotic or half order. We have concluded that the military conquest of the world by a single nation is not possible except under conditions which do not exist and of which there is as yet no visible prospect. But an imperial nation, such as England for example, spread all over the world, possessing the empire of the seas, knowing how to federate successfully its constituent parts and organise their entire potential strength, having the skill to make itself the representative and protector of the most progressive and liberal tendencies of the new times, allying itself with other forces and nations interested in their triumph and showing that it had the secret of a just and effective international organisation, might conceivably become the arbiter of the nations and the effective centre of an

² The Nazi Third Reich in Germany seemed for a time to be driving towards the realisation of this possibility in another form, a German empire of central Europe under a totalitarian hegemony.

international government. Such a possibility in any form is as yet extremely remote, but it could become under new circumstances a realisable possibility of the future.

Conceivably, if the task of organising the world proved too difficult, if no lasting agreement could be arrived at or no firmly constituted legal authority created, the task might be undertaken not by a single empire, but by two or three great imperial Powers sufficiently near in interest and united in idea to sink possible differences and jealousies and strong enough to dominate or crush all resistance and enforce some sort of effective international law and government. The process would then be a painful one and might involve much brutality of moral and economic coercion, but if it commanded the prestige of success and evolved some tolerable form of legality and justice or even only of prosperous order, it might in the end conciliate a general moral support and prove a starting-point for freer and better forms.

Yet another possibility that cannot be ignored is that the merely inter-governmental and political evolution which alone we have considered, may be broken in upon by the long-threatened war of classes. Labour internationalism broke down, like every other form of internationalism—scientific, cultural, pacific, religious—under the fierce test of war and during the great crisis the struggle between Labour and Capital was suspended. It was then hoped that after the war the spirit of unity, conciliation and compromise would continue to reign and the threatened conflict would be averted. Nothing in human nature or in history warranted any such confident trust in the hopes of the moment. The interclass conflict has long been threatening like the European collision. The advent of the latter was preceded by large hopes of world-peace and attempts at a European concert and treaties of arbitration which would render war finally impossible. The hope of a concert between Labour and Capital idyllically settling all their acute causes of conflict in amoebaean stanzas of melodious compromise for the sake of the higher national interests is likely to be as treacherous and delusive. Even the socialisation of governments and the increasing nationalisation of industry will not remove

the root cause of conflict. For there will still remain the crucial question of the form and conditions of the new State socialism, whether it shall be regulated in the interests of Labour or of the capitalistic State and whether its direction shall be democratic by the workers themselves or oligarchic or bureaucratic by the present directing classes. This question may well lead to struggles which may easily grow into an international or at least an inter-European conflict; it might even rend each nation in two instead of uniting it as in the war crisis. And the results of such a struggle may have an incalculable effect, either in changing the ideas and life of men dynamically in new directions or in breaking down the barriers of existing nations and empires.³

³ This hypothetic forecast was fully justified—and tended to become more and more so—by the post-war developments of national and international life. The internecine butchery in Spain, the development of two opposite types of Socialism in Russia, Italy and Germany, the uneasy political situation in France were examples of the fulfilment of these tendencies. But this tendency has reached its acme in the emergence of Communism and it now seems probable that the future will belong to a struggle between Communism and a surviving capitalistic Industrialism in the New World or even between Communism and a more moderate system of social democracy in the two continents of the Old World. But generally speaking, speculations noted down in this chapter at a time when the possibilities of the future were very different from what they are now and all was in a flux and welter of dubious confusion, are out of date since an even more stupendous conflict has intervened and swept the previous existing conditions out of existence. Nevertheless, some of them still survive and threaten the safe evolution of the new tentative world-order or, indeed, any future world-order.

Chapter XVI

The Problem of Uniformity and Liberty

THE QUESTION with which we started has reached some kind of answer. After sounding as thoroughly as our lights permit the possibility of a political and administrative unification of mankind by political and economic motives and through purely political and administrative means, it has been concluded that it is not only possible, but that the thoughts and tendencies of mankind and the result of current events and existing forces and necessities have turned decisively in this direction. This is one of the dominant drifts which the World-Nature has thrown up in the flow of human development and it is the logical consequence of the past history of mankind and of our present circumstances. At the same time nothing justifies us in predicting its painless or rapid development or even its sure and eventual success. We have seen some of the difficulties in the way; we have seen also what are the lines on which it may practically proceed to the overcoming of those difficulties. We have concluded that the one line it is not likely to take is the ideal, that which justice and the highest expediency and the best thought of mankind demand, that which would ensure it the greatest possibility of an enduring success. It is not likely to take perfectly, until a probably much later period of our collective evolution, the form of a federation of free and equal nations or adopt as its motive a perfect harmony between the contending principles of nationalism and internationalism.

And now we have to consider the second aspect of the problem, its effect on the springs of human life and progress. The political and administrative unification of mankind is not only possible but foreshadowed by our present evolution; the collective national egoism which resists it may be overborne by

an increasing flood of the present unifying tendency to which the anguish of the European war gave a body and an articulate voice. But the question remains whether not in its first loose formation, but as it develops and becomes more complete and even vigorous, a strictly unified order will not necessarily involve a considerable overriding of the liberties of mankind, individual and collective, and an oppressive mechanism by which the free development of the soul-life of humanity will be for some time at least seriously hindered or restricted or in danger of an excessive repression. We have seen that a period of loose formation is in such developments usually followed by a period of restriction and constriction in which a more rigid unification will be attempted so that firm moulds may be given to the new unity. And this has meant in past unifications and is likely to mean here also a suppression of that principle of liberty in human life which is the most precious gain of humanity's past spiritual, political and social struggles. The old circle of progression by retrogression is likely to work itself out again on this new line of advance.

Such a development would be not only probable, but inevitable if the unification of mankind proceeded in accordance with the Germanic gospel of the increasing domination of the world by the one fit empire, nation, race. It would be equally inevitable if the means employed by Destiny were the domination of humanity by two or three great imperial nations; or if the effectuating force were a closely organised united Europe which would, developing the scheme of a certain kind of political thinkers, take in hand the rest of the world and hold the darker-coloured races of mankind in tutelage for an indefinite period.

The ostensible object and justification of such a tutelage would be to civilise, that is to say, to Europeanise the less developed races. Practically, we know that it would mean their exploitation, since in the course of human nature the benevolent but forceful guardian would feel himself justified in making the best profit out of his advantageous situation, always of course in the interest at once of his own development and that of the world in general. The regime would rest upon superior force for

its maintenance and oppose itself to the velleities of freedom in the governed on the ground either that they were unfit or that the aspiration was immature, two arguments that may well remain valid for ever, since they can never be refuted to the satisfaction of those who advance them. At first this regime might be so worked as to preserve the principle of individual liberty for the governing races while enforcing a beneficial subjection upon the ruled; but that could not endure. The experience of the past teaches us that the habit of preferring the principle of authority to the principle of liberty is engendered in an imperial people, reacts upon it at home and leads it first insensibly and then by change of thought and the development of a fate in circumstances to the sacrifice of its own inner freedom. There could be only two outlets to such a situation, either the growth of the principle of liberty among the peoples still subject or, let us say, administered by others for their own benefit, or else its general decline in the world. Either the higher state must envelop from above or the lower from below; they cannot subsist perpetually together in the same human economy. But nine times out of ten, in the absence of circumstances ending the connection, it is the unhappier possibility that conquers.¹

All these means of unification would proceed practically by the use of force and compulsion and any deliberately planned, prolonged and extended use of restrictive means tends to discourage the respect for the principle of liberty in those who apply the compulsion as well as the fact of liberty in those to whom it is applied. It favours the growth of the opposite principle of dominating authority whose whole tendency is to introduce rigidity, uniformity, a mechanised and therefore eventually an unprogressive system of life. This is a psychological relation of cause and effect whose working cannot be avoided except by taking care to found all use of authority on the widest possible basis of free consent. But by their very nature and origin the

¹ These considerations have now become irrelevant to the actual condition of things. Asia is now for the most part free or in the process of liberation, the idea of a dominant West or a dominant Europe has no longer any force and has indeed receded out of men's minds and practically out of existence.

regimes of unification thus introduced would be debarred from the free employment of this corrective; for they would have to proceed by compulsion of what might be very largely a reluctant material and the imposing of their will for the elimination of all resisting forces and tendencies. They would be compelled to repress, diminish, perhaps even abolish all forms of liberty which their experience found to be used for fostering the spirit of revolt or of resistance; that is to say, all those larger liberties of free action and free self-expression which make up the best, the most vigorous, the most stimulating part of human freedom. They would be obliged to abolish, first by violence and then by legal suppression and repression, all the elements of what we now call national freedom; in the process individual liberty would be destroyed both in the parts of humanity coerced and, by inevitable reaction and contagion, in the imperial nation or nations. Relapse in this direction is always easy, because the assertion of his human dignity and freedom is a virtue man has only acquired by long evolution and painful endeavour; to respect the freedom of others he is still less naturally prone, though without it his own liberty can never be really secure; but to oppress and dominate where he can — often, be it noted, with excellent motives — and otherwise to be half dupe and half serf of those who can dominate, are his inborn animal propensities. Therefore in fact all unnecessary restriction of the few common liberties man has been able to organise for himself becomes a step backward, whatever immediate gain it may bring; and every organisation of oppression or repression beyond what the imperfect conditions of human nature and society render inevitable, becomes, no matter where or by whom it is practised, a blow to the progress of the whole race.

If, on the other hand, the formal unification of the race is effectuated by a combination of free nations and empires and if these empires strive to become psychological realities and therefore free organisms, or if by that time the race has advanced so far that the principle of free national or cultural grouping within a unified mankind can be adopted, then the danger of retrogression will be greatly diminished. Still, it will

exist. For, as we have seen, the principle of order, of uniformity is the natural tendency of a period of unification. The principle of liberty offers a natural obstacle to the growth of uniformity and, although perfectly reconcilable with a true order and easily coexistent with an order already established into which it has been fitted, is not so easily reconciled as a matter of practice with a new order which demands from it new sacrifices for which it is not yet psychologically prepared. This in itself need not matter; for all movement forward implies a certain amount of friction and difficulty of adjustment, and if in the process liberty suffered a few shocks on one side and order a few shocks on the other, they would still shake down easily enough into a new adjustment after a certain amount of experience. Unfortunately, it is the nature of every self-asserting tendency or principle in the hour of its growth, when it finds circumstances favourable, to over-assert itself and exaggerate its claim, to carry its impulses to a one-sided fruition, to affirm its despotic rule and to depress and even to trample upon other tendencies and principles and especially on those which it instinctively feels to be the farthest removed from its own nature. And if it finds a resistance in these opposite powers, then its impulse of self-assertion becomes angry, violent, tyrannical; instead of the friction of adjustment we have an inimical struggle stumbling through violent vicissitudes, action and reaction, evolution and revolution till one side or the other prevails in the conflict.

This is what has happened in the past development of mankind; the struggle of order and uniformity against liberty has been the dominant fact of all great human formations and developments—religious, social, political. There is as yet no apparent ground for predicting a more reasonable principle of development in the near future. Man seems indeed to be becoming more generally a reasoning animal than in any known past period of his history, but he has not by that become, except in one or two directions, much more of a reasonable mind and a harmonious spirit; for he still uses his reason much more commonly to justify strife and mutual contradiction than to arrive at a wise agreement. And always his mind and reason are very

much at the mercy of his vital desires and passions. Therefore we must suppose that even under the best circumstances the old method of development will assert itself and the old struggle be renewed in the attempt at human unification. The principle of authority and order will attempt a mechanical organisation; the principle of liberty will resist and claim a more flexible, free and spacious system. The two ancient enemies will struggle for the control of the human unity as they did in the past for the control of the growing form of the nation. In the process, the circumstances being favourable to the narrower power, both national and individual liberty are likely to go to the wall—happy if they are not set against it before a firing platoon of laws and restrictions to receive a military quietus.

This might not happen if within the nations themselves the spirit of individual liberty still flourished in its old vigour; for that would then demand, both from an innate sympathy and for its own sake, respect for the liberties of all the constituent nations. But, as far as all present appearances go to show, we are entering into a period in which the ideal of individual liberty is destined to an entire eclipse under the shadow of the State idea, if not to a sort of temporary death or at least of long stupor, coma and hibernation. The constriction and mechanisation of the unifying process is likely to coincide with a simultaneous process of constriction and mechanisation within each constituting unit. Where then in this double process will the spirit of liberty find its safeguard or its alimentation? The old practical formulations of freedom would disappear in the double process and the only hope of healthy progress would lie in a new formulation of liberty produced by a new powerful movement spiritual or intellectual of the human mind which will reconcile individual liberty with the collective ideal of a communal life and the liberty of the group-unit with the new-born necessity of a more united life for the human race.

Meanwhile, we have to consider how far it is either likely or possible to carry the principle of unification in those more outward and mechanical aspects which the external, that is to say, political and administrative method is prone to favour, and

how far they will in their more extreme formulations favour or retard the true progress of the race to its perfection. We have to consider how far the principle of nationality itself is likely to be affected, whether there is any chance of its entire dissolution or, if it is preserved, what place the subordinated nation-unit will take in the new united life. This involves the question of control, the idea of the "Parliament of Man" and other ideas of political organisation as applied to this new portentous problem in the science of collective living. Thirdly, there is the question of uniformity and how far uniformity is either healthful to the race or necessary to unity. It is evident that we enter here upon problems which we shall have to treat in a much more abstract fashion and with much less sense of actuality than those we have till now been handling. For all this is in the dark future, and all the light we can have is from past experience and the general principles of life and nature and sociology; the present gives us only a dim light on the solution which plunges a little further on in Time into a shadowy darkness full of incalculable possibilities. We can foresee nothing; we can only speculate and lay down principles.

We see that there are always two extreme possibilities with a number of more or less probable compromises. The nation is at present the firm group-unit of the human aggregation to which all other units tend to subordinate themselves; even the imperial has hitherto been only a development of the national and empires have existed in recent times, not consciously for the sake of a wider aggregation as did the imperial Roman world, but to serve the instinct of domination and expansion, the land hunger, money hunger, commodity hunger, the vital, intellectual, cultural aggressiveness of powerful and prosperous nations. This, however, does not secure the nation-unit from eventual dissolution in a larger principle of aggregation. Group-units there must always be in any human unity, even the most entire, intolerant and uniform, for that is the very principle not only of human nature, but of life and of every aggregation; we strike here on a fundamental law of universal existence, on the fundamental mathematics and physics of creation. But

it does not follow that the nation need persist as the group-unit. It may disappear altogether; even now the rejection of the nation-idea has begun, the opposite idea of the *sans-patrie*, the citizen of the world, has been born and was a growing force before the war; and though temporarily overborne, silenced and discouraged, it is by no means slain, but is likely to revive with an increased violence hereafter. On the other hand, the nation-idea may persist in full vitality or may assert in the event — after whatever struggle and apparent decline — its life, its freedom, its vigorous particularism within the larger unity. Finally, it may persist, but with a reduced and subjected vitality, or even without real vitality or any living spirit of particularism or separatism, as a convenience, an administrative rather than a psychological fact like a French department or an English county. But still it may preserve just sufficient mechanical distinctness to form a starting-point for that subsequent dissolution of human unity which will come about inevitably if the unification is more mechanical than real, — if, that is to say, it continues to be governed by the political and administrative motive, supported by the experience of economic and social or merely cultural ease and convenience and fails to serve as a material basis for the spiritual oneness of mankind.

So also with the ideal of uniformity; for with many minds, especially those of a rigid, mechanical cast, those in which logic and intellectuality are stronger than the imagination and the free vital instinct or those which are easily seduced by the beauty of an idea and prone to forget its limitations, uniformity is an ideal, even sometimes the highest ideal of which they can think. The uniformity of mankind is not an impossible eventuality, even though impracticable in the present circumstances and in certain directions hardly conceivable except in a far distant future. For certainly there is or has been an immense drive towards uniformity of life habits, uniformity of knowledge, uniformity political, social, economic, educational, and all this, if followed out to its final conclusion, will lead naturally to a uniformity of culture. If that were realised, the one barrier left against a dead level of complete uniformity would be the difference

of language; for language creates and determines thought even while it is created and determined by it, and so long as there is difference of language there will always be a certain amount of free variation of thought, of knowledge and of culture. But it is easily conceivable that the general uniformity of culture and intimate association of life will give irresistible force to the need already felt of a universal language, and a universal language once created or once adopted may end by killing out the regional languages as Latin killed out the languages of Gaul, Spain and Italy or as English has killed out Cornish, Gaelic, Erse and has been encroaching on the Welsh tongue. On the other hand, there is a revival nowadays, due to the growing subjectivism of the human mind, of the principle of free variation and refusal of uniformity. If this tendency triumphs, the unification of the race will have so to organise itself as to respect the free culture, thought, life of its constituent units. But there is also the third possibility of a dominant uniformity which will allow or even encourage such minor variations as do not threaten the foundations of its rule. And here again the variations may be within their limits vital, forceful, to a certain extent particularist though not separatist, or they may be quite minor tones and shades, yet sufficient to form a starting-point for the dissolution of uniformity into a new cycle of various progress.

So again with the governing organisation of the human race. It may be a rigid regimentation under a central authority such as certain socialistic schemes envisage for the nation, a regime suppressing all individual and regional liberty in the interests of a close and uniform organisation of human training, economic life, social habits, morals, knowledge, religion even, every department of human activity. Such a development may seem impossible, as it would be indeed impracticable in the near future, because of the immense masses it would have to embrace, the difficulties it would have to surmount, the many problems that would have to be solved before it could become possible. But this idea of impossibility leaves out of consideration two important factors, the growth of Science with its increasingly easy manipulation of huge masses — witness the present war

—and of large-scale problems and the rapid march of Socialism.² Supposing the triumph of the socialistic idea—or of its practice, in whatever disguise—in all the continents, it might naturally lead to an international socialisation which would be rendered possible by the growth of science and scientific organisation and by the annihilation of space difficulties and numerical difficulties. On the other hand, it is possible that after a cycle of violent struggle between the ideal of regimentation and the ideal of liberty the socialistic period of mankind might prove comparatively of brief duration like that of monarchical absolutism in Europe and might be followed by another more inspired by the principles of philosophic Anarchism, that is to say, of unity based upon the completest individual freedom and freedom also of natural unforced grouping. A compromise might also be reached, a dominant regimentation with a subordinate freedom more or less vital, but even if less vital, yet a starting-point for the dissolution of the regime when humanity begins to feel that regimentation is not its ultimate destiny and that a fresh cycle of search and experiment has become again indispensable to its future.

It is impossible here to consider these large questions with any thoroughness. To throw out certain ideas which may guide us in our approach to the problem of unification is all that we can attempt. The problem is vast and obscure and even a ray of light upon it here and there may help to diminish its difficulty and darkness.

² Even such apparent reactions as the now-defeated Fascist regime in Italy merely prepare or embody new possibilities of the principle of State control and direction which is the essence of Socialism.

The Ideal of Human Unity

Part II

Chapter XVII

Nature's Law in Our Progress— Unity in Diversity, Law and Liberty

FOR MAN alone of terrestrial creatures to live rightly involves the necessity of knowing rightly, whether, as rationalism pretends, by the sole or dominant instrumentation of his reason or, more largely and complexly, by the sum of his faculties; and what he has to know is the true nature of being and its constant self-effectuation in the values of life, in less abstract language the law of Nature and especially of his own nature, the forces within him and around him and their right utilisation for his own greater perfection and happiness or for that and the greater perfection and happiness of his fellow-creatures. In the old phrase his business is to learn to live according to Nature. But Nature can no longer be imaged, as once it was, as an eternal right rule from which man has wandered, since it is rather a thing itself changing, progressing, evolving, ascending from height to more elevated height, widening from limit to broader limit of its own possibilities. Yet in all this changing there are certain eternal principles or truths of being which remain the same and upon them as bedrock, with them as a primary material and within them as a framework our progress and perfection are compelled to take place. Otherwise there would be an infinite chaos and not a world ordered even in the clash of its forces.

The subhuman life of animal and plant is not subjected to this necessity of knowledge nor of that which is the necessary accompaniment of knowledge, a conscious will impelled always to execute what knowledge perceives. By this exemption it is saved from an immense amount of error, deformation and disease, for it lives spontaneously according to Nature, its knowledge and will are hers and incapable, whether conscient or subconscious, of variation from her laws and dictates. Man seems, on the

contrary, to possess a power of turning his mind and will upon Nature and a possibility of governing her movement, even of varying from the course she dictates to him. But here there is really a deformative trick of language. For man's mentality is also a part of Nature; his mentality is even the most important, if not the largest part of his nature. It is, we may say, Nature become partly conscious of her own laws and forces, conscious of her struggle of progression and inspired with the conscious will to impose a higher and higher law on her own processes of life and being. In subhuman life there is a vital and physical struggle, but no mental conflict. Man is subjected to this mental conflict and is therefore at war not only with others but with himself; and because he is capable of this war with himself, he is also capable of that which is denied to the animal, of an inner evolution, a progression from higher to higher type, a constant self-transcending.

This evolution takes place at present by a conflict and progress of ideas applied to life. In their primary aspect human ideas of life are simply a mental translation of the forces and tendencies of life itself as they emerge in the form of needs, desires and interests. The human mind has a practical intelligence more or less clear and exact which takes these things into account and gives to one and another a greater or less value according to its own experience, preference and judgment. Some the man accepts and helps in their growth by his will and intelligence, others he rejects, discourages and even succeeds in eliminating. But from this elementary process there emerges a second and more advanced character of man's ideas about life; he passes beyond the mere mental translation and ready dynamic handling to a regulated valuation of the forces and tendencies that have emerged or are emerging in him and his environment. He studies them as fixed processes and rules of Nature and endeavours to understand their law and norm. He tries to determine the laws of his mind and life and body, the law and rule of the facts and forces about him that constitute his environment and determine the field and the mould of his action. Since we are imperfect and evolutionary beings, this study of the laws of life is bound to

envisage two aspects: it perceives the rule of what is and the rule of what may or ought to be, the law of our actualities and the law of our potentialities. The latter takes for the human intellect which tends always to an arbitrary and emphatic statement of things, the form of a fixed ideal standard or set of principles from which our actual life is a fall and deviation or towards which it is a progress and aspiration.

The evolutionary idea of Nature and life brings us to a profounder view. Both what is and what may be are expressions of the same constant facts of existence and forces or powers of our Nature from which we cannot and are not meant to escape, since all life is Nature fulfilling itself and not Nature destroying or denying itself; but we may raise and we are intended to raise, change and widen the forms, arrangements and values of these constant facts and forces of our nature and existence, and in the course of our progress the change and perfectioning may amount to what seems a radical transformation, although nothing essential is altered. Our actualities are the form and value or power of expression to which our nature and life have attained; their norm or law is the fixed arrangement and process proper to that stage of evolution. Our potentialities point us to a new form, value, power of expression with their new and appropriate arrangement and process which is their proper law and norm. Standing thus between the actual and the possible, our intellect tends to mistake present law and form for the eternal law of our nature and existence and regard any change as a deviation and fall or else, on the contrary, to mistake some future and potential law and form for our ideal rule of life and all actual deviation from that as an error or sin of our nature. In reality, only that is eternal which is constant through all changes and our ideal can be no more than a progressive expression of it. Only the utmost limit of height, wideness and fullness of self-expression possible to man, if any such limit there be, could be regarded, did we know of it, — and as yet we do not know our utmost possibilities,— as the eternal ideal.

Whatever the ideas or ideals which the human mind extracts from life or tries to apply to life, they can be nothing

but the expression of that life itself as it attempts to find more and more and fix higher and higher its own law and realise its potentialities. Our mentality represents the conscious part of the movement of Nature in this progressive self-realisation and self-fulfilment of the values and potentialities of her human way of living. If that mentality were perfect, it would be one in its knowledge and will with the totality of the secret Knowledge and Will which she is trying to bring to the surface and there would be no mental conflict. For we should then be able to identify ourself with her movement, know her aim and follow intelligently her course,—realising the truth on which the Gita lays stress that it is Nature alone that acts and the movements of our mind and life are only the action of her modes. The subhuman life vitally, instinctively and mechanically does this very thing, lives according to Nature within the limits of its type and is free from internal conflict though not from conflict with other life. A superhuman life would reach consciously this perfection, make the secret Knowledge and Will in things its own and fulfil itself through Nature by her free, spontaneous and harmonious movement unhaesting, unresting, towards that full development which is her inherent and therefore her predestined aim. Actually, because our mentality is imperfect, we catch only a glimpse of her tendencies and objects and each glimpse we get we erect into an absolute principle or ideal theory of our life and conduct; we see only one side of her process and put that forward as the whole and perfect system which must govern our ordering of our life. Working through the imperfect individual and still more imperfect collective mind, she raises up the facts and powers of our existence as opposing principles and forces to which we attach ourselves through our intellect and emotions, and favouring and depressing now this and now another she leads them in the mind of man through struggle and conflict towards a mutual knowledge and the sense of their mutual necessity and towards a progressively right relation and synthesis of their potentialities which is represented in an increasing harmony and combination of realised powers in the elastic potentiality of human life.

The social evolution of the human race is necessarily a development of the relations between three constant factors, individuals, communities of various sorts and mankind. Each seeks its own fulfilment and satisfaction, but each is compelled to develop them not independently but in relation to the others. The first natural aim of the individual must be his own inner growth and fullness and its expression in his outer life; but this he can only accomplish through his relations with other individuals, to the various kinds of community religious, social, cultural and political to which he belongs and to the idea and need of humanity at large. The community must seek its own fulfilment, but, whatever its strength of mass consciousness and collective organisation, can accomplish its growth only through its individuals under the stress of the circumstances set for it by its environment and subject to the conditions imposed by its relations to other communities and individuals and to humanity at large. Mankind as a whole has at present no consciously organised common life; it has only an inchoate organisation determined much more by circumstances than by human intelligence and will. And yet the idea and the fact of our common human existence, nature, destiny has always exercised its strong influence on human thought and action. One of the chief preoccupations of ethics and religion has been the obligations of man to mankind. The pressure of the large movements and fluctuations of the race has always affected the destinies of its separate communities, and there has been a constant return-pressure of separate communities social, cultural, political, religious to expand and include, if it might be, the totality of the race. And if or when the whole of humanity arrives at an organised common life and seeks a common fulfilment and satisfaction, it can only do it by means of the relation of this whole to its parts and by the aid of the expanding life of individual human beings and of the communities whose progress constitutes the larger terms of the life of the race.

Nature works always through these three terms and none of them can be abolished. She starts from the visible manifestation of the one and the many, from the totality and its constituent

units and creates intermediary unities between the two without which there can be no full development either of the totality or of the units. In the life-type itself she creates always the three terms of genus, species and individual. But while in the animal life she is satisfied to separate rigidly and group summarily, in the human she strives, on the contrary, to override the divisions she has made and lead the whole kind to the sense of unity and the realisation of oneness. Man's communities are formed not so much by the instinctive herding together of a number of individuals of the same genus or species as by local association, community of interests and community of ideas; and these limits tend always to be overcome in the widening of human thoughts and sympathies brought about by the closer intermingling of races, nations, interests, ideas, cultures. Still, if overcome in their separatism, they are not abolished in their fact, because they repose on an essential principle of Nature,—diversity in unity. Therefore it would seem that the ideal or ultimate aim of Nature must be to develop the individual and all individuals to their full capacity, to develop the community and all communities to the full expression of that many-sided existence and potentiality which their differences were created to express, and to evolve the united life of mankind to its full common capacity and satisfaction, not by suppression of the fullness of life of the individual or the smaller commonalty, but by full advantage taken of the diversity which they develop. This would seem the soundest way to increase the total riches of mankind and throw them into a fund of common possession and enjoyment.

The united progress of mankind would thus be realised by a general principle of interchange and assimilation between individual and individual and again between individual and community, between community and community and again between the smaller commonalty and the totality of mankind, between the common life and consciousness of mankind and its freely developing communal and individual constituents. As a matter of fact, although this interchange is what Nature even now contrives to bring about to a certain extent, life is far from being governed by such a principle of free and harmonious mutuality.

There is a struggle, an opposition of ideas, impulses and interests, an attempt of each to profit by various kinds of war on the others, by a kind of intellectual, vital, physical robbery and theft or even by the suppression, devouring, digestion of its fellows rather than by a free and rich interchange. This is the aspect of life which humanity in its highest thought and aspiration knows that it has to transcend, but has either not yet discovered the right means or else has not had the force to apply it. It now endeavours instead to get rid of strife and the disorders of growth by a strong subordination or servitude of the life of the individual to the life of the community and, logically, it will be led to the attempt to get rid of strife between communities by a strong subordination or servitude of the life of the community to the united and organised life of the human race. To remove freedom in order to get rid of disorder, strife and waste, to remove diversity in order to get rid of separatism and jarring complexities is the impulse of order and regimentation by which the arbitrary rigidity of the intellectual reason seeks to substitute its straight line for the difficult curves of the process of Nature.

But freedom is as necessary to life as law and regime; diversity is as necessary as unity to our true completeness. Existence is one only in its essence and totality, in its play it is necessarily multiform. Absolute uniformity would mean the cessation of life, while on the other hand the vigour of the pulse of life may be measured by the richness of the diversities which it creates. At the same time, while diversity is essential for power and fruitfulness of life, unity is necessary for its order, arrangement and stability. Unity we must create, but not necessarily uniformity. If man could realise a perfect spiritual unity, no sort of uniformity would be necessary; for the utmost play of diversity would be securely possible on that foundation. If again he could realise a secure, clear, firmly-held unity in the principle, a rich, even an unlimited diversity in its application might be possible without any fear of disorder, confusion or strife. Because he cannot do either of these things he is tempted always to substitute uniformity for real unity. While the life-power in man demands diversity,

his reason favours uniformity. It prefers it because uniformity gives him a strong and ready illusion of unity in place of the real oneness at which it is so much more difficult to arrive. It prefers it, secondly, because uniformity makes easy for him the otherwise difficult business of law, order and regimentation. It prefers it too because the impulse of the mind in man is to make every considerable diversity an excuse for strife and separation and therefore uniformity seems to him the one secure and easy way to unification. Moreover, uniformity in any one direction or department of life helps him to economise his energies for development in other directions. If he can standardise his economic existence and escape from its problems, he is likely to have more leisure and room to attend to his intellectual and cultural growth. Or again, if he standardises his whole social existence and rejects its farther possible problems, he is likely to have peace and a free mind to attend more energetically to his spiritual development. Even here, however, the complex unity of existence asserts its truth: in the end man's total intellectual and cultural growth suffers by social immobility,— by any restriction or poverty of his economic life; the spiritual existence of the race, if it attains to remote heights, weakens at last in its richness and continued sources of vivacity when it depends on a too standardised and regimented society; the inertia from below rises and touches even the summits.

Owing to the defects of our mentality uniformity has to a certain extent to be admitted and sought after; still the real aim of Nature is a true unity supporting a rich diversity. Her secret is clear enough from the fact that though she moulds on one general plan, she insists always on an infinite variation. The plan of the human form is one, yet no two human beings are precisely alike in their physical characteristics. Human nature is one in its constituents and its grand lines, but no two human beings are precisely alike in their temperament, characteristics and psychological substance. All life is one in its essential plan and principle; even the plant is a recognisable brother of the animal; but the unity of life admits and encourages an infinite variety of types. The natural variation of human communities from each

other proceeds on the same plan as the variation of individuals; each develops its own character, variant principle, natural law. This variation and fundamental following of its own separate law is necessary to its life, but it is equally necessary to the healthy total life of mankind. For the principle of variation does not prevent free interchange, does not oppose the enrichment of all from a common stock and of the common stock by all which we have seen to be the ideal principle of existence; on the contrary, without a secure variation such interchange and mutual assimilation would be out of the question. Therefore we see that in this harmony between our unity and our diversity lies the secret of life; Nature insists equally in all her works upon unity and upon variation. We shall find that a real spiritual and psychological unity can allow a free diversity and dispense with all but the minimum of uniformity which is sufficient to embody the community of nature and of essential principle. Until we can arrive at that perfection, the method of uniformity has to be applied, but we must not over-apply it on peril of discouraging life in the very sources of its power, richness and sane natural self-unfolding.

The quarrel between law and liberty stands on the same ground and moves to the same solution. The diversity, the variation must be a free variation. Nature does not manufacture, does not impose a pattern or a rule from outside; she impels life to grow from within and to assert its own natural law and development modified only by its commerce with its environment. All liberty, individual, national, religious, social, ethical, takes its ground upon this fundamental principle of our existence. By liberty we mean the freedom to obey the law of our being, to grow to our natural self-fulfilment, to find out naturally and freely our harmony with our environment. The dangers and disadvantages of liberty, the disorder, strife, waste and confusion to which its wrong use leads are indeed obvious. But they arise from the absence or defect of the sense of unity between individual and individual, between community and community, which pushes them to assert themselves at the expense of each other instead of growing by mutual help and interchange and

to assert freedom for themselves in the very act of encroaching on the free development of their fellows. If a real, a spiritual and psychological unity were effectuated, liberty would have no perils and disadvantages; for free individuals enamoured of unity would be compelled by themselves, by their own need, to accommodate perfectly their own growth with the growth of their fellows and would not feel themselves complete except in the free growth of others. Because of our present imperfection and the ignorance of our mind and will, law and regimentation have to be called in to restrain and to compel from outside. The facile advantages of a strong law and compulsion are obvious, but equally great are the disadvantages. Such perfection as it succeeds in creating tends to be mechanical and even the order it imposes turns out to be artificial and liable to break down if the yoke is loosened or the restraining grasp withdrawn. Carried too far, an imposed order discourages the principle of natural growth which is the true method of life and may even slay the capacity for real growth. We repress and over-standardise life at our peril; by over-regimentation we crush Nature's initiative and habit of intuitive self-adaptation. Dwarfed or robbed of elasticity, the devitalised individuality, even while it seems outwardly fair and symmetrical, perishes from within. Better anarchy than the long continuance of a law which is not our own or which our real nature cannot assimilate. And all repressive or preventive law is only a makeshift, a substitute for the true law which must develop from within and be not a check on liberty, but its outward image and visible expression. Human society progresses really and vitally in proportion as law becomes the child of freedom; it will reach its perfection when, man having learned to know and become spiritually one with his fellow-man, the spontaneous law of his society exists only as the outward mould of his self-governed inner liberty.

Chapter XVIII

The Ideal Solution— A Free Grouping of Mankind

THESE principles founded on the essential and constant tendencies of Nature in the development of human life ought clearly to be the governing ideas in any intelligent attempt at the unification of the human race. And it might so be done if that unification could be realised after the manner of a Lycurgan constitution or by the law of an ideal Manu, the perfect sage and king. Attempted, as it will be, in very different fashion according to the desires, passions and interests of great masses of men and guided by no better light than the half-enlightened reason of the world's intellectuals and the empirical opportunism of the world's statesmen and politicians, it is likely to be done by a succession of confused experiments, recoils and returns, resistances and persistences; it will progress in spite of human unreason in the midst of a clamour of rival ideas and interests, stumble through a war of principles, advance by a clash of vehement parties ending in more or less clumsy compromises. It may even, as we have said, be managed in the most unideal, though not the most inconvenient method of all, by a certain amount of violence, the domination of a few vast and powerful empires or even the emergence of a single predominant world-empire, a king-state that will be accepted or will impose itself as the arbiter, if not the ruler of mankind. Not any intelligent principle, but necessity and convenience, not urgent light, but urgent power is likely to be the effective force in any political, administrative and economic unification of the race.

Still, though the ideal may not be immediately practicable, it is that to which our action ought more and more to move. And if the best method cannot always be employed, it is well to know the best method, so that in the strife of principles and forces

and interests something of it may enter into our dealings with each other and mitigate the errors, stumblings and sufferings which our ignorance and unreason compel us to pay as the price of our progress. In principle, then, the ideal unification of mankind would be a system in which, as a first rule of common and harmonious life, the human peoples would be allowed to form their own groupings according to their natural divisions of locality, race, culture, economic convenience and not according to the more violent accidents of history or the egoistic will of powerful nations whose policy it must always be to compel the smaller or less timely organised to serve their interests as dependents or obey their commands as subjects. The present arrangement of the world has been worked out by economic forces, by political diplomacies, treaties and purchases and by military violence without regard to any moral principle or any general rule of the good of mankind. It has served roughly certain ends of the World-Force in its development and helped at much cost of bloodshed, suffering, cruelty, oppression and revolt to bring humanity more together. Like all things that, though in themselves unideal, have been and have asserted themselves with force, it has had its justification, not moral but biological, in the necessity of the rough methods which Nature has to use with a half-animal mankind as with her animal creation. But the great step of unification once taken, the artificial arrangements which have resulted would no longer have any reason for existence. It would be so in the first place because the convenience and good of the world at large and not the satisfaction of the egoism, pride and greed of particular nations would be the object to be held in view, in the second because whatever legitimate claim any nation might have upon others, such as necessities of economic well-being and expansion, would be arranged for in a soundly organised world-union or world-state no longer on the principle of strife and competition, but on a principle of cooperation or mutual adjustment or at least of competition regulated by law and equity and just interchange. Therefore no ground would remain for forced and artificial groupings except that of historical tradition or accomplished fact which

would obviously have little weight in a great change of world conditions impossible to achieve unless the race is prepared to break hundreds of traditions and unsettle the great majority of accomplished facts.

The first principle of human unity, groupings being necessary, should be a system of free and natural groupings which would leave no room for internal discords, mutual incompatibilities and repression and revolt as between race and race or people and people. For otherwise the world-state would be founded in part at least upon a system of legalised injustice and repression or at the best upon a principle of force and compulsion, however mitigated. Such a system would contain dissatisfied elements eager to seize upon any hope of change and throw their moral force and whatever material power they might still keep on the side of any velleities that might appear in the race towards disorder, secession, dissolution of the system and perhaps a return to the old order of things. Moral centres of revolt would thus be preserved which, given the restlessness of the human mind, could not fail to have, in periods favourable to them, a great power of contagion and self-diffusion. In fact, any system which would appear to stereotype anomalies, eternise injustice and inequality or rest permanently on a principle of compulsion and forced subjection, could have no security and would be condemned by its very nature to transience.

This was the principal weakness of the drift during the war towards the settlement of the world on the basis of the actual *status quo* that followed the recent world convulsion. Such a settlement must have had the vice of fixing conditions which in their nature must be transient. It would mean not only the rule of this or that nation over dissatisfied foreign minorities but the supremacy of Europe over most of Asia and all Africa. A league or incipient unity of the nations would be equivalent under such conditions to the control of the enormous mass of mankind by an oligarchy of a few white races. Such could not be the principle of a long-enduring settlement of the world. For then one of two alternatives would be inevitable. The new system would have to support by law and force the existing

condition of things and resist any attempt at radical change; but this would lead to an unnatural suppression of great natural and moral forces and in the end a tremendous disorder, perhaps a world-shattering explosion. Or else some general legislative authority and means of change would have to be established by which the judgment and sentiment of mankind would be able to prevail over imperialistic egoisms and which would enable the European, Asiatic and African peoples now subject to make the claims of their growing self-consciousness felt in the councils of the world.¹ But such an authority, interfering with the egoisms of great and powerful empires, would be difficult to establish, slow to act and not by any means at ease in its exercise of power or moral influence or likely to be peaceful or harmonious in its deliberations. It would either reduce itself to a representative of the sentiments and interests of a ruling oligarchy of great Powers or end in such movements of secession and civil war between the States as settled the question of slavery in America. There would be only one other possible issue,—that the liberal sentiments and principles at first aroused by the war in Europe should become settled and permanent forces of action and extend themselves to the dealings of European nations with their non-European dependencies. In other words, it must become a settled political principle with European nations to change the character of their imperialism and convert their empires as soon as might be from artificial into true psychological unities.

But that would end inevitably in the recognition of the principle we have advanced, the arrangement of the world in a system of free and natural and not as hitherto of partly free and partly forced groupings. For a psychological unity could only be assured by a free assent of nations now subject to their inclusion in the imperial aggregate and the power of free assent would imply a power of free dissent and separation. If owing to incompatibility of culture, temperament or economic or other

¹ The League of Nations started with some dim ideal of this kind; but even its first halting attempts at opposing imperial egoisms ended in secession and avoided a civil war among its members only by drawing back from its own commitments. In fact, it was never more than an instrument subservient to the policy of a few great Powers.

interest the psychological unity could not be established, either such separation would be inevitable or else there must be a resort to the old principle of force,—a difficult matter when dealing with great masses of men who must in the course of the new process have arrived at self-consciousness and recovered their united intellectual force and vitality. Imperial unities of this kind must be admitted as a possible, but by no means an inevitable next step in human aggregation easier to realise than a united mankind in present conditions; but such unities could have only two rational purposes, one as a half-way house to the unity of all the nations of the world and an experiment in administrative and economic confederation on a large scale, the other as a means of habituating nations of different race, traditions, colour, civilisation to dwell together in a common political family as the whole human race would have to dwell in any scheme of unity which respected the principle of variation and did not compel a dead level of uniformity. The imperial heterogeneous unit has a value in Nature's processes only as a means towards this greater unity and, where not maintained afterwards by some natural attraction or by some miracle of entire fusion,—a thing improbable, if possible,—would cease to exist once the greater unity was accomplished. On this line of development also and indeed on any line of development the principle of a free and natural grouping of peoples must be the eventual conclusion, the final and perfect basis. It must be so because on no other foundation could the unification of mankind be secure or sound. And it must be so because once unification is firmly accomplished and war and jealous national competition replaced by better methods of intercourse and mutual adjustment, there can be no object in maintaining any other more artificial system, and therefore both reason and convenience would compel the change. The institution of a natural system of grouping would become as much a matter of course as the administrative arrangement of a country according to its natural provinces. And it would be as much a necessity of reason or convenience as the regard necessarily paid in any system of devolution or free federation to race or national sentiment or long-established local unities. Other considerations

might modify the application of the principle, but there would be none that could be strong enough to abrogate it.

The natural unit in such a grouping is the nation, because that is the basis natural evolution has firmly created and seems indeed to have provided with a view to the greater unity. Unless, therefore, unification is put off to a much later date of our history and in the meanwhile the national principle of aggregation loses its force and vitality and is dissolved in some other, the free and natural nation-unit and perhaps the nation-group would be the just and living support of a sound and harmonious world-system. Race still counts and would enter in as an element, but only as a subordinate element. In certain groupings it would predominate and be decisive; in others it would be set at nought partly by a historic and national sentiment overriding differences of language and race, partly by economic and other relations created by local contact or geographical oneness. Cultural unity would count, but need not in all cases prevail; even the united force of race and culture might not be sufficiently strong to be decisive.

The examples of this complexity are everywhere. Switzerland belongs by language, race and culture and even by affinities of sentiment to different national aggregations, two of sentiment and culture, the Latin and the Teutonic, three of race and language, the German, French and Italian, and these differences worked sufficiently to bewilder and divide Swiss sympathies in the clash of nations; but the decisive feeling overriding all others is the sentiment of Helvetian nationality and that would seem to forbid now and always any idea of a voluntary partition or dissolution of Switzerland's long-standing natural, local and historic unity. Alsace belongs predominantly by race, language and early history to a Germanic union, but the German appealed in vain to these titles and laboured in vain to change Alsace-Lorraine into Elsass-Lothringen; the living sentiments and affinities of the people, national, historical, cultural, bound it still to France. Canada and Australia have no geographical connection with the British Isles or with each other and the former would seem to belong by predestination to an American group-unity; but

certainly, in the absence of a change of sentiment not now easily foreseen, both would prefer to belong to a British grouping rather than the one fuse itself into an increasingly cosmopolitan American nation or the other stand apart as an Australasian union. On the other hand the Slavonic and Latin elements of Austro-Hungary, though they belonged by history, geographical position and economic convenience to that empire, moved strongly towards separation and, where local sentiments permitted, to union with their racial, cultural and linguistic kin. If Austria had dealt with her Slav subjects as with the Magyars or had been able to build a national culture of her own out of her German, Slav, Magyar and Italian elements, it would have been otherwise and her unity would have been secure against all external or internal forces of disruption. Race, language, local relations and economic convenience are powerful factors, but what decides must be a dominant psychological element that makes for union. To that subtler force all others, however restless they may be, must succumb; however much they may seek for free particularist expression and self-possession within a larger unity, they must needs subordinate themselves to the more powerful attraction.

For this very reason the basic principle adopted must be a free grouping and not that of some abstract or practical rule or principle of historic tradition or actual status imposed upon the nations. It is easy to build up a system in the mind and propose to erect it on foundations which would be at first sight rational and convenient. At first sight it would seem that the unity of mankind could most rationally and conveniently arrange itself upon the basis of a European grouping, an Asiatic grouping, an American grouping, with two or three sub-groups in America, Latin and English-speaking, three in Asia, the Mongolian, Indian and West-Asian, with Moslem North Africa perhaps as a natural annex to the third of these, four in Europe, the Latin, Slavonic, Teutonic and Anglo-Celtic, the latter with the colonies that still chose to adhere to it, while Central and Southern Africa might be left to develop under present conditions but with the more humane and progressive principles upon which the sentiment

of a united humanity would insist. Certain of the actual and obvious difficulties might not be of great importance under a better system of things. We know, for instance, that nations closely connected by every apparent tie, are actually divided by stronger antipathies than those more ideative and less actual which separate them from peoples who have with them no tie of affinity. Mongolian Japan and Mongolian China are sharply divided from each other in sentiment; Arab and Turk and Persian, although one in Islamic religion and culture, would not, if their present sentiments towards each other persisted, make an entirely happy family. Scandinavian Norway and Sweden had everything to draw them together and perpetuate their union,—except a strong, if irrational sentiment which made the continuance of that union impossible. But these antipathies really persist only so long as there is some actual unfriendly pressure or sense of subjugation or domination or fear of the oppression of the individuality of one by the other; once that is removed they would be likely to disappear. It is notable, for instance, that since the separation of Norway and Sweden the three Scandinavian States have been increasingly disposed to act together and regard themselves as a natural grouping in Europe. The long antipathy of the Irish and English nations is declining in the actuality of a juster, though still imperfect relation between these two national individualities, as the antipathy of Austrian and Magyar gave way when once a just relation had been established between the two kingdoms. It is easily conceivable therefore that with a system in which the causes of hostility would disappear, natural affinities would prevail and a grouping of the kind imagined might become more easily practicable. It is arguable also that the trend of mankind under a great stress of tendency towards unification would naturally move to the creation of such a symmetry. It may be that a great change and revolution in the world would powerfully and rapidly abolish all the obstacles, as the obstacles of the old regime to a uniform democratic system were abolished in France by the French Revolution. But any such arrangement would be quite impracticable unless and until the actual sentiments of the peoples corresponded with these systems

of rational convenience: the state of the world is at present far removed from any such ideal correspondence.

The idea of a new basis founded on the principle of national sentiment seemed at one time to be taking within a limited field the shape of a practical proposition. It was confined to a European resettlement and even there it was only to be imposed by the logic of war and force upon defeated empires. The others proposed to recognise it for themselves only in a restricted form, Russia by the concession of autonomy to Poland, England by Home Rule in Ireland and a federation with her colonies, while other denials of the principle were still to persist and even perhaps one or two new denials of it to be established in obedience to imperial ambitions and exigencies. A name even was given to this new principle and for a time the idea of self-determination received an official sanction and almost figured as a gospel. However imperfect the application, this practical enforcement of it, if effected, would have meant the physical birth and infancy of a new ideal and would have held forth to the hopes of mankind the prospect of its eventual application in a larger field until it came to be universalised. Even if the victory of the Allies put an end to these high professions, it is no longer possible to consider this ideal of a rearrangement of the world on the basis of free national groupings as an impossible dream, an altogether chimerical ideal.

Still, the forces against it are considerable and it is idle to hope that they will be overcome except after long and difficult struggles. National and imperial egoism is the first and most powerful of the contrary forces. To give up the instinct of domination and the desire still to be rulers and supreme where rule and supremacy have been the reward of past efforts, to sacrifice the advantages of a commercial exploitation of dependencies and colonies which can only be assured by the confirmation of dominance and supremacy, to face disinterestedly the emergence into free national activity of vigorous and sometimes enormous masses of men, once subjects and passive means of self-enrichment but henceforth to be powerful equals and perhaps formidable rivals, is too great a demand upon egoistic

human nature to be easily and spontaneously conceded where concession is not forced upon the mind by actual necessity or the hope of some great and palpable gain that will compensate the immediate and visible loss. There is, too, the claim of Europe, not yet renounced, to hold the rest of the world in the interests of civilisation, by which is meant European civilisation, and to insist upon its acceptance as a condition for the admission of Asiatic races to any kind of equality or freedom. This claim which is destined soon to lose all its force in Asia, has still a strong justification in the actual state of the African continent. For the present, let us note that it works strongly against a wider recognition of the new-born ideal and that until the problems it raises are resolved, the settlement of the world on any such ideal principle must wait upon the evolution of new forces and the coming to a head both in Asia and Europe of yet unaccomplished spiritual, intellectual and material revolutions.²

² These revolutions have now happened and these obstacles, though not yet entirely, have faded or are fading out of existence.

Chapter XIX

The Drive towards Centralisation and Uniformity — Administration and Control of Foreign Affairs

SUPPOSING the free grouping of the nations according to their natural affinities, sentiments, sense of economic and other convenience to be the final basis of a stable world-union, the next question that arises is what precisely would be the status of these nation-units in the larger and more complex unity of mankind. Would they possess only a nominal separateness and become parts of a machine or retain a real and living individuality and an effective freedom and organic life? Practically, this comes to the question whether the ideal of human unity points to the forcible or at least forceful fusing and welding of mankind into a single vast nation and centralised world-state with many provinces or to its aggregation under a more complex, loose and flexible system into a world-union of free nationalities. If the former more rigorous idea or tendency or need dominated, we must have a period of compression, constriction, negation of national and individual liberties as in the second of the three historical stages of national formation in Europe. This process would end, if entirely successful, in a centralised world-government which would impose its uniform rule and law, uniform administration, uniform economic and educational system, one culture, one social principle, one civilisation, perhaps even one language and one religion on all mankind. Centralised, it would delegate some of its powers to national authorities and councils, but only as the centralised French government — Parliament and bureaucracy — delegate some of their powers to the departmental prefects and councils and their subordinate officials and communes.

Such a state of things seems a sufficiently far-off dream and

assuredly not, except to the rigid doctrinaire, a very beautiful dream. Certainly, it would take a long time to become entirely practicable and would have to be preceded by a period of loose formation corresponding to the feudal unity of France or Germany in mediaeval Europe. Still, at the rate of ever accelerated speed with which the world is beginning to progress and with the gigantic revolutions of international thought, outlook and practice which the future promises, we have to envisage it as not only an ultimate, but, it may very well be, a not immeasurably far-off possibility. If things continued to move persistently, victoriously in one direction and Science still farther to annihilate the obstacles of space and of geographical and mental division which yet exist and to aggrandise its means and powers of vast and close organisation, it might well become feasible within a century or two, at the most within three or four. It would be the logical conclusion of any process in which force and constraint or the predominance of a few great nations or the emergence of a king-state, an empire predominant on sea and land, became the principal instrument of unification. It might come about, supposing some looser unity to be already established, by the triumph throughout the world of the political doctrine and the coming to political power of a party of socialistic and internationalistic doctrinaires alike in mentality to the unitarian Jacobins of the French Revolution who would have no tenderness for the sentiments of the past or for any form of group individualism and would seek to crush out of existence all their visible supports so as to establish perfectly their idea of an absolute human equality and unity.

A system of the kind, however established, by whatever forces, governed by the democratic State idea which inspires modern socialism or by the mere State idea socialistic perhaps, but undemocratic or anti-democratic, would stand upon the principle that perfect unity is only to be realised by uniformity. All thought in fact that seeks to establish unity by mechanical or external means is naturally attracted towards uniformity. Its thesis would seem to be supported by history and the lessons of the past; for in the formation of national unity, the trend to

centralisation and uniformity has been the decisive factor, a condition of uniformity the culminating point. The precedent of the formation of diverse and often conflicting elements of a people into a single national State would naturally be the determining precedent for the formation of the populations of the earth, the human people, into a single world-nation and World-State. In modern times there have been significant examples of the power of this trend towards uniformity which increases as civilisation progresses. The Turkish movement began with the ideal of toleration for all the heterogeneous elements — races, languages, religions, cultures — of the ramshackle Turkish empire, but inevitably the dominant Young Turk element was carried away by the instinct for establishing, even by coercion, a uniform Ottoman culture and Ottoman nationality.¹ Belgium, composed almost equally of Teutonic Flemings and Gallic Walloons, grew into a nationality under the aegis of a Franco-Belgian culture with French as the dominant language; the Fleming movement which should logically have contented itself with equal rights for the two languages, aimed really at a reversal of the whole position and not merely the assertion but the dominance of the Flemish language and an indigenous Flemish culture. Germany, uniting her ancient elements into one body, suffered her existing States with their governments and administrations to continue, but the possibility of considerable diversities thus left open was annulled by the centralisation of national life in Berlin; a nominal separateness existed, but overshadowed by a real and dominant uniformity which all but converted Germany into the image of a larger Prussia in spite of the more democratic and humanistic tendencies and institutions of the Southern States. There are indeed apparent types of a freer kind of federation, Switzerland, the United States, Australia, South Africa, but even here the spirit of uniformity really prevails or tends to prevail in spite of variation in detail and the latitude of free legislation in minor

¹ This trend has found its completion, after the elimination of the Greek element and the loss of the empire, in the small purely Turkish State of today, but curiously the national uniformity has been topped by the association with it and assimilation of European culture and social forms and habits.

matters conceded to the component States. Everywhere unity seems to call for and strive to create a greater or less uniformity as its secure basis.

The first uniformity from which all the rest takes its start is that of a centralised government whose natural function is to create and ensure a uniform administration. A central government is necessary to every aggregate which seeks to arrive at an organic unity of its political and economic life. Although nominally or to begin with this central government may be only an organ created by several States that still claim to be sovereign within their own borders, an instrument to which for convenience' sake they attribute a few of their powers for common objects, yet in fact it tends always to become itself the sovereign body and desires always to concentrate more and more power into its hands and leave only delegated powers to local legislatures and authorities. The practical inconveniences of a looser system strengthen this tendency and weaken gradually the force of the safeguards erected against an encroachment which seems more and more to be entirely beneficial and supported by the logic of general utility. Even in the United States with its strong attachment to its original constitution and slowness in accepting constitutional innovations on other than local lines, the tendency is manifesting itself and would certainly have resulted by this time in great and radical changes if there had not been a Supreme Court missioned to nullify any legislative interference with the original constitution, or if the American policy of aloofness from foreign affairs and complications had not removed the pressure of those necessities that in other nations have aided the central government to engross all real power and convert itself into the source as well as the head or centre of national activities. The traditional policy of the United States, its pacifism, its anti-militarism, its aversion to entanglement in European complications or any close touch with the politics of Europe, its jealousy of interference by the European Powers in American affairs in spite of their possession of colonies and interests in the Western hemisphere, are largely due to the instinct that this separateness is the sole security for the maintenance

of its institutions and the peculiar type of its national life. Once militarised, once cast into the vortex of old-world politics, as it at times threatens to be, nothing could long protect the States from the necessity of large changes in the direction of centralisation and the weakening of the federal principle.² Switzerland owes the security of its federal constitution to a similarly self-centred neutrality.

For the growth of national centralisation is due to two primary needs of which the first and most pressing is the necessity of compactness, single-mindedness, a single and concentrated action against other nations, whether for defence against external aggression or for aggression upon others in the pursuit of national interests and ambitions. The centralising effect of war and militarism, its call for a concentration of powers, has been a commonplace of history from the earliest times. It has been the chief factor in the evolution of centralised and absolute monarchies, in the maintenance of close and powerful aristocracies, in the welding together of disparate elements and the discouragement of centrifugal tendencies. The nations which, faced with this necessity, have failed to evolve or to preserve this concentration of powers, have always tended to fare ill in the battle of life, even if they have not shared the fate long endured by Italy and Poland in Europe or by India in Asia. The strength of centralised Japan, the weakness of decentralised China was a standing proof that even in modern conditions the ancient rule holds good. Only yesterday the free States of Western Europe found themselves compelled to suspend all their hard-earned liberties and go back to the ancient Roman device of an irresponsible Senate and even to a covert dictatorship in order to meet the concentrated strength of a nation powerfully centralised and organised for military defence and attack. If the sense of this necessity could covertly or overtly survive the actual duration of war, there can be no doubt that democracy and liberty would

² The Roosevelt policy and the difficulties it encountered illustrate vividly the power of these two conflicting forces in the United States; but the trend towards the strengthening of the federal case, however slow, is unmistakable.

receive the most dangerous and possibly fatal blow they have yet suffered since their re-establishment in modern times.³

The power of Prussia to take the life of Germany into its grasp was due almost wholly to the sense of an insecure position between two great and hostile nations and to the feeling of encirclement and insecurity for its expansion which was imposed on the Reich by its peculiar placement in Europe. Another example of the same tendency was the strength which the idea of confederation acquired as a result of war in England and her colonies. So long as the colonies could stand aloof and unaffected by England's wars and foreign policy, this idea had little chance of effectuation; but the experience of the war and its embarrassments and the patent inability to compel a concentration of all the potential strength of the empire under a system of almost total decentralisation seem to have made inevitable a tightening up of the loose and easy make of the British Empire which may go very far once the principle has been recognised and put initially into practice.⁴ A loose federation in one form or another serves well where peace is the rule; wherever peace is insecure or the struggle of life difficult and menacing, looseness becomes a disadvantage and may turn even into a fatal defect, the opportunity of fate for destruction.

The pressure of peril from without and the need of expansion create only the tendency towards a strong political and military centralisation; the growth of uniformity arises from the need of a close internal organisation of which the centre thus created becomes the instrument. This organisation is partly called for by the same needs as create the instrument, but much more by the advantages of uniformity for a well-ordered social and

³ Even as it is, the direction of the drive of forces tends to be evidently away from democracy towards a more and more rigid State control and regimentation.

⁴ As yet this has only gone so far as equality of status with close consultation in foreign affairs, attempts at a closer economic cooperation, but a continuation of large wars might either according to its fortunes dissolve the still loose or compel a more coherent system. At present, however, this possibility is held back by the arrival of true Dominion Status and the Westminster Statute which make federation unnecessary for any practical purpose and even perhaps undesirable for the sentiment in favour of a practical independence.

economic life based upon a convenience of which life is careless but which the intelligence of man constantly demands,— a clear, simple and, as far as the complexity of life will allow, a facile principle of order. The human intelligence as soon as it begins to order life according to its own fashion and not according to the more instinctively supple and flexible principle of organic order inherent in life, aims necessarily at imitating physical Nature in the fixity of her uniform fundamental principles of arrangement, but tries also to give to them, as much as may be, a uniform application. It drives at the suppression of all important variations. It is only when it has enlarged itself and feels more competent to understand and deal with natural complexities that it finds itself at all at ease in managing what the principle of life seems always to demand, the free variation and subtly diverse application of uniform principles. First of all, in the ordering of a national society, it aims naturally at uniformity in that aspect of it which most nearly concerns the particular need of the centre of order which has been called into existence, its political and military function. It aims first at a sufficient and then at an absolute unity and uniformity of administration.

The monarchies which the need of concentration called into being, drove first at a preliminary concentration, a gathering of the main threads of administration into the hands of the central authority. We see this everywhere, but the stages of the process are most clearly indicated in the political history of France; for there the confusion of feudal separatism and feudal jurisdictions created the most formidable difficulties and yet by a constant centralising insistence and a final violent reaction from their surviving results it was there that they were most successfully resolved and removed. The centralising monarchy, brought to supreme power by the repeated lessons of the English invasions, the Spanish pressure, the civil wars, developed inevitably that absolutism which the great historic figure of Louis XIV so strikingly personifies. His famous dictum, "I am the State", expressed really the need felt by the country of the development of one undisputed sovereign power which should concentrate in itself all military, legislative and administrative authority as against

the loose and almost chaotic organisation of feudal France. The system of the Bourbons aimed first at administrative centralisation and unity, secondarily at a certain amount of administrative uniformity. It could not carry this second aim to an entirely successful conclusion because of its dependence on the aristocracy which it had replaced, but to which it was obliged to leave the confused debris of its feudal privileges. The Revolution made short work of this aristocracy and swept away the relics of the ancient system. In establishing a rigorous uniformity it did not reverse but rather completed the work of the monarchy. An entire unity and uniformity legislative, fiscal, economic, judicial, social was the goal towards which French absolutism, monarchical or democratic, was committed by its original impulse. The rule of the Jacobins and the regime of Napoleon only brought rapidly to fruition what was slowly evolving under the monarchy out of the confused organism of feudal France.

In other countries the movement was less direct and the survival of old institutions even after the loss of their original reason for existence more obstinate; but everywhere in Europe, even in Germany⁵ and Russia, the trend has been the same and the eventual result is inevitable. The study of that evolution is of considerable importance for the future; for the difficulties to be surmounted were identical in essence, however different in form and extent, to those which would stand in the way of the evolution of a world-state out of the loose and still confused organism of the modern civilised world.

⁵ Note the absolute culmination of this drive in Germany in the unprecedented centralisation, the rigid standardisation and uniformity of the Nationalist Socialist regime under Hitler.

Chapter XX

The Drive towards Economic Centralisation

THE OBJECTIVE organisation of a national unity is not yet complete when it has arrived at the possession of a single central authority and the unity and uniformity of its political, military and strictly administrative functions. There is another side of its organic life, the legislative and its corollary, the judicial function, which is equally important; the exercise of legislative power becomes eventually indeed, although it was not always, the characteristic sign of the sovereign. Logically, one would suppose that the conscious and organised determination of its own rules of life should be the first business of a society from which all others should derive and on which they should be dependent and therefore it would naturally be the earliest to develop. But life develops in obedience to its own law and the pressure of forces and not according to the law and the logic of the self-conscious mind; its first course is determined by the subconscious and is only secondarily and derivatively self-conscious. The development of human society has been no exception to the rule; for man, though in the essence of his nature a mental being, has practically started with a largely mechanical mentality as the conscious living being, Nature's human animal, and only afterwards can he be the self-conscious living being, the self-perfected Manu. That is the course the individual has had to follow; the group-man follows in the wake of the individual and is always far behind the highest individual development. Therefore, the development of the society as an organism consciously and entirely legislating for its own needs, which should be by the logic of reason the first necessary step, is actually in the logic of life the last and culminating step. It enables the society at last to perfect consciously by means of

the State the whole organisation of its life, military, political, administrative, economic, social, cultural. The completeness of the process depends on the completeness of the development by which the State and society become, as far as that may be, synonymous. That is the importance of democracy; that is the importance also of socialism. They are the sign that the society is getting ready to be an entirely self-conscious and therefore a freely and consciously self-regulating organism.¹ But it must be remarked that modern democracy and modern socialism are only a first crude and bungling attempt at that consummation, an inefficient hint and not a freely intelligent realisation.

At first, in the early stage of society, there is no such thing as what we understand by law, the Roman *lex*; there are only a mass of binding habits, *nomoi, mores, ācāra*, determined by the inner nature of the group-man and according to the action upon it of the forces and the necessities of his environment. They become *instituta*, things that acquire a fixed and formal status, institutions, and crystallise into laws. Moreover, they embrace the whole life of the society; there is no distinction between the political and administrative, the social and the religious law; these not only all meet in one system, but run inextricably into and are determined by each other. Such was the type of the ancient Jewish law and of the Hindu Shastras which preserved up to recent times this early principle of society in spite of the tendencies of specialisation and separation which have triumphed elsewhere as a result of the normal development of the analytical and practical reason of mankind. This complex customary law evolved indeed, but by a natural development of the body of social habits in obedience to changing ideas and more and more complex necessities. There was no single and fixed legislative authority to determine them by conscious shaping and selection or in anticipation of popular consent or by direct ideative action upon the general consensus of need and opinion. Kings and

¹ Fascism, National Socialism have cut out the "freely" in this formula and set about the task of creating the organised self-regulating consciousness by a violent regimentation.

prophets and Rishis and Brahmin jurists might exercise such an action according to their power and influence, but none of these were the constituted legislative sovereign; the king in India was the administrator of the Dharma and not at all or only exceptionally and to a hardly noticeable extent the legislator.

It is worth noting, indeed, that this customary law was often attributed to an original legislator, a Manu, Moses, Lycurgus; but the historic truth of any such tradition has been discredited by modern inquiry and perhaps rightly, if we consider only the actual ascertainable facts and the ordinary process of the human mind and its development. In fact, if we examine the profound legendary tradition of India, we see that its idea of the Manu is more a symbol than anything else. His name means man the mental being. He is the divine legislator, the mental demi-god in humanity who fixes the lines upon which the race or people has to govern its evolution. In the Purana he or his sons are said to reign in subtle earths or worlds or, as we may say, they reign in the larger mentality which to us is subconscious and from there have power to determine the lines of development of the conscious life of man. His law is the *mānava-dharmaśāstra*, the science of the law of conduct of the mental or human being and in this sense we may think of the law of any human society as being the conscious evolution of the type and lines which its Manu has fixed for it. If there comes an embodied Manu, a living Moses or Mahomed, he is only the prophet or spokesman of the Divinity who is veiled in the fire and the cloud, Jehovah on Sinai, Allah speaking through his angels. Mahomed, as we know, only developed the existing social, religious and administrative customs of the Arab people into a new system dictated to him often in a state of trance, in which he passed from his conscient into his superconscient self, by the Divinity to his secret intuitive mind. All that may be suprarational or, if you will, irrational, but it represents a different stage of human development from the government of society by its rational and practical mind which in contact with life's changing needs and permanent necessities demands a created and codified law determined by a fixed legislative authority, the society's organised brain or centre.

This rational development consists, as we have seen, in the creation of a central authority,—at first a distinct central force but afterwards more and more conterminous with the society itself or directly representing it,—which gradually takes over the specialised and separated parts of the social activity. At first this authority was the king, elective or hereditary, in his original character a war-leader and at home only the chief, the head of the elders or the strong men and the convener of the nation and the army, a nodus of its action, but not the principal determinant: in war only, where entire centralisation of power is the first condition of effective action, was he entirely supreme. As host-leader, *strategos*, he was also *imperator*, the giver of the absolute command. When he extended this combination of headship and rule from outside inward, he tended to become the executive power, not merely the chief instrument of social administration but the executive ruler.

It was naturally easier for him to become thus supreme in foreign than in internal politics. Even now European governments which have in internal affairs to defer to the popular will or to persuade and cajole the nation, are able in foreign politics to act either entirely or very largely according to their own ideas: for they are allowed to determine their acts by a secret diplomacy in which the people can have no voice and the representatives of the nation have only a general power of criticising or ratifying its results. Their action in foreign politics is nominal or at any rate restricted to a minimum, since they cannot prevent secret arrangements and treaties; even to such as are made early public they can only withhold their ratification at the risk of destroying the sureness and continuity, the necessary uniformity of the external action of the nation and thus destroying too the confidence of foreign governments without which negotiations cannot be conducted nor stable alliances and combinations formed. Nor can they really withhold their sanction in a crisis, whether for war or peace, at the only moment when they are effectively consulted, the last hour or rather the last minute when either has become inevitable. Much more necessarily was this the case in the old monarchies when

the king was the maker of war and peace and conducted the external affairs of the country according to his personal idea of the national interests, largely affected by his own passions, predilections and personal and family interests. But whatever the attendant disadvantages, the conduct of war and peace and foreign politics as well as the conduct of the host in the field of battle had at least been centralised, unified in the sovereign authority. The demand for real parliamentary control of foreign policy and even for an open diplomacy—a difficult matter to our current notions, yet once practised and perfectly capable of practice—indicates one more step in the transformation, far from complete in spite of the modern boast of democracy, from a monarchical and oligarchic to a democratic system, the taking over of all sovereign functions from the one sovereign administrator or the few dominant executive men by the society as a whole organised in the democratic State.

In its seizure of the internal functionings the central authority has a more difficult task, because its absorption of them or of their chief control has to reckon with powerful competing or modifying forces and interests and the strength of established and often cherished national habits and existing rights and privileges. But it is bound in the end to arrive at some unified control of those which are in their nature executive and administrative. This administrative side of the national organisation has three principal parts, financial, executive proper and judicial. The financial power carries with it the control of the public purse and the expenditure of the wealth contributed by the society for national purposes, and it is evident that this must pass into the hands of whatever authority has taken up the business of organising and making efficient the united action of the community. But that authority in its impulse towards an undivided and uncontrolled gestation, a complete unification of powers must naturally desire not only to determine the expenditure according to its own free will, but to determine also the contributions of the society to the public purse both in its amount and in its repartition over the individuals and classes who constitute the nation. Monarchy in its impulse towards a despotic centrality

has always sought to engross and struggled to retain this power; for the control over the purse of the nation is the most important sign and the most effective element of real sovereignty, more essential perhaps than the control over life and limb. In the most despotic regimes, this control is absolute and extends to the power of confiscation and despoliation otherwise than by judicial procedure. On the other hand, a ruler who has to bargain with his subjects over the amount of their contribution and the methods of taxation, is at once hedged in in his sovereignty and is not in fact the sole and entire sovereign. A vital power is in the hands of an inferior estate of the realm and can be turned against him fatally in any struggle for the shifting of the sovereignty from him to that estate. That is the reason why the supreme political instinct of the English people fixed, in the struggle with the monarchy, upon this question of taxation as the first vital point in a conflict for the power of the purse. Once that was settled in the Parliament by the defeat of the Stuarts, the transformation of the monarchical sovereignty into the sovereignty of the people or, more accurately, the shifting of the organic control from the throne to the aristocracy, thence to the bourgeoisie, and again to the whole people,—the latter two steps comprising the rapid evolution of the last eighty years,—was only a question of time. In France, the successful practical absorption of this control was the strength of the monarchy; it was its inability to manage with justice and economy the public purse, its unwillingness to tax the enormous riches of the aristocracy and clergy as against the crushing taxation on the people and the consequent necessity of deferring again to the nation which provided the opportunity for the Revolution. In advanced modern countries we have a controlling authority which claims at least to represent more or less perfectly the whole nation; individuals and classes have to submit because there is no appeal from the will of the whole society. But even so it is questions, not of taxation, but of the proper organisation and administration of the economic life of the society which are preparing the revolutions of the future.

Chapter XXI

The Drive towards Legislative and Social Centralisation and Uniformity

THE GATHERING of the essential powers of administration into the hands of the sovereign is completed when there is unity and uniformity of judicial administration,—especially of the criminal side; for this is intimately connected with the maintenance of order and internal peace. And it is, besides, necessary for the ruler to have the criminal judicial authority in his hands so that he may use it to crush all rebellion against himself as treason and even, so far as may be possible, to stifle criticism and opposition and penalise that free thought and free speech which, by their continual seeking for a more perfect social principle and their subtle or direct encouragement to progress, are so dangerous to established powers and institutions, so subversive of the dominant thing in being by their drive towards a better thing in becoming. Unity of jurisdiction, the power to constitute tribunals, to appoint, salary and remove judges and the right to determine offences and their punishments comprise on the criminal side the whole judicial power of the sovereign. A similar unity of jurisdiction, power to constitute tribunals administering the civil law and the right to modify the laws relating to property, marriage and other social matters which concern the public order of society, comprise its civil side. But the unity and uniformity of the civil law is of less pressing and immediate importance to the State when it is substituting itself for the natural organic society; it is not so directly essential as an instrument. Therefore it is the criminal jurisdiction which is first absorbed in a greater or less entirety.

Originally, all these powers belonged to the organic society and were put into force mainly by various natural devices of a loose and entirely customary character, such as the Indian

panchayat or village jury, the jurisdiction of guilds or other natural associations, the judicial power of the assembly or convocations of the citizens as in the various Roman comitia or large and unwieldy juries chosen by lot or otherwise as in Rome and Athens, and only to a minor extent by the judicial action of the king or elders in their administrative capacity. Human societies, therefore, in their earlier development retained for a long time an aspect of great complexity in their judicial administration and neither possessed nor felt any need of a uniformity of jurisdiction or of a centralised unity in the source of judicial authority. But as the State idea develops, this unity and uniformity must arrive. It accomplishes itself at first by the gathering up of all these various jurisdictions with the king as at once the source of their sanctions and a high court of appeal and the possessor of original powers, which are exercised sometimes as in ancient India by judicial process but sometimes in more autocratic polities by ukase—the latter especially on the criminal side, in the awarding of punishments and more particularly punishments for offences against the person of the king or the authority of the State. Against this tendency to unification and State authority there militates often a religious sense in the community which attaches as in most countries of the East a sacrosanct character to its laws and customs and tends to keep the king or State in bounds; the ruler is accepted as the administrator of justice, but he is supposed to be strictly bound by the law of which he is not the fountain but the channel. Sometimes this religious sense develops a theocratical element in the society, a Church with its separate ecclesiastical authority and jurisdiction, a Shastra in the keeping of Brahmin jurists, a law entrusted to the Ulemas. Where the religious sense maintains its predominance, a solution is found by the association of Brahmin jurists with the king or with the judge appointed by him in every State tribunal and by maintenance of the supreme authority of the Pundits or Ulemas in all moot judicial questions. Where, as in Europe, the political instinct is stronger than the religious, the ecclesiastical jurisdiction comes in time to be subordinated to the State's and finally disappears.

Thus eventually the State — or the monarchy, that great instrument of the transition from the organic to the rational society — becomes the head of the law as well as the embodiment of public order and efficiency. The danger of subordinating the judiciary entirely to an executive possessed at all of arbitrary and irresponsible powers is obvious; but it is only in England — the one country always where liberty has been valued as of equal importance with order and not considered a lesser necessity or no necessity at all — that there was a successful attempt from an early period to limit the judicial power of the State. This was done partly by the firm tradition of the independence of the tribunals supported by the complete security of the judges, once appointed, in their position and emoluments and partly by the institution of the jury system. Much room was left for oppression and injustice, as in all human institutions social or political, but the object was roughly attained. Other countries, it may be noted, have adopted the jury system but, more dominated by the instinct of order and system, have left the judiciary under the control of the executive. This, however, is not so serious a defect where the executive not only represents but is appointed and controlled by the society as where it is independent of public control.

Uniformity of the law develops on different lines from the unity and uniformity of judicial administration. In its beginnings, law is always customary and where it is freely customary, where, that is to say, it merely expresses the social habits of the people, it must, except in small societies, naturally lead to or permit considerable variety of custom. In India, any sect or even any family was permitted to develop variations of the religious and civil custom which the general law of the society was bound within vague limits to accept, and this freedom is still part of the theory of Hindu law, although now in practice it is very difficult to get any new departure recognised. This spontaneous freedom of variation is the surviving sign of a former natural or organic life of society as opposed to an intellectually ordered, rationalised or mechanised living. The organic group-life fixed its general lines and particular divergences by the general sense

and instinct or intuition of the group-life rather than by the stricter structure of the reason.

The first marked sign of a rational evolution is the tendency of code and constitution to prevail over custom. But still there are codes and codes. For first there are systems that are unwritten or only partly written and do not throw themselves into the strict code form, but are a floating mass of laws, *decreta*, precedents, and admit still of a large amount of merely customary law. And again there are systems that do take the strict code form, like the Hindu Shastra, but are really only an ossification of custom and help to stereotype the life of the society but not to rationalise it. Finally, there are those deliberately ordered codes which are an attempt at intelligent systematisation; a sovereign authority fixes the *cadres* of the law and admits from time to time changes that are intelligent accommodations to new needs, variations that do not disturb but merely modify and develop the intelligent unity and reasonable fixity of the system. The coming to perfection of this last type is the triumph of the narrower but more self-conscious and self-helpful rational over the larger but vaguer and more helpless life-instinct in the society. When it has arrived at this triumph of a perfectly self-conscious and systematically rational determination and arrangement of its life on one side by a fixed and uniform constitution, on the other by a uniform and intelligently structural civil and criminal law, the society is ready for the second stage of its development. It can undertake the self-conscious, uniform ordering of its whole life in the light of the reason which is the principle of modern socialism and has been the drift of all the Utopias of the thinkers.

But before we can arrive at this stage, the great question must be settled, who is to be the State? Is the embodiment of the intellect, will and conscience of the society to be a king and his counsellors or a theocratic, autocratic or plutocratic governing class or a body which shall at least seem to stand sufficiently for the whole society, or is it to be a compromise between some or all of these possibilities? The whole course of constitutional history has turned upon this question and to all appearance wavered obscurely between various possibilities; but in reality,

we can see that throughout there has been acting the pressure of a necessity which travelled indeed through the monarchical, aristocratic and other stages, but had to debouch in the end in a democratic form of government. The king in his attempt to be the State—an attempt imposed on him by the impulse of his evolution—must try indeed to become the fountain as well as the head of the law; he must seek to engross the legislative as well as the administrative functions of the society, its side of efficient thought as well as its side of efficient action. But even in so doing he was only preparing the way for the democratic State.

The king, his council military and civil, the priesthood and the assembly of freemen converting itself for the purposes of war into the host, were perhaps everywhere, but certainly in the Aryan races, the elements with which the self-conscious evolution of society began: they represent the three orders of the free nation in its early and elementary form with the king as the keystone of the structure. The king may get rid of the power of the priesthood, he may reduce his council to an instrument of his will or the nobility which they represent to a political and military support for his actions, but until he has got rid of the assembly or is no longer obliged to convoke it,—like the French monarchy with its States-General summoned only once or twice in the course of centuries and under the pressure of great difficulties,—he cannot be the chief, much less the sole legislative authority. Even if he leaves the practical work of legislation to a non-political, a judicial body like the French Parliaments, he is bound to find there a centre of resistance. Therefore the disappearance of the assembly or the power of the monarch to convoke it or not at his pleasure is always the real mark of his absolutism. But when he has succeeded, when his decrees are laws, when he has got rid of or subordinated to himself all the other powers of the social life, there at that point of his highest success his failure begins; the monarchical system has fulfilled its positive part in the social evolution and all that is left to it is either to hold the State together until it has transformed itself or else to provoke by oppression the movement towards the sovereignty of the people.

The reason is that in engrossing the legislative power the monarchy has exceeded the right law of its being, it has gone beyond its dharma, it has undertaken functions which it cannot healthily and effectively fulfil. Administration is simply the regulation of the outward life of the people, the ordered maintenance of the external activities of its developed or developing being, and the king may well be their regulator; he may well fulfil the function which the Indian polity assigned to him, the upholder of the "dharma". But legislation, social development, culture, religion, even the determination of the economic life of the people are outside his proper sphere; they constitute the expression of the life, the thought, the soul of the society which, if he is a strong personality in touch with the spirit of the age, he may help to influence but which he cannot determine. They constitute the national dharma,—we must use the Indian word which alone is capable of expressing the whole idea; for our dharma means the law of our nature and it means also its formulated expression. Only the society itself can determine the development of its own dharma or can formulate its expression; and if this is to be done not in the old way by a naturally organic and intuitive development, but by a self-conscious regulation through the organised national reason and will, then a governing body must be created which will more or less adequately represent, if it cannot quite embody, the reason and will of the whole society. A governing class, aristocracy or intelligent theocracy may represent, not indeed this but some vigorous or noble part of the national reason and will; but even that can only be a stage of development towards a democratic State. Certainly, democracy as it is now practised is not the last or penultimate stage; for it is often merely democratic in appearance and even at the best amounts to the rule of the majority and works by the vicious method of party government, defects the increasing perception of which enters largely into the present-day dissatisfaction with parliamentary systems. Even a perfect democracy is not likely to be the last stage of social evolution, but it is still the necessary broad standing-ground upon which the self-consciousness of the social being can come

to its own.¹ Democracy and Socialism are, as we have already said, the sign that that self-consciousness is beginning to ripen into fullness.

Legislation may seem at first sight to be something external, simply a form for the administration, not part of the intimate grain of the social life like its economic forms, its religion, its education and culture. It so appears because in the past polity of the European nations it has not been like oriental legislation or Shastra all-embracing, but has confined itself until recently to politics and constitutional law, the principles and process of administration and so much only of social and economic legislation as was barely necessary for the security of property and the maintenance of public order. All this, it might seem, might well fall within the province of the king and be discharged by him with as much efficiency as by a democratic government. But it is not so in reality, as history bears witness; the king is an inefficient legislator and unmixed aristocracies are not much better. For the laws and institutions of a society are the framework it builds for its life and its dharma. When it begins to determine these for itself by a self-conscious action of its reason and will within whatever limits, it has taken the first step in a movement which must inevitably end in an attempt to regulate self-consciously its whole social and cultural life; it must, as its self-consciousness increases, drive towards the endeavour to realise something like the Utopia of the thinker. For the Utopian thinker is the individual mind forerunning in its turn of thought the trend which the social mind must eventually take.

But as no individual thinker can determine in thought by his arbitrary reason the evolution of the rational self-conscious society, so no executive individual or succession of executive individuals can determine it in fact by his or their arbitrary power. It is evident that he cannot determine the whole social life of the nation, it is much too large for him; no society would

¹ It does not follow that a true democracy must necessarily come into being at some time. For man individually or collectively to come to a full self-consciousness is a most difficult task. Before a true democracy can be established, the process is likely to be overtaken by a premature socialistic endeavour.

bear the heavy hand of an arbitrary individual on its whole social living. He cannot determine the economic life, that too is much too large for him; he can only watch over it and help it in this or that direction where help is needed. He cannot determine the religious life, though that attempt has been made; it is too deep for him; for religion is the spiritual and ethical life of the individual, the relations of his soul with God and the intimate dealings of his will and character with other individuals, and no monarch or governing class, not even a theocracy or priesthood, can really substitute itself for the soul of the individual or for the soul of a nation. Nor can he determine the national culture; he can only in great flowering times of that culture help by his protection in fixing for it the turn which by its own force of tendency it was already taking. To attempt more is an irrational attempt which cannot lead to the development of a rational society. He can only support the attempt by autocratic oppression which leads in the end to the feebleness and stagnation of the society, and justify it by some mystical falsity about the divine right of kings or monarchy a peculiarly divine institution. Even exceptional rulers, a Charlemagne, an Augustus, a Napoleon, a Chandragupta, Asoka or Akbar, can do no more than fix certain new institutions which the time needed and help the emergence of its best or else its strongest tendencies in a critical era. When they attempt more, they fail. Akbar's effort to create a new dharma for the Indian nation by his enlightened reason was a brilliant futility. Asoka's edicts remain graven upon pillar and rock, but the development of Indian religion and culture took its own line in other and far more complex directions determined by the soul of a great people. Only the rare individual Manu, Avatar or prophet who comes on earth perhaps once in a millennium can speak truly of his divine right, for the secret of his force is not political but spiritual. For an ordinary political ruling man or a political institution to have made such a claim was one of the most amazing among the many follies of the human mind.

Yet the attempt in itself and apart from its false justifications and practical failure was inevitable, fruitful and a necessary step

in social evolution. It was inevitable because this transitional instrument represented the first idea of the human reason and will seizing on the group-life to fashion, mould and arrange it according to its own pleasure and power and intelligent choice, to govern Nature in the human mass as it has already learned partly to govern it in the human individual. And since the mass is unenlightened and incapable of such an intelligent effort, who can do this for it, if not the capable individual or a body of intelligent and capable individuals? That is the whole rationale of absolutism, aristocracy and theocracy. Its idea is false or only a half-truth or temporary truth, because the real business of the advanced class or individual is progressively to enlighten and train the whole body consciously to do for itself its own work and not eternally to do things for it.² But the idea had to take its course and the will in the idea,—for every idea has in itself a mastering will for self-fulfilment,—had necessarily to attempt its own extreme. The difficulty was that the ruling man or class could take up the more mechanical part of the life of society, but all that represented its more intimate being eluded their grasp; they could not lay hands on its soul. Still, unless they could do so, they must remain unfulfilled in their trend and insecure in their possession, since at any time they might be replaced by more adequate powers that must inevitably rise up from the larger mind of humanity to oust them and occupy their throne.

Two principal devices alone seemed adequate and have been employed in all such attempts at complete mastery. One was chiefly negative; it worked by an oppression on the life and soul of the community, a more or less complete inhibition of its freedom of thought, speech, association, individual and associated action,—often attended by the most abominable methods of inquisition and interference and pressure on the most sacred relations and liberties of man the individual and social being,—and an encouragement and patronage of only such thought and

² It is not meant that in a perfect society there would be no place for monarchical, aristocratic or theocratic elements; but there these would fulfil their natural function in a conscious body, not maintain and propel an unconscious mass.

culture and activities as accepted, flattered and helped the governing absolutism. Another was positive; it consisted in getting a control over the religion of the society and calling in the priest as the spiritual helper of the king. For in natural societies and in those which, even if partly intellectualised, still cling to the natural principles of our being, religion, if it is not the whole life, yet watches over and powerfully influences and moulds the whole life of the individual and society, as it did till recent times in India and to a great extent in all Asiatic countries. State religions are an expression of this endeavour. But a State religion is an artificial monstrosity, although a national religion may well be a living reality; but even that, if it is not to formalise and kill in the end the religious spirit or prevent spiritual expansion, has to be tolerant, self-adaptive, flexible, a mirror of the deeper soul of the society. Both these devices, however seemingly successful for a time, are foredoomed to failure, failure by revolt of the oppressed social being or failure by its decay, weakness and death or life in death. Stagnation and weakness such as in the end overtook Greece, Rome, the Mussulman nations, China, India, or else a saving spiritual, social and political revolution are the only issues of absolutism. Still it was an inevitable stage of human development, an experiment that could not fail to be made. It was also fruitful in spite of its failure and even by reason of it; for the absolutist monarchical and aristocratic State was the father of the modern idea of the absolutist socialistic State which seems now to be in process of birth. It was, for all its vices, a necessary step because only so could the clear idea of an intelligently self-governing society firmly evolve.

For what king or aristocracy could not do, the democratic State may perhaps with a better chance of success and a greater security attempt and bring nearer to fruition,—the conscious and organised unity, the regularised efficiency on uniform and intelligent principles, the rational order and self-governed perfectioning of a developed society. That is the idea and, however imperfectly, the attempt of modern life; and this attempt has been the whole rationale of modern progress. Unity and uniformity are its principal trend; for how else are the incalculable

complexities of the vast and profound thing we call life to be taken hold of, dominated, made calculable and manageable by a logical intelligence and unified will? Socialism is the complete expression of this idea. Uniformity of the social and economic principles and processes that govern the collectivity secured by means of a fundamental equality of all and the management of the whole social and economic life in all its parts by the State; uniformity of culture by the process of a State education organised upon scientific lines; to regularise and maintain the whole a unified, uniform and perfectly organised government and administration that will represent and act for the whole social being, this is the modern Utopia which in one form or another it is hoped to turn, in spite of all extant obstacles and opposite tendencies, into a living reality. Human science will, it seems, replace the large and obscure processes of Nature and bring about perfection or at least some approach to perfection in the collective human life.

Chapter XXII

World-Union or World-State

THIS, then, in principle is the history of the growth of the State. It is a history of strict unification by the development of a central authority and of a growing uniformity in administration, legislation, social and economic life and culture and the chief means of culture, education and language. In all, the central authority becomes more and more the determining and regulating power. The process culminates by the transformation of this governing sole authority or sovereign power from the rule of the central executive man or the capable class into that of a body whose proposed function is to represent the thought and will of the whole community. The change represents in principle an evolution from a natural and organic to a rational and mechanically organised state of society. An intelligent centralised unification aiming at a perfect rational efficiency replaces a loose and natural unity whose efficiency is that of life developing with a certain spontaneity its organs and powers under the pressure of inner impulse and the needs of the environment and the first conditions of existence. A rational, ordered, strict uniformity replaces a loose oneness full of natural complexities and variations. The intelligent will of the whole society expressed in a carefully thought-out law and ordered regulation replaces its natural organic will expressed in a mass of customs and institutions which have grown up as the result of its nature and temperament. In the last perfection of the State a carefully devised, in the end a giant machinery productive and regulative replaces the vigour and fertility of life with the natural simplicity of its great lines and the obscure, confused, luxuriant complexity of its details. The State is the masterful but arbitrary and intolerant science and reason of man that successfully takes the place of the intuitions and evolutionary experimentations of Nature; intelligent organisation replaces natural organism.

The unity of the human race by political and administrative means implies eventually the formation and organisation of a single World-State out of a newly created, though still loose, natural organic unity of mankind. For the natural organic unity already exists, a unity of life, of involuntary association, of a closely interdependent existence of the constituent parts in which the life and movements of one affect the life of the others in a way which would have been impossible a hundred years ago. Continent has no longer a separate life from continent; no nation can any longer isolate itself at will and live a separate existence. Science, commerce and rapid communications have produced a state of things in which the disparate masses of humanity, once living to themselves, have been drawn together by a process of subtle unification into a single mass which has already a common vital and is rapidly forming a common mental existence. A great precipitating and transforming shock was needed which should make this subtle organic unity manifest and reveal the necessity and create the will for a closer and organised union, and this shock came with the Great War. The idea of a World-State or world-union has been born not only in the speculating forecasting mind of the thinker, but in the consciousness of humanity out of the very necessity of this new common existence.

The World-State must now either be brought about by a mutual understanding or by the force of circumstances and a series of new and disastrous shocks. For the old still-prevailing order of things was founded on circumstances and conditions which no longer exist. A new order is demanded by the new conditions and, so long as it is not created, there will be a transitional era of continued trouble or recurrent disorders, inevitable crises through which Nature will effect in her own violent way the working out of the necessity which she has evolved. There may be in the process a maximum of loss and suffering through the clash of national and imperial egoisms or else a minimum, if reason and goodwill prevail. To that reason two alternative possibilities and therefore two ideals present themselves, a World-State founded upon the principle of centralisation and uniformity, a mechanical and formal unity, or a world-union

founded upon the principle of liberty and variation in a free and intelligent unity. These two ideals and possibilities we have successively to consider.

Chapter XXIII

Forms of Government

THE IDEA of a world-union of free nations and empires, loose at first, but growing closer-knit with time and experience, seems at first sight the most practicable form of political unity; it is the only form indeed which would be immediately practicable, supposing the will to unity to become rapidly effective in the mind of the race. On the other hand, it is the State idea which is now dominant. The State has been the most successful and efficient means of unification and has been best able to meet the various needs which the progressive aggregate life of societies has created for itself and is still creating. It is, besides, the expedient to which the human mind at present has grown accustomed, and it is too the most ready means both for its logical and its practical reason to work with because it provides it with what our limited intelligence is always tempted to think its best instrument, a clear-cut and precise machinery and a stringent method of organisation. Therefore it is by no means impossible that, even though beginning with a loose union, the nations may be rapidly moved by the pressure of the many problems which would arise from the ever closer interworking of their needs and interests, to convert it into the more stringent form of a World-State. We can find no safe conclusion upon the immediate impracticability of its creation or on the many difficulties which would stand in its way; for past experience shows that the argument of impracticability is of very little value. What the practical man of today denies as absurd and impracticable is often enough precisely the thing that future generations set about realising and eventually in some form or other succeed in bringing into effective existence.

But a World-State implies a strong central organ of power that would represent or at least stand for the united will of the nations. A unification of all the necessary powers in the hands of

this central and common governing body, at least in their source — powers military, administrative, judicial, economic, legislative, social, educational — would be indispensable. And as an almost inevitable result there would be an increasing uniformity of human life throughout the world in all these departments, even perhaps to the choice or creation of one common and universal language. This, indeed, is the dream of a unified world which Utopian thinkers have been more and more moved to place before us. The difficulties in the way of arriving at this result are at present obvious, but they are perhaps not so great as they seem at first sight and none of them are insoluble. It is no longer a Utopia that can be put aside as the impracticable dream of the ideal thinker.

The first difficulty would be the character and composition of this governing body, a problem beset with doubts and perils. In ancient times it was solved readily enough in smaller limits by the absolutist and monarchical solution with the rule of a conquering race as the starting-point, as in the Persian and Roman empires. But that resource is no longer as easily open to us in the new conditions of human society, whatever dreams may in the past have entered into the minds of powerful nations or their Czars and Kaisers. The monarchical idea itself is beginning to pass away after a brief and fallacious attempt at persistence and revival. Almost it seems to be nearing its final agony; the seal of the night is upon it. Contemporary appearances are often enough deceptive, but they are less likely to be so in the present instance than in many others, because the force which makes for the disappearance of the still-surviving monarchies is strong, radical and ever increasing. The social aggregates have ripened into self-conscious maturity and no longer stand in need of a hereditary kingship to do their governing work for them or even to stand for them — except perhaps in certain exceptional cases such as the British Empire — as the symbol of their unity. Either then the monarchy can only survive in name, — as in England where the king has less power even, if that be possible, than the French President and infinitely less than the heads of the American republics, — or else it becomes a source of offence,

a restraint to the growing democratic spirit of the peoples and to a greater or less degree a centre, a refuge or at least an opportunity for the forces of reaction. Its prestige and popularity tend therefore not to increase but to decline, and at some crisis when it comes too strongly into conflict with the sentiment of the nation, it falls with small chance of lasting revival.

Monarchy has thus fallen or is threatened almost everywhere — and most suddenly in countries where its tradition was once the strongest. Even in these days it has fallen in Germany and Austria, in China, in Portugal, in Russia; it has been in peril in Greece and Italy;¹ and it has been cast out of Spain. In no continental country is it really safe except in some of the smaller States. In most of them it exists for reasons that already belong to the past and may soon lose if they are not already losing their force. The continent of Europe seems destined to become in time as universally republican as the two Americas. For kingship there is now only a survival of the world's past; it has no deep root in the practical needs or the ideals or the temperament of present-day humanity. When it disappears, it will be truer to say of it that it has ceased to survive than to say that it has ceased to live.

The republican tendency is indeed Western in its origin, stronger as we go more and more to the West, and has been historically powerful chiefly in Western Europe and dominant in the new societies of America. It might be thought that with the entrance of Asia into the active united life of the world, when the eastern continent has passed through its present throes of transition, the monarchical idea might recover strength and find a new source of life. For in Asia kingship has been not only a material fact resting upon political needs and conditions, but a spiritual symbol and invested with a sacrosanct character. But in Asia no less than in Europe, monarchy has been a historical growth, the result of circumstances and therefore subject to disappearance when those circumstances no longer exist. The true mind of Asia has always remained, behind all surface appearances,

¹ Now in Italy too it is gone with practically no hope of return.

not political but social, monarchical and aristocratic at the surface but with a fundamental democratic trend and a theocratic spirit. Japan with its deep-rooted monarchic sentiment is the one prominent exception to this general rule. Already a great tendency of change is manifest. China, always a democratic country at bottom though admitting in its democratic system an official aristocracy of intellect and a symbolic imperial head, is now definitely republican. The difficulty of the attempt to revive monarchy or to replace it by temporary dictatorships has been due to an innate democratic sentiment now invigorated by the acceptance of a democratic form for the supreme government, the one valuable contribution of Western experience to the problem at which the old purely social democracies of the East were unable to arrive. In breaking with the last of its long succession of dynasties China had broken with an element of her past which was rather superficial than at the very centre of her social temperament and habits. In India the monarchical sentiment, which coexisted with but was never able to prevail over the theocratic and social except during the comparatively brief rule of the Moghuls, was hopelessly weakened, though not effaced, by the rule of a British bureaucracy and the political Europeanising of the active mind of the race.² In Western Asia monarchy has disappeared in Turkey, it exists only in the States which need the monarch as a centralising power or keystone.

At the two extremes of the Asiatic world in Japan and in Turkey the monarchy after the close of the war still preserved something of its old sacrosanct character and its appeal to the sentiment of the race. In Japan, still imperfectly democratised, the sentiment which surrounds the Mikado is visibly weakened, his prestige survives but his actual power is very limited, and the growth of democracy and socialism is bound to aid the weakening and limiting process and may well produce the same results as in Europe. The Moslem Caliphate, originally the head of a

² Now with the liberation of the country and the establishment of a republican and democratic constitution, the ruling princes have either disappeared or become subordinate heads with their small kingdoms becoming partly or wholly democratised or destined to melt into a united India.

theocratic democracy, was converted into a political institution by the rapid growth of a Moslem empire, now broken into pieces. The Caliphate now abolished could only have survived as a purely religious headship and even in that character its unity was threatened by the rise of new spiritual and national movements in Persia, Arabia and Egypt. But the one real and important fact in Asia of today is this that the whole active force of its future is centred not in priesthood or aristocracy, but, as it was formerly in Russia before the Revolution, in a newly-created intelligentsia, small at first in numbers, but increasing in energy and the settled will to arrive and bound to become exceedingly dynamic by reason of the inherited force of spirituality. Asia may well preserve its ancient spirituality; even in its hour of greatest weakness it has been able to impose its prestige increasingly even on the positive European mind. But whatever turn that spirituality takes, it will be determined by the mentality of this new intelligentsia and will certainly flow into other channels than the old ideas and symbols. The old forms of Asiatic monarchy and theocracy seem therefore destined to disappear; at present there is no chance of their revival in new figures, although that may happen in the future.

The only apparent chance eventually for the monarchical idea is that its form may be retained as a convenient symbol for the unity of the heterogeneous empires which would be the largest elements in any unification based upon the present political configuration of the world. But even for these empires the symbol has not proved to be indispensable. France has done without it, Russia has recently dispensed with it. In Austria it had become odious to some of the constituent races as the badge of subjection and was bound to perish even without the collapse of the Great War. Only in England and in some small countries is it at once innocuous and useful and therefore upheld by a general feeling. Conceivably, if the British Empire,³ even now the leading, the most influential, the most powerful

³ Now no longer Empire but Commonwealth.

force in the world, were to become the nucleus or the pattern of the future unification, there might be some chance of the monarchical element surviving in the figure—and even an empty figure is sometimes useful as a support and centre for future potentialities to grow and fill with life. But against this stands the fixed republican sentiment of the whole of America and the increasing spread of the republican form; there is little chance that even a nominal kingship representing one element of a very heterogeneous whole would be accepted by the rest in any form of general unification. In the past, at least, this has only happened under the stress of conquest. Even if the World-State found it convenient as the result of experience to introduce or to reintroduce the monarchical element into its constitution, it could only be in some quite new form of a democratic kingship. But a democratic kingship, as opposed to a passive figure of monarchy, the modern world has not succeeded in evolving.

The two determining facts in modern conditions which alter the whole problem are that in this kind of unification nations take the place of individuals and that these nations are mature self-conscious societies, predestined therefore to pass through pronounced forms of social democracy or some other form of socialism. It is reasonable to suppose that the World-State will tend to strive after the same principle of formation as that which obtains in the separate societies which are to constitute it. The problem would be simpler if we could suppose the difficulties created by conflicting national temperaments, interests and cultures to be either eliminated or successfully subordinated and minimised by the depression of separative nationalistic feeling and the growth of a cosmopolitan internationalism. That solution is not altogether impossible in spite of the serious check to internationalism and the strong growth of nationalistic feeling developed by the world war. For, conceivably, internationalism may revive with a redoubled force after the stress of the feelings created by the war has passed. In that case, the tendency of unification may look to the ideal of a world-wide Republic with the nations as provinces, though at first very sharply distinct provinces, and governed by a council or parliament responsible

to the united democracies of the world. Or it might be something like the disguised oligarchy of an international council reposing its rule on the assent, expressed by election or otherwise, of what might be called a semi-passive democracy as its first figure. For that is what the modern democracy at present is in fact; the sole democratic elements are public opinion, periodical elections and the power of the people to refuse re-election to those who have displeased it. The government is really in the hands of the bourgeoisie, the professional and business men, the landholders, — where such a class still exists, — strengthened by a number of new arrivals from the working-class who very soon assimilate themselves to the political temperament and ideas of the governing classes.⁴ If a World-State were to be established on the present basis of human society, it might well try to develop its central government on this principle.

But the present is a moment of transition and a bourgeois World-State is not a probable consummation. In each of the more progressive nations, the dominance of the middle class is threatened on two sides. There is first the dissatisfaction of the intellectuals who find in its unimaginative business practicality and obstinate commercialism an obstacle to the realisation of their ideals. And there is the dissatisfaction of the great and growing power of Labour which sees democratic ideals and changes continually exploited in the interests of the middle class, though as yet it has found no alternative to the Parliamentarism by which that class ensures its rule.⁵ What changes the alliance between these two dissatisfactions may bring about, it is impossible to foresee. In Russia, where it was strongest, we have seen it taking the lead of the Revolution and compelling the bourgeoisie to undergo its control, although the compromise so effected could not long outlast the exigencies of the war. Since then the old order there has been “liquidated” and the triumph of the new

⁴ This has now changed and the Trade Unions and similar institutions have attained an equal power with the other classes.

⁵ Written before the emergence of the Soviet State in Russia and of the Fascist States. In the latter it is the middle class itself that rose against democracy and established for a time a new form of government and society.

tendencies has been complete. In two directions it may lead to a new form of modified oligarchy with a democratic basis. The government of a modern society is now growing an exceedingly complicated business in each part of which a special knowledge, special competence, special faculties are required and every new step towards State socialism must increase this tendency. The need of this sort of special training or faculty in the councillor and administrator combined with the democratic tendencies of the age might well lead to some modern form of the old Chinese principle of government, a democratic organisation of life below, above the rule of a sort of intellectual bureaucracy, an official aristocracy of special knowledge and capacity recruited from the general body without distinction of classes. Equal opportunity would be indispensable but this governing élite would still form a class by itself in the constitution of the society. On the other hand, if the industrialism of the modern nations changes, as some think it will, and develops into a sort of guild socialism, a guild aristocracy of Labour might well become the governing body in the society.⁶ If any of these things were done, any movement towards a World-State would then take the same direction and evolve a governing body of the same model.

But in these two possibilities we leave out of consideration the great factor of nationalism and the conflicting interests and tendencies it creates. To overcome these conflicting interests, it has been supposed, the best way is to evolve a sort of world Parliament in which, it is to be presumed, the freely formed and freely expressed opinion of the majority would prevail. Parliamentarism, the invention of the English political genius, is a necessary stage in the evolution of democracy, for without it the generalised faculty of considering and managing with the least possible friction large problems of politics, administration, economics, legislation concerning considerable aggregates of men cannot easily be developed. It has also been the one successful

⁶ Something of the kind was attempted in Soviet Russia for a time. The existing conditions were not favourable and a definite form of government not revolutionary and provisional is not anywhere in sight. In Fascist Italy a cooperative State was announced but this too took no effectual or perfect shape.

means yet discovered of preventing the State executive from suppressing the liberties of the individual and the nation. Nations emerging into the modern form of society are therefore naturally and rightly attracted to this instrument of government. But it has not yet been found possible to combine Parliamentarism and the modern trend towards a more democratic democracy; it has been always an instrument either of a modified aristocratic or of a middle-class rule. Besides, its method involves an immense waste of time and energy and a confused, swaying and uncertain action that "muddles out" in the end some tolerable result. This method accords ill with the more stringent ideas of efficient government and administration that are now growing in force and necessity and it might be fatal to efficiency in anything so complicated as the management of the affairs of the world. Parliamentarism means too, in practice, the rule and often the tyranny of a majority, even of a very small majority, and the modern mind attaches increasing importance to the rights of minorities. And these rights would be still more important in a World-State where any attempt to override them might easily mean serious discontents and disorders or even convulsions fatal to the whole fabric. Above all, a Parliament of the nations must necessarily be a united parliament of free nations and could not well come into successful being in the present anomalous and chaotic distribution of power in the world. The Asiatic problem alone, if still left unsolved, would be a fatal obstacle and it is not alone; the inequalities and anomalies are all-pervasive and without number.

A more feasible form would be a supreme council of the free and imperial nations of the existing world-system, but this also has its difficulties. It could only be workable at first if it amounted in fact to an oligarchy of a few strong imperial nations whose voice and volume would prevail at every point over that of the more numerous but smaller non-imperialistic commonwealths and it could only endure by a progressive and, if possible, a peaceful evolution from this sort of oligarchy of actual power to a more just and ideal system in which the imperialistic idea would dissolve and the great empires merge their

separate existence into that of a unified mankind. How far national egoism would allow that evolution to take place without vehement struggles and dangerous convulsions, is, in spite of the superficial liberalism now widely professed, a question still fraught with grave and ominous doubts.

On the whole, then, whichever way we turn, this question of the form of a World-State is beset with doubts and difficulties that are for the moment insoluble. Some arise from the surviving sentiments and interests of the past; some menace from the rapidly developing revolutionary forces of the future. It does not follow that they can never or will never be solved, but the way and the line any such solution would take are beyond calculation and can really be determined only by practical experience and experiment under the pressure of the forces and necessities of the modern world. For the rest, the form of government is not of supreme importance. The real problem is that of the unification of powers and the uniformity which any manageable system of a World-State would render inevitable.

Chapter XXIV

The Need of Military Unification

IN THE process of centralisation by which all the powers of an organised community come to be centred in one sovereign governing body,—the process which has been the most prominent characteristic of national formations,—military necessity has played at the beginning the largest overt part. This necessity was both external and internal,—external for the defence of the nation against disruption or subjection from without, internal for its defence against civil disruption and disorder. If a common administrative authority is essential in order to bind together the constituent parts of a nation in the forming, the first need and claim of that central authority is to have in its hands the means to prevent mortal dissidence and violent strife that would weaken or break up the organic formation. The monarchy or any other central body must effect this end partly by moral force and psychological suggestion. For it stands as the symbol of union and imposes respect for their visible and consecrated unity on the constituent parts, however strong may be their local, racial, clan or class instincts of separatism. It embodies the united authority of the nation entitled to impose its moral force as greater than the moral right of the separate parts, even if they be something like sub-nations, and to command their obedience. But in the last resort, since these motives may at any moment fail when revolting interests or sentiments are strong and passions run high, the governing body must have always the greatest military force at its command so as to overawe the constituent elements and prevent the outbreak of a disruptive civil war. Or if the civil war or rebellion comes about, as can always happen when the monarchy or the government is identified closely with one of the parties in a quarrel or is itself the subject of dissatisfaction and attack, then it must have so great a predominance of force behind it as to be morally sure of victory in the conflict. This

can only be secured to the best possible perfection,— it cannot be done absolutely except by an effective disarmament,— if the whole military authority is centred in the central body and the whole actual or potential military force of the society subjected to its undivided control.

In the trend to the formation of the World-State, however subconscious, vague and formless it may yet be, military necessity has begun to play the same large visible part. The peoples of the world already possess a loose and chaotic unity of life in which none can any longer lead an isolated, independent and self-dependent existence. Each feels in its culture, political tendencies and economic existence the influence and repercussion of events and movements in other parts of the world. Each already feels subtly or directly its separate life overshadowed by the life of the whole. Science, international commerce and the political and cultural penetration of Asia and Africa by the dominant West have been the agents of this great change. Even in this loose unacknowledged and underlying unity the occurrence or the possibility of great wars has become a powerful element of disturbance to the whole fabric, a disturbance that may one day become mortal to the race. Even before the European war, the necessity of avoiding or minimising a collision between one or two that might prove fatal to all was keenly felt and various well-intentioned but feeble and blundering devices were tentatively introduced which had that end in view. Had any of these makeshifts been tolerably effective, the world might long have remained content with its present very unideal conditions and the pressing need of a closer international organisation would not have enforced itself on the general mind of the race. But the European collision rendered the indefinite continuance of the old chaotic regime impossible. The necessity of avoiding any repetition of the catastrophe was for a time universally acknowledged. A means of keeping international peace and of creating an authority which shall have the power to dispose of dangerous international questions and prevent what from the new point of view of human unity we may call civil war between the peoples of mankind, had somehow or other to be found or created.

Various ideas were put forward with more or less authority as to the necessary conditions of international peace. The crudest of these was the foolish notion, created by a one-sided propaganda, which imagined that the destruction of German militarism was the one thing needful and in itself sufficient to secure the future peace of the world. The military power, the political and commercial ambitions of Germany and her acute sense of her confined geographical position and her encirclement by an unfriendly alliance were the immediate moral cause of this particular war; but the real cause lay in the very nature of the international situation and the psychology of national life. The chief feature of this psychology is the predominance and worship of national egoism under the sacred name of patriotism. Every national ego, like every organic life, desires a double self-fulfilment, intensive and extensive or expansive. The deepening and enriching of its culture, political strength and economic well-being within its borders is not felt to be sufficient if there is not, without, an extension or expansion of its culture, an increase of its political extent, dominion, power or influence and a masterful widening of its commercial exploitation of the world. This natural and instinctive desire is not an abnormal moral depravity but the very instinct of egoistic life; and what life at present is not egoistic? But it can be satisfied only to a very limited degree by peaceful and unaggressive means. And where it feels itself hemmed in by obstacles that it thinks it can overcome, opposed by barriers, encircled, dissatisfied with a share of possession and domination it considers disproportionate to its needs and its strength, or where new possibilities of expansion open out to it in which only its strength can obtain for it its desirable portion, it is at once moved to the use of some kind of force and can only be restrained by the amount of resistance it is likely to meet. If it has a weak opposition of unorganised or ill-organised peoples to overcome, it will not hesitate; if it has the opposition of powerful rivals to fear, it will pause, seek for alliances or watch for its moment. Germany had not the monopoly of this expansive instinct and egoism; but its egoism was the best organised and least satisfied, the youngest, crudest, hungriest,

most self-confident and presumptuous, most satisfied with the self-righteous brutality of its desires. The breaking of German militarism might ease for a moment the intensity of the many-headed commercial wrestle but it cannot, by the removal of a dangerous and restless competitor, end it. So long as any kind of militarism survives, so long as fields of political or commercial aggrandisement are there and so long as national egoisms live and are held sacred and there is no final check on their inherent instinct of expansion, war will be always a possibility and almost a necessity of the life of the human peoples.

Another idea put forward with great authorities behind it was a league of free and democratic nations which would keep the peace by pressure or by the use of force if need be. If less crude, this solution is not for that any more satisfactory than the other. It is an old idea, the idea Metternich put into practice after the overthrow of Napoleon; only in place of a Holy Alliance of monarchs to maintain peace and monarchical order and keep down democracy, it was proposed to have a league of free—and imperial—peoples to enforce democracy and to maintain peace. One thing is perfectly sure that the new league would go the way of the old; it would break up as soon as the interests and ambitions of the constituent Powers became sufficiently disunited or a new situation arose such as was created by the violent resurgence of oppressed democracy in 1848 or such as would be created by the inevitable future duel between the young Titan, Socialism, and the old Olympian gods of a bourgeois-democratic world. That conflict was already outlining its formidable shadow in revolutionary Russia, has now taken a body and cannot be very long delayed throughout Europe. For the war and its after consequences momentarily suspended but may very well turn out to have really precipitated the advent and accentuated its force. One cause or the other or both together would bring a certain dissolution. No voluntary league can be permanent in its nature. The ideas which supported it, change; the interests which made it possible and effective become fatally modified or obsolete.

The supposition is that democracies will be less ready to go

to war than monarchies; but this is true only within a certain measure. What are called democracies are bourgeois States in the form either of a constitutional monarchy or a middle-class republic. But everywhere the middle class has taken over with certain modifications the diplomatic habits, foreign policies and international ideas of the monarchical or aristocratic governments which preceded them.¹ This continuity seems to have been a natural law of the mentality of the ruling class. In Germany it was the aristocratic and the capitalist class combined that constituted the Pan-German party with its exaggerated and almost insane ambitions. In the new Russia the bourgeoisie during its brief rule rejected the political ideas of the Czardom in internal affairs and helped to overturn autocracy, but preserved its ideas in external affairs minus the German influence and stood for the expansion of Russia and the possession of Constantinople. Certainly, there is an important difference. The monarchical or aristocratic State is political in its mentality and seeks first of all territorial aggrandisement and political predominance or hegemony among the nations, commercial aims are only a secondary preoccupation attendant on the other. In the bourgeois State there is a reverse order; for it has its eye chiefly on the possession of markets, the command of new fields of wealth, the formation or conquest of colonies or dependencies which can be commercially and industrially exploited and on political aggrandisement only as a means for this more cherished object. Moreover, the monarchical or aristocratic statesman turned to war as almost his first expedient. As soon as he was dissatisfied with the response to his diplomacy, he grasped at the sword or the rifle. The bourgeois statesman hesitates, calculates, gives a longer rope to diplomacy, tries to gain his ends by bargainings, arrangements, peaceful pressure, demonstrations of power. In the end he is ready to resort to war, but only when these expedients have failed him and only if the end seems commensurate with the means and the great speculation of war promises a very

¹ So also has Socialist Russia taken over from the Czars these ideas and habits with very little or no modification.

strong chance of success and solid profit. But on the other hand, the bourgeois-democratic State has developed a stupendous military organisation of which the most powerful monarchs and aristocracies could not dream. And if this tends to delay the outbreak of large wars, it tends too to make their final advent sure and their proportions enormous and nowadays incalculable and immeasurable.

There was a strong suggestion at the time that a more truly democratic and therefore a more peaceful spirit and more thoroughly democratic institutions would reign after the restoration of peace by the triumph of the liberal nations. One rule of the new international situation was to be the right of nations to dispose of their own destinies and to be governed only by their free consent. The latter condition is impossible of immediate fulfilment except in Europe, and even for Europe the principle is not really recognised in its total meaning or put into entire practice. If it were capable of universal application, if the existing relations of peoples and the psychology of nations could be so altered as to establish it as a working principle, one of the most fertile causes of war and revolution would be removed, but all causes would not disappear. The greater democratisation of the European peoples affords no sure guarantee. Certainly, democracy of a certain kind, democracy reposing for its natural constitution on individual liberty would be likely to be indisposed to war except in moments of great and universal excitement. War demands a violent concentration of all the forces, a spirit of submission, a suspension of free-will, free action and of the right of criticism which is alien to the true democratic instinct. But the democracies of the future are likely to be strongly concentrated governments in which the principle of liberty is subordinated to the efficient life of the community by some form of State socialism. A democratic State of that kind might well have even a greater power for war, might be able to put forward a more violently concentrated military organisation in event of hostilities than even the bourgeois democracies and it is not at all certain that it would be less tempted to use its means and power. Socialism has been international and pacific

in its tendencies because the necessity of preparation for war is favourable to the rule of the upper classes and because war itself is used in the interests of the governments and the capitalists; the ideas and classes it represents are at present depressed and do not grow by the uses or share visibly in the profits of war. What will happen when they have hold of the government and its temptations and opportunities has to be seen but can easily be forecast. The possession of power is the great test of all idealisms and as yet there have been none religious or secular which have withstood it or escaped diminution and corruption.

To rely upon the common consent of conflicting national egoisms for the preservation of peace between the nations is to rely upon a logical contradiction. A practical improbability which, if we can judge by reason and experience, amounts to an impossibility, can hardly be a sound foundation for the building of the future. A League of Peace can only prevent armed strife for a time. A system of enforced arbitration, even with the threat of a large armed combination against the offender, may minimise the chance of war and may absolutely forbid it to the smaller or weaker nations; but a great nation which sees a chance of making itself the centre of a strong combination of peoples interested in upsetting the settled order of things for their own benefit, might always choose to take the risks of the adventure in the hope of snatching advantages which in its estimation outweighed the risks.² Moreover, in times of great upheaval and movement when large ideas, enormous interests and inflamed passions divide the peoples of the world, the whole system would be likely to break to pieces and the very elements of its efficacy would cease to exist. Any tentative and imperfect device would be bound before long to disclose its inefficacy and the attempt at a deliberate organisation of international life would have to be abandoned and the work left to be wrought out confusedly by the force of events. The creation of a real, efficient and powerful authority which would stand for the general sense and the general power

² The subsequent history of the League of Nations, which had not been formed at the time of writing, has amply proved the inefficacy of these devices.

of mankind in its collective life and spirit and would be something more than a bundle of vigorously separate States loosely tied together by the frail bond of a violable moral agreement is the only effective step possible on this path. Whether such an authority can really be created by agreement, whether it must not rather create itself partly by the growth of ideas, but still more by the shock of forces, is a question to which the future alone can answer.

An authority of this nature would have to command the psychological assent of mankind, exercise a moral force upon the nations greater than that of their own national authority and compel more readily their obedience under all normal circumstances. It would have not only to be a symbol and a centre of the unity of the race, but make itself constantly serviceable to the world by assuring the effective maintenance and development of large common interests and benefits which would outweigh all separate national interests and satisfy entirely the sense of need that had brought it into existence. It must help more and more to fix the growing sense of a common humanity and a common life in which the sharp divisions which separate country from country, race from race, colour from colour, continent from continent would gradually lose their force and undergo a progressive effacement. Given these conditions, it would develop a moral authority which would enable it to pursue with less and less opposition and friction the unification of mankind. The nature of the psychological assent it secured from the beginning would depend largely on its constitution and character and would in its turn determine both the nature and power of the moral authority it could exercise on the earth's peoples. If its constitution and character were such as to conciliate the sentiment and interest in its maintenance the active support of all or most of the different sections of mankind or at least those whose sentiment and support counted powerfully and to represent the leading political, social, cultural ideas and interests of the time, it would have the maximum of psychological assent and moral authority and its way would be comparatively smooth. If defective in these respects, it would have to make up the deficiency by a greater

concentration and show of military force at its back and by extraordinary and striking services to the general life, culture and development of the human race such as assured for the Roman imperial authority the long and general assent of the Mediterranean and Western peoples to their subjection and the obliteration of their national existence.

But in either case the possession and concentration of military power would be for long the first condition of its security, and the effectiveness of its own control and this possession would have to be, as soon as possible, a sole possession. It is difficult at present to foresee the consent of the nations of the world to their own total disarmament. For so long as strong national egoisms of any kind remained and along with them mutual distrust, the nations would not sacrifice their possession of an armed force on which they could rely for self-defence if their interests, or at least those that they considered essential to their prosperity and their existence, came to be threatened. Any distrust of the assured impartiality of the international government would operate in the same direction. Yet such a disarmament would be essential to the assured cessation of war — in the absence of some great and radical psychological and moral change. If national armies exist, the possibility, even the certainty of war will exist along with them. However small they might be made in times of peace, and international authority, even with a military force of its own behind it, would be in the position of the feudal king never quite sure of his effective control over his vassals. The international authority must hold under its command the sole trained military force in the world for the policing of the nations and also — otherwise the monopoly would be ineffective — the sole disposal of the means of manufacturing arms and implements of war. National and private munition factories and arms factories must disappear. National armies must become like the old baronial armies a memory of past and dead ages.

This consummation would mark definitely the creation of a World-State in place of the present international conditions. For it can be brought into truly effective existence only if the

international authority became, not merely the arbiter of disputes, but the source of law and the final power behind their execution. For the execution of its decrees against recalcitrant countries or classes, for the prevention of all kinds of strife not merely political but commercial, industrial and others or at least of their decision by any other ways than a peaceful resort to law and arbitration, for the suppression of any attempt at violent change and revolution, the World-State, even at its strongest, would still need the concentration of all force in its own hands. While man remains what he is, force in spite of all idealisms and generous pacific hopes must remain the ultimate arbiter and governor of his life and its possessor the real ruler. Force may veil its crude presence at ordinary times and take only mild and civilised forms,—mild in comparison, for are not the jail and the executioner still the two great pillars of the social order?—but it is there silently upholding the specious appearances of our civilisation and ready to intervene, whenever called upon, in the workings of the fairer but still feebler gods of the social cosmos. Diffused, force fulfils the free workings of Nature and is the servant of life but also of discord and struggle; concentrated, it becomes the guarantee of organisation and the bond of order.

Chapter XXV

War and the Need of Economic Unity

THE MILITARY necessity, the pressure of war between nations and the need for prevention of war by the assumption of force and authority in the hands of an international body, World-State or Federation or League of Peace, is that which will most directly drive humanity in the end towards some sort of international union. But there is behind it another necessity which is much more powerful in its action on the modern mind, the commercial and industrial, the necessity born of economic interdependence. Commercialism is a modern sociological phenomenon; one might almost say that is the whole phenomenon of modern society. The economic part of life is always important to an organised community and even fundamental; but in former times it was simply the first need, it was not that which occupied the thoughts of men, gave the whole tone to the social life, stood at the head and was clearly recognised as standing at the root of social principles. Ancient man was in the group primarily a political being, in the Aristotelian sense,—as soon as he ceased to be primarily religious,—and to this preoccupation he added, wherever he was sufficiently at ease, the preoccupation of thought, art and culture. The economic impulses of the group were worked out as a mechanical necessity, a strong desire in the vital being rather than a leading thought in the mind. Nor was the society regarded or studied as an economic organism except in a very superficial aspect. The economic man held an honourable, but still a comparatively low position in the society; he was only the third caste or class, the Vaishya. The lead was in the hands of the intellectual and political classes,—the Brahmin, thinker, scholar, philosopher and priest, the Kshatriya, ruler and warrior.

It was their thoughts and preoccupations that gave the tone to society, determined its conscious drift and action, coloured most powerfully all its motives. Commercial interests entered into the relations of States and into the motives of war and peace; but they entered as subordinate and secondary predisposing causes of amity or hostility and only rarely and as it were accidentally came to be enumerated among the overt and conscious causes of peace, alliance and strife. The political consciousness, the political motive dominated; increase of wealth was primarily regarded as a means of political power and greatness and opulence of the mobilisable resources of the State than as an end in itself or a first consideration.

Everything now is changed. The phenomenon of modern social development is the decline of the Brahmin and Kshatriya, of the Church, the military aristocracy and the aristocracy of letters and culture, and the rise to power or predominance of the commercial and industrial classes, Vaishya and Shudra, Capital and Labour. Together they have swallowed up or cast out their rivals and are now engaged in a fratricidal conflict for sole possession in which the completion of the downward force of social gravitation, the ultimate triumph of Labour and the remodelling of all social conceptions and institutions with Labour as the first, the most dignified term which will give its value to all others seem to be the visible writing of Fate. At present, however, it is the Vaishya who still predominates and his stamp on the world is commercialism, the predominance of the economic man, the universality of the commercial value or the utilitarian and materially efficient and productive value for everything in human life. Even in the outlook on knowledge, thought, science, art, poetry and religion the economic conception of life overrides all others.¹

¹ It is noticeable that the bourgeois habit of the predominance of commercialism has been taken up and continued in an even larger scale by the new Socialist societies though on the basis of a labour, instead of a bourgeois economy, and an attempt at a new distribution of its profits or else, more characteristically, a concentration of all in the hands of the State.

For the modern economic view of life, culture and its products have chiefly a decorative value; they are costly and desirable luxuries, not at all indispensable necessities. Religion is in this view a by-product of the human mind with a very restricted utility—if indeed it is not a waste and a hindrance. Education has a recognised importance but its object and form are no longer so much cultural as scientific, utilitarian and economic, its value the preparation of the efficient individual unit to take his place in the body of the economic organism. Science is of immense importance not because it discovers the secrets of Nature for the advancement of knowledge, but because it utilises them for the creation of machinery and develops and organises the economic resources of the community. The thought-power of the society, almost its soul-power—if it has any longer so unsubstantial and unproductive a thing as a soul—is not in its religion or its literature, although the former drags on a feeble existence and the latter teems and spawns, but in the daily Press primarily an instrument of commercialism and governed by the political and commercial spirit and not like literature a direct instrument of culture. Politics, government itself are becoming more and more a machinery for the development of an industrialised society, divided between the service of bourgeois capitalism and the office of a half-involuntary channel for the incoming of economic Socialism. Free thought and culture remain on the surface of this great increasing mass of commercialism and influence and modify it, but are themselves more and more influenced, penetrated, coloured, subjugated by the economic, commercial and industrial view of human life.

This great change has affected profoundly the character of international relations in the past and is likely to affect them still more openly and powerfully in the future. For there is no apparent probability of a turn in a new direction in the immediate future. Certain prophetic voices announce indeed the speedy passing of the age of commercialism. But it is not easy to see how this is to come about; certainly, it will not be by a reversion to the predominantly political spirit of the past or the temper and forms of the old aristocratic social type. The sigh of

the extreme conservative mind for the golden age of the past, which was not so golden as it appears to an imaginative eye in the distance, is a vain breath blown to the winds by the rush of the car of the Time-Spirit in the extreme velocity of its progress. The end of commercialism can only come about either by some unexpected development of commercialism itself or through a reawakening of spirituality in the race and its coming to its own by the subordination of the political and economic motives of life to the spiritual motive.

Certain signs are thought to point in this direction. The religious spirit is reviving and even the old discouraged religious creeds and forms are recovering a kind of vigour. In the secular thought of mankind there are signs of an idealism which increasingly admits a spiritual element among its motives. But all this is as yet slight and superficial; the body of thought and practice, the effective motive, the propelling impulsion remain untouched and unchanged. That impulsion is still towards the industrialising of the human race and the perfection of the life of society as an economic and productive organism. Nor is this spirit likely to die as yet by exhaustion, for it has not yet fulfilled itself and is growing, not declining in force. It is aided, moreover, by modern Socialism which promises to be the master of the future; for Socialism proceeds on the Marxian principle that its own reign has to be preceded by an age of bourgeois capitalism of which it is to be the inheritor and to seize upon its work and organisation in order to turn it to its own uses and modify it by its own principles and methods. It intends indeed to substitute Labour as the master instead of Capital;² but this only means that all activities will be valued by the labour contributed and work produced rather than by the wealth contribution and production. It will be a change from one side of economism to the other, but not a change from economism to the domination

² The connection between Socialism and the democratic or equalitarian idea or the revolt of the proletariat is however an accident of its history, not its essence. In Italian Fascism there arose a Socialism undemocratic and non-equalitarian in its form, idea and temper. Fascism has gone, but there is no inevitable connection between Socialism and the domination of Labour.

of some other and higher motive of human life. The change itself is likely to be one of the chief factors with which international unification will have to deal and either its greatest aid or its greatest difficulty.

In the past, the effect of commercialism has been to bind together the human race into a real economic unity behind its apparent political separateness. But this was a subconscious unity of inseparable interrelations and of intimate mutual dependence, not any oneness of the spirit or of the conscious organised life. Therefore these interrelations produced at once the necessity of peace and the unavoidability of war. Peace was necessary for their normal action, war frightfully perturbatory to their whole system of being. But because the organised units were politically separate and rival nations, their commercial interrelations became relations of rivalry and strife or rather a confused tangle of exchange and interdependence and hostile separatism. Self-defence against each other by a wall of tariffs, a race for closed markets and fields of exploitation, a struggle for place or predominance in markets and fields which could not be monopolised and an attempt at mutual interpenetration in spite of tariff walls have been the chief features of this hostility and this separatism. The outbreak of war under such conditions was only a matter of time; it was bound to come as soon as one nation or else one group of nations felt itself either unable to proceed farther by pacific means or threatened with the definite limitation of its expansion by the growing combination of its rivals. The Franco-German was the last great war dictated by political motives. Since then the political motive has been mainly a cover for the commercial. Not the political subjugation of Serbia which could only be a fresh embarrassment to the Austrian empire, but the commercial possession of the outlet through Salonika was the motive of Austrian policy. Pan-Germanism covered the longings of German industry for possession of the great resources and the large outlet into the North Sea offered by the countries along the Rhine. To seize African spaces of exploitation and perhaps French coal fields, not to rule over French territory, was the drift of its real intention. In Africa, in China, in Persia,

in Mesopotamia, commercial motives determined political and military action. War is no longer the legitimate child of ambition and earth-hunger, but the bastard offspring of wealth-hunger or commercialism with political ambition as its putative father.

On the other hand the effect, the shock of war have been rendered intolerable by the industrial organisation of human life and the commercial interdependence of the nations. It would be too much to say that it laid that organisation in ruins, but it turned it topsy-turvy, deranged its whole system and diverted it to unnatural ends. And it produced a wide-spread suffering and privation in belligerent and a *gêne* and perturbation of life in neutral countries to which the history of the world offers no parallel. The angry cry that this must not be suffered again and that the authors of this menace and disturbance to the modern industrial organisation of the world, self-styled civilisation, must be visited with condign punishment and remain for some time as international outcastes under a ban and a boycott, showed how deeply the lesson had gone home. But it showed too, as the post-war mentality has shown, that the real, the inner truth of it all has not yet been understood or not seized at its centre. Certainly, from this point of view also, the prevention of war must be one of the first preoccupations of a new ordering of international life. But how is war to be entirely prevented if the old state of commercial rivalry between politically separate nations is to be perpetuated? If peace is still to be a covert war, an organisation of strife and rivalry, how is the physical shock to be prevented? It may be said, through the regulation of the inevitable strife and rivalry by a state of law as in the competitive commercial life of a nation before the advent of Socialism. But that was only possible because the competing individuals or combines were part of a single social organism subject to a single governmental authority and unable to assert their individual will of existence against it. Such a regulation between nations can therefore have no other conclusion, logically or practically, than the formation of a centralised World-State.

But let us suppose that the physical shock of war is prevented, not by law, but by the principle of enforced arbitration

in extreme cases which might lead to war, not by the creation of an international authority, but by the overhanging threat of international pressure. The state of covert war will still continue; it may even take new and disastrous forms. Deprived of other weapons the nations are bound to have increasing resort to the weapon of commercial pressure, as did Capital and Labour in their chronic state of "pacific" struggle within the limits of the national life. The instruments would be different, but would follow the same principle, that of the strike and the lock-out which are on one side a combined passive resistance by the weaker party to enforce its claims, on the other a passive pressure by the stronger party to enforce its wishes. Between nations, the corresponding weapon to the strike would be a commercial boycott, already used more than once in an unorganised fashion both in Asia and Europe and bound to be extremely effective and telling if organised even by a politically or commercially weak nation. For the weaker nation is necessary to the stronger, if as nothing else, yet as a market or as a commercial and industrial victim. The corresponding weapons to the lock-out would be the refusal of capital or machinery, the prohibition of all or of any needed imports into the offending or victim country, or even a naval blockade leading, if long maintained, to industrial ruin or to national starvation. The blockade is a weapon used originally only in a state of war, but it was employed against Greece as a substitute for war, and this use may easily be extended in the future. There is always too the weapon of prohibitive tariffs.

It is clear that these weapons need not be employed for commercial purposes or motives only, they may be grasped at to defend or to attack any national interest, to enforce any claim of justice or injustice between nation and nation. It has been shown into how tremendous a weapon commercial pressure can be turned when it is used as an aid to war. If Germany was crushed in the end, the real means of victory was the blockade, the cutting off of money, resources and food and the ruin of industry and commerce. For the military debacle was not directly due to military weakness, but primarily to the diminution and failure of resources, to exhaustion, semi-starvation and the

moral depression of an intolerable position cut off from all hope of replenishment and recovery. This lesson also may have in the future considerable application in a time of "peace". Already it was proposed at one time in some quarters to continue the commercial war after the political had ceased, in order that Germany might not only be struck off the list of great imperial nations but also permanently hampered, disabled or even ruined as a commercial and industrial rival. A policy of refusal of capital and trade relations and a kind of cordon or hostile blockade has been openly advocated and was for a time almost in force against Bolshevik Russia. And it has been suggested too that a League of Peace³ might use this weapon of commercial pressure against any recalcitrant nation in place of military force.

But so long as there is not a firm international authority, the use of this weapon would not be likely to be limited to such occasions or used only for just and legitimate ends. It might be used by a strong nation secure of general indifference to crush and violate the weak; it might be used by a combination of strong imperial Powers to enforce their selfish and evil will upon the world. Force and coercion of any kind not concentrated in the hands of a just and impartial authority are always liable to abuse and misapplication. Therefore inevitably in the growing unity of mankind the evolution of such an authority must become an early and pressing need. The World-State even in its early and imperfect organisation must begin not only to concentrate military force in its hands, but to commence consciously in the beginning what the national State only arrived at by a slow and natural development, the ordering of the commercial, industrial, economic life of the race and the control at first, no doubt, only of the principal relations of international commerce,⁴ but inevitably in the end of its whole system and principles. Since

³ Afterwards realised as the League of Nations.

⁴ Some first beginnings of this kind of activity were trying to appear in the activities of the now almost moribund League of Nations. These activities were still only platonic and advisory as in its futile discussions about disarmament and its inconclusive attempts to regulate certain relations of Capital and Labour, but they showed that the need is already felt and were a signpost on the road to the future.

industry and trade are now five-sixths of social life and the economic principle the governing principle of society, a World-State which did not control human life in its chief principle and its largest activity would exist only in name.

Chapter XXVI

The Need of Administrative Unity

IN ALMOST all current ideas of the first step towards international organisation, it is taken for granted that the nations will continue to enjoy their separate existence and liberties and will only leave to international action the prevention of war, the regulation of dangerous disputes, the power of settling great international questions which they cannot settle by ordinary means. It is impossible that the development should stop there; this first step would necessarily lead to others which could travel only in one direction. Whatever authority were established, if it is to be a true authority in any degree and not a mere concert for palaver, would find itself called upon to act more and more frequently and to assume always increasing powers. To avoid preventible disturbance and friction, to avert hereafter the recurrence of troubles and disasters which in the beginning the first limitations of its powers had debarred the new authority from averting by a timely intervention before they came to a head, to bring about a coordination of activities for common ends, would be the principal motives impelling humanity to advance from a looser to a closer union, from a voluntary self-subordination in great and exceptional matters to an obligatory subordination in most matters. The desire of powerful nations to use it for their own purposes, the utility for weaker nations of appealing to it for the protection of their interests, the shock of actual or threatened internal disturbances and revolutions would all help to give the international authority greater power and provide occasions for extending its normal action. Science, thought and religion, the three great forces which in modern times tend increasingly to override national distinctions and point the race towards unity of life and spirit, would become more impatient of national barriers, hostilities and divisions and lend their powerful influence to the change. The great struggle

between Capital and Labour might become rapidly world-wide, arrive at such an international organisation as would precipitate the inevitable step or even present the actual crisis which would bring about the transformation.

Our supposition for the moment is that a well-unified World-State with the nations for its provinces would be the final outcome. At first taking up the regulation of international disputes and of economic treaties and relations, the international authority would start as an arbiter and an occasional executive power and change by degrees into a legislative body and a standing executive power. Its legislation would be absolutely necessary in international matters, if fresh convulsions are to be avoided; for it is idle to suppose that any international arrangement, any ordering of the world arrived at after the close of a great war and upheaval could be permanent and definitive. Injustice, inequalities, abnormalities, causes of quarrel or dissatisfaction would remain in the relations of nation with nation, continent with continent which would lead to fresh hostilities and explosions. As these are prevented in the nation-State by the legislative authority which constantly modifies the existing system of things in conformity with new ideas, interests, forces and necessities, so it would have to be in the developing World-State. This legislative power, as it developed, extended, regularised its action, powers and processes, would become more complex and would be bound to interfere at many points and override or substitute its own for the separate national action. That would imply the growth also of its executive power and the development of an international executive organisation. At first it might confine itself to the most important questions and affairs which obviously demanded its control; but it would tend increasingly to stretch its hand to all or most matters that could be viewed as having an international effect and importance. Before long it would invade and occupy even those fields in which the nations are now jealous of their own rights and power. And eventually it would permeate the whole system of the national life and subject it to international control in the interests of the better coordination of the united life, culture,

science, organisation, education, efficiency of the human race. It would reduce the now free and separate nations first to the position of the States of the American union or the German empire and eventually perhaps to that of geographical provinces or departments of the single nation of mankind.

The present obstacle to any such extreme consummation is the still strong principle of nationalism, the sense of group separateness, the instinct of collective independence, its pride, its pleasure in itself, its various sources of egoistic self-satisfaction, its insistence on the subordination of the human idea to the national idea. But we are supposing that the new-born idea of internationalism will grow apace, subject to itself the past idea and temper of nationalism, become dominant and take possession of the human mind. As the larger nation-group has subordinated to itself and tended to absorb all smaller clan, tribal and regional groups, as the larger empire-group now tends to subordinate and might, if allowed to develop, eventually absorb the smaller nation-groups, we are supposing that the complete human group of united mankind will subordinate to itself in the same way and eventually absorb all smaller groups of separated humanity. It is only by a growth of the international idea, the idea of a single humanity, that nationalism can disappear, if the old natural device of an external unification by conquest or other compulsive force continues to be no longer possible; for the methods of war have become too disastrous and no single empire has the means and the strength to overcome, whether rapidly or in the gradual Roman way, the rest of the world. Undoubtedly, nationalism is a more powerful obstacle to farther unification than was the separateness of the old pettier and less firmly self-conscious groupings which preceded the developed nation-State. It is still the most powerful sentiment in the collective human mind, still gives an indestructible vitality to the nation and is apt to reappear even where it seemed to have been abolished. But we cannot argue safely from the present balance of tendencies in the beginning of a great era of transitions. Already there are at work not only ideas but forces, all the more powerful for being forces of the future and not established powers of the present,

which may succeed in subordinating nationalism to themselves far earlier than we can at present conceive.

If the principle of the World-State is carried to its logical conclusion and to its extreme consequences, the result will be a process analogous in principle, with whatever necessary differences in the manner or form or extent of execution, to that by which in the building of the nation-State the central government, first as a monarchy, then as a democratic assembly and executive, gathered up the whole administration of the national life. There will be a centralisation of all control, military and police, administrative, judicial, legislative, economic, social and cultural in the one international authority. The spirit of the centralisation will be a strong unitarian idea and the principle of uniformity enforced for the greatest practical convenience and the result a rationalised mechanism of human life and activities throughout the world with justice, universal well-being, economy of effort and scientific efficiency as its principal objects. Instead of the individual activities of nation-groups each working for itself with the maximum of friction and waste and conflict, there will be an effort at coordination such as we now see in a well-organised modern State, of which the complete idea is a thoroughgoing State socialism, nowhere yet realised indeed, but rapidly coming into existence.¹ If we glance briefly at each department of the communal activity, we shall see that this development is inevitable.

We have seen already that all military power — and in the World-State that would mean an international armed police — must be concentrated in the hands of one common authority; otherwise the State cannot endure. A certain concentration of the final power of decision in economic matters would be also in time inevitable. And in the end this supremacy could not stop short of a complete control. For the economic life of the world is becoming more and more one and indivisible; but the present

¹ Since this was written, this coming into existence has become much more rapid and thoroughgoing in three at least of the greatest nations and a more hesitating and less clearly self-conscious imitation of it is in evidence in smaller countries.

state of international relations is an anomalous condition of opposite principles partly in conflict, partly accommodated to each other as best they can be, — but the best is bad and harmful to the common interest. On the one side, there is the underlying unity which makes each nation commercially dependent on all the rest. On the other there is the spirit of national jealousy, egoism and sense of separate existence which makes each nation attempt at once to assert its industrial independence and at the same time reach out for a hold of its outgoing commercial activities upon foreign markets. The interaction of these two principles is regulated at present partly by the permitted working of natural forces, partly by tacit practice and understanding, partly by systems of tariff protection, bounties, State aid of one kind or another on the one hand and commercial treaties and agreements on the other. Inevitably, as the World-State grew, this would be felt to be an anomaly, a wasteful and uneconomical process. An efficient international authority would be compelled more and more to intervene and modify the free arrangements of nation with nation. The commercial interests of humanity at large would be given the first place; the independent proclivities and commercial ambitions or jealousies of this or that nation would be compelled to subordinate themselves to the human good. The ideal of mutual exploitation would be replaced by the ideal of a fit and proper share in the united economic life of the race. Especially, as socialism advanced and began to regulate the whole economic existence of separate countries, the same principle would gain ground in the international field and in the end the World-State would be called upon to take up into its hands the right ordering of the industrial production and distribution of the world. Each country might be allowed for a time to produce its own absolute necessities: but in the end it would probably be felt that this was no more necessary than for Wales or Scotland to produce all its own necessities independently of the rest of the British Isles or for one province of India to be an economic unit independent of the rest of the country. Each would produce and distribute only what it could to the best advantage, most naturally, most efficiently and most

economically, for the common need and demand of mankind in which its own would be inseparably included. It would do this according to a system settled by the common will of mankind through its State government and under a method made uniform in its principles, however variable in local detail, so as to secure the simplest, smoothest and most rational working of a necessarily complicated machinery.

The administration of the general order of society is a less pressing matter of concern than it was to the nation-States in their period of formation, because those were times when the element of order had almost to be created and violence, crime and revolt were both more easy and more a natural and general propensity of mankind. At the present day, not only are societies tolerably well-organised in this respect and equipped with the absolutely necessary agreements between country and country, but by an elaborate system of national, regional and municipal governments linked up by an increasingly rapid power of communication the State can regulate parts of the order of life with which the cruder governments of old were quite unable to deal with any full effect. In the World-State, it may be thought, each country may be left to its own free action in matters of its internal order and, indeed, of all its separate political, social and cultural life. But even here it is probable that the World-State would demand a greater centralisation and uniformity than we can now easily imagine.

In the matter, for instance, of the continual struggle of society with the still ineradicable element of crime which it generates in its own bosom, the crudity of the present system is sure to be recognised and a serious attempt made to deal with it in a very radical manner. The first necessity would be the close observation and supervision of the great mass of constantly re-created corrupt human material in which the bacillus of crime finds its natural breeding-ground. This is at present done very crudely and imperfectly and, for the most part, after the event of actual crime by the separate police of each nation with extradition treaties and informal mutual aid as a device against evasion by place-shift. The World-State would insist on an international as

well as a local supervision, not only to deal with the phenomenon of what may be called international crime and disorder which is likely to increase largely under future conditions, but for the more important object of the prevention of crime.

For the second necessity it would feel would be the need to deal with crime at its roots and in its inception. It may attempt this, first, by a more enlightened method of education and moral and temperamental training which would render the growth of criminal propensities more difficult; secondly, by scientific or eugenic methods of observation, treatment, isolation, perhaps sterilisation of corrupt human material; thirdly, by a humane and enlightened gaol system and penological method which would have for its aim not the punishment but the reform of the incipient and the formed criminal. It would insist on a certain uniformity of principle so that there might not be countries that would persevere in backward and old-world or inferior or erratic systems and so defeat the general object. For this end centralisation of control would be necessary or at least strongly advisable. So too with the judicial method. The present system is still considered as enlightened and civilised, and it is so comparatively with the mediaeval methods; but a time will surely come when it will be condemned as grotesque, inefficient, irrational and in many of its principal features semi-barbaric, a half-conversion at most of the more confused and arbitrary methods of an earlier state of social thought and feeling and social life. With the development of a more rational system, the preservation of the old juridical and judicial principles and methods in any part of the world would be felt to be intolerable and the World-State would be led to standardise the new principles and the new methods by a common legislation and probably a general centralised control.

In all these matters, it might be admitted, uniformity and centralisation would be beneficial and to some extent inevitable; no jealousy of national separateness and independence could be allowed under such conditions to interfere with the common good of humanity. But at least in the choice of their political system and in other spheres of their social life the nations might

well be left to follow their own ideals and propensities and to be healthily and naturally free. It may even be said that the nations would never tolerate any serious interference in these matters and that the attempt to use the World-State for such a purpose would be fatal to its existence. But, as a matter of fact, the principle of political non-interference is likely to be much less admitted in the future than it has been in the past or is at present. Always in times of great and passionate struggle between conflicting political ideas,—between oligarchy and democracy in ancient Greece, between the old regime and the ideas of the French Revolution in modern Europe,—the principle of political non-interference has gone to the wall. But now we see another phenomenon—the opposite principle of interference slowly erecting itself into a conscious rule of international life. There is more and more possible an intervention like the American interference in Cuba, not on avowed grounds of national interest, but ostensibly on behalf of liberty, constitutionalism and democracy or of an opposite social and political principle, on international grounds therefore and practically in the force of this idea that the internal arrangements of a country concern, under certain conditions of disorder or insufficiency, not only itself, but its neighbours and humanity at large. A similar principle was put forward by the Allies in regard to Greece during the war. It was applied to one of the most powerful nations of the world in the refusal of the Allies to treat with Germany or, practically, to re-admit it into the comity of nations unless it set aside its existing political system and principles and adopted the forms of modern democracy, dismissing all remnant of absolutist rule.²

This idea of the common interest of the race in the internal affairs of a nation is bound to increase as the life of humanity becomes more unified. The great political question of the future

² The hardly disguised intervention of the Fascist Powers in Spain to combat and beat down the democratic Government of the country is a striking example of a tendency likely to increase in the future. Since then there has been the interference in an opposite sense with the Franco regime in the same country and the pressure put upon it, however incomplete and wavering, to change its method and principle.

is likely to be the challenge of Socialism, the full evolution of the omnipotent and omnipresent social State. And if Socialism triumphs in the leading nations of the world, it will inevitably seek to impose its rule everywhere not only by indirect pressure, but even by direct interference in what it would consider backward countries. An international authority, Parliamentary or other, in which it commanded the majority or the chief influence, would be too ready a means to be neglected. Moreover, a World-State would probably no more find it possible to tolerate the continuance of certain nations as capitalist societies, itself being socialistic in major part, than a capitalist—or socialist—Great Britain would tolerate a socialist—or capitalist—Scotland or Wales. On the other hand, if all nations become socialistic in form, it would be natural enough for the World-State to co-ordinate all these separate socialisms into one great system of human life. But Socialism pursued to its full development means the destruction of the distinction between political and social activities; it means the socialisation of the common life and its subjection in all its parts to its own organised government and administration. Nothing small or great escapes its purview. Birth and marriage, labour and amusement and rest, education, culture, training of physique and character, the socialistic sense leaves nothing outside its scope and its busy intolerant control. Therefore, granting an international Socialism, neither the politics nor the social life of the separate peoples is likely to escape the centralised control of the World-State.³

Such a world-system is remote indeed from our present conceptions and established habits of life, but these conceptions and habits are already subjected at their roots to powerful forces of change. Uniformity is becoming more and more the law of the world; it is becoming more and more difficult, in spite of sentiment and in spite of conscious efforts of conservation and revival, for local individualities to survive. But the triumph of

³ This aspect of Socialism in action has received a striking confirmation in the trend to total governmental control in Germany and Italy. The strife between national (Fascist) Socialism and pure Marxist Socialism could not have been foreseen at the time of writing; but whichever form prevails, there is an identical principle.

uniformity would naturally make for centralisation; the radical incentive to separateness would disappear. And centralisation once accomplished would in its turn make for a more complete uniformity. Such decentralisation as might be indispensable in a uniform humanity would be needed for convenience of administration, not on the ground of true separative variations. Once the national sentiment has gone under before a dominant internationalism, large questions of culture and race would be the only grounds left for the preservation of a strong though subordinate principle of separation in the World-State. But difference of culture is quite as much threatened today as any other more outward principle of group variation. The differences between the European nations are simply minor variations of a common occidental culture. And now that Science, that great power for uniformity of thought and life and method, is becoming more and more the greater part and threatens to become the whole of culture and life, the importance of these variations is likely to decrease. The only radical difference that still exists is between the mind of the Occident and the mind of the Orient. But here too Asia is undergoing the shock of Europeanism and Europe is beginning to feel, however slightly, the reflux of Asiaticism. A common world-culture is the most probable outcome. The valid objection to centralisation will then be greatly diminished in force, if not removed altogether. Race-sense is perhaps a stronger obstacle because it is more irrational; but this too may be removed by the closer intellectual, cultural and physical intercourse which is inevitable in the not distant future.

The dream of the cosmopolitan socialist thinker may therefore be realised after all. And given the powerful continuance of the present trend of world-forces, it is in a way inevitable. Even what seems now most a chimera, a common language, may become a reality. For a State naturally tends to establish one language as the instrument of all its public affairs, its thought, its literature; the rest sink into patois, dialects, provincial tongues, like Welsh in Great Britain or Breton and Provençal in France; exceptions like Switzerland are few, hardly more than one or

two in number, and are preserved only by unusually favourable conditions. It is difficult indeed to suppose that languages with powerful literatures spoken by millions of cultured men will allow themselves to be put into a quite secondary position, much less snuffed out by any old or new speech of man. But it cannot be quite certainly said that scientific reason, taking possession of the mind of the race and thrusting aside separative sentiment as a barbaric anachronism, may not accomplish one day even this psychological miracle. In any case, variety of language need be no insuperable obstacle to uniformity of culture, to uniformity of education, life and organisation or to a regulating scientific machinery applied to all departments of life and settled for the common good by the united will and intelligence of the human race. For that would be what a World-State, such as we have imagined, would stand for, its meaning, its justification, its human object. It is likely indeed that this and nothing less would come in the end to be regarded as the full justification of its existence.

Chapter XXVII

The Peril of the World-State

THIS THEN is the extreme possible form of a World-State, the form dreamed of by the socialistic, scientific, humanitarian thinkers who represent the modern mind at its highest point of self-consciousness and are therefore able to detect the trend of its tendencies, though to the half-rationalised mind of the ordinary man whose view does not go beyond the day and its immediate morrow, their speculations may seem to be chimerical and utopian. In reality they are nothing of the kind; in their essence, not necessarily in their form, they are, as we have seen, not only the logical outcome, but the inevitable practical last end of the incipient urge towards human unity, if it is pursued by a principle of mechanical unification,—that is to say, by the principle of the State. It is for this reason that we have found it necessary to show the operative principles and necessities which have underlain the growth of the unified and finally socialistic nation-State, in order to see how the same movement in international unification must lead to the same results by an analogous necessity of development. The State principle leads necessarily to uniformity, regulation, mechanisation; its inevitable end is socialism. There is nothing fortuitous, no room for chance in political and social development, and the emergence of socialism was no accident or a thing that might or might not have been, but the inevitable result contained in the very seed of the State idea. It was inevitable from the moment that idea began to be hammered out in practice. The work of the Alfreds and Charlemagnes and other premature national or imperial unifiers contained this as a sure result, for men work almost always without knowing for what they have worked. But in modern times the signs are so clear that we need not be deceived or imagine, when we begin to lay a mechanical base for world-unification, that the result contained

in the very effort will not insist on developing, however far-off it may seem at present from any immediate or even any distant possibilities. A strict unification, a vast uniformity, a regulated socialisation of united mankind will be the predestined fruit of our labour.

This result can only be avoided if an opposite force interposes and puts in its veto, as happened in Asia where the State idea, although strongly affirmed within its limits, could never go in its realisation beyond a certain point, because the fundamental principle of the national life was opposed to its full intolerant development. The races of Asia, even the most organised, have always been peoples rather than nations in the modern sense. Or they were nations only in the sense of having a common soul-life, a common culture, a common social organisation, a common political head, but not nation-States. The State machine existed only for a restricted and superficial action; the real life of the people was determined by other powers with which it could not meddle. Its principal function was to preserve and protect the national culture and to maintain sufficient political, social and administrative order—as far as possible an immutable order—for the real life of the people to function undisturbed in its own way and according to its own innate tendencies. Some such unity for the human race is possible in the place of an organised World-State, if the nations of mankind succeed in preserving their developed instinct of nationalism intact and strong enough to resist the domination of the State idea. The result would then be not a single nation of mankind and a World-State, but a single human people with a free association of its nation-units. Or, it may be, the nation as we know it might disappear, but there would be some other new kind of group-units, assured by some sufficient machinery of international order in the peaceful and natural functioning of their social, economic and cultural relations.

Which then of these two major possibilities would be preferable? To answer that question we have to ask ourselves, what would be the account of gain and loss for the life of the human race which would result from the creation of a unified

World-State. In all probability the results would be, with all allowance for the great difference between then and now, very much the same in essence as those which we observe in the ancient Roman Empire. On the credit side, we should have first one enormous gain, the assured peace of the world. It might not be absolutely secure against internal shocks and disturbances but, supposing certain outstanding questions to be settled with some approach to permanence, it would eliminate even such occasional violences of civil strife as disturbed the old Roman imperial economy and, whatever perturbations there might still be, need not disturb the settled fabric of civilisation so as to cast all again into the throes of a great radical and violent change. Peace assured, there would be an unparalleled development of ease and well-being. A great number of outstanding problems would be solved by the united intelligence of mankind working no longer in fragments but as one. The vital life of the race would settle down into an assured rational order comfortable, well-regulated, well-informed, with a satisfactory machinery for meeting all difficulties, exigencies and problems with the least possible friction, disturbance and mere uncertainty of adventure and peril. At first, there would be a great cultural and intellectual efflorescence. Science would organise itself for the betterment of human life and the increase of knowledge and mechanical efficiency. The various cultures of the world—those that still exist as separate realities—would not only exchange ideas more intimately, but would throw their gains into one common fund, and new motives and forms would arise for a time in thought and literature and Art. Men would meet each other much more closely and completely than before, develop a greater mutual understanding rid of many accidental motives of strife, hatred and repugnance which now exist, and arrive, if not at brotherhood,—which cannot come by mere political, social and cultural union,—yet at some imitation of it, a sufficiently kindly association and interchange. There would be an unprecedented splendour, ease and amenity in this development of human life, and no doubt some chief poet of the age, writing in the common or

official tongue—shall we say, Esperanto?—would sing confidently of the approach of the golden age or even proclaim its actual arrival and eternal duration. But after a time, there would be a dying down of force, a static condition of the human mind and human life, then stagnation, decay, disintegration. The soul of man would begin to wither in the midst of his acquisitions.

This result would come about for the same essential reasons as in the Roman example. The conditions of a vigorous life would be lost, liberty, mobile variation and the shock upon each other of freely developing differentiated lives. It may be said that this will not happen, because the World-State will be a free democratic State, not a liberty-stifling empire or autocracy, and because liberty and progress are the very principle of modern life and no development would be tolerated which went contrary to that principle. But in all this, there is not really the security that seems to be offered. For what is now, need not endure under quite different circumstances and the idea that it will is a strange mirage thrown from the actualities of the present on the possibly quite different actualities of the future. Democracy is by no means a sure preservative of liberty; on the contrary, we see today the democratic system of government march steadily towards such an organised annihilation of individual liberty as could not have been dreamed of in the old aristocratic and monarchical systems. It may be that from the more violent and brutal forms of despotic oppression which were associated with those systems, democracy has indeed delivered those nations which have been fortunate enough to achieve liberal forms of government, and that is no doubt a great gain. It revives now only in periods of revolution and excitement, often in the form of mob tyranny or a savage revolutionary or reactionary repression. But there is a deprivation of liberty which is more respectable in appearance, more subtle and systematised, more mild in its method because it has a greater force at its back, but for that very reason more effective and pervading. The tyranny of the majority has become a familiar phrase and its deadening effects have been depicted with a great

force of resentment by certain of the modern intellectuals;¹ but what the future promises us is something more formidable still, the tyranny of the whole, of the self-hypnotised mass over its constituent groups and units.²

This is a very remarkable development, the more so as in the origins of the democratic movement individual freedom was the ideal which it set in front both in ancient and modern times. The Greeks associated democracy with two main ideas, first, an effective and personal share by each citizen in the actual government, legislation, administration of the community, secondly, a great freedom of individual temperament and action. But neither of these characteristics can flourish in the modern type of democracy, although in the United States of America there was at one time a tendency to a certain extent in this direction. In large States, the personal share of each citizen in the government cannot be effective; he can only have an equal share — illusory for the individual although effective in the mass — in the periodical choice of his legislators and administrators. Even if these have not practically to be elected from a class which is not the whole or even the majority of the community, at present almost everywhere the middle class, still these legislators and administrators do not really represent their electors. The Power they represent is another, a formless and bodiless entity, which has taken the place of monarch and aristocracy, that impersonal group-being which assumes some sort of outward form and body and conscious action in the huge mechanism of the modern State. Against this power the individual is much more helpless than he was against old oppressions. When he feels its pressure grinding him into its uniform moulds, he has no resource except either an impotent anarchism or else a retreat, still to some extent possible, into the freedom of his soul or the freedom of his intellectual being.

¹ E.g. Ibsen in his drama, "An Enemy of the People".

² There was first seen the drastic beginning of this phenomenon in Fascist Italy and Soviet Russia. At the time of writing this development could be seen only in speculative prevision. It assumed afterwards the proportions of a growing fact and we can now see its full and formidable body.

For this is one gain of modern democracy which ancient liberty did not realise to the same extent and which has not yet been renounced, a full freedom of speech and thought. And as long as this freedom endures, the fear of a static condition of humanity and subsequent stagnation might seem to be groundless,—especially when it is accompanied by universal education which provides the largest possible human field for producing an effectuating force. Freedom of thought and speech—the two necessarily go together, since there can be no real freedom of thought where a padlock is put upon freedom of speech—is not indeed complete without freedom of association; for free speech means free propagandism and propagandism only becomes effective by association for the realisation of its objects. This third liberty also exists with more or less of qualifying limitations or prudent safeguards in all democratic States. But it is a question whether these great fundamental liberties have been won by the race with an entire security,—apart from their occasional suspensions even in free nations and the considerable restrictions with which they are hedged in subject countries. It is possible that the future has certain surprises for us in this direction.³ Freedom of thought would be the last human liberty directly attacked by the all-regulating State, which will first seek to regulate the whole life of the individual in the type approved by the communal mind or by its rulers. But when it sees how all-important is the thought in shaping the life, it will be led to take hold of that too by forming the thought of the individual through State education and by training him to the acceptance of the approved communal, ethical, social, cultural, religious ideas, as was done in many ancient forms of education. Only if it finds this weapon ineffective, is it likely to limit freedom of thought directly on the plea of danger to the State and to civilisation. Already we see the right of the State to interfere with individual thought announced here and there in a most ominous

³ A surprise no longer, but more and more an accomplished fact. At this moment freedom of speech and thought exists no longer in Russia; it was entirely suspended for a time in Germany and Southern Europe.

manner. One would have imagined religious liberty at least was assured to mankind, but recently we have seen an exponent of "new thought" advancing positively the doctrine that the State is under no obligation to recognise the religious liberty of the individual and that even if it grants freedom of religious thought, it can only be conceded as a matter of expediency, not of right. There is no obligation, it is contended, to allow freedom of cult; and indeed this seems logical; for if the State has the right to regulate the whole life of the individual, it must surely have the right to regulate his religion, which is so important a part of his life, and his thought, which has so powerful an effect upon his life.⁴

Supposing an all-regulating socialistic World-State to be established, freedom of thought under such a regime would necessarily mean a criticism not only of the details, but of the very principles of the existing state of things. This criticism, if it is to look not to the dead past but to the future, could only take one direction, the direction of anarchism, whether of the spiritual Tolstoyan kind or else the intellectual anarchism which is now the creed of a small minority but still a growing force in many European countries. It would declare the free development of the individual as its gospel and denounce government as an evil and no longer at all a necessary evil. It would affirm the full and free religious, ethical, intellectual and temperamental growth of the individual from within as the true ideal of human life and all else as things not worth having at the price of the renunciation of this ideal, a renunciation which it would describe as the loss of his soul. It would preach as the ideal of society a free association or brotherhood of individuals without government or any kind of compulsion.

What would the World-State do with this kind of free thought? It might tolerate it so long as it did not translate itself into individual and associated action; but the moment it spread

⁴ It was an error of prevision to suppose that the State would hesitate for a time to suppress freedom of thought altogether. It has been done at once and decisively by Bolshevik Russia and the totalitarian States. Religious liberty is not yet utterly destroyed, but is being slowly ground out in Russia, as it was in Germany, by State pressure.

or turned towards a practical self-affirmation in life, the whole principle of the State and its existence would be attacked and its very base would be sapped and undermined and in imminent danger. To stop the destruction at its root or else consent to its own subversion would be the only alternatives before the established Power. But even before any such necessity arises, the principle of regulation of all things by the State would have extended itself to the regulation of the mental as well as the physical life of man by the communal mind, which was the ideal of former civilisations. A static order of society would be the necessary consequence, since without the freedom of the individual a society cannot remain progressive. It must settle into the rut or the groove of a regulated perfection or of something to which it gives that name because of the rationality of system and symmetrical idea of order which it embodies. The communal mass is always conservative and static in its consciousness and only moves slowly in the tardy process of subconscious Nature. The free individual is the conscious progressive: it is only when he is able to impart his own creative and mobile consciousness to the mass that a progressive society becomes possible.

Chapter XXVIII

Diversity in Oneness

IT IS essential to keep constantly in view the fundamental powers and realities of life if we are not to be betrayed by the arbitrary rule of the logical reason and its attachment to the rigorous and limiting idea into experiments which, however convenient in practice and however captivating to a unitarian and symmetrical thought, may well destroy the vigour and impoverish the roots of life. For that which is perfect and satisfying to the system of the logical reason, may yet ignore the truth of life and the living needs of the race. Unity is an idea which is not at all arbitrary or unreal; for unity is the very basis of existence. The oneness that is secretly at the foundation of all things, the evolving spirit in Nature is moved to realise consciously at the top; the evolution moves through diversity from a simple to a complex oneness. Unity the race moves towards and must one day realise.

But uniformity is not the law of life. Life exists by diversity; it insists that every group, every being shall be, even while one with all the rest in its universality, yet by some principle or ordered detail of variation unique. The over-centralisation which is the condition of a working uniformity, is not the healthy method of life. Order is indeed the law of life, but not an artificial regulation. The sound order is that which comes from within as the result of a nature that has discovered itself and found its own law and the law of its relations with others. Therefore the truest order is that which is founded on the greatest possible liberty; for liberty is at once the condition of vigorous variation and the condition of self-finding. Nature secures variation by division into groups and insists on liberty by the force of individuality in the members of the group. Therefore the unity of the human race to be entirely sound and in consonance with the deepest laws of life must be founded on free groupings, and the groupings again must be the natural association of free individuals. This is

an ideal which it is certainly impossible to realise under present conditions or perhaps in any near future of the human race; but it is an ideal which ought to be kept in view, for the more we can approximate to it, the more we can be sure of being on the right road. The artificiality of much in human life is the cause of its most deep-seated maladies; it is not faithful to itself or sincere with Nature and therefore it stumbles and suffers.

The utility, the necessity of natural groupings may be seen if we consider the purpose and functioning of one great principle of division in Nature, her insistence on diversity of language. The seeking for a common language for all mankind was very strong at the close of the last and the beginning of the present century and gave rise to several experiments, none of which could get to any vital permanence. Now whatever may be the need of a common medium of communication for mankind and however it may be served by the general use either of an artificial and conventional language or of some natural tongue, as Latin, and later on to a slight extent French, was for some time the common cultural tongue of intercourse between the European nations or Sanskrit for the Indian peoples, no unification which destroyed or overshadowed, dwarfed and discouraged the large and free use of the varying natural languages of humanity, could fail to be detrimental to human life and progress. The legend of the Tower of Babel speaks of the diversity of tongues as a curse laid on the race; but whatever its disadvantages, and they tend more and more to be minimised by the growth of civilisation and increasing intercourse, it has been rather a blessing than a curse, a gift to mankind rather than a disability laid upon it. The purposeless exaggeration of anything is always an evil, and an excessive pullulation of varying tongues that serve no purpose in the expression of a real diversity of spirit and culture is certainly a stumbling-block rather than a help: but this excess, though it existed in the past,¹ is hardly a possibility of

¹ In India the pedants enumerate I know not how many hundred languages. This is a stupid misstatement; there are about a dozen great tongues; the rest are either dialects or aboriginal survivals of tribal speech that are bound to disappear.

the future. The tendency is rather in the opposite direction. In former times diversity of language helped to create a barrier to knowledge and sympathy, was often made the pretext even of an actual antipathy and tended to a too rigid division. The lack of sufficient interpenetration kept up both a passive want of understanding and a fruitful crop of active misunderstandings. But this was an inevitable evil of a particular stage of growth, an exaggeration of the necessity that then existed for the vigorous development of strongly individualised group-souls in the human race. These disadvantages have not yet been abolished, but with closer intercourse and the growing desire of men and nations for the knowledge of each other's thought and spirit and personality, they have diminished and tend to diminish more and more and there is no reason why in the end they should not become inoperative.

Diversity of language serves two important ends of the human spirit, a use of unification and a use of variation. A language helps to bring those who speak it into a certain large unity of growing thought, formed temperament, ripening spirit. It is an intellectual, aesthetic and expressive bond which tempers division where division exists and strengthens unity where unity has been achieved. Especially it gives self-consciousness to national or racial unity and creates the bond of a common self-expression and a common record of achievement. On the other hand, it is a means of national differentiation and perhaps the most powerful of all, not a barren principle of division merely, but a fruitful and helpful differentiation. For each language is the sign and power of the soul of the people which naturally speaks it. Each develops therefore its own peculiar spirit, thought-temperament, way of dealing with life and knowledge and experience. If it receives and welcomes the thought, the life-experience, the spiritual impact of other nations, still it transforms them into something new of its own and by that power of transmutation it enriches the life of humanity with its fruitful borrowings and does not merely repeat what had been gained elsewhere. Therefore it is of the utmost value to a nation, a human group-soul, to preserve its language and to make of it

a strong and living cultural instrument. A nation, race or people which loses its language cannot live its whole life or its real life. And this advantage to the national life is at the same time an advantage to the general life of the human race.

How much a distinct human group loses by not possessing a separate tongue of its own or by exchanging its natural self-expression for an alien form of speech, can be seen by the examples of the British colonies, the United States of America and Ireland. The colonies are really separate peoples in the psychological sense, although they are not as yet separate nations. English, for the most part or at the lowest in great part, in their origin and political and social sympathy, they are yet not replicas of England, but have already a different temperament, a bent of their own, a developing special character. But this new personality can only appear in the more outward and mechanical parts of their life and even there in no great, effective and fruitful fashion. The British colonies do not count in the culture of the world, because they have no native culture, because by the fact of their speech they are and must be mere provinces of England. Whatever peculiarities they may develop in their mental life tend to create a type of provincialism and not a central intellectual, aesthetic, spiritual life of their own with its distinct importance for mankind. For the same reason the whole of America, in spite of its powerfully independent political and economic being, has tended to be culturally a province of Europe, the south and centre by their dependence on the Spanish, and the north by its dependence on the English language. The life of the United States alone tends and strives to become a great and separate cultural existence, but its success is not commensurate with its power. Culturally, it is still to a great extent a province of England. Neither its literature, in spite of two or three great names, nor its art nor its thought, nor anything else on the higher levels of the mind, has been able to arrive at a vigorous maturity independent in its soul-type. And this because its instrument of self-expression, the language which the national mind ought to shape and be in turn shaped by it, was formed and must continue to be formed by another country with a different mentality and

must there find its centre and its law of development. In old times, America would have evolved and changed the English language according to its own needs until it became a new speech, as the mediaeval nations dealt with Latin, and arrived in this way at a characteristic instrument of self-expression; but under modern conditions this is not easily possible.²

Ireland had its own tongue when it had its own free nationality and culture and its loss was a loss to humanity as well as to the Irish nation. For what might not this Celtic race with its fine psychic turn and quick intelligence and delicate imagination, which did so much in the beginning for European culture and religion, have given to the world through all these centuries under natural conditions? But the forcible imposition of a foreign tongue and the turning of a nation into a province left Ireland for so many centuries mute and culturally stagnant, a dead force in the life of Europe. Nor can we count as an adequate compensation for this loss the small indirect influence of the race upon English culture or the few direct contributions made by gifted Irishmen forced to pour their natural genius into a foreign mould of thought. Even when Ireland in her struggle for freedom was striving to recover her free soul and give it a voice, she has been hampered by having to use a tongue which does not naturally express her spirit and peculiar bent. In time she may conquer the obstacle, make this tongue her own, force it to express her, but it will be long, if ever, before she can do it with the same richness, force and unfettered individuality as she would have done in her Gaelic speech. That speech she had tried to recover but the natural obstacles have been and are likely always to be too heavy and too strongly established for any complete success in that endeavour.

Modern India is another striking example. Nothing has stood more in the way of the rapid progress in India, nothing

² It is affirmed that now such an independent development is taking place in America; it has to be seen how far this becomes a truly vigorous reality: at present it has amounted only to a provincial turn, a sort of national slang or a racy oddity. Even in the farthest development it would only be a sort of dialect, not a national language.

has more successfully prevented her self-finding and development under modern conditions than the long overshadowing of the Indian tongues as cultural instruments by the English language. It is significant that the one sub-nation in India which from the first refused to undergo this yoke, devoted itself to the development of its language, made that for long its principal preoccupation, gave to it its most original minds and most living energies, getting through everything else perfunctorily, neglecting commerce, doing politics as an intellectual and oratorical pastime,—that it is Bengal which first recovered its soul, re-spiritualised itself, forced the whole world to hear of its great spiritual personalities, gave it the first modern Indian poet and Indian scientist of world-wide fame and achievement, restored the moribund art of India to life and power, first made her count again in the culture of the world, first, as a reward in the outer life, arrived at a vital political consciousness and a living political movement not imitative and derivative in its spirit and its central ideal.³ For so much does language count in the life of a nation; for so much does it count to the advantage of humanity at large that its group-souls should preserve and develop and use with a vigorous group-individuality their natural instrument of expression.

A common language makes for unity and therefore it might be said that the unity of the human race demands unity of language; the advantages of diversity must be foregone for this greater good, however serious the temporary sacrifice. But it makes for a real, fruitful, living unity, only when it is the natural expression of the race or has been made natural by a long adaptation and development from within. The history of universal tongues spoken by peoples to whom they were not natural, is not encouraging. Always they have tended to become dead tongues, sterilising so long as they kept their hold, fruitful only when they were decomposed and broken up into new derivative languages or departed leaving the old speech, where that still persisted, to

³ Now, of course, everything has changed and these remarks are no longer applicable to the actual state of things in India.

revive with this new stamp and influence upon it. Latin, after its first century of general domination in the West, became a dead thing, impotent for creation, and generated no new or living and evolving culture in the nations that spoke it; even so great a force as Christianity could not give it a new life. The times during which it was an instrument of European thought, were precisely those in which that thought was heaviest, most traditional and least fruitful. A rapid and vigorous new life only grew up when the languages which appeared out of the detritus of dying Latin or the old languages which had not been lost took its place as the complete instruments of national culture. For it is not enough that the natural language should be spoken by the people; it must be the expression of its higher life and thought. A language that survives only as a patois or a provincial tongue like Welsh after the English conquest or Breton or Provençal in France or as Czech survived once in Austria or Ruthenian and Lithuanian in imperial Russia, languishes, becomes sterile and does not serve all the true purpose of survival.

Language is the sign of the cultural life of a people, the index of its soul in thought and mind that stands behind and enriches its soul in action. Therefore it is here that the phenomena and utilities of diversity may be most readily seized, more than in mere outward things; but these truths are important because they apply equally to the thing which it expresses and symbolises and serves as an instrument. Diversity of language is worth keeping because diversity of cultures and differentiation of soul-groups are worth keeping and because without that diversity life cannot have full play; for in its absence there is a danger, almost an inevitability of decline and stagnation. The disappearance of national variation into a single uniform human unity, of which the systematic thinker dreams as an ideal and which we have seen to be a substantial possibility and even a likelihood if a certain tendency becomes dominant, might lead to political peace, economic well-being, perfect administration, the solution of a hundred material problems, as did on a lesser scale the Roman unity in old times; but to what eventual good if it leads also to an uncreative sterilisation of the mind and

the stagnation of the soul of the race? In laying this stress on culture, on the things of the mind and the spirit there need be no intention of undervaluing the outward material side of life; it is not at all my purpose to belittle that to which Nature always attaches so insistent an importance. On the contrary, the inner and the outer depend upon each other. For we see that in the life of a nation a great period of national culture and vigorous mental and soul life is always part of a general stirring and movement which has its counterpart in the outward political, economic and practical life of the nation. The cultural brings about or increases the material progress but also it needs it that it may itself flourish with an entirely full and healthy vigour. The peace, well-being and settled order of the human world is a thing eminently to be desired as a basis for a great world-culture in which all humanity must be united; but neither of these unities, the outward or inward, ought to be devoid of an element even more important than peace, order and well-being, — freedom and vigour of life, which can only be assured by variation and by the freedom of the group and of the individual. Not then a uniform unity, not a logically simple, a scientifically rigid, a beautifully neat and mechanical sameness, but a living oneness full of healthy freedom and variation is the ideal which we should keep in view and strive to get realised in man's future.

But how is this difficult end to be secured? For if an excessive uniformity and centralisation tends to the disappearance of necessary variations and indispensable liberties, a vigorous diversity and strong group-individualism may lead to an incurable persistence or constant return of the old separatism which will prevent human unity from reaching completeness or even will not allow it to take firm root. For it will not be enough for the constituent groups or divisions to have a certain formal administrative and legislative separateness like the States of the American union if, as there, there is liberty only in mechanical variations and all vivid departures from the general norm proceeding from a profounder inner variation are discouraged or forbidden. Nor will it be sufficient to found a unity plus local independence of the German type; for there the real overriding force was a

unifying and disciplined Prussianism and independence survived only in form. Nor will even the English colonial system give us any useful suggestion; for there is there local independence and a separate vigour of life, but the brain, heart and central spirit are in the metropolitan country and the rest are at the best only outlying posts of the Anglo-Saxon idea.⁴ The Swiss cantonal life offers no fruitful similitude; for apart from the exiguity of its proportions and frame, there is the phenomenon of a single Swiss life and practical spirit with a mental dependence on three foreign cultures sharply dividing the race; a common Swiss culture does not exist. The problem is rather, on a larger and more difficult scale and with greater complexities, that which offered itself for a moment to the British Empire, how, if it is at all possible, to unite Great Britain, Ireland, the Colonies, Egypt, India in a real oneness, throw their gains into a common stock, use their energies for a common end, help them to find the account of their national individuality in a supra-national life, yet preserve that individuality,—Ireland keeping the Irish soul and life and cultural principle, India the Indian soul and life and cultural principle, the other units developing theirs, not united by a common Anglicisation, which was the past empire-building ideal, but held together by a greater as yet unrealised principle of free union. Nothing was suggested at any time in the way of a solution except some sort of bunch or rather bouquet system, unifying its clusters not by the living stalk of a common origin or united past, for that does not exist, but by an artificial thread of administrative unity which might at any moment be snapped irretrievably by centrifugal forces.

But after all, it may be said, unity is the first need and should be achieved at any cost, just as national unity was achieved by crushing out the separate existence of the local units; afterwards a new principle of group-variation may be found other than the nation-unit. But the parallel here becomes illusory, because an important factor is lacking. For the history of the birth of the nation is a coalescence of small groups into a larger unit among

⁴ This may be less so than before, but the improvement does not go very far.

many similar large units. The old richness of small units which gave such splendid cultural, but such unsatisfactory political results in Greece, Italy and India was lost, but the principle of life made vivid by variative diversity was preserved with nations for the diverse units and the cultural life of a continent for the common background. Here nothing of the kind is possible. There will be a sole unity, the world-nation; all outer source of diversity will disappear. Therefore the inner source has to be modified indeed, subordinated in some way, but preserved and encouraged to survive. It may be that this will not happen; the unitarian idea may forcefully prevail and turn the existing nations into mere geographical provinces or administrative departments of a single well-mechanised State. But in that case the outraged need of life will have its revenge, either by a stagnation, a collapse and a detrition fruitful of new separations or by some principle of revolt from within. A gospel of Anarchism might enforce itself, for example, and break down the world-order for a new creation. The question is whether there is not somewhere a principle of unity in diversity by which this method of action and reaction, creation and destruction, realisation and relapse cannot be, if not altogether avoided, yet mitigated in its action and led to a more serene and harmonious working.

Chapter XXIX

The Idea of a League of Nations

THE ONLY means that readily suggests itself by which a necessary group-freedom can be preserved and yet the unification of the human race achieved, is to strive not towards a closely organised World-State, but towards a free, elastic and progressive world-union. If this is to be done, we shall have to discourage the almost inevitable tendency which must lead any unification by political, economic and administrative means, in a word, by the force of machinery, to follow the analogy of the evolution of the nation-State. And we shall have to encourage and revive that force of idealistic nationalism which, before the war, seemed on the point of being crushed on the one side under the weight of the increasing world-empires of England, Russia, Germany and France, on the other by the progress of the opposite ideal of internationalism with its large and devastating contempt for the narrow ideas of country and nation and its denunciation of the evils of nationalistic patriotism. But at the same time we shall have to find a cure for the as yet incurable separative sentiments natural to the very idea to which we shall have to give a renewed strength. How is all this to be done?

On our side in the attempt we have the natural principle of compensating reactions. The law of action and reaction, valid even in physical Science, is in human action, which must always depend largely on psychological forces, a more constant and pervading truth. That in life to every pressure of active forces there is a tendency of reaction of opposite or variative forces which may not immediately operate but must eventually come into the field or which may not act with an equal and entirely compensating force, but must act with some force of compensation, may be taken as well established. It is both a philosophical necessity and a constant fact of experience. For

Nature works by a balancing system of the interplay of opposite forces. When she has insisted for some time on the dominant force of one tendency as against all others, she seeks to correct its exaggerations by reviving, if dead, or newly awakening, if only in slumber, or bringing into the field in a new and modified form the tendency that is exactly opposite. After long insistence on centralisation, she tries to modify it by at least a subordinated decentralisation. After insisting on more and more uniformity, she calls again into play the spirit of multiform variation. The result need not be an equipollence of the two tendencies, it may be any kind of compromise. Or, instead of a compromise it may be in act a fusion and in result a new creation which shall be a compound of both principles. We may expect her to apply the same method to the tendencies of unification and group-variation in dealing with the great mass unit of humanity. At present, the nation is the fulcrum which the latter tendency has been using for its workings as against the imperialistic tendency of unifying assimilation. Now the course of Nature's working in humanity may destroy the nation-unit, as she destroyed the tribe and clan, and develop a quite new principle of grouping; but also she may preserve it and give it sufficient power of vitality and duration to balance usefully the trend towards too heavy a force of unification. It is this latter contingency that we have to consider.

The two forces in action before the war were imperialism—of various colours, the more rigid imperialism of Germany, the more liberal imperialism of England,—and nationalism. They were the two sides of one phenomenon, the aggressive or expansive and the defensive aspects of national egoism. But in the trend of imperialism this egoism had some eventual chance of dissolving itself by excessive self-enlargement, as the aggressive tribe disappeared, for example, the Persian tribe, first into the empire and then into the nationality of the Persian people, or as the city state also disappeared, first into the Roman Empire and then both tribe and city state without hope of revival into the nations which arose by fusion out of the irruption of the German tribes into the declining Latin unity.

In the same or a similar way aggressive national imperialism by overspreading the world might end in destroying altogether the nation-unit as the city state and tribe were destroyed by the aggressive expansion of a few dominant city states and tribes. The force of defensive nationalism has reacted against this tendency, restricted it and constantly thwarted its evolutionary aim. But before the war, the separative force of nationalism seemed doomed to impotence and final suppression in face of the tremendous power with which science, organisation and efficiency had armed the governing States of the large imperial aggregates.

All the facts were pointing in one direction. Korea had disappeared into the nascent Japanese empire on the mainland of Asia. Persian nationalism had succumbed and lay suppressed under a system of spheres of influence which were really a veiled protectorate,— and all experience shows that the beginning of a protectorate is also the beginning of the end of the protected nation; it is a euphemistic name for the first process of chewing previous to deglutition. Tibet and Siam were so weak and visibly declining that their continued immunity could not be hoped for. China had only escaped by the jealousies of the world-Powers and by its size which made it an awkward morsel to swallow, let alone to digest. The partition of all Asia between four or five or at the most six great empires seemed a foregone conclusion which nothing but an unexampled international convulsion could prevent. The European conquest of Northern Africa had practically been completed by the disappearance of Morocco, the confirmed English protectorate over Egypt and the Italian hold on Tripoli. Somaliland was in a preliminary process of slow deglutition; Abyssinia, saved once by Menelik but now torn by internal discord, was the object of a revived dream of Italian colonial empire. The Boer republics had gone under before the advancing tide of imperialistic aggression. All the rest of Africa practically was the private property of three great Powers and two small ones. In Europe, no doubt, there were still a few small independent nations, Balkan and Teutonic, and also two quite unimportant neutralised countries. But the Balkans

were a constant theatre of uncertainty and disturbance and the rival national egoisms could only have ended, in case of the ejection of Turkey from Europe, either by the formation of a young, hungry and ambitious Slav empire under the dominance of Serbia or Bulgaria or by their disappearance into the shadow of Austria and Russia. The Teutonic States were coveted by expanding Germany and, had that Power been guided by the prudently daring diplomacy of a new Bismarck,—a not unlikely contingency, could William II have gone to the grave before letting loose the hounds of war,—their absorption might well have been compassed. There remained America where imperialism had not yet arisen, but it was already emerging in the form of Rooseveltian Republicanism, and the interference in Mexico, hesitating as it was, yet pointed to the inevitability of a protectorate and a final absorption of the disorderly Central American republics; the union of South America would then have become a defensive necessity. It was only the stupendous cataclysm of the world war which interfered with the progressive march towards the division of the world into less than a dozen great empires.

The war revived with a startling force the idea of free nationality, throwing it up in three forms, each with a stamp of its own. First, in opposition to the imperialistic ambitions of Germany in Europe the allied nations, although themselves empires, were obliged to appeal to a qualified ideal of free nationality and pose as its champions and protectors. America, more politically idealistic than Europe, entered the war with a cry for a league of free nations. Finally, the original idealism of the Russian revolution cast into this new creative chaos an entirely new element by the distinct, positive, uncompromising recognition, free from all reserves of diplomacy and self-interest, of the right of every aggregate of men naturally marked off from other aggregates to decide its own political status and destiny. These three positions were in fact distinct from each other, but each has in effect some relation to the actually possible future of humanity. The first based itself upon the present conditions and aimed at a certain practical rearrangement. The second tried to hasten into

immediate practicability a not entirely remote possibility of the future. The third aimed at bringing into precipitation by the alchemy of revolution — for what we inappropriately call revolution, is only a rapidly concentrated movement of evolution — a yet remote end which in the ordinary course of events could only be realised, if at all, in the far distant future. All of them have to be considered; for a prospect which only takes into view existing realised forces or apparently realisable possibilities is foredoomed to error. Moreover, the Russian idea by its attempt at self-effectuation, however immediately ineffective, rendered itself an actual force which must be counted among those that may influence the future of the race. A great idea already striving to enforce itself in the field of practice is a power which cannot be left out of count, nor valued only according to its apparent chances of immediate effectuation at the present hour.

The position taken by England, France and Italy, the Western European section of the Allies, contemplated a political rearrangement of the world, but not any radical change of its existing order. It is true that it announced the principle of free nationalities; but in international politics which is still a play of natural forces and interests and in which ideals are only a comparatively recent development of the human mind, principles can only prevail where and so far as they are consonant with interests, or where and so far as, being hostile to interests, they are yet assisted by natural forces strong enough to overbear these interests which oppose them. The pure application of ideals to politics is as yet a revolutionary method of action which can only be hoped for in exceptional crises; the day when it becomes a rule of life, human nature and life itself will have become a new phenomenon, something almost superterrestrial and divine. That day is not yet. The Allied Powers in Europe were themselves nations with an imperial past and an imperial future; they could not, even if they wished, get away by the force of a mere word, a mere idea from that past and that future. Their first interest, and therefore the first duty of their statesmen, must be to preserve each its own empire, and even, where it can in their view be

legitimately done, to increase it. The principle of free nationality could only be applied by them in its purity where their own imperial interests were not affected, as against Turkey and the Central Powers, because there the principle was consonant with their own interests and could be supported as against German, Austrian or Turkish interests by the natural force of a successful war which was or could be made to appear morally justified in its results because it was invited by the Powers which had to suffer. It could not be applied in its purity where their own imperial interests were affected, because there it was opposed to existing forces and there was no sufficient countervailing force by which that opposition could be counteracted. Here, therefore, it must be acted upon in a qualified sense, as a force moderating that of pure imperialism. So applied, it would amount in fact at most to the concession of internal self-government or Home Rule in such proportion, at such a time or by such stages as might be possible, practicable and expedient for the interests of the empire and of the subject nation so far as they could be accommodated with one another. It must be understood, in other words, as the common sense of the ordinary man would understand it; it could not be and has nowhere been understood in the sense which would be attached to it by the pure idealist of the Russian type who was careless of all but the naked purity of his principle.

What then would be the practical consequences of this qualified principle of free nationality as it would have been possible to apply it after a complete victory of the Allied Powers, its representatives? In America it would have no field of immediate application. In Africa there are not only no free nations, but with the exception of Egypt and Abyssinia no nations, properly speaking; for Africa is the one part of the world where the old tribal conditions have still survived and only tribal peoples exist, not nations in the political sense of the word. Here then a complete victory of the Allies meant the partition of the continent between three colonial empires, Italy, France and England, with the continuance of the Belgian, Spanish and Portuguese enclaves and the precarious continuance for a time of the Abyssinian

kingdom. In Asia it meant the appearance of three or four new nationalities out of the ruins of the Turkish empire; but these by their immaturity would all be foredoomed to remain, for a time at least, under the influence or the protection of one or other of the great Powers. In Europe it implied the diminution of Germany by the loss of Alsace and Poland, the disintegration of the Austrian empire, the reversion of the Adriatic coast to Serbia and Italy, the liberation of the Czech and Polish nations, some rearrangement in the Balkan Peninsula and the adjacent countries. All this, it is clear, meant a great change in the map of the world, but no radical transformation. The existing tendency of nationalism would gain some extension by the creation of a number of new independent nations; the existing tendency of imperial aggregation would gain a far greater extension by the expansion of the actual territory, world-wide influence and international responsibilities of the successful empires.

Still, certain very important results could not but be gained which must make in the end for a free world-union. The most important of these, the result of the Russian Revolution born out of the war and its battle-cry of free nationality but contingent on the success and maintenance of the revolutionary principle, is the disappearance of Russia as an aggressive empire and its transformation from an imperialistic aggregate into a congeries or a federation of free republics.¹ The second is the destruction of the German type of imperialism and the salvation of a number of independent nationalities which lay under its menace.² The third is the multiplication of distinct nationalities with a claim to the recognition of their separate existence and legitimate voice in the affairs of the world, which makes for the strengthening of the idea of a free world-union as the ultimate solution of international problems. The fourth is the definite recognition by the British nation of the qualified principle of free nationality in the inevitable reorganisation of the Empire.

¹ Not so free in practice under Bolshevik rule as in principle; but still the principle is there and capable of development in a freer future.

² Unfortunately this result seems destined to disappear by the formidable survival of a military Germany under the Führer.

This development took two forms, the recognition of the principle of Home Rule³ in Ireland and India and the recognition of the claim of each constituent nation to a voice, which in the event of Home Rule must mean a free and equal voice, in the councils of the Empire. Taken together, these things would mean the ultimate conversion from an empire constituted on the old principle of nationalistic imperialism which was represented by the supreme government of one predominant nation, England, into a free and equal commonwealth of nations managing their common affairs through a supple coordination by mutual goodwill and agreement. In other words, such a development could mean in the end the application within certain limits of precisely that principle which would underlie the constitution, on the larger scale, of a free world-union. Much work would have to be done, several extensions made, many counterforces overcome before such a commonwealth could become a realised fact, but that it should have taken shape in the principle and in the germ, constitutes a notable event in world-history. Two questions remained for the future. What would be the effect of this experiment on the other empires which adhere to the old principle of a dominant centralisation? Probably it would have this effect, if it succeeded, that as they are faced by the growth of strong nationalistic movements, they may be led to adopt the same or a similar solution, just as they adopted from England with modifications her successful system of Parliamentary government in the affairs of the nation. Secondly, what of the relations between these empires and the many independent

³ Now called Dominion Status. Unfortunately, this recognition could not be put into force except after a violent struggle in Ireland and was marred by the partition of the country. After a vehement passive resistance in India it came to be recognised there but in a truncated form shifting the full concession to a far future. In Egypt also it was only after a struggle that freedom was given but subject to a controlling British alliance. Still the nationalistic principle worked in the creation of a free Iraq, the creation of Arab kingdom and Syrian republic, the withdrawal of imperialistic influence from Persia and, above all, in the institution of Dominion Status substituting an internally free and equal position in a commonwealth of peoples for a dominating Empire. Yet these results, however imperfect, prepared the greater fulfilments which we now see accomplished as part of a new world of free peoples.

non-imperial nations or republics which would exist under the new arrangement of the world? How are they to be preserved from fresh attempts to extend the imperial idea, or how is their existence to be correlated in the international comity with the huge and overshadowing power of the empires? It is here that the American idea of the League of free nations intervened and found a justification in principle.

Unfortunately, it was always difficult to know what exactly this idea would mean in practice. The utterances of its original spokesman, President Wilson, were marked by a magnificent nebulous idealism full of inspiring ideas and phrases, but not attended by a clear and specific application. For the idea behind the head of the President we must look for light to the past history and the traditional temperament of the American people. The United States were always pacific and non-imperialistic in sentiment and principle, yet with an undertone of nationalistic susceptibility which threatened recently to take an imperialistic turn and led the nation to make two or three wars ending in conquests whose results it had then to reconcile with its non-imperialistic pacifism. It annexed Mexican Texas by war and then turned it into a constituent State of the union, swamping it at the same time with American colonists. It conquered Cuba from Spain and the Philippines first from Spain and then from the insurgent Filipinos and, not being able to swamp them with colonists, gave Cuba independence under the American influence and promised the Filipinos a complete independence. American idealism was always governed by a shrewd sense of American interests, and highest among these interests is reckoned the preservation of the American political idea and its constitution, to which all imperialism, foreign or American, has to be regarded as a mortal peril.

As a result and as the result of its inevitable amalgamation with that much more qualified aim of the Allied Powers, a League of Nations was bound to have both an opportunist and an idealistic element. The opportunist element was bound to take in its first form the legalisation of the map and political formation of the world as it emerged from the convulsion of the

war. Its idealistic side, if supported by the use of the influence of America in the League, could favour the increasing application of the democratic principle in its working and its result might be the final emergence of a United States of the world with a democratic Congress of the nations as its governing agency. The legalisation might have the good effect of minimising the chances of war, if a real League of Nations proved practicable and succeeded,—even under the best conditions by no means a foregone conclusion.⁴ But it would have the bad effect of tending to stereotype a state of things which must be in part artificial, irregular, anomalous and only temporarily useful. Law is necessary for order and stability, but it becomes a conservative and hampering force unless it provides itself with an effective machinery for changing the laws as soon as circumstances and new needs make that desirable. This can only happen if a true Parliament, Congress or free Council of the nations becomes an accomplished thing. Meanwhile, how is the added force for the conservation of old principles to be counteracted and an evolution assured which will lead to the consummation desired by the democratic American ideal? America's presence and influence in such a League would not be sufficient for that purpose; for it would have at its side other influences interested in preserving the *status quo* and some interested in developing the imperialist solution. Another force, another influence would be needed. Here the Russian ideal, if truly applied and made a force, could intervene and find its justification. For our purpose, it would be the most interesting and important of the three anti-imperialistic influences which Nature might throw as elements into her great crucible to reshape the human earth-mass for a yet unforeseen purpose.

⁴ The League was eventually formed with America outside it and as an instrument of European diplomacy, which was a bad omen for its future.

Chapter XXX

The Principle of Free Confederation

THE ISSUES of the original Russian idea of a confederation of free self-determining nationalities were greatly complicated by the transitory phenomenon of a revolution which has sought, like the French Revolution before it, to transform immediately and without easy intermediate stages the whole basis not only of government, but of society, and has, moreover, been carried out under pressure of a disastrous war. This double situation led inevitably to an unexampled anarchy and, incidentally, to the forceful domination of an extreme party which represented the ideas of the Revolution in their most uncompromising and violent form. The Bolshevik despotism corresponds in this respect to the Jacobin despotism of the French Reign of Terror. The latter lasted long enough to secure its work, which was to effect violently and irrevocably the transition from the post-feudal system of society to the first middle-class basis of democratic development. The Labourite despotism in Russia, the rule of the Soviets, fixing its hold and lasting long enough, could effect the transition of society to a second and more advanced basis of the same or even to a still farther development. But we are concerned only with the effect on the ideal of free nationality. On this point all Russia except the small reactionary party was from the first agreed; but the resort to the principle of government by force brought in a contradictory element which endangered its sound effectuation even in Russia itself and therefore weakened the force which it might have had in the immediate future of the world-development.¹ For it stands on a moral principle which belongs to the future,

¹ The component States of Sovietic Russia are allowed a certain cultural, linguistic and other autonomy, but the rest is illusory as they are in fact governed by the force of a highly centralised autocracy in Moscow.

while government of other nations by force belongs to the past and present and is radically inconsistent with the founding of the new world-arrangement on the basis of free choice and free status. It must therefore be considered in itself apart from any application now received, which must necessarily be curbed and imperfect.

The political arrangement of the world hitherto has rested on an almost entirely physical and vital, that is to say, a geographical, commercial, political and military basis. Both the nation idea and the State idea have been built and have worked on this foundation. The first unity aimed at has been a geographical, commercial, political and military union, and in establishing this unity the earlier vital principle of race on which the clan and tribe were founded, has been everywhere overridden. It is true that nationhood still founds itself largely on the idea of race, but this is in the nature of a fiction. It covers the historical fact of a fusion of many races and attributes a natural motive to a historical and geographical association. Nationhood finds itself partly on this association, partly on others which accentuate it, common interests, community of language, community of culture, and all these in unison have evolved a psychological idea, a psychological unity, which finds expression in the idea of nationalism. But the nation idea and the State idea do not everywhere coincide, and in most cases the former has been overridden by the latter and always on the same physical and vital grounds—grounds of geographical, economic, political and military necessity or convenience. In the conflict between the two, force, as in all vital and physical struggle, must always be the final arbiter. But the new principle proposed,² that of the right of every natural grouping which feels its own separateness to choose its own status and partnerships, makes a clean sweep of these vital and physical grounds and substitutes a purely psychological principle of free-will and free choice as against

² This principle was recognised in theory by the Allies under the name of self-determination but, needless to say, it has been disregarded as soon as the cry had served its turn.

the claims of political and economic necessity. Or rather the vital and physical grounds of grouping are only to be held valid when they receive this psychological sanction and are to found themselves upon it.

How the two rival principles work out, can be seen by the example of Russia itself which is now prominently before our eyes. Russia has never been a nation-State in the pure sense of the word, like France, Spain, Italy, Great Britain or modern Germany; it has been a congeries of nations, Great Russia, Ruthenian Ukraine, White Russia, Lithuania, Poland, Siberia, all Slavic with a dash of Tartar and German blood, Courland which is mostly Slav but partly German, Finland which has no community of any kind with the rest of Russia, and latterly the Asiatic nations of Turkistan, all bound together by one bond only, the rule of the Tsar. The only psychological justification of such a union was the future possibility of fusion into a single nation with the Russian language as its instrument of culture, thought and government, and it was this which the old Russian regime had in view. The only way to bring this about was by governmental force, the way that had been long attempted by England in Ireland and was attempted by Germany in German Poland and Lorraine. The Austrian method of federation employed with Hungary as a second partner or of a pressure tempered by leniency, by concessions and by measures of administrative half-autonomy, might have been tried, but their success in Austria has been small. Federation has not as yet proved a successful principle except between States and nations or sub-nations already disposed to unite by ties of common culture, a common past or an already developed or developing sense of common nationhood; such conditions existed in the American States and in Germany and they exist in China and in India, but they have not existed in Austria or Russia. Or, if things and ideas had been ripe, instead of this attempt, there might have been an endeavour to found a free union of nations with the Tsar as the symbol of a supra-national idea and bond of unity; but for this the movement of the world was not yet ready. Against an obstinate psychological resistance the vital and physical motive

of union could only resort to force, military, administrative and political, which has succeeded often enough in the past. In Russia, it was probably on the way to a slow success as far as the Slavic portions of the Empire were concerned; in Finland, perhaps also in Poland, it would probably have failed much more irretrievably than the long reign of force failed in Ireland, partly because even a Russian or a German autocracy cannot apply perfectly and simply the large, thoroughgoing and utterly brutal and predatory methods of a Cromwell or Elizabeth,³ partly because the resisting psychological factor of nationalism had become too self-conscious and capable of an organised passive resistance or at least a passive force of survival.

But if the psychological justification was deficient or only in process of creation, the vital and physical case for a strictly united Russia, not excluding Finland, was overwhelming. The work of the Peters and Catherines was founded on a strong political, military and economic necessity. From the political and military point of view, all these Slavic nations had everything to lose by disunion, because, disunited, they were each exposed and they exposed each other to the oppressive contact of any powerful neighbour, Sweden, Turkey, Poland, while Poland was a hostile and powerful State, or Germany and Austria. The union of the Ukraine Cossacks with Russia was indeed brought about by mutual agreement as a measure of defence against Poland. Poland itself, once weakened, stood a better chance by being united with Russia than by standing helpless and alone between three large and powerful neighbours, and her total inclusion would certainly have been a better solution for her than the fatal partition between these three hungry Powers. On the other hand, by union a State was created, so geographically compact, yet so large in bulk, numerous in population, well-defended by natural conditions and rich in potential resources that, if it had been properly organised, it could not only have stood secure

³ This could no longer be said after the revival of mediaeval barbaric cruelty in Nazi Germany, one of the most striking recent developments of "modern" humanity. But this may be regarded perhaps as a temporary backsliding, though it sheds lurid lights on the still existing darker possibilities of human nature.

in itself, but dominated half Asia, as it already does, and half Europe, as it was once, even without proper organisation and development, almost on the way to do, when it interfered as armed arbiter, here deliverer, there champion of oppression in Austro-Hungary and in the Balkans. Even the assimilation of Finland was justified from this point of view; for a free Finland would have left Russia geographically and economically incomplete and beset and limited in her narrow Baltic outlet, while a Finland dominated by a strong Sweden or a powerful Germany would have been a standing military menace to the Russian capital and the Russian empire. The inclusion of Finland, on the contrary, made Russia secure, at ease and powerful at this vital point. Nor, might it be argued, did Finland herself really lose, since, independent, she would be too small and weak to maintain herself against neighbouring imperial aggressiveness and must rely on the support of Russia. All these advantages have been destroyed, temporarily at least, by the centrifugal forces let loose by the Revolution and its principle of the free choice of nationalities.

It is evident that these arguments, founded as they are on vital and physical necessity and regardless of moral and psychological justification, might be carried very far. They would not only justify Austria's now past domination of Trieste and her Slavic territories, as they justified England's conquest and holding of Ireland against the continued resistance of the Irish people, but also, extended a little farther, Germany's scheme of Pan-Germanism and even her larger ideas of absorption and expansion. It could be extended to validate all that imperial expansion of the European nations which has now no moral justification and could only have been justified morally in the future by the creation of supra-national psychological unities; for the vital and physical grounds always exist. Even the moral, at least the psychological and cultural justification of a unified Russian culture and life in process of creation, could be extended, and the European claim to spread and universalise European civilisation by annexation and governmental force presents on its larger scale a certain moral analogy. This, too, extended, might justify

the pre-war German ideal of a sort of unification of the world under the aegis of German power and German culture. But, however liable to abuse by extension, vital necessity must be allowed a word in a world still dominated fundamentally by the law of force, however mitigated in its application, and by vital and physical necessity, so far at least as concerns natural geographical unities like Russia, the United Kingdom,⁴ even Austria within its natural frontiers.⁵

The Russian principle belongs, in fact, to a possible future in which moral and psychological principles will have a real chance to dominate and vital and physical necessities will have to suit themselves to them, instead of, as now, the other way round; it belongs to an arrangement of things that would be the exact reverse of the present international system. As things are at present, it has to struggle against difficulties which may well be insuperable. The Russians were much ridiculed and more vilified for their offer of a democratic peace founded on the free choice of nations to autocratic and militarist Germany bent on expansion like other empires by dishonest diplomacy and by the sword. From the point of view of practical statesmanship the ridicule was justified; for the offer ignored facts and forces and founded itself on the power of the naked and unarmed idea. The Russians, thoroughgoing idealists, acted, in fact, in the same spirit as did once the French in the first fervour of their revolutionary enthusiasm; they offered their new principle of liberty and democratic peace to the world,—not, at first, to Germany alone,—in the hope that its moral beauty and truth and inspiration would compel acceptance, not by the Governments but by the peoples who would force the hands of their governments or overturn them if they opposed. Like the French revolutionists, they found that ours is still a world in which ideals can only be imposed if they have a preponderating vital and physical force in their hands or at their backs. The French Jacobins with their ideal of

⁴ Now we must say Great Britain and Ireland, for the United Kingdom exists no longer.

⁵ Note from this point of view the disastrous economic results of the breaking up of the Austrian empire in the small nations that have arisen in its place.

unitarian nationalism were able to concentrate their energies and make their principle triumph for a time by force of arms against a hostile world. The Russian idealists found in their attempt to effectuate their principle that the principle itself was a source of weakness; they found themselves helpless against the hard-headed German cynicism, not because they were disorganised, — for revolutionary France was also disorganised and overcame the difficulty, — but because the dissolution of the old Russian fabric to which they had consented deprived them of the means of united and organised action. Nevertheless, their principle was a more advanced, because a moral principle, than the aggressive nationalism which was all the international result of the French Revolution; it has a greater meaning for the future.

For it belongs to a future of free world-union in which precisely this principle of free self-determination must be either the preliminary movement or the main final result, to an arrangement of things in which the world will have done with war and force as the ultimate basis of national and international relations and be ready to adopt free agreement as a substitute. If the idea could work itself out, even if only within the bounds of Russia,⁶ and arrive at some principle of common action, even at the cost of that aggressive force which national centralisation can alone give, it would mean a new moral power in the world. It would certainly not be accepted elsewhere, except in case of unexpected revolutions, without enormous reserves and qualifications; but it would be there working as a power to make the world ready for itself and, when it is ready, would play a large determining part in the final arrangement of human unity. But even if it fails entirely in its present push for realisation, it will still have its part to play in a better prepared future.

⁶ The idea was sincere at the time, but it has lost its significance because of the principle of revolutionary force on which Sovietism still rests.

Chapter XXXI

The Conditions of a Free World-Union

A FREE world-union must in its very nature be a complex unity based on a diversity and that diversity must be based on free self-determination. A mechanical unitarian system would regard in its idea the geographical groupings of men as so many conveniences for provincial division, for the convenience of administration, much in the same spirit as the French Revolution reconstituted France with an entire disregard of old natural and historic divisions. It would regard mankind as one single nation and it would try to efface the old separative national spirit altogether; it would arrange its system probably by continents and subdivide the continents by convenient geographical demarcations. In this other quite opposite idea, the geographical, the physical principle of union would be subordinated to a psychological principle; for not a mechanical division, but a living diversity would be its object. If this object is to be secured, the peoples of humanity must be allowed to group themselves according to their free-will and their natural affinities; no constraint or force could be allowed to compel an unwilling nation or distinct grouping of peoples to enter into another system or join itself or remain joined to it for the convenience, aggrandisement or political necessity of another people or even for the general convenience, in disregard of its own wishes. Nations or countries widely divided from each other geographically like England and Canada or England and Australia might cohere together. Nations closely grouped locally might choose to stand apart, like England and Ireland or like Finland and Russia. Unity would be the largest principle of life, but freedom would be its foundation-stone.¹

¹ Necessarily to every principle there must be in application a reasonable limit; otherwise fantastic and impracticable absurdities might take the place of a living truth.

In a world built on the present political and commercial basis this system of groupings might present often insuperable difficulties or serious disadvantages; but in the condition of things in which alone a free world-union would be possible, these difficulties and disadvantages would cease to operate. Military necessity of forced union for strength of defence or for power of aggression would be non-existent, because war would no longer be possible; force as the arbiter of international differences and a free world-union are two quite incompatible ideas and practically could not coexist. The political necessity would also disappear; for it is largely made up of that very spirit of conflict and the consequent insecure conditions of international life apportioning predominance in the world to the physically and organically strongest nations out of which the military necessity arose. In a free world-union determining its affairs and settling its differences by agreement or, where agreement failed, by arbitration, the only political advantage of including large masses of men not otherwise allied to each other in a single State would be the greater influence arising from mass and population. But this influence could not work if the inclusion were against the will of the nations brought together in the State; for then it would rather be a source of weakness and disunion in the State's international action — unless indeed it were allowed in the international system to weigh by its bulk and population without regard to the will and opinion of the peoples constituting it. Thus the population of Finland and Poland might swell the number of voices which a united Russia could count in the council of the nations, but the will, sentiment and opinions of the Finns and Poles be given no means of expression in that mechanical and unreal unity.² But this would be contrary to the modern sense of justice and reason and incompatible with the principle of freedom which could alone ensure a sound and peaceful basis for the world-arrangement. Thus the elimination of war and the settlement of differences by peaceful means would

² The inclusion of India in the League of Nations has evidently been an arrangement of this type.

remove the military necessity for forced unions, while the right of every people to a free voice and status in the world would remove its political necessity and advantage. The elimination of war and the recognition of the equal rights of all peoples are intimately bound up with each other. That interdependence, admitted for a moment, even though imperfectly, during the European conflict, will have to be permanently accepted if there is to be any unification of the race.

The economic question remains, and it is the sole important problem of a vital and physical order which might possibly present in this kind of world-arrangement any serious difficulties, or in which the advantages of a unitarian system might really outweigh those of this more complex unity. In either, however, the forcible economic exploitation of one nation by another, which is so large a part of the present economic order, would necessarily be abolished. There would remain the possibility of a sort of peaceful economic struggle, a separateness, a building up of artificial barriers,—a phenomenon which has been a striking and more and more prominent feature of the present commercial civilisation. But it is likely that once the element of struggle were removed from the political field, the stress of the same struggle in the economic field would greatly decrease. The advantages of self-sufficiency and predominance, to which political rivalry and struggle and the possibility of hostile relations now give an enormous importance, would lose much of their stringency and the advantages of a freer give and take would become more easily visible. It is obvious, for example, that an independent Finland would profit much more by encouraging the passage of Russian commerce through Finnish ports or an Italian Trieste by encouraging the passage of the commerce of the present Austrian provinces than by setting up a barrier between itself and its natural feeders. An Ireland politically or administratively independent, able to develop its agricultural and technical education and intensification of productiveness, would find a greater advantage in sharing the movement of the commerce of Great Britain than in isolating itself, even as Great Britain would profit more by an agreement with such an Ireland than by

keeping her a poor and starving helot on her estate. Throughout the world, the idea and fact of union once definitely prevailing, unity of interests would be more clearly seen and the greater advantage of agreement and mutual participation in a naturally harmonised life over the feverish artificial prosperity created by a stressing of separative barriers. That stressing is inevitable in an order of struggle and international competition; it would be seen to be prejudicial in an order of peace and union which would make for mutual accommodation. The principle of a free world-union being that of the settlement of common affairs by common agreement, this could not be confined to the removal of political differences and the arrangement of political relations alone, but must naturally extend to economic differences and economic relations as well. To the removal of war and the recognition of the right of self-determination of the peoples the arrangement of the economic life of the world in its new order by mutual and common agreement would have to be added as the third condition of a free union.

There remains the psychological question of the advantage to the soul of humanity, to its culture, to its intellectual, moral, aesthetic, spiritual growth. At present, the first great need of the psychological life of humanity is the growth towards a greater unity; but its need is that of a living unity, not in the externals of civilisation, in dress, manners, habits of life, details of political, social and economic order, not a uniformity, which is the unity towards which the mechanical age of civilisation has been driving, but a free development everywhere with a constant friendly interchange, a close understanding, a feeling of our common humanity, its great common ideals and the truths towards which it is driving and a certain unity and correlation of effort in the united human advance. At present it may seem that this is better helped and advanced by many different nations and cultures living together in one political State-union than by their political separateness. Temporarily, this may be true to a certain extent, but let us see within what limits.

The old psychological argument for the forcible inclusion of a subject nation by a dominant people was the right or advantage

of imposing a superior civilisation upon one that was inferior or upon a barbarous race. Thus the Welsh and Irish people used to be told that their subjugation was a great blessing to their countries, their languages petty patois which ought to disappear as soon as possible, and in embracing English speech, English institutions, English ideas lay their sole road to civilisation, culture and prosperity. The British domination in India was justified by the priceless gift of British civilisation and British ideals, to say nothing of the one and only true religion, Christianity, to a heathen, orientally benighted and semi-barbarous nation. All this is now an exploded myth. We can see clearly enough that the long suppression of the Celtic spirit and Celtic culture, superior in spirituality if inferior in certain practical directions to the Latin and Teutonic, was a loss not only to the Celtic peoples, but to the world. India has vehemently rejected the pretensions to superiority of British civilisation, culture and religion, while still admitting, not so much the British, as the modern ideals and methods in politics and in the trend to a greater social equality; and it is becoming clear now, even to the more well-informed European minds that the Anglicisation of India would have been a wrong not only to India itself but to humanity.

Still it may be said that, if the old principle of the association was wrong, yet the association itself leads eventually to a good result. If Ireland has lost for the most part its old national speech and Wales has ceased to have a living literature, yet as a large compensation the Celtic spirit is now reviving and putting its stamp on the English tongue spoken by millions throughout the world, and the inclusion of the Celtic countries in the British Empire may lead to the development of an Anglo-Celtic life and culture better for the world than the separate development of the two elements. India by the partial possession of the English language has been able to link herself to the life of the modern world and to reshape her literature, life and culture on a larger basis and, now that she is reviving her own spirit and ideals in a new mould, is producing an effect on the thought of the West; a perpetual union of the two countries and a constant mutual interaction of their culture by this close association would be

more advantageous to them and to the world than their cultural isolation from each other in a separate existence.

There is a temporary apparent truth in this idea, though it is not the whole truth of the position, and we have given it full weight in considering the claims of the imperialistic solution or line of advance on the way to unity. But even the elements of truth in it can only be admitted, provided a free and equal union replaces the present abnormal, irritating and falsifying relations. Moreover, these advantages could only be valuable as a stage towards a greater unity in which this close association would no longer be of the same importance. For the final end is a common world-culture in which each national culture should be, not merged into or fused with some other culture differing from it in principle or temperament, but evolved to its full power and could then profit to that end by all the others as well as give its gains and influences to them, all serving by their separateness and their interaction the common aim and idea of human perfection. This would best be served, not by separateness and isolation, of which there would be no danger, but yet by a certain distinctness and independence of life not subordinated to the mechanising force of an artificial unity. Even within the independent nation itself, there might be with advantage a tendency towards greater local freedom of development and variation, a sort of return to the vivid local and regional life of ancient Greece and India and mediaeval Italy; for the disadvantages of strife, political weakness and precariousness of the nation's independence would no longer exist in a condition of things from which the old terms of physical conflict had been excluded, while all the cultural and psychological advantages might be recovered. A world secure of its peace and freedom might freely devote itself to the intensification of its real human powers of life by the full encouragement and flowering of the individual, local, regional, national mind and power in the firm frame of a united humanity.

What precise form the framework might take, it is impossible to forecast and useless to speculate; only certain now current ideas would have to be modified or abandoned. The idea of a

world-parliament is attractive at first sight, because the parliamentary form is that to which our minds are accustomed; but an assembly of the present unitarian national type could not be the proper instrument of a free world-union of this large and complex kind; it could only be the instrument of a unitarian World-State. The idea of a world-federation, if by that be understood the Germanic or American form, would be equally inappropriate to the greater diversity and freedom of national development which this type of world-union would hold as one of its cardinal principles. Rather some kind of confederation of the peoples for common human ends, for the removal of all causes of strife and difference, for interrelation and the regulation of mutual aid and interchange, yet leaving to each unit a full internal freedom and power of self-determination, would be the right principle of this unity.

But, since this is a much looser unity, what would prevent the spirit of separateness and the causes of clash and difference from surviving in so powerful a form as to endanger the endurance of the larger principle of oneness,—even if that spirit and those causes at all allowed it to reach some kind of sufficient fulfilment? The unitarian ideal, on the contrary, seeks to efface these opposite tendencies in their forms and even in their root cause and by so doing would seem to ensure an enduring union. But it may be pointed out in answer that, if it is by political ideas and machinery, under the pressure of the political and economic spirit that the unity is brought about, that is to say, by the idea and experience of the material advantages, conveniences, well-being secured by unification, then the unitarian system also could not be sure of durability. For in the constant mutability of the human mind and earthly circumstances, as long as life is active, new ideas and changes are inevitable. The suppressed desire to recover the lost element of variability, separateness, independent living might well take advantage of them for what would then be considered as a wholesome and necessary reaction. The lifeless unity accomplished would dissolve from the pressure of the need of life within, as the Roman unity dissolved by its lifelessness in helpless response to a pressure from without, and

once again local, regional, national egoism would reconstitute for itself fresh forms and new centres.

On the other hand, in a free world-union, though originally starting from the national basis, the national idea might be expected to undergo a radical transformation; it might even disappear into a new and less strenuously compact form and idea of group-aggregation which would not be separative in spirit, yet would preserve the necessary element of independence and variation needed by both individual and grouping for their full satisfaction and their healthy existence. Moreover, by emphasising the psychological quite as much as the political and mechanical idea and basis, it would give a freer and less artificial form and opportunity for the secure development of the necessary intellectual and psychological change; for such an inner change could alone give some chance of durability to the unification. That change would be the growth of the living idea or religion of humanity; for only so could there come the psychological modification of life and feeling and outlook which would accustom both individual and group to live in their common humanity first and most, subduing their individual and group egoism, yet losing nothing of their individual or group power to develop and express in its own way the divinity in man which, once the race was assured of its material existence, would emerge as the true object of human existence.

Chapter XXXII

Internationalism

THE IDEA of humanity as a single race of beings with a common life and a common general interest is among the most characteristic and significant products of modern thought. It is an outcome of the European mind which proceeds characteristically from life-experience to the idea and, without going deeper, returns from the idea upon life in an attempt to change its outward forms and institutions, its order and system. In the European mentality it has taken the shape known currently as internationalism. Internationalism is the attempt of the human mind and life to grow out of the national idea and form and even in a way to destroy it in the interest of the larger synthesis of mankind. An idea proceeding on these lines needs always to attach itself to some actual force or developing power in the life of the times before it can exercise a practical effect. But usually it suffers by contact with the interests and prepossessions of its grosser ally some lesser or greater diminution of itself or even a distortion, and in that form, no longer pure and absolute, enters on the first stage of practice.

The idea of internationalism was born of the thought of the eighteenth century and it took some kind of voice in the first idealistic stages of the French Revolution. But at that time, it was rather a vague intellectual sentiment than a clear idea seeing its way to practice; it found no strong force in life to help it to take visible body. What came out of the French Revolution and the struggle that grew around it, was a complete and self-conscious nationalism and not internationalism. During the nineteenth century we see the larger idea growing again in the minds of thinkers, sometimes in a modified form, sometimes in its own pure idealism, till allying itself with the growing forces of socialism and anarchism it took a clear body and a recognisable vital force. In its absolute form, it became the internationalism of

the intellectuals, intolerant of nationalism as a narrow spirit of the past, contemptuous of patriotism as an irrational prejudice, a maleficent corporate egoism characteristic of narrow intellects and creative of arrogance, prejudice, hatred, oppression, division and strife between nation and nation, a gross survival of the past which the growth of reason was destined to destroy. It is founded on a view of things which looks at man in his manhood only and casts away all those physical and social accidents of birth, rank, class, colour, creed, nationality, which have been erected into so many walls and screens behind which man has hidden himself from his fellow-man; he has turned them into sympathy-proof shelters and trenches from which he wages against him a war of defence and aggression, war of nations, war of continents, war of classes, war of colour with colour, creed with creed, culture with culture. All this barbarism the idea of the intellectual internationalist seeks to abolish by putting man face to face with man on the basis of their common human sympathy, aims, highest interests of the future. It is entirely futurist in its view; it turns away from the confused and darkened good of the past to the purer good of the future when man, at last beginning to become a truly intelligent and ethical being, will shake away from him all these sources of prejudice and passion and evil. Humanity will become one in idea and feeling, and life be consciously what it now is in spite of itself, one in its status on earth and its destiny.

The height and nobility of the idea is not to be questioned and certainly a mankind which set its life upon this basis would make a better, purer, more peaceful and enlightened race than anything we can hope to have at present. But as the human being is now made, the pure idea, though always a great power, is also afflicted by a great weakness. It has an eventual capacity, once born, of taking hold of the rest of the human being and forcing him in the end to acknowledge its truth and make some kind of attempt to embody it; that is its strength. But also because man at present lives more in the outward than in the inward, is governed principally by his vital existence, sensations, feelings and customary mentality rather than by his higher thought-mind and feels himself in these to be really alive, really to exist and

be, while the world of ideas is to him something remote and abstract and, however powerful and interesting in its way, not a living thing, the pure idea seems, until it is embodied in life, something not quite real; in that abstractness and remoteness lies its weakness.

The sense of this abstractness imposes on the idea an undue haste to get itself recognised by life and embodied in a form. If it could have confidence in its strength and be content to grow, to insist, to impress itself till it got well into the spirit of man, it might conceivably become a real part of his soul-life, a permanent power in his psychology and might succeed in remoulding his whole life in its image. But it has inevitably a desire to get as soon as possible admitted into a form of the life, for until then it does not feel itself strong and cannot quite be sure that it has vindicated its truth. It hurries into action before it has real knowledge of itself and thereby prepares its own disappointment, even when it seems to triumph and fulfil its object. For in order to succeed, it allies itself with powers and movements which are impelled by another aim than its own, but are glad enough to get its aid so that they may strengthen their own case and claim. Thus when it realises itself at last, it does it in a mixed, impure and ineffective form. Life accepts it as a partial habit, but not completely, not quite sincerely. That has been the history of every idea in succession and one reason at least why there is almost always something unreal, inconclusive and tormented about human progress.

There are many conditions and tendencies in human life at present which are favourable to the progress of the internationalist idea. The strongest of these favourable forces is the constant drawing closer of the knots of international life, the multiplication of points of contact and threads of communication and an increasing community in thought, in science and in knowledge. Science especially has been a great force in this direction; for science is a thing common to all men in its conclusions, open to all in its methods, available to all in its results: it is international in its very nature; there can be no such thing as a national science, but only the nations' contributions to the work and growth of

science which are the indivisible inheritance of all humanity. Therefore it is easier for men of science or those strongly influenced by science to grow into the international spirit and all the world is now beginning to feel the scientific influence and to live in it. Science also has created that closer contact of every part of the world with every other part, out of which some sort of international mind is growing. Even cosmopolitan habits of life are now not uncommon and there are a fair number of persons who are as much or more citizens of the world as citizens of their own nation. The growth of knowledge is interesting the peoples in each other's art, culture, religion, ideas and is breaking down at many points the prejudice, arrogance and exclusiveness of the old nationalistic sentiment. Religion, which ought to have led the way, but owing to its greater dependence on its external parts and its infrarational rather than its spiritual impulses has been as much, or even more, a sower of discord as a teacher of unity, — religion is beginning to realise, a little dimly and ineffectively as yet, that spirituality is after all its own chief business and true aim and that it is also the common element and the common bond of all religions. As these influences grow and come more and more consciously to cooperate with each other, it might be hoped that the necessary psychological modification will quietly, gradually, but still irresistibly and at last with an increasing force of rapidity take place which can prepare a real and fundamental change in the life of humanity.

But this is at present a slow process, and meanwhile the internationalist idea, eager for effectuation, allied and almost identified itself with two increasingly powerful movements which have both assumed an international character, Socialism and Anarchism. Indeed, it is this alliance that most commonly went by the name of internationalism. But this socialistic and anarchistic internationalism was recently put to the test, the fiery test of the European war, and thus tried, it was found sadly wanting. In every country, the Socialist party shed its internationalist promise with the greatest ease and lightness, German socialism, the protagonist of the idea, massively leading the way in this formidable abjuration. It is true that a small minority in

each country either remained heroically faithful to its principles or soon returned to them, and as the general weariness of the great international massacre grew, even the majority showed a sensible turn in the same direction; but this was rather the fruit of circumstance than of principle. Russian socialism, it may be said, has, at least in its extremer form, shown a stronger root of internationalistic feeling. But what it has actually attempted to accomplish is a development of Labour rule on the basis of a purified nationalism, non-aggressive except for revolutionary purposes and self-contained, and not on the larger international idea. In any case, the actual results of the Russian attempt show only up to the present a failure of the idea to acquire the vital strength and efficiency which would justify it to life; it is possible to use them much more as a telling argument against internationalism than as a justification of its truth or at least of its applicability in the present stage of human progress.

But what is the cause of this almost total bankruptcy of the international ideal under the strong test of life? Partly it may be because the triumph of socialism is not necessarily bound up with the progress of internationalism. Socialism is really an attempt to complete the growth of the national community by making the individual do what he has never yet done, live for the community more than for himself. It is an outgrowth of the national, not of the international idea. No doubt, when the society of the nation has been perfected, the society of nations can and even must be formed; but this is a later possible or eventual result of Socialism, not its primary vital necessity. In the crises of life it is the primary vital necessity which tells, while the other and remoter element betrays itself to be a mere idea not yet ready for accomplishment; it can only become powerful when it also becomes either a vital or a psychological necessity. The real truth, the real cause of the failure is that internationalism is as yet, except with some exceptional men, merely an idea; it is not yet a thing near to our vital feelings or otherwise a part of our psychology. The normal socialist or syndicalist cannot escape from the general human feeling and in the test he too turns out, even though he were a professed *sans-patrie* in ordinary times, in

his inner heart and being a nationalist. As a vital fact, moreover, these movements have been a revolt of Labour aided by a number of intellectuals against the established state of things, and they have only allied themselves with internationalism because that too is an intellectual revolt and because its idea helps them in the battle. If Labour comes to power, will it keep or shed its internationalistic tendencies? The experience of countries in which it is or has been at the head of affairs does not give an encouraging answer, and it may at least be said that, unless at that time the psychological change in humanity has gone much farther than it has now, Labour in power is likely to shed more of the internationalist feeling than it will succeed in keeping and to act very much from the old human motives.

No doubt, the European war itself was an explosion of all that was dangerous and evil in successful nationalism, and the resulting conflagration may well turn out to have been a purificatory process that has burned up many things that needed to die. It has already strengthened the international idea and forced it on governments and peoples. But we cannot rely too greatly on ideas and resolutions formed in a moment of abnormal crisis under the violent stress of exceptional circumstances. Some effect there may be in the end, some first recognition of juster principles in international dealings, some attempt at a better, more rational or at least a more convenient international order. But until the idea of humanity has grown not only upon the intelligence but in the sentiments, feelings, natural sympathies and mental habits of man, the progress made is likely to be more in external adjustments than in the vital matters, more in a use of the ideal for mixed and egoistic purposes than at once or soon in a large and sincere realisation of the ideal. Until man in his heart is ready, a profound change of the world conditions cannot come; or it can only be brought about by force, physical force or else force of circumstances, and that leaves all the real work to be done. A frame may have then been made, but the soul will have still to grow into that mechanical body.

Chapter XXXIII

Internationalism and Human Unity

THE GREAT necessity, then, and the great difficulty is to help this idea of humanity which is already at work upon our minds and has even begun in a very slight degree to influence from above our actions, and turn it into something more than an idea, however strong, to make it a central motive and a fixed part of our nature. Its satisfaction must become a necessity of our psychological being, just as the family idea or the national idea has become each a psychological motive with its own need of satisfaction. But how is this to be done? The family idea had the advantage of growing out of a primary vital need in our being and therefore it had not the least difficulty in becoming a psychological motive and need; for our readiest and strongest mental motives and psychological needs are those which grow out of our vital necessities and instincts. The clan and the tribe ideas had a similar origin, less primary and compelling, and therefore looser and more dissolvable; but still they arose from the vital necessity in human nature for aggregation and the ready basis given to it by the inevitable physical growth of the family into clan or tribe. These were natural aggregations, evolutionary forms already prepared on the animal level.

The nation idea, on the contrary, did not arise from a primary vital need, but from a secondary or even tertiary necessity which resulted not from anything inherent in our vital nature, but from circumstances, from environmental evolution; it arose not from a vital, but from a geographical and historical necessity. And we notice that as one result it had to be created most commonly by force, force of circumstances partly, no doubt, but also by physical force, by the power of the king and the conquering tribe converted into a military and dominant State. Or else it came by a reaction against force, a revolt against conquest and domination that brought a slow or sudden compactness

to peoples who, though geographically or even historically and culturally one, had lacked power of cohesion and remained too conscious of an original heterogeneity or of local and regional and other divisions. But still the necessity was there and the nation form after many failures and false successes got into being, and the psychological motive of patriotism, a sign of the growth of a conscious national ego, arose in the form as the expression of its soul and the guarantee of its durability. For without such a soul, such a psychological force and presence within the frame, there can be no guarantee of durability. Without it, what circumstances have created, circumstances easily will destroy. It was for this reason that the ancient world failed to create nations, except on a small scale, little clans and small regional nations of brief duration and usually of loose structure; it created only artificial empires which went to pieces and left chaos behind them.

What then of this international unity now in the first obscure throes of the pre-formatory state resembling a ferment of cells drawing together for amalgamation? What is the compelling necessity behind it? If we look at outward things only, the necessity is much less direct and much less compelling than any that preceded it. There is here no vital necessity; mankind as a whole can get on well enough without international unity, so far as mere living goes; it will not be at all a perfect, rational or ideal collective living of the race,—but after all where is there yet any element in human life or society which is perfect, rational or ideal? As yet at least none; still we get on somehow with life, because the vital man in us, who is the dominant element in our instincts and in our actions, cares for none of these things and is quite satisfied with any just tolerable or any precariously or partly agreeable form of living, because that is all to which he is accustomed and all therefore that he feels to be necessary. The men who are not satisfied, the thinkers, the idealists, are always a minority and in the end an ineffectual minority, because though always in the end they do get their way partly, their victory yet turns into a defeat; for the vital man remains still the majority and degrades the apparent success into a pitiful parody of their

rational hope, their clear-sighted ideal or their strong counsel of perfection.

The geographical necessity for a unification of this kind does not exist, unless we consider that it has been created through the drawing closer together of the earth and its inhabitants by Science and her magical lessening of physical distances and attenuation of barriers. But whatever may happen in the future, this is as yet not sufficient; earth is still large enough and her divisions still real enough for her to do without any formal unity. If there is any strong need, it may be described — if such an epithet can be applied to a thing in the present and the future — as a historical necessity, that is, a need which has arisen as the result of certain actual circumstances that have grown up in the evolution of international relations. And that need is economic, political, mechanical, likely under certain circumstances to create some tentative or preliminary framework, but not at first a psychological reality which will vivify the frame. Moreover, it is not yet sufficiently vital to be precisely a necessity; for it amounts mainly to a need for the removal of certain perils and inconveniences, such as the constant danger of war, and at most to the strong desirability of a better international coordination. But by itself this creates only a possibility, not even a moral certainty, of a first vague sketch and loose framework of unity which may or may not lead to something more close and real.

But there is another power than that of external circumstance which we have a right to take into consideration. For behind all the external circumstances and necessities of which we are more easily aware in Nature, there is always an internal necessity in the being, a will and a design in Nature itself which precedes the outward signals of its development and in spite of all obstacles and failures must in the long end inevitably get itself realised. Nowadays we can see this truth everywhere in Nature down to her lowest forms; a will in the very seed of the being, not quite conscious or only partially conscious in the form itself, but still present there in Nature. It is subconscious or even inconscient if you like, but it is still a blind will, a mute idea which contains beforehand the form it is going to create, is

aware of a necessity other than the environmental, a necessity contained in the very being itself, and creates persistently and inevitably a form that best answers to the necessity, however we may labour to interfere with or thwart its operations.

This is true biologically, but it is also, though in a more subtle and variable way, psychologically true. Now the very nature of man is that of an individual who on one side is always emphasising and developing his individual being to the extent of his power but who is also driven by the Idea or Truth within him to unify himself with others of his species, to join himself to them or agglutinate them to him, to create human groups, aggregates and collectivities. And if there is an aggregate or collectivity which it is possible for him to realise but is not yet realised, we may be sure that that too in the end he will create. This will in him is not always or often quite conscient or foreseeing; it is often largely subconscious, but even then it is eventually irresistible. And if it gets into his conscious mind, as the international idea has now done, we may count on a more rapid evolution. Such a will in Nature creates for itself favourable external circumstances and happenings or finds them created for it in the stress of events. And even if they are insufficient, she will still often use them beyond their apparent power of effectivity, not minding the possibility of failure, for she knows that in the end she will succeed and every experience of failure will help to better the eventual success.

Well then, it may be said, let us trust to this inevitable will in Nature and let us follow out her method of operation. Let us create anyhow this framework, any framework of the aggregate; for she knows already the complete form she intends and she will work it out eventually in her own time; by the power of the idea and our will to realise it, by help of strong force of circumstances, by pressure of all kinds, by physical force even, if need be, since that too seems still to be a part of her necessary machinery, let us create it. Let us have the body; the soul will grow in the body. And we need not mind if the bodily formation is artificial with at first a small or no conscious psychological reality to vivify it. That will begin to form itself as soon as the body has been

formed. For the nation too was at first more or less artificially formed out of incoherent elements actually brought together by the necessity of a subconscious idea, though apparently it was done only by physical force and the force of circumstances. As a national ego formed which identified itself with the geographical body of the nation and developed in it the psychological instinct of national unity and the need of its satisfaction, so a collective human ego will develop in the international body and will evolve in it the psychological instinct of human unity and the need of its satisfaction. That will be the guarantee of duration. And that possibly is how the thing will happen, man being what he is; indeed if we cannot do better, it will so happen, since happen somehow it must, whether in the worse way or the better.

It may be as well to review here briefly in the light of these considerations the main possibilities and powers which are shaping us towards such an end in the present world conditions. The old means of unification, conquest by a single great Power, which would reduce part of the world by force and bring the remaining nations into the condition of dependencies, protectorates and dependent allies, the whole forming the basic structure of a great final unification,—this was the character of the ancient Roman precedent,—does not seem immediately possible. It would require a great predominance of force simultaneously by sea and land,¹ an irresistibly superior science and organisation and with all this a constantly successful diplomacy and an invincible good fortune. If war and diplomacy are still to be the decisive factors in international politics in the future as in the past, it would be rash to predict that such a combination may not arise, and if other means fail, it must arise; for there is nothing that can be set down as impossible in the chances of the future, and the urge in Nature always creates its own means. But, at present, the possibilities of the future do not seem to point in this direction. There is, on the other hand, a very strong possibility of the whole earth, or at least the three continents of the eastern hemisphere, being dominated by three or four great empires largely increased

¹ Now also by air.

in extent of dominion, spheres of influence, protectorates, and thereby exercising a pre-eminence which they could either maintain by agreements, avoiding all causes of conflict, or in a rivalry which would be the cause of fresh wars and changes. This would normally have been the result of the great European conflict.

But there has struck across this possibility a revived strength of the idea of nationality expressed in the novel formula of the principle of self-determination to which the great world-empires have had to pay at least a verbal homage. The idea of international unity to which this intervention of the revived force of nationality is leading, takes the form of a so-called League of Nations. Practically, however, the League of Nations under present conditions or any likely to be immediately realised would still mean the control of the earth by a few great Powers, — a control that would be checked only by the necessity of conciliating the sympathy and support of the more numerous smaller or less powerful nations. On the force and influence of these few would rest practically, if not admittedly, the decision of all important debatable questions. And without it there could be no chance of enforcing the decisions of the majority against any recalcitrant great Power or combination of Powers. The growth of democratic institutions would perhaps help to minimise the chances of conflict and of the abuse of power, — though that is not at all certain; but it would not alter this real character of the combination.

In all this there is no immediate prospect of any such form of unification as would give room for a real psychological sense of unity, much less necessitate its growth. Such a form might evolve; but we should have to trust for it to the chapter of accidents or at best to the already declared urge in Nature expressed in the internationalist idea. On that side, there was at one time a possibility which seemed to be very suddenly and rapidly growing into something more, the emergence of a powerful party in all the advanced countries of the world pledged to internationalism, conscious of its necessity as a first condition for their other aims and more and more determined to give it precedence and to unite internationally to bring it about. That combination of the

intellectuals with Labour which created the Socialist parties in Germany, Russia and Austria, formed anew recently the Labour party in England and has had its counterparts in most other European countries, seems to be travelling in that direction. This world-wide movement which made internationalism and Labour rule its two main principles, had already created the Russian revolution and seemed ready to bring about another great socialistic revolution in central Europe. It was conceivable that this party might everywhere draw together. By a chain of revolutions such as took place in the nineteenth century and of less violent but still rapid evolutions brought about by the pressure of their example, or even by simply growing into the majority in each country, the party might control Europe. It might create counterparts of itself in all the American republics and in Asiatic countries. It might by using the machinery of the League of Nations or, where necessary, by physical force or economic or other pressure persuade or compel all the nations into some more stringent system of international unification. A World-State or else a close confederation of democratic peoples might be created with a common governing body for the decision of principles and for all generally important affairs or at least for all properly international affairs and problems; a common law of the nations might grow up and international courts to administer it and some kind of system of international police control to maintain and enforce it. In this way, by the general victory of an idea, Socialist or other, seeking to organise humanity according to its own model or by any other yet unforeseen way, a sufficient formal unity might come into existence.

The question then arises, how out of this purely formal unity a real psychological unity can be created and whether it can be made a living oneness. For a mere formal, mechanical, administrative, political and economic union does not necessarily create a psychological unity. None of the great empires have yet succeeded in doing that, and even in the Roman where some sense of unity did come into being, it was nothing very close and living; it could not withstand all shocks from within and without, it could not prevent what was much more dangerous, the peril of decay.

and devitalisation which the diminution of the natural elements of free variation and helpful struggle brought with it. A complete world-union would have indeed this advantage that it would have no need to fear forces from without, for no such forces would any longer exist. But this very absence of outer pressure might well give greater room and power to internal elements of disintegration and still more to the opportunities of decay. It might indeed for a long time foster an internal intellectual and political activity and social progress which would keep it living; but this principle of progress would not be always secure against a natural tendency to exhaustion and stagnation which every diminution of variety and even the very satisfaction of social and economic well-being might well hasten. Disruption of unity would then be necessary to restore humanity to life. Again, while the Roman Empire appealed only to the idea of Roman unity, an artificial and accidental principle, this World-State would appeal to the idea of human unity, a real and vital principle. But if the idea of unity can appeal to the human mind, so too can the idea of separative life, for both address themselves to vital instincts of his nature. What guarantee will there be that the latter will not prevail when man has once tried unity and finds perhaps that its advantages do not satisfy his whole nature? Only the growth of some very powerful psychological factor will make unity necessary to him, whatever other changes and manipulations might be desirable to satisfy his other needs and instincts.

The formal unification of mankind would come in upon us in the shape of a system which would be born, grow, come to its culmination. But every system by the very nature of things tends after its culmination to decay and die. To prevent the organism from decaying and dying there must be such a psychological reality within as will persist and survive all changes of its body. Nations have that in a sort of collective national ego which persists through all vital changes. But this ego is not by any means self-existent and immortal; it supports itself on certain things with which it is identified. First, there is the geographical body, the country; secondly, the common interests of all

who inhabit the same country, defence, economic well-being and progress, political liberty, etc.; thirdly, a common name, sentiment, culture. But we have to mark that this national ego owes its life to the coalescence of the separative instinct and the instinct of unity; for the nation feels itself one as distinguished from other nations; it owes its vitality to interchange with them and struggle with them in all the activities of its nature. Nor are all these altogether sufficient; there is a deeper factor. There must be a sort of religion of country, a constant even if not always explicit recognition not only of the sacredness of the physical mother, the land, but also, in however obscure a way, of the nation as a collective soul which it is the first duty and need of every man to keep alive, to defend from suppression or mortal attaint or, if suppressed, then to watch, wait and struggle for its release and rehabilitation, if sicklied over with the touch of any fatal spiritual ailment, then to labour always to heal and revivify and save alive.

The World-State will give its inhabitants the great advantages of peace, economic well-being, general security, combination for intellectual, cultural, social activity and progress. None of these are in themselves sufficient to create the thing needed. Peace and security we all desire at present, because we have them not in sufficiency; but we must remember that man has also within him the need of combat, adventure, struggle, almost requires these for his growth and healthy living; that instinct would be largely suppressed by a universal peace and a flat security and it might rise up successfully against suppression. Economic well-being by itself cannot permanently satisfy and the price paid for it might be so heavy as to diminish its appeal and value. The human instinct for liberty, individual and national, might well be a constant menace to the World-State, unless it so skilfully arranged its system as to give them sufficient free play. A common intellectual and cultural activity and progress may do much, but need not by themselves be sufficient to bring into being the fully powerful psychological factor that would be required. And the collective ego created would have to rely on the instinct of unity alone; for it would be in conflict with the

separative instinct which gives the national ego half its vitality.

It is not impossible that the indispensable inner factor for this outer frame might be increasingly created in its very process of growth, but certain psychological elements would have to be present in great strength. There would be needed, to make the change persist, a religion of humanity or an equivalent sentiment much more powerful, explicit, self-conscious, universal in its appeal than the nationalist's religion of country; the clear recognition by man in all his thought and life of a single soul in humanity of which each man and each people is an incarnation and soul-form; an ascension of man beyond the principle of ego which lives by separateness,—and yet there must be no destruction of individuality, for without that man would stagnate; a principle and arrangement of the common life which would give free play to individual variation, interchange in diversity and the need of adventure and conquest by which the soul of man lives and grows great, and sufficient means of expressing all the resultant complex life and growth in a flexible and progressive form of human society.

Chapter XXXIV

The Religion of Humanity

ARELIGION of humanity may be either an intellectual and sentimental ideal, a living dogma with intellectual, psychological and practical effects, or else a spiritual aspiration and rule of living, partly the sign, partly the cause of a change of soul in humanity. The intellectual religion of humanity already to a certain extent exists, partly as a conscious creed in the minds of a few, partly as a potent shadow in the consciousness of the race. It is the shadow of a spirit that is yet unborn, but is preparing for its birth. This material world of ours, besides its fully embodied things of the present, is peopled by such powerful shadows, ghosts of things dead and the spirit of things yet unborn. The ghosts of things dead are very troublesome actualities and they now abound, ghosts of dead religions, dead arts, dead moralities, dead political theories, which still claim either to keep their rotting bodies or to animate partly the existing body of things. Repeating obstinately their sacred formulas of the past, they hypnotise backward-looking minds and daunt even the progressive portion of humanity. But there are too those unborn spirits which are still unable to take a definite body, but are already mind-born and exist as influences of which the human mind is aware and to which it now responds in a desultory and confused fashion. The religion of humanity was mind-born in the eighteenth century, the *mānasa putra*¹ of the rationalist thinkers who brought it forward as a substitute for the formal spiritualism of ecclesiastical Christianity. It tried to give itself a body in Positivism, which was an attempt to formulate the dogmas of this religion, but on too heavily and severely rationalistic a basis for acceptance even by an Age of Reason. Humanitarianism has been its most prominent emotional result.

¹ Mind-born child, an idea and expression of Indian Puranic cosmology.

Philanthropy, social service and other kindred activities have been its outward expression of good works. Democracy, socialism, pacifism are to a great extent its by-products or at least owe much of their vigour to its inner presence.

The fundamental idea is that mankind is the godhead to be worshipped and served by man and that the respect, the service, the progress of the human being and human life are the chief duty and the chief aim of the human spirit. No other idol, neither the nation, the State, the family nor anything else ought to take its place; they are only worthy of respect so far as they are images of the human spirit and enshrine its presence and aid its self-manifestation. But where the cult of these idols seeks to usurp the place of the spirit and makes demands inconsistent with its service, they should be put aside. No injunctions of old creeds, religious, political, social or cultural, are valid when they go against its claims. Science even, though it is one of the chief modern idols, must not be allowed to make claims contrary to its ethical temperament and aim, for science is only valuable in so far as it helps and serves by knowledge and progress the religion of humanity. War, capital punishment, the taking of human life, cruelty of all kinds whether committed by the individual, the State or society, not only physical cruelty, but moral cruelty, the degradation of any human being or any class of human beings under whatever specious plea or in whatever interest, the oppression and exploitation of man by man, of class by class, of nation by nation and all those habits of life and institutions of society of a similar kind which religion and ethics formerly tolerated or even favoured in practice, whatever they might do in their ideal rule or creed, are crimes against the religion of humanity, abominable to its ethical mind, forbidden by its primary tenets, to be fought against always, in no degree to be tolerated. Man must be sacred to man regardless of all distinctions of race, creed, colour, nationality, status, political or social advancement. The body of man is to be respected, made immune from violence and outrage, fortified by science against disease and preventable death. The life of man is to be held sacred, preserved, strengthened, ennobled, uplifted. The heart

of man is to be held sacred also, given scope, protected from violation, from suppression, from mechanisation, freed from belittling influences. The mind of man is to be released from all bonds, allowed freedom and range and opportunity, given all its means of self-training and self-development and organised in the play of its powers for the service of humanity. And all this too is not to be held as an abstract or pious sentiment, but given full and practical recognition in the persons of men and nations and mankind. This, speaking largely, is the idea and spirit of the intellectual religion of humanity.

One has only to compare human life and thought and feeling a century or two ago with human life, thought and feeling in the pre-war period to see how great an influence this religion of humanity has exercised and how fruitful a work it has done. It accomplished rapidly many things which orthodox religion failed to do effectively, largely because it acted as a constant intellectual and critical solvent, an unsparing assailant of the thing that is and an unflinching champion of the thing to be, faithful always to the future, while orthodox religion allied itself with the powers of the present, even of the past, bound itself by its pact with them and could act only at best as a moderating but not as a reforming force. Moreover, this religion has faith in humanity and its earthly future and can therefore aid its earthly progress, while the orthodox religions looked with eyes of pious sorrow and gloom on the earthly life of man and were very ready to bid him bear peacefully and contentedly, even to welcome its crudities, cruelties, oppressions, tribulations as a means for learning to appreciate and for earning the better life which will be given us hereafter. Faith, even an intellectual faith, must always be a worker of miracles, and this religion of humanity, even without taking bodily shape or a compelling form or a visible means of self-effectuation, was yet able to effect comparatively much of what it set out to do. It to some degree humanised society, humanised law and punishment, humanised the outlook of man on man, abolished legalised torture and the cruder forms of slavery, raised those who were depressed and fallen, gave large hopes to humanity, stimulated philanthropy

and charity and the service of mankind, encouraged everywhere the desire of freedom, put a curb on oppression and greatly minimised its more brutal expressions. It had almost succeeded in humanising war and would perhaps have succeeded entirely but for the contrary trend of modern Science. It made it possible for man to conceive of a world free from war as imaginable even without waiting for the Christian millennium. At any rate, this much change came about that, while peace was formerly a rare interlude of constant war, war became an interlude, if a much too frequent interlude of peace, though as yet only of an armed peace. That may not be a great step, but still it was a step forward. It gave new conceptions of the dignity of the human being and opened new ideas and new vistas of his education, self-development and potentiality. It spread enlightenment; it made man feel more his responsibility for the progress and happiness of the race; it raised the average self-respect and capacity of mankind; it gave hope to the serf, self-assertion to the down-trodden and made the labourer in his manhood the potential equal of the rich and powerful. True, if we compare what is with what should be, the actual achievement with the ideal, all this will seem only a scanty work of preparation. But it was a remarkable record for a century and a half or a little more and for an unembodied spirit which had to work through what instruments it could find and had as yet no form, habitation or visible engine of its own concentrated workings. But perhaps it was in this that lay its power and advantage, since that saved it from crystallising into a form and getting petrified or at least losing its more free and subtle action.

But still in order to accomplish all its future this idea and religion of humanity has to make itself more explicit, insistent and categorically imperative. For otherwise it can only work with clarity in the minds of the few and with the mass it will be only a modifying influence, but will not be the rule of human life. And so long as that is so, it cannot entirely prevail over its own principal enemy. That enemy, the enemy of all real religion, is human egoism, the egoism of the individual, the egoism of class and nation. These it could for a time soften, modify, force

to curb their more arrogant, open and brutal expressions, oblige to adopt better institutions, but not to give place to the love of mankind, not to recognise a real unity between man and man. For that essentially must be the aim of the religion of humanity, as it must be the earthly aim of all human religion, love, mutual recognition of human brotherhood, a living sense of human oneness and practice of human oneness in thought, feeling and life, the ideal which was expressed first some thousands of years ago in the ancient Vedic hymn and must always remain the highest injunction of the Spirit within us to human life upon earth. Till that is brought about, the religion of humanity remains unaccomplished. With that done, the one necessary psychological change will have been effected without which no formal and mechanical, no political and administrative unity can be real and secure. If it is done, that outward unification may not even be indispensable or, if indispensable, it will come about naturally, not, as now it seems likely to be, by catastrophic means, but by the demand of the human mind, and will be held secure by an essential need of our perfected and developed human nature.

But this is the question whether a purely intellectual and sentimental religion of humanity will be sufficient to bring about so great a change in our psychology. The weakness of the intellectual idea, even when it supports itself by an appeal to the sentiments and emotions, is that it does not get at the centre of man's being. The intellect and the feelings are only instruments of the being and they may be the instruments of either its lower and external form or of the inner and higher man, servants of the ego or channels of the soul. The aim of the religion of humanity was formulated in the eighteenth century by a sort of primal intuition; that aim was and it is still to re-create human society in the image of three kindred ideas, liberty, equality and fraternity. None of these has really been won in spite of all the progress that has been achieved. The liberty that has been so loudly proclaimed as an essential of modern progress is an outward, mechanical and unreal liberty. The equality that has been so much sought after and battled for is equally an outward and mechanical and will turn out to be an unreal equality. Fraternity

is not even claimed to be a practicable principle of the ordering of life and what is put forward as its substitute is the outward and mechanical principle of equal association or at the best a comradeship of labour. This is because the idea of humanity has been obliged in an intellectual age to mask its true character of a religion and a thing of the soul and the spirit and to appeal to the vital and physical mind of man rather than his inner being. It has limited his effort to the attempt to revolutionise political and social institutions and to bring about such a modification of the ideas and sentiments of the common mind of mankind as would make these institutions practicable; it has worked at the machinery of human life and on the outer mind much more than upon the soul of the race. It has laboured to establish a political, social and legal liberty, equality and mutual help in an equal association.

But though these aims are of great importance in their own field, they are not the central thing; they can only be secure when founded upon a change of the inner human nature and inner way of living; they are themselves of importance only as means for giving a greater scope and a better field for man's development towards that change and, when it is once achieved, as an outward expression of the larger inward life. Freedom, equality, brotherhood are three godheads of the soul; they cannot be really achieved through the external machinery of society or by man so long as he lives only in the individual and the communal ego. When the ego claims liberty, it arrives at competitive individualism. When it asserts equality, it arrives first at strife, then at an attempt to ignore the variations of Nature, and, as the sole way of doing that successfully, it constructs an artificial and machine-made society. A society that pursues liberty as its ideal is unable to achieve equality; a society that aims at equality will be obliged to sacrifice liberty. For the ego to speak of fraternity is for it to speak of something contrary to its nature. All that it knows is association for the pursuit of common egoistic ends and the utmost that it can arrive at is a closer organisation for the equal distribution of labour, production, consumption and enjoyment.

Yet is brotherhood the real key to the triple gospel of the idea of humanity. The union of liberty and equality can only be achieved by the power of human brotherhood and it cannot be founded on anything else. But brotherhood exists only in the soul and by the soul; it can exist by nothing else. For this brotherhood is not a matter either of physical kinship or of vital association or of intellectual agreement. When the soul claims freedom, it is the freedom of its self-development, the self-development of the divine in man in all his being. When it claims equality, what it is claiming is that freedom equally for all and the recognition of the same soul, the same godhead in all human beings. When it strives for brotherhood, it is founding that equal freedom of self-development on a common aim, a common life, a unity of mind and feeling founded upon the recognition of this inner spiritual unity. These three things are in fact the nature of the soul; for freedom, equality, unity are the eternal attributes of the Spirit. It is the practical recognition of this truth, it is the awakening of the soul in man and the attempt to get him to live from his soul and not from his ego which is the inner meaning of religion, and it is that to which the religion of humanity also must arrive before it can fulfil itself in the life of the race.

Chapter XXXV

Summary and Conclusion

IN OTHER words,— and this is the conclusion at which we arrive,— while it is possible to construct a precarious and quite mechanical unity by political and administrative means, the unity of the human race, even if achieved, can only be secured and can only be made real if the religion of humanity, which is at present the highest active ideal of mankind, spiritualises itself and becomes the general inner law of human life.

The outward unity may well achieve itself,— possibly, though by no means certainly, in a measurable time,— because that is the inevitable final trend of the working of Nature in human society which makes for larger and yet larger aggregations and cannot fail to arrive at a total aggregation of mankind in a closer international system.

This working of Nature depends for its means of fulfilment upon two forces which combine to make the larger aggregation inevitable. First, there is the increasing closeness of common interests or at least the interlacing and interrelation of interests in a larger and yet larger circle which makes old divisions an obstacle and a cause of weakness, obstruction and friction, and the clash and collision that comes out of this friction a ruinous calamity to all, even to the victor who has to pay a too heavy price for his gains; and even these expected gains, as war becomes more complex and disastrous, are becoming more and more difficult to achieve and the success problematical. An increasing perception of this community or interrelation of interests and a growing unwillingness to face the consequences of collision and ruinous struggle must push men to welcome any means for mitigating the divisions which lead to such disasters. If the trend to the mitigation of divisions is once given a definite form, that commences an impetus which drives towards closer and closer union. If she cannot arrive by these means, if the incoherence is too great for

the trend of unification to triumph, Nature will use other means, such as war and conquest or the temporary domination of the powerful State or empire or the menace of such a domination which will compel those threatened to adopt a closer system of union. It is these means and this force of outward necessity which she used to create nation-units and national empires, and, however modified in the circumstances and workings, it is at bottom the same force and the same means which she is using to drive mankind towards international unification.

But, secondly, there is the force of a common uniting sentiment. This may work in two ways; it may come before as an originating or contributory cause or it may come afterwards as a cementing result. In the first case, the sentiment of a larger unity springs up among units which were previously divided and leads them to seek after a form of union which may then be brought about principally by the force of the sentiment and its idea or by that secondarily as an aid to other and more outward events and causes. We may note that in earlier times this sentiment was insufficiently effective, as among the petty clan or regional nations; unity had ordinarily to be effected by outward circumstances and generally by the grossest of them, by war and conquest, by the domination of the most powerful among many warring or contiguous peoples. But in later times the force of the sentiment of unity, supported as it has been by a clearer political idea, has become more effective. The larger national aggregates have grown up by a simple act of federation or union, though this has sometimes had to be preceded by a common struggle for liberty or a union in war against a common enemy; so have grown into one the United States, Italy, Germany, and more peacefully the Australian and South African federations. But in other cases, especially in the earlier national aggregations, the sentiment of unity has grown up largely or entirely as the result of the formal, outward or mechanical union. But whether to form or to preserve the growth of the sentiment, the psychological factor is indispensable; without it there can be no secure and lasting union. Its absence, the failure to create such a sentiment or to make it sufficiently living, natural, forcible has been the cause of

the precariousness of such aggregates as Austro-Hungary and of the ephemeral character of the empires of the past, even as it is likely to bring about, unless circumstances change, the collapse or disintegration of the great present-day empires.

The trend of forces towards some kind of international world-organisation eventuating in a possible far-off unification, which is now just beginning to declare itself as an idea or aspiration though the causes which made it inevitable have been for some time at work, is enforced by the pressure of need and environment, by outward circumstances. At the same time, there is a sentiment helped and stimulated by these outward circumstances, a cosmopolitan, international sentiment, still rather nebulous and vaguely ideal, which may accelerate the growth of the formal union. In itself this sentiment would be an insufficient cement for the preservation of any mechanical union which might be created; for it could not easily be so close and forcible a sentiment as national feeling. It would have to subsist on the conveniences of union as its only substantial provender. But the experience of the past shows that this mere necessity of convenience is in the end not strong enough to resist the pressure of unfavourable circumstances and the reassertion of old or the effective growth of new centrifugal forces. There is, however, at work a more powerful force, a sort of intellectual religion of humanity, clear in the minds of the few, vaguely felt in its effects and its disguises by the many, which has largely helped to bring about much of the trend of the modern mind and the drift of its developing institutions. This is a psychological force which tends to break beyond the formula of the nation and aspires to replace the religion of country and even, in its more extreme forms, to destroy altogether the national sentiment and to abolish its divisions so as to create the single nation of mankind.

We may say, then, that this trend must eventually realise itself, however great may be the difficulties; and they are really enormous, much greater than those which attended the national formation. If the present unsatisfactory condition of international relations should lead to a series of cataclysms, either large and world-embracing like the present war or, though each more

limited in scope, yet in their sum world-pervading and necessarily, by the growing interrelation of interests, affecting even those who do not fall directly under their touch, then mankind will finally be forced in self-defence to a new, closer and more stringently unified order of things. Its choice will be between that and a lingering suicide. If the human reason cannot find out the way, Nature herself is sure to shape these upheavals in such a way as to bring about her end. Therefore,—whether soon or in the long run, whether brought about by its own growing sentiment of unity, stimulated by common interest and convenience, or by the evolutionary pressure of circumstances,—we may take it that an eventual unification or at least some formal organisation of human life on earth is, the incalculable being always allowed for, practically inevitable.

I have tried to show from the analogy of the past evolution of the nation that this international unification must culminate or at least is likely to culminate in one of two forms. There is likely to be either a centralised World-State or a looser world-union which may be either a close federation or a simple confederacy of the peoples for the common ends of mankind. The last form is the most desirable, because it gives sufficient scope for the principle of variation which is necessary for the free play of life and the healthy progress of the race. The process by which the World-State may come starts with the creation of a central body which will at first have very limited functions, but, once created, must absorb by degrees all the different utilities of a centralised international control, as the State, first in the form of a monarchy and then of a parliament, has been absorbing by degrees the whole control of the life of the nation, so that we are now within measurable distance of a centralised socialistic State which will leave no part of the life of its individuals unregulated. A similar process in the World-State will end in the taking up and the regulation of the whole life of the peoples into its hands; it may even end by abolishing national individuality and turning the divisions that it has created into mere departmental groupings, provinces and districts of the one common State. Such an eventuality may seem now a fantastic dream or an unrealisable

idea; but it is one which, under certain conditions that are by no means beyond the scope of ultimate possibility, may well become feasible and even, after a certain point is reached, inevitable. A federal system and still more a confederacy would mean, on the other hand, the preservation of the national basis and a greater or less freedom of national life, but the subordination of the separate national to the larger common interests and of full separate freedom to the greater international necessities.

It may be questioned whether past analogies are a safe guide in a problem so new and whether something else might not be evolved more intimately and independently arising from it and suitable to its complexities. But mankind even in dealing with its new problems works upon past experience and therefore upon past motives and analogies. Even when it seizes on new ideas, it goes to the past for the form it gives to them. Behind the apparent changes of the most radical revolutions we see this unavoidable principle of continuity surviving in the heart of the new order. Moreover, these alternatives seem the only way in which the two forces in presence can work out their conflict, either by the disappearance of the one, the separative national instinct, or by an accommodation between them. On the other hand, it is quite possible that human thought and action may take so new a turn as to bring in a number of unforeseen possibilities and lead to a quite different ending. And one might upon these lines set one's imagination to work and produce perhaps a utopia of a better kind. Such constructive efforts of the human imagination have their value and often a very great value; but any such speculations would evidently have been out of place in the study I have attempted.

Assuredly, neither of the two alternatives and none of the three forms considered are free from serious objections. A centralised World-State would signify the triumph of the idea of mechanical unity or rather of uniformity. It would inevitably mean the undue depression of an indispensable element in the vigour of human life and progress, the free life of the individual, the free variation of the peoples. It must end, if it becomes permanent and fulfils all its tendencies, either in a death in

life, a stagnation, or by the insurgence of some new saving but revolutionary force or principle which would shatter the whole fabric into pieces. The mechanical tendency is one to which the logical reason of man, itself a precise machine, is easily addicted and its operations are obviously the easiest to manage and the most ready to hand; its full evolution may seem to the reason desirable, necessary, inevitable, but its end is predestined. A centralised socialistic State may be a necessity of the future, once it is founded, but a reaction from it will be equally an eventual necessity of the future. The greater its pressure, the more certainly will it be met by the spread of the spiritual, the intellectual, the vital and practical principle of Anarchism in revolt against that mechanical pressure. So, too, a centralised mechanical World-State must rouse in the end a similar force against it and might well terminate in a crumbling up and disintegration, even in the necessity for a repetition of the cycle of humanity ending in a better attempt to solve the problem. It could be kept in being only if humanity agreed to allow all the rest of its life to be regularised for it for the sake of peace and stability and took refuge for its individual freedom in the spiritual life, as happened once under the Roman Empire. But even that would be only a temporary solution. A federal system also would tend inevitably to establish one general type for human life, institutions and activities; it would allow only a play of minor variations. But the need of variation in living Nature could not always rest satisfied with that scanty sustenance. On the other hand, a looser confederacy might well be open to the objection that it would give too ready a handle for centrifugal forces, were such to arise in new strength. A loose confederation could not be permanent; it must turn in one direction or the other, end either in a close and rigid centralisation or at last by a break-up of the loose unity into its original elements.

The saving power needed is a new psychological factor which will at once make a united life necessary to humanity and force it to respect the principle of freedom. The religion of humanity seems to be the one growing force which tends in that direction; for it makes for the sense of human oneness, it

has the idea of the race, and yet at the same time it respects the human individual and the natural human grouping. But its present intellectual form seems hardly sufficient. The idea, powerful in itself and in its effects, is yet not powerful enough to mould the whole life of the race in its image. For it has to concede too much to the egoistic side of human nature, once all and still nine-tenths of our being, with which its larger idea is in conflict. On the other side, because it leans principally on the reason, it turns too readily to the mechanical solution. For the rational idea ends always as a captive of its machinery, becomes a slave of its own too binding process. A new idea with another turn of the logical machine revolts against it and breaks up its machinery, but only to substitute in the end another mechanical system, another credo, formula and practice.

A spiritual religion of humanity is the hope of the future. By this is not meant what is ordinarily called a universal religion, a system, a thing of creed and intellectual belief and dogma and outward rite. Mankind has tried unity by that means; it has failed and deserved to fail, because there can be no universal religious system, one in mental creed and vital form. The inner spirit is indeed one, but more than any other the spiritual life insists on freedom and variation in its self-expression and means of development. A religion of humanity means the growing realisation that there is a secret Spirit, a divine Reality, in which we are all one, that humanity is its highest present vehicle on earth, that the human race and the human being are the means by which it will progressively reveal itself here. It implies a growing attempt to live out this knowledge and bring about a kingdom of this divine Spirit upon earth. By its growth within us oneness with our fellow-men will become the leading principle of all our life, not merely a principle of cooperation but a deeper brotherhood, a real and an inner sense of unity and equality and a common life. There must be the realisation by the individual that only in the life of his fellow-men is his own life complete. There must be the realisation by the race that only on the free and full life of the individual can its own perfection and permanent happiness be founded. There must be too a discipline and a way of salvation

in accordance with this religion, that is to say, a means by which it can be developed by each man within himself, so that it may be developed in the life of the race. To go into all that this implies would be too large a subject to be entered upon here; it is enough to point out that in this direction lies the eventual road. No doubt, if this is only an idea like the rest, it will go the way of all ideas. But if it is at all a truth of our being, then it must be the truth to which all is moving and in it must be found the means of a fundamental, an inner, a complete, a real human unity which would be the one secure base of a unification of human life. A spiritual oneness which would create a psychological oneness not dependent upon any intellectual or outward uniformity and compel a oneness of life not bound up with its mechanical means of unification, but ready always to enrich its secure unity by a free inner variation and a freely varied outer self-expression, this would be the basis for a higher type of human existence.

Could such a realisation develop rapidly in mankind, we might then solve the problem of unification in a deeper and truer way from the inner truth to the outer forms. Until then, the attempt to bring it about by mechanical means must proceed. But the higher hope of humanity lies in the growing number of men who will realise this truth and seek to develop it in themselves, so that when the mind of man is ready to escape from its mechanical bent,—perhaps when it finds that its mechanical solutions are all temporary and disappointing,—the truth of the Spirit may step in and lead humanity to the path of its highest possible happiness and perfection.

A Postscript Chapter

AT THE time when this book was being brought to its close, the first attempt at the foundation of some initial hesitating beginning of the new world-order, which both governments and peoples had begun to envisage as a permanent necessity if there was to be any order in the world at all, was under debate and consideration but had not yet been given a concrete and practical form; but this had to come and eventually a momentous beginning was made. It took the name and appearance of what was called a League of Nations. It was not happy in its conception, well-inspired in its formation or destined to any considerable longevity or a supremely successful career. But that such an organised endeavour should be launched at all and proceed on its way for some time without an early breakdown was in itself an event of capital importance and meant the initiation of a new era in world history; especially, it was an initiative which, even if it failed, could not be allowed to remain without a sequel but had to be taken up again until a successful solution has safeguarded the future of mankind, not only against continued disorder and lethal peril but against destructive possibilities which could easily prepare the collapse of civilisation and perhaps eventually something even that could be described as the suicide of the human race. Accordingly, the League of Nations disappeared but was replaced by the United Nations Organisation which now stands in the forefront of the world and struggles towards some kind of secure permanence and success in the great and far-reaching endeavour on which depends the world's future.

This is the capital event, the crucial and decisive outcome of the world-wide tendencies which Nature has set in motion for her destined purpose. In spite of the constant shortcomings of human effort and its stumbling mentality, in spite of adverse

possibilities that may baulk or delay for a time the success of this great adventure, it is in this event that lies the determination of what must be. All the catastrophes that have attended this course of events and seem to arise of purpose in order to prevent the working out of her intention have not prevented, and even further catastrophes will not prevent, the successful emergence and development of an enterprise which has become a necessity for the progress and perhaps the very existence of the race. Two stupendous and world-devastating wars have swept over the globe and have been accompanied or followed by revolutions with far-reaching consequences which have altered the political map of the earth and the international balance, the once fairly stable equilibrium of five continents, and changed the whole future. A third still more disastrous war with a prospect of the use of weapons and other scientific means of destruction far more fatal and of wider reach than any ever yet invented, weapons whose far-spread use might bring down civilisation with a crash and whose effects might tend towards something like extermination on a large scale, looms in prospect; the constant apprehension of it weighs upon the mind of the nations and stimulates them towards further preparations for war and creates an atmosphere of prolonged antagonism, if not yet of conflict, extending to what is called "cold war" even in times of peace. But the two wars that have come and gone have not prevented the formation of the first and second considerable efforts towards the beginning of an attempt at union and the practical formation of a concrete body, an organised instrument with that object: rather they have caused and hastened this new creation. The League of Nations came into being as a direct consequence of the first war, the U.N.O. similarly as a consequence of the second world-wide conflict. If the third war which is regarded by many if not by most as inevitable does come, it is likely to precipitate as inevitably a further step and perhaps the final outcome of this great world-endeavour. Nature uses such means, apparently opposed and dangerous to her intended purpose, to bring about the fruition of that purpose. As in the practice of the spiritual science and art of Yoga one has to raise

up the psychological possibilities which are there in the nature and stand in the way of its spiritual perfection and fulfilment so as to eliminate them, even, it may be, the sleeping possibilities which might arise in future to break the work that has been done, so too Nature acts with the world-forces that meet her on her way, not only calling up those which will assist her but raising too, so as to finish with them, those that she knows to be the normal or even the unavoidable obstacles which cannot but start up to impede her secret will. This one has often seen in the history of mankind; one sees it exemplified today with an enormous force commensurable with the magnitude of the thing that has to be done. But always these resistances turn out to have assisted by the resistance much more than they have impeded the intention of the great Creatrix and her Mover.

We may then look with a legitimate optimism on what has been hitherto achieved and on the prospects of further achievement in the future. This optimism need not and should not blind us to undesirable features, perilous tendencies and the possibilities of serious interruptions in the work and even disorders in the human world that might possibly subvert the work done. As regards the actual conditions of the moment it may even be admitted that most men nowadays look with dissatisfaction on the defects of the United Nations Organisation and its blunders and the malignancies that endanger its existence and many feel a growing pessimism and regard with doubt the possibility of its final success. This pessimism it is unnecessary and unwise to share; for such a psychology tends to bring about or to make possible the results which it predicts but which need not at all ensue. At the same time, we must not ignore the danger. The leaders of the nations, who have the will to succeed and who will be held responsible by posterity for any avoidable failure, must be on guard against unwise policies or fatal errors; the deficiencies that exist in the organisation or its constitution have to be quickly remedied or slowly and cautiously eliminated; if there are obstinate oppositions to necessary change, they have somehow to be overcome or circumvented without breaking the institution; progress towards its perfection, even if it cannot be

easily or swiftly made, must yet be undertaken and the frustration of the world's hope prevented at any cost. There is no other way for mankind than this, unless indeed a greater way is laid open to it by the Power that guides through some delivering turn or change in human will or human nature or some sudden evolutionary progress, a not easily foreseeable leap, *saltus*, which will make another and greater solution of our human destiny feasible.

In the first idea and form of a beginning of world-union which took the shape of the League of Nations, although there were errors in the structure such as the insistence on unanimity which tended to sterilise, to limit or to obstruct the practical action and effectuality of the League, the main defect was inherent in its conception and in its general build, and that again arose naturally and as a direct consequence from the condition of the world at that time. The League of Nations was in fact an oligarchy of big Powers each drawing behind it a retinue of small States and using the general body so far as possible for the furtherance of its own policy much more than for the general interest and the good of the world at large. This character came out most in the political sphere, and the manoeuvres and discords, accommodations and compromises inevitable in this condition of things did not help to make the action of the League beneficial or effective as it purposed or set out to be. The absence of America and the position of Russia had helped to make the final ill-success of this first venture a natural consequence, if not indeed unavoidable. In the constitution of the U.N.O. an attempt was made, in principle at least, to escape from these errors; but the attempt was not thoroughgoing and not altogether successful. A strong surviving element of oligarchy remained in the preponderant place assigned to the five great Powers in the Security Council and was clinched by the device of the veto; these were concessions to a sense of realism and the necessity of recognising the actual condition of things and the results of the second great war and could not perhaps have been avoided, but they have done more to create trouble, hamper the action and diminish the success of the new institution than anything else in

its make-up or the way of action forced upon it by the world situation or the difficulties of a combined working inherent in its very structure. A too hasty or radical endeavour to get rid of these defects might lead to a crash of the whole edifice; to leave them unmodified prolongs a malaise, an absence of harmony and smooth working and a consequent discredit and a sense of limited and abortive action, cause of the wide-spread feeling of futility and regard of doubt the world at large has begun to cast on this great and necessary institution which was founded with such high hopes and without which world conditions would be infinitely worse and more dangerous, even perhaps irremediable. A third attempt, the substitution of a differently constituted body, could only come if this institution collapsed as the result of a new catastrophe: if certain dubious portents fulfil their menace, it might emerge into being and might even this time be more successful because of an increased and a more general determination not to allow such a calamity to occur again; but it would be after a third cataclysmal struggle which might shake to its foundations the international structure now holding together after two upheavals with so much difficulty and unease. Yet, even in such a contingency, the intention in the working of Nature is likely to overcome the obstacles she has herself raised up and they may be got rid of once and for all. But for that it will be necessary to build, eventually at least, a true World-State without exclusions and on a principle of equality into which considerations of size and strength will not enter. These may be left to exercise whatever influence is natural to them in a well-ordered harmony of the world's peoples safeguarded by the law of a new international order. A sure justice, a fundamental equality and combination of rights and interests must be the law of this World-State and the basis of its entire edifice.

The real danger at the present second stage of the progress towards unity lies not in any faults, however serious, in the building of the United Nations Assembly but in the division of the peoples into two camps which tend to be natural opponents and might at any moment become declared enemies irreconcilable and even their common existence incompatible.

This is because the so-called Communism of Bolshevik Russia came to birth as the result, not of a rapid evolution, but of an unprecedentedly fierce and prolonged revolution sanguinary in the extreme and created an autocratic and intolerant State system founded upon a war of classes in which all others except the proletariat were crushed out of existence, "liquidated", upon a "dictatorship of the proletariat" or rather of a narrow but all-powerful party system acting in its name, a Police State, and a mortal struggle with the outside world: the fierceness of this struggle generated in the minds of the organisers of the new State a fixed idea of the necessity not only of survival but of continued struggle and the spread of its domination until the new order had destroyed the old or evicted it, if not from the whole earth, yet from the greater part of it and the imposition of a new political and social gospel or its general acceptance by the world's peoples. But this condition of things might change, lose its acrimony and full consequence, as it has done to some degree, with the arrival of security and the cessation of the first ferocity, bitterness and exasperation of the conflict; the most intolerant and oppressive elements of the new order might have been moderated and the sense of incompatibility or inability to live together or side by side would then have disappeared and a more secure *modus vivendi* been made possible. If much of the unease, the sense of inevitable struggle, the difficulty of mutual toleration and economic accommodation still exists, it is rather because the idea of using the ideological struggle as a means for world domination is there and keeps the nations in a position of mutual apprehension and preparation for armed defence and attack than because the coexistence of the two ideologies is impossible. If this element is eliminated, a world in which these two ideologies could live together, arrive at an economic interchange, draw closer together, need not be at all out of the question; for the world is moving towards a greater development of the principle of State control over the life of the community, and a congeries of socialistic States on the one hand, and on the other, of States coordinating and controlling a modified Capitalism might well come to exist side by side and develop

friendly relations with each other. Even a World-State in which both could keep their own institutions and sit in a common assembly might come into being and a single world-union on this foundation would not be impossible. This development is indeed the final outcome which the foundation of the U.N.O. presupposes; for the present organisation cannot be itself final, it is only an imperfect beginning useful and necessary as a primary nucleus of that larger institution in which all the peoples of the earth can meet each other in a single international unity: the creation of a World-State is, in a movement of this kind, the one logical and inevitable ultimate outcome.

This view of the future may under present circumstances be stigmatised as a too facile optimism, but this turn of things is quite as possible as the more disastrous turn expected by the pessimists, since the cataclysm and crash of civilisation sometimes predicted by them need not at all be the result of a new war. Mankind has a habit of surviving the worst catastrophes created by its own errors or by the violent turns of Nature and it must be so if there is any meaning in its existence, if its long history and continuous survival is not the accident of a fortuitously self-organising Chance, which it must be in a purely materialistic view of the nature of the world. If man is intended to survive and carry forward the evolution of which he is at present the head and, to some extent, a half-conscious leader of its march, he must come out of his present chaotic international life and arrive at a beginning of organised united action; some kind of World-State, unitary or federal, or a confederacy or a coalition he must arrive at in the end; no smaller or looser expedient would adequately serve the purpose. In that case, the general thesis advanced in this book would stand justified and we can foreshadow with some confidence the main line of advance which the course of events is likely to take, at least the main trend of the future history of the human peoples.

The question now put by evolving Nature to mankind is whether its existing international system, if system it can be called, a sort of provisional order maintained with constant evolutionary or revolutionary changes, cannot be replaced by

a willed and thought-out fixed arrangement, a true system, eventually a real unity serving all the common interests of the earth's peoples. An original welter and chaos with its jumble of forces forming, wherever it could, larger or smaller masses of civilisation and order which were in danger of crumbling or being shaken to pieces by attacks from the outer chaos was the first attempt at cosmos successfully arrived at by the genius of humanity. This was finally replaced by something like an international system with the elements of what could be called international law or fixed habits of intercommunication and interchange which allowed the nations to live together in spite of antagonisms and conflicts, a security alternating with precariousness and peril and permitting of too many ugly features, however local, of oppression, bloodshed, revolt and disorder, not to speak of wars which sometimes devastated large areas of the globe. The indwelling deity who presides over the destiny of the race has raised in man's mind and heart the idea, the hope of a new order which will replace the old unsatisfactory order and substitute for it conditions of the world's life which will in the end have a reasonable chance of establishing permanent peace and well-being. This would for the first time turn into an assured fact the ideal of human unity which, cherished by a few, seemed for so long a noble chimera; then might be created a firm ground of peace and harmony and even a free room for the realisation of the highest human dreams, for the perfectibility of the race, a perfect society, a higher upward evolution of the human soul and human nature. It is for the men of our day and, at the most, of tomorrow to give the answer. For, too long a postponement or too continued a failure will open the way to a series of increasing catastrophes which might create a too prolonged and disastrous confusion and chaos and render a solution too difficult or impossible; it might even end in something like an irremediable crash not only of the present world-civilisation but of all civilisation. A new, a difficult and uncertain beginning might have to be made in the midst of the chaos and ruin after perhaps an extermination on a large scale, and a more successful creation could be predicted only if a way

was found to develop a better humanity or perhaps a greater, a superhuman race.

The central question is whether the nation, the largest natural unit which humanity has been able to create and maintain for its collective living, is also its last and ultimate unit or whether a greater aggregate can be formed which will englobe many and even most nations and finally all in its united totality. The impulse to build more largely, the push towards the creation of considerable and even very vast supra-national aggregates has not been wanting; it has even been a permanent feature in the life-instincts of the race. But the form it took was the desire of a strong nation for mastery over others, permanent possession of their territories, subjugation of their peoples, exploitation of their resources: there was also an attempt at quasi-assimilation, an imposition of the culture of a dominant race and, in general, a system of absorption wholesale or as complete as possible. The Roman Empire was the classic example of this kind of endeavour and the Graeco-Roman unity of a single way of life and culture in a vast framework of political and administrative unity was the nearest approach within the geographical limits reached by this civilisation to something one might regard as a first figure or an incomplete suggestion of a figure of human unity. Other similar attempts have been made though not on so large a scale and with a less consummate ability throughout the course of history, but nothing has endured for more than a small number of centuries. The method used was fundamentally unsound in as much as it contradicted other life-instincts which were necessary to the vitality and healthy evolution of mankind and the denial of which must end in some kind of stagnation and arrested progress. The imperial aggregate could not acquire the unconquerable vitality and power of survival of the nation-unit. The only enduring empire-units have been in reality large nation-units which took that name like Germany and China and these were not forms of the supra-national State and need not be reckoned in the history of the formation of the imperial aggregate. So, although the tendency to the creation of empire testifies to an urge in Nature towards larger unities of human

life,— and we can see concealed in it a will to unite the disparate masses of humanity on a larger scale into a single coalescing or combined life-unit,— it must be regarded as an unsuccessful formation without a sequel and unserviceable for any further progress in this direction. In actual fact a new attempt of worldwide domination could succeed only by a new instrumentation or under novel circumstances in englobing all the nations of the earth or persuading or forcing them into some kind of union. An ideology, a successful combination of peoples with one aim and a powerful head like Communist Russia, might have a temporary success in bringing about such an objective. But such an outcome, not very desirable in itself, would not be likely to ensure the creation of an enduring World-State. There would be tendencies, resistances, urges towards other developments which would sooner or later bring about its collapse or some revolutionary change which would mean its disappearance. Finally, any such stage would have to be overpassed; only the formation of a true World-State, either of a unitary but still elastic kind,— for a rigidly unitary State might bring about stagnation and decay of the springs of life,— or a union of free peoples could open the prospect of a sound and lasting world-order.

It is not necessary to repeat or review, except in certain directions, the considerations and conclusions set forward in this book with regard to the means and methods or the lines of divergence or successive development which the actual realisation of human unity may take. But still on some sides possibilities have arisen which call for some modification of what has been written or the conclusions arrived at in these chapters. It had been concluded, for instance, that there was no likelihood of the conquest and unification of the world by a single dominant people or empire. This is no longer altogether so certain, for we have just had to admit the possibility of such an attempt under certain circumstances. A dominant Power may be able to group round itself strong allies subordinated to it but still considerable in strength and resources and throw them into a world struggle with other Powers and peoples. This possibility would be increased if the dominating Power managed to procure, even if

only for the time being, a monopoly of an overwhelming superiority in the use of some of the tremendous means of aggressive military action which Science has set out to discover and effectively utilise. The terror of destruction and even of large-scale extermination created by these ominous discoveries may bring about a will in the governments and peoples to ban and prevent the military use of these inventions, but, so long as the nature of mankind has not changed, this prevention must remain uncertain and precarious and an unscrupulous ambition may even get by it a chance of secrecy and surprise and the utilisation of a decisive moment which might conceivably give it victory and it might risk the tremendous chance. It may be argued that the history of the last war runs counter to this possibility, for in conditions not quite realising but approximating to such a combination of circumstances the aggressive Powers failed in their attempt and underwent the disastrous consequences of a terrible defeat. But after all, they came for a time within a hair's breadth of success and there might not be the same good fortune for the world in some later and more sagaciously conducted and organised adventure. At least, the possibility has to be noted and guarded against by those who have the power of prevention and the welfare of the race in their charge.

One of the possibilities suggested at the time was the growth of continental agglomerates, a united Europe, some kind of a combine of the peoples of the American continent under the leadership of the United States, even possibly in the resurgence of Asia and its drive towards independence from the dominance of the European peoples, a drawing together for self-defensive combination of the nations of this continent; such an eventuality of large continental combinations might even be a stage in the final formation of a world-union. This possibility has tended to take shape to a certain extent with a celerity that could not then be anticipated. In the two American continents it has actually assumed a predominating and practical form, though not in its totality. The idea of a United States of Europe has also actually taken shape and is assuming a formal existence, but is not yet able to develop into a completed and fully realised possibility

because of the antagonism based on conflicting ideologies which cuts off from each other Russia and her satellites behind their iron curtain and Western Europe. This separation has gone so far that it is difficult to envisage its cessation at any foreseeable time in a predictable future. Under other circumstances a tendency towards such combinations might have created the apprehension of huge continental clashes such as the collision, at one time imagined as possible, between a resurgent Asia and the Occident. The acceptance by Europe and America of the Asiatic resurgence and the eventual total liberation of the Oriental peoples, as also the downfall of Japan which figured at one time and indeed actually presented itself to the world as the liberator and leader of a free Asia against the domination of the West, have removed this dangerous possibility. Here again, as elsewhere, the actual danger presents itself rather as a clash between two opposing ideologies, one led by Russia and Red China and trying to impose the Communistic extreme partly by military and partly by forceful political means on a reluctant or at least an infected but not altogether willing Asia and Europe, and on the other side a combination of peoples, partly capitalist, partly moderate socialist who still cling with some attachment to the idea of liberty,—to freedom of thought and some remnant of the free life of the individual. In America there seems to be a push, especially in the Latin peoples, towards a rather intolerant completeness of the Americanisation of the whole continent and the adjacent islands, a sort of extended Monroe Doctrine, which might create friction with the European Powers still holding possessions in the northern part of the continent. But this could only generate minor difficulties and disagreements and not the possibility of any serious collision, a case perhaps for arbitration or arrangement by the U.N.O., not any more serious consequence. In Asia a more perilous situation has arisen, standing sharply across the way to any possibility of a continental unity of the peoples of this part of the world, in the emergence of Communist China. This creates a gigantic bloc which could easily englobe the whole of Northern Asia in a combination between two enormous Communist Powers,

Russia and China, and would overshadow with a threat of absorption South-Western Asia and Tibet and might be pushed to overrun all up to the whole frontier of India, menacing her security and that of Western Asia with the possibility of an invasion and an overrunning and subjection by penetration or even by overwhelming military force to an unwanted ideology, political and social institutions and dominance of this militant mass of Communism whose push might easily prove irresistible. In any case, the continent would be divided between two huge blocs which might enter into active mutual opposition and the possibility of a stupendous world-conflict would arise dwarfing anything previously experienced: the possibility of any world-union might, even without any actual outbreak of hostilities, be indefinitely postponed by the incompatibility of interests and ideologies on a scale which would render their inclusion in a single body hardly realisable. The possibility of a coming into being of three or four continental unions, which might subsequently coalesce into a single unity, would then be very remote and, except after a world-shaking struggle, hardly feasible.

At one time it was possible to regard as an eventual possibility the extension of Socialism to all the nations; an international unity could then have been created by its innate tendencies which turned naturally towards an overcoming of the dividing force of the nation-idea with its separatism and its turn towards competitions and rivalries often culminating in open strife; this could have been regarded as the natural road and could have turned in fact into the eventual way towards world-union. But, in the first place, Socialism has under certain stresses proved to be by no means immune against infection by the dividing national spirit and its international tendency might not survive its coming into power in separate national States and a resulting inheritance of competing national interests and necessities: the old spirit might very well survive in the new socialist bodies. But also there might not be or not for a long time to come an inevitable tide of the spread of Socialism to all the peoples of the earth: other forces might arise which would dispute what seemed at one time and perhaps still seems the most likely outcome of

existing world tendencies; the conflict between Communism and the less extreme socialistic idea which still respects the principle of liberty, even though a restricted liberty, and the freedom of conscience, of thought, of personality of the individual, if this difference perpetuated itself, might create a serious difficulty in the formation of a World-State. It would not be easy to build a constitution, a harmonised State-law and practice in which any modicum of genuine freedom for the individual or any continued existence of him except as a cell in the working of a rigidly determined automatism of the body of the collectivist State or a part of a machine would be possible or conceivable. It is not that the principle of Communism necessitates any such results or that its system must lead to a termite civilisation or the suppression of the individual; it could well be, on the contrary, a means at once of the fulfilment of the individual and the perfect harmony of a collective being. The already developed systems which go by the name are not really Communism but constructions of an inordinately rigid State Socialism. But Socialism itself might well develop away from the Marxist groove and evolve less rigid modes; a cooperative Socialism, for instance, without any bureaucratic rigour of a coercive administration, of a Police State, might one day come into existence, but the generalisation of Socialism throughout the world is not under existing circumstances easily foreseeable, hardly even a predominant possibility: in spite of certain possibilities or tendencies created by recent events in the Far East, a division of the earth between the two systems, capitalistic and socialistic, seems for the present a more likely issue. In America the attachment to individualism and the capitalistic system of society and a strong antagonism not only to Communism but to even a moderate Socialism remains complete and one can foresee little possibility of any abatement in its intensity. The extreme success of Communism creeping over the continents of the Old World, which we have had to envisage as a possibility, is yet, if we consider existing circumstances and the balance of opposing Powers, highly improbable and, even if it occurred, some accommodation would still be necessary, unless one of the two forces gained an overwhelming eventual

victory over its opponent. A successful accommodation would demand the creation of a body in which all questions of possible dispute could be solved as they arose without any breaking out of open conflict, and this would be a successor of the League of Nations and the U.N.O. and move in the same direction. As Russia and America, in spite of the constant opposition of policy and ideology, have avoided so far any step that would make the preservation of the U.N.O. too difficult or impossible, this third body would be preserved by the same necessity or imperative utility of its continued existence. The same forces would work in the same direction and a creation of an effective world-union would still be possible; in the end the mass of general needs of the race and its need of self-preservation could well be relied on to make it inevitable.

There is nothing then in the development of events since the establishment of the United Nations Organisation, in the sequel to the great initiation at San Francisco of the decisive step towards the creation of a world-body which might end in the establishment of a true world-unity, that need discourage us in the expectation of an ultimate success of this great enterprise. There are dangers and difficulties, there can be an apprehension of conflicts, even of colossal conflicts that might jeopardise the future, but total failure need not be envisaged unless we are disposed to predict the failure of the race. The thesis we have undertaken to establish of the drive of Nature towards larger agglomerations and the final establishment of the largest of all and the ultimate union of the world's peoples still remains unaltered: this is evidently the line which the future of the human race demands and which conflicts and perturbations, however immense, may delay, even as they may modify greatly the forms it now promises to take, but are not likely to prevent; for a general destruction would be the only alternative destiny of mankind. But such a destruction, whatever the catastrophic possibilities balancing the almost certain beneficial results, hardly limitable in their extent, of the recent discoveries and inventions of Science, has every chance of being as chimerical as any early expectation of final peace and felicity or a perfected society of the human

peoples. We may rely, if on nothing else, on the evolutionary urge and, if on no other greater hidden Power, on the manifest working and drift or intention in the World-Energy we call Nature to carry mankind at least as far as the necessary next step to be taken, a self-preserving next step: for the necessity is there, at least some general recognition of it has been achieved and of the thing to which it must eventually lead the idea has been born and the body of it is already calling for its creation. We have indicated in this book the conditions, possibilities, forms which this new creation may take and those which seem to be most desirable without dogmatising or giving prominence to personal opinion; an impartial consideration of the forces that work and the results that are likely to ensue was the object of this study. The rest will depend on the intellectual and moral capacity of humanity to carry out what is evidently now the one thing needful.

We conclude then that in the conditions of the world at present, even taking into consideration its most disparaging features and dangerous possibilities, there is nothing that need alter the view we have taken of the necessity and inevitability of some kind of world-union; the drive of Nature, the compulsion of circumstances and the present and future need of mankind make it inevitable. The general conclusions we have arrived at will stand and the consideration of the modalities and possible forms or lines of alternative or successive development it may take. The ultimate result must be the formation of a World-State and the most desirable form of it would be a federation of free nationalities in which all subjection or forced inequality and subordination of one to another would have disappeared and, though some might preserve a greater natural influence, all would have an equal status. A confederacy would give the greatest freedom to the nations constituting the World-State, but this might give too much room for fissiparous or centrifugal tendencies to operate; a federal order would then be the most desirable. All else would be determined by the course of events and by general agreement or the shape given by the ideas and necessities that may grow up in the future. A world-union of this

kind would have the greatest chances of long survival or permanent existence. This is a mutable world and uncertainties and dangers might assail or trouble for a time; the formed structure might be subjected to revolutionary tendencies as new ideas and forces emerged and produced their effect on the general mind of humanity, but the essential step would have been taken and the future of the race assured or at least the present era overpassed in which it is threatened and disturbed by unsolved needs and difficulties, precarious conditions, immense upheavals, huge and sanguinary world-wide conflicts and the threat of others to come. The ideal of human unity would be no longer an unfulfilled ideal but an accomplished fact and its preservation given into the charge of the united human peoples. Its future destiny would lie on the knees of the gods and, if the gods have a use for the continued existence of the race, may be left to lie there safe.

War and Self-Determination

Foreword to the First Edition

THE FOUR essays published in this volume¹ were not written at one time or conceived with any intentional connection between them in idea or purpose. The first was written in the early months of the war, two others when it was closing, the last recently during the formation and first operations of that remarkably ill-jointed, stumbling and hesitating machine, the League of Nations. But still they happen to be bound together by a common idea or at least look at four related subjects from a single general standpoint, — the obvious but practically quite forgotten truth that the destiny of the race in this age of crisis and revolution will depend much more on the spirit which we are than on the machinery we shall use. A few words on the present bearing of this truth by way of foreword may not be out of place.

The whole difficulty of the present situation turns upon the peculiar and critical character of the age in which we are living. It is a period of immense and rapid changes so swift that few of us who live among them can hope to seize their whole burden or their inmost meaning or to form any safe estimate of their probable outcome. Great hopes are abroad, high and large ideals fill the view, enormous forces are in the field. It is one of those vast critical moments in the life of the race when all is pressing towards change and reconstitution. The ideals of the future, especially the ideals of freedom, equality, commonality, unity, are demanding to be brought out from their limited field in the spiritual life or the idealism of the few and to be given some beginning of a true soul of action and bodily shape in the life of the race. But banded against any such fulfilment there are powerful obstacles, and the greatest of them

¹ *The present edition includes two additional essays.—Ed.*

come not from outside but from within. For they are the old continued impulsions and obstinate recalcitrance of mankind's past nature, the almost total subjection of its normal mind to egoistic, vital and material interests and ambitions which make not for union but for strife and discord, the plausibilities of the practical reason which looks at the possibilities of the day and the morrow and shuts its eyes to the consequences of the day after, the habits of pretence and fiction which impel men and nations to pursue and forward their own interest under the camouflage of a specious idealism, a habit made up only partly of the diplomatic hypocrisy of politicians, but much more of a general half-voluntary self-deception, and, finally, the inrush of blinder unsatisfied forces and crude imperfect idealisms—of such is the creed of Bolshevism—to take advantage of the unrest and dissatisfaction prevalent in such times and lay hold for a while on the life of mankind. It is these things which we see dominant around us and not in the least degree any effort to be of the right spirit and evolve from it the right method. The one way out harped on by the modern mind which has been as much blinded as enlightened by the victories of physical science, is the approved western device of salvation by machinery; get the right kind of machine to work and everything can be done, this seems to be the modern creed. But the destinies of mankind cannot be turned out to order in an American factory. It is a subtler thing than that which is now putting its momentous problem before us, and if the spirit of the things we profess is absent or falsified, no method or machinery can turn them out for us or deliver the promised goods. That is the one truth which the scientific and industrialised modern mind forgets always, because it looks at process and commodity and production and ignores the spirit in man and the deeper inner law of his being.

The elimination of war is one of the cherished ideals and expectations of the age. But what lies at the root of this desire? A greater unity of heart, sympathy, understanding between men and nations, a settled will to get rid of national hatreds,贪欲, ambitions, all the fertile seeds of strife and war? If so, it is well with us and success will surely crown our efforts. But

of this deeper thing there may be something in sentiment, but there is still very little in action and dominant motive. For the masses of men the idea is rather to labour and produce and amass at ease and in security without the disturbance of war; for the statesmen and governing classes the idea is to have peace and security for the maintenance of past acquisitions and an untroubled domination and exploitation of the world by the great highly organised imperial and industrial nations without the perturbing appearance of new unsatisfied hungers and the peril of violent unrests, revolts, revolutions. War, it was hoped at one time, would eliminate itself by becoming impossible, but that delightfully easy solution no longer commands credit. But now it is hoped to conjure or engineer it out of existence by the machinery of a league of victorious nations admitting the rest, some if they will, others whether they like it or not, as subordinate partners or as protégés. In the magic of this just and beautiful arrangement the intelligence and good will of closeted statesmen and governments supported by the intelligence and good will of the peoples is to combine and accommodate interests, to settle or evade difficulties, to circumvent the natural results, the inevitable Karma of national selfishness and passions and to evolve out of the present chaos a fair and charmingly well-mechanised cosmos of international order, security, peace and welfare. Get the clockwork going, put your pennyworth of excellent professions or passably good intentions in the slot and all will go well, this seems to be the principle. But it is too often the floor of Hell that is paved with these excellent professions and passable intentions, and the cause is that while the better reason and will of man may be one hopeful factor in Nature, they are not the whole of nature and existence and not by any means the whole of our human nature. There are other and very formidable things in us and in the world and if we juggle with them or put on them, in order to get them admitted, these masks of reason and sentiment,—as unfortunately we have all the habit of doing and that is still the greater part of the game of politics,—the results are a foregone conclusion. War and violent revolution can be eliminated, if we will, though

not without immense difficulty, but on the condition that we get rid of the inner causes of war and the constantly accumulating Karma of successful injustice of which violent revolutions are the natural reactions. Otherwise, there can be only at best a fallacious period of artificial peace. What was in the past will be sown still in the present and continue to return on us in the future.

The intelligent mind or the best intellectual reason and science of man are not the sole disposers of our future. Fortunately for the order of things a greater unseen power, a Universal Will, or, if you please, a universal Force or Law is there which not only gives us all the framework and conditions of our idea and effort, but evolves by them and by the law of these conditions out of the thing in being the thing that is to be. And this power deals with us not so much according to the devices of our reason, the truths or fictions of our intelligence, but much rather according to the truth of what man is and the real soul and meaning of what he does. God is not to be deceived, says the Scripture. The modern mind does not believe in God, but it believes in Nature: but Nature too is not to be deceived; she enforces her law, she works out always her results from the thing that really is and from the real spirit and character of the energy we put into action. And this especially is one of the ages in which mankind is very closely put to the question. The hopes, the ideals, the aspirations that are abroad in it are themselves so many severe and pregnant questions put to us, not merely to our intelligence but to the spirit of our being and action. In this fateful examination it is not skill and cleverness, machinery and organisation which will ultimately prevail,—that was the faith which Germany professed, and we know how it ended,—but the truth and sincerity of our living. It is not impossible for man to realise his ideals so that he may move on to yet greater undreamed things, but on condition that he makes them totally an inner in order that they may become too an outer reality. The changes which this age of reconstruction portends will certainly come, but the gain they will bring to humanity depends on the spirit which governs us during the time of their execution.

We of today have not the excuse of ignorance since we have before us perfectly clear ideals and conditions. Freedom and unity, the self-determination of men and nations in the framework of a life drawn together by cooperation, comradeship, brotherhood if it may be, the acceptance of a close interrelation of the common aims and interests of the race, an increasing oneness of human life in which we cannot deny any longer to others what we claim for ourselves,—are things of which we have formed a definite conception. The acknowledgment of them is there in the human mind, but not as yet any settled will to practise. Words and professions are excellent things in themselves and we will do them all homage; but facts are for the present more powerful and the facts will have their results, but the results which we deserve and not those aimed at by our egoism. The principle of self-determination is not in itself a chimera, it is only that if we choose to make it so. It is the condition of the better order of the world which we wish to bring into being, and to make jettison of it at the very first opportunity is an unpromising beginning for so great and difficult an endeavour. Self-determination is not a principle which can stand by itself and be made the one rule to be followed; no principle can rightly stand in that way isolated and solely dominant in the complicated web of life and, if we so treat it, it gets falsified in its meaning and loses much of its virtue. Moreover, individual self-determination must harmonise with a common self-determination, freedom must move in the frame of unity or towards the realisation of a free unity. And it may readily be conceded to the opportunist, the practical man and all the minds that find a difficulty in looking beyond the circumstances of the past and present, that there are in very many instances great difficulties in the way of applying the principle immediately and in its full degree. But when in the light of a great revealing moment a principle of this kind has been recognised not only as an ideal but as a clear condition of the result at which we aim, it has to be accepted as a leading factor of the problem to be worked out, the difficulties sincerely considered and met and a way found by which without evasion or equivocation

and without unnecessary delay it can be developed and given its proper place in the solution. But it is the very opposite method that has been adopted by the governments of the world, and admitted by its peoples. The natural result is that things are being worked out in the old way with a new name or at the most with some halting change and partial improvement of the method.

The botched constitution and limping action of the League of Nations is the result of this ancient manoeuvre. The League has been got into being by sacrificing the principles which governed the idea behind its inception. The one thing that has been gained is a formal, regularised and established instrument by which the governments of the leading nations can meet together habitually, consult, accommodate their interests, give some kind of consideration to the voice and the claim of the smaller free nations, try to administer with a common understanding certain common or conflicting interests, delay dangerous outbreaks and collisions or minimise them when they come, govern the life of the nations that are not free and not already subjects of the successful empires under the cover of a mandate instead of the rough-and-tumble chances of a scramble for markets, colonies and dependencies. The machine does not seem to be acting even for these ends with any remarkable efficiency, but it is at least something, it may be said, that it can be got to act at all. In any case it is an accomplished fact which has to be accepted without enthusiasm, for it merits none, but with a practical acquiescence or an enforced recognition. All the more reason that the imperfections it embodies and the evils and dangers its action involves or keeps in being, should not be thrust into the background, but kept in the full light so that the imperfections may be recognised and mended and there may be some chance of avoiding the worst incidence of the threatened evils and dangers. And all the more reason too that the ideals which have been ignored or converted in the practice into a fiction, should insist on themselves and, defrauded of the present, still lift their voice to lay their claim on the future.

For these ideals stand and they represent the greater aims

of the spirit in man which through all the denials, obstacles and imperfections of his present incomplete nature knows always the perfection towards which it moves and the greatness of which it is capable. Circumstance and force and external necessity and past nature may still be too strong for us, the Rudra powers still govern our destinies and the Lords of truth and justice and the Lords of love have to wait for their reign, but if the light of the ideal is kept burning in its flame of knowledge and its flame of power, it will seize even on these things and create out of their evil its greater inevitable good. At present it may seem only an idea and a word unable to become a living reality, but it is the Idea and the Word expressing what was concealed in the Spirit which preside over creation. The time will come when they will be able to seize on the Force that works and turn it into the instrument of a greater and fairer creation. The nearness or the distance of the time depends on the fidelity of the mind and will of man to the best that he sees and the insistence of his self-knowledge, unobsessed by subjection to the circumstances he suffers and the machinery he uses, to live out its truth within himself so that his environment may accept it and his outward life be shaped in its image.

The Passing of War?

THE PROGRESS of humanity proceeds by a series of imaginations which the will in the race turns into accomplished facts and a train of illusions which contain each of them an inevitable truth. The truth is there in the secret Will and Knowledge that are conducting our affairs for us and it reflects itself in the soul of mankind; the illusion is in the shape we give to that reflection, the veil of arbitrary fixations of time, place and circumstance which that deceptive organ of knowledge, the human intellect, weaves over the face of the Truth. Human imaginations are often fulfilled to the letter; our illusions on the contrary find the truth behind them realised most unexpectedly, at a time, in ways, under circumstances far other than those we had fixed for them.

Man's illusions are of all sorts and kinds, some of them petty though not unimportant,—for nothing in the world is unimportant,—others vast and grandiose. The greatest of them all are those which cluster round the hope of a perfected society, a perfected race, a terrestrial millennium. Each new idea religious or social which takes possession of the epoch and seizes on large masses of men, is in turn to be the instrument of these high realisations; each in turn betrays the hope which gave it its force to conquer. And the reason is plain enough to whosoever chooses to see; it is that no change of ideas or of the intellectual outlook upon life, no belief in God or Avatar or prophet, no victorious science or liberating philosophy, no social scheme or system, no sort of machinery internal or external can really bring about the great desire implanted in the race, true though that desire is in itself and the index of the goal to which we are being led. Because man is himself not a machine nor a device, but a being and a most complex one at that, therefore he cannot be saved by machinery; only by an entire change which shall affect all the

members of his being can he be liberated from his discords and imperfections.

One of the illusions incidental to this great hope is the expectation of the passing of war. This grand event in human progress is always being confidently expected and since we are now all scientific minds and rational beings, we no longer expect it by a divine intervention, but assign sound physical and economic reasons for the faith that is in us. The first form taken by this new gospel was the expectation and the prophecy that the extension of commerce would be the extinction of war. Commercialism was the natural enemy of militarism and would drive it from the face of the earth. The growing and universal lust of gold and the habit of comfort and the necessities of increased production and intricate interchange would crush out the lust of power and dominion and glory and battle. Gold-hunger or commodity-hunger would drive out earth-hunger, the dharma of the Vaishya would set its foot on the dharma of the Kshatriya and give it its painless quietus. The ironic reply of the gods has not been long in coming. Actually this very reign of commercialism, this increase of production and interchange, this desire for commodities and markets and this piling up of a huge burden of unnecessary necessities has been the cause of half the wars that have since afflicted the human race. And now we see militarism and commercialism united in a loving clasp, coalescing into a sacred biune duality of national life and patriotic aspiration and causing and driving by their force the most irrational, the most monstrous and nearly cataclysmic, the hugest war of modern and indeed of all historic times.

Another illusion was that the growth of democracy would mean the growth of pacifism and the end of war. It was fondly thought that wars are in their nature dynastic and aristocratic; greedy kings and martial nobles driven by earth-hunger and battle-hunger, diplomatists playing at chess with the lives of men and the fortunes of nations, these were the guilty causes of war who drove the unfortunate peoples to the battle-field like sheep to the shambles. These proletariates, mere food for powder, who had no interest, no desire, no battle-hunger driving them to

armed conflict, had only to become instructed and dominant to embrace each other and all the world in a free and fraternal amity. Man refuses to learn from that history of whose lessons the wise prate to us; otherwise the story of old democracies ought to have been enough to prevent this particular illusion. In any case the answer of the gods has been, here too, sufficiently ironic. If kings and diplomatists are still often the movers of war, none more ready than the modern democracy to make itself their enthusiastic and noisy accomplice, and we see even the modern spectacle of governments and diplomats hanging back in affright or doubt from the yawning and clamorous abyss while angry shouting peoples impel them to the verge. Bewildered pacifists who still cling to their principles and illusions, find themselves howled down by the people and, what is piquant enough, by their own recent comrades and leaders. The socialist, the syndicalist, the internationalist of yesterday stands forward as a banner-bearer in the great mutual massacre and his voice is the loudest to cheer on the dogs of war.

Another recent illusion was the power of Courts of Arbitration and Concerts of Europe to prevent war. There again the course that events immediately took was sufficiently ironic; for the institution of the great Court of international arbitration was followed up by a series of little and great wars which led by an inexorable logical chain to the long-dreaded European conflict and the monarch who had first conceived the idea, was also the first to unsheathe his sword in a conflict dictated on both sides by the most unrighteous greed and aggression. In fact this series of wars, whether fought in Northern or Southern Africa, in Manchuria or the Balkans, were marked most prominently by the spirit which disregards cynically that very idea of inherent and existing rights, that balance of law and equity upon which alone arbitration can be founded. As for the Concert of Europe, it seems far enough from us now, almost antediluvian in its antiquity, — as it belongs indeed to the age before the deluge; but we can remember well enough what an unmusical and discordant concert it was, what a series of fumblings and blunderings and how its diplomacy led us fatally to the inevitable event against

which it struggled. Now it is suggested by many to substitute a United States of Europe for the defunct Concert and for the poor helpless Hague tribunal an effective Court of international law with force behind it to impose its decisions. But so long as men go on believing in the sovereign power of machinery, it is not likely that the gods either will cease from their studied irony.

There have been other speculations and reasonings; ingenious minds have searched for a firmer and more rational ground of faith. The first of these was propounded in a book by a Russian writer which had an enormous success in its day but has now passed into the silence. Science was to bring war to an end by making it physically impossible. It was mathematically proved that with modern weapons two equal armies would fight each other to a standstill, attack would become impossible except by numbers thrice those of the defence and war therefore would bring no military decision but only an infructuous upheaval and disturbance of the organised life of the nations. When the Russo-Japanese war almost immediately proved that attack and victory were still possible and the battle-fury of man superior to the fury of his death-dealing engines, another book was published, called by a title which has turned into a jest upon the writer, *The Great Illusion*, to prove that the idea of a commercial advantage to be gained by war and conquest was an illusion and that as soon as this was understood and the sole benefit of peaceful interchange realised, the peoples would abandon a method of settlement now chiefly undertaken from motives of commercial expansion, yet whose disastrous result was only to disorganise fatally the commercial prosperity it sought to serve. The present war came as the immediate answer of the gods to this sober and rational proposition. It has been fought for conquest and commercial expansion and it is proposed, even when it has been fought out on the field, to follow it up by a commercial struggle between the belligerent nations.

The men who wrote these books were capable thinkers but they ignored the one thing that matters, human nature. The present war has justified to a certain extent the Russian writer though by developments he did not foresee; scientific warfare

has brought military movement to a standstill and baffled the strategist and the tactician, it has rendered decisive victory impossible except by overwhelming numbers or an overwhelming weight of artillery. But this has not made war impossible, it has only changed its character; it has at the most replaced the war of military decisions by that of military and financial exhaustion aided by the grim weapon of famine. The English writer on the other hand erred by isolating the economic motive as the one factor that weighed; he ignored the human lust of dominion which, carried into the terms of commercialism, means the undisputed control of markets and the exploitation of helpless populations. Again, when we rely upon the disturbance of organised national and international life as a preventive of war, we forget the boundless power of self-adaptation which man possesses; that power has been shown strikingly enough in the skill and ease with which the organisation and finance of peace were replaced in the present crisis by the organisation and finance of war. And when we rely upon Science to make war impossible, we forget that the progress of Science means a series of surprises and that it means also a constant effort of human ingenuity to overcome impossibilities and find fresh means of satisfying our ideas, desires and instincts. Science may well make war of the present type with shot and shell and mines and battleships an impossibility and yet develop and put in their place simpler or more summary means which may bring back an easier organisation of warfare.

So long as war does not become psychologically impossible, it will remain or, if banished for a while, return. War itself, it is hoped, will end war; the expense, the horror, the butchery, the disturbance of tranquil life, the whole confused sanguinary madness of the thing has reached or will reach such colossal proportions that the human race will fling the monstrosity behind it in weariness and disgust. But weariness and disgust, horror and pity, even the opening of the eyes to reason by the practical fact of the waste of human life and energy and the harm and extravagance are not permanent factors; they last only while the lesson is fresh. Afterwards, there is forgetfulness;

human nature recuperates itself and recovers the instincts that were temporarily dominated. A long peace, even a certain organisation of peace may conceivably result, but so long as the heart of man remains what it is, the peace will come to an end, the organisation will break down under the stress of human passions. War is no longer, perhaps, a biological necessity, but it is still a psychological necessity; what is within us, must manifest itself outside.

Meanwhile it is well that every false hope and confident prediction should be answered as soon as may well be by the irony of the gods; for only so can we be driven to the perception of the real remedy. Only when man has developed not merely a fellow-feeling with all men, but a dominant sense of unity and commonalty, only when he is aware of them not merely as brothers,—that is a fragile bond,—but as parts of himself, only when he has learned to live not in his separate personal and communal ego-sense, but in a larger universal consciousness can the phenomenon of war, with whatever weapons, pass out of his life without the possibility of return. Meanwhile that he should struggle even by illusions towards that end, is an excellent sign; for it shows that the truth behind the illusion is pressing towards the hour when it may become manifest as reality.

The Unseen Power

AWAR has ended, a world has perished in the realm of thought and begun to disappear in the order of outward Nature. The war that has ended, was fought in physical trenches, with shell and shot, with machine-gun and tank and aeroplane, with mangling of limbs and crash of physical edifices and rude uptearing of the bosom of our mother earth; the new war, or the old continued in another form, that is already beginning, will be fought more with mental trenches and bomb-proof shelters, with reconnaissances and batteries and moving machines of thought and word, propaganda and parties and programmes, with mangling of the desire-souls of men and of nations, crash of many kinds of thrones and high-built institutions and strong uptearing of the old earth of custom which man has formed as a layer over the restless molten forces of evolutionary Nature. The old world that is shaken outwardly in its bases and already crumbling in some of its parts, is the economic and materialistic civilisation which mankind has been forming for the last few centuries from once new materials now growing rapidly effete pieced out with broken remnants of antiquity and the middle ages. The period of military conflict just at an end came to breach that which thought had already been sapping, an era of revolutions has opened which is likely to complete the ruin and prepare the building of a new structure. In this struggle the question arises to the thinking man, what Power or what Powers are expressing their will or their strivings in this upheaval? and we, what power or powers shall we serve? to what thing inward or superhuman, since outward thrones and systems are but as leaves driven before the storm-wind of the breath of Time, shall we owe allegiance? what or whom is it that we shall fight to enthrone?

Men fight for their personal or communal or national interests or for ideas and principles of which they make watchwords and battle-cries. But the largest human interests are only means and instruments which some Force greater than themselves breaks or uses in its inconscient impulse or else for its conscious purposes; ideas and principles are births of our minds which are born, reign and pass away and they are mere words unless they express some power of our being and of world-being which finds in them a mental self-expression. Something there is greater than our thoughts and desires, something more constant and insistent which lasts and grows beyond and yet by their changings. If no such thing were, then all this human effort would be a vain perturbation, the life of man only the busy instinctive routine of the hive and the ant-hill on a little higher scale, but with more useless suffering in it and less economy and wisdom, and our thought a vain glittering of imaginations weaving out involuntarily a web like that of old legend that is spun and respun only to be undone and again undone and of reasonings that build a series of intellectual and practical conventions which we represent to ourselves as the truth and the right, making the fallacies of our minds a substitute for wisdom and the fallacies of our social living a substitute for happiness. For this is certain that nothing we form and no outward system we create can last beyond its appointed or else its possible time. As this great materialistic civilisation of Europe to which the high glowing dawn of the Renaissance gave its brilliant birth and the dry brazen afternoon of nineteenth-century rationalism its hard maturity, is passing away and the bosom of earth and the soul of man heave a sigh of relief at its going, so whatever new civilisation we construct after this evening of the cycle, *yuga-sandhyā*, on which we are entering,—for those are surely mistaken who think it is already the true dawn,—will also live its time and collapse fiercely or decay dully,—unless indeed there is that eternal Spirit in things and he should have found in its keynote the first sounds of the strain of his real harmony, in which case it may be the first of an ascending series of changes to the creation of a greater humanity. Otherwise, all this vast clash

and onset of peoples and world-wide bloodshed would be only a fortuitous nightmare, and the happiest known age of nation or mankind only the pleasant dream of a moment. Then the old-world gospel which bade us look upon human life as a vanity of vanities, would be the only wisdom.

But with that creed the soul of man has never remained contented and still less can we at the present day live in it, because this intuition of a greater Power than our apparent selves in the workings of the world is now growing upon the race and the vast sense of an unaccomplished aim in the urge of life is driving it to an unprecedented effort of human thought and energy. In such a moment even the hugest calamities cannot exhaust the life or discourage its impetus, but rather impel it to a new élan of endeavour; for the flames of thought rise higher than the flames of the conflagration that destroys and see in it a meaning and the promise of a new creation. In the destruction that has been effected, in the void that has been left the mind sees only more room for hope to grow and a wide space that the Spirit who builds in Time has cleared for his new structure. For who that has eyes at all to see cannot see this, that in what has happened, immense Powers have been at work which nourish a vaster world-purpose than the egoistic mind of individual or nation could mete with their yard-measure of narrow personal idea or communal interest and for which the motives and passions of governments and peoples were only tools or opportunities? When the autocrats and the war-lords of the east and the centre resolved to dare this huge catastrophe in order to seize from it the crown of their ambitions, when they drove madly to the precipice of an incalculable world-conflict, they could have no inkling that within four years or less their thrones would have fallen, themselves be slain or flee into exile and all for which they stood be hastening into the night of the past; only that which impelled them foresaw and intended it. Nor were the peoples who staggered unwillingly over the brink of war, more enlightened of the secret purpose: defence of what they were and possessed, wrath at a monstrous aggression which was a menace to their ordered European civilisation, drove their will and inflamed their

resolution. Yet to convict that civilisation of error and prepare another era of humanity was the intention of the Force that has given them victory, its voice echoed confusedly in their thought and growing clearer in the minds of those who entered later with a deliberate and conscious will into the struggle.

Great has been the havoc and ruin, immense the suffering, thick the blood-red cloud of darkness enveloping the world, heavy the toll of life, bottomless the expenditure of treasure and human resources, and all has not yet been worked out, the whole price has not yet been paid; for the after-effects of the war are likely to be much greater than its present effects and much that by an effort of concentration has resisted the full shock of the earthquake will fall in the after-tremblings. Well might the mind of a man during the calamity, aware of the Power that stood over the world wrapped in this tempest, repeat the words of Arjuna on the field of Kurukshetra,—

*drṣṭvādbhutam rūpam ugram tavedam
lokatrayam pravyathitam mahātman. . . .
drṣṭvā hi tvām pravyathitāntarātmā
dhṛtim na vindāmi śamām ca viṣṇo. . . .
yathā nadinām bahavo'mbuvegāḥ
samudram evābhimukhā dravanti,
tathā tavāmī nara-loka-vīrā
viśanti vaktrāṇyabhivijvalanti.
yathā pradiptam jvalanam pataṅgā
viśanti nāśaya samṛddhavēgāḥ,
tathaiva nāśaya viśanti lokās
tavāpi vaktrāṇi samṛddhavēgāḥ.
lelibyase grasamānāḥ samantāl
lokān samagrān vadanair jvaladbhil,
tejobhir āpūrya jagat samagram
bhāsas tavogrāḥ pratapanti viṣṇo.
ākhyāhi me ko bhavān ugrarūpo
namo'stu te devavara prasīda,
vijñātum icchāmi bhavantam ādyam
na hi prajānāmi tava pravṛttim.*

“When is seen this thy fierce and astounding form, the three worlds are all in pain and suffer, O thou mighty Spirit. . . . Troubled and in anguish is the soul within me as I look upon thee and I find no peace or gladness. . . . As the speed of many rushing waters races towards the ocean, so all these heroes of the world of man are entering into thy many mouths of flame. As a swarm of moths with ever increasing speed fall to their destruction into a fire that someone has kindled, so now the nations with ever increasing speed are entering into thy jaws of doom. Thou lickest the regions all around with thy tongues and thou art swallowing up all the nations in thy mouths of burning; all the world is filled with the blaze of thy energies; fierce and terrible are thy lustres and they burn us, O Vishnu. Declare to me who art thou that comest to us in this form of fierceness; salutation to thee, O thou great godhead, turn thy heart to grace! I would know who art thou who wast from the beginning, for I know not the will of thy workings.”

If the first answer might seem to come in the same words that answered the appeal of Arjuna, “I am the Time-Spirit, destroyer of the world, arisen huge-statured for the destruction of the nations,”

*kālo’smi loka-kṣaya-kṛt pravṛddho
lokān samāhartum iha pravṛttah,*

and the voice the same to those who would shrink back hesitating from participation in the devastating struggle and massacre, “Without thee even all these shall cease to be who stand in the opposing hosts, for already have I slain them in my foreseeing will; know thyself to be an instrument only of an end predestined,” — still in the end it is the Friend of man, the Charioteer of his battle and his journey who appears in the place of the form of destruction and the outcome of all the ruin is the *dharmaṛājya*, the kingdom of the Dharma. To humanity as to the warrior of Kurukshetra the concluding message has been uttered, “Therefore arise, destroy the foe, enjoy a rich and happy kingdom.” But the kingdom of what Dharma? It is doubtful enough whether as the nations were blind to the nature of the destruction that

was coming, they may not be at least purblind to the nature of the construction that is to be created. An increase of mechanical freedom to be lavished or doled out according to the needs, interests, hesitations of the old-world forces that still remain erect, a union effected by a patchwork of the remnants of the past and the unshaped materials of the future, a credit and debit account with fate writing off so much of the evil and error of the past as can no longer be kept and writing up as good capital, — with some diminutions by way of acquitment of conscience, part payment of overdue debts, — all that has not been hopelessly destroyed, an acceptance of the change already effected by the tempest or made immediately inevitable and a new system of embankments to prevent the farther encroachments of the flood, is not likely to put a successful term to the cataclysm. Even if a short-sighted sagacity could bring this about for a time by a combined effort of successful and organised egoisms making terms with the powerful Idea-forces that are abroad as the messengers of the Time-Spirit, still it would be only an artificial check leading to a new upheaval in the not distant future. A liquidation of the old bankrupt materialistic economism which will enable it to set up business again under a new name with a reserve capital and a clean ledger, will be a futile attempt to cheat destiny. Commercialism has no doubt its own dharma, its ideal of utilitarian justice and law and adjustment, its civilisation presided over by the sign of the Balance, and, its old measures being now annulled, it is eager enough to start afresh with a new system of calculated values. But a *dharmarājya* of the half-penitent Vaishya is not to be the final consummation of a time like ours pregnant with new revelations of thought and spirit and new creations in life, nor is a golden or rather a copper-gilt age of the sign of the Balance to be the glorious reward of this anguish and travail of humanity. It is surely the kingdom of another and higher dharma that is in preparation.

What that dharma is we can only know if we know this Power whose being and whose thought are at work behind all that we attempt and suffer, conceive and strive for. A former humanity conceived of it as a creative Divinity or almighty Power

high above man and his being and his effort or of a pantheon or hierarchy of universal Powers who looked upon and swayed the labour and passion and thought of the race. But the system of cosmic deities lacked a base and a principle of unity in their workings and above it the ancients were obliged to conceive of a vague and ineffable Divinity, the unknown God to whom they built a nameless altar, or a Necessity with face of sphinx and hands of bronze to whom the gods themselves had to give an ignorant obedience, and it left the life of man at once the victim of an inscrutable fate and the puppet of superhuman caprices. That to a great extent he is so long as he lives in his vital ego and is the servant of his own personal ideas and passions. Later religions gave a name and some body of form and quality to the one unknown Godhead and proclaimed an ideal law which they gave out as his word and scripture. But the dogmatism of a partial and unlived knowledge and the external tendencies of the human mind darkened the illuminations of religion with the confusions of error and threw over its face strange masks of childish and cruel superstitions. Religion too by putting God far above in distant heavens made man too much of a worm of the earth little and vile before his Creator and admitted only by a caprice of his favour to a doubtful salvation in superhuman worlds. Modern thought seeking to make a clear riddance of these past conceptions had to substitute something else in its place, and what it saw and put there was the material law of Nature and the biological law of life of which human reason was to be the faithful exponent and human science the productive utiliser and profiteer. But to apply the mechanical blindness of the rule of physical Nature as the sole guide of thinking and seeing man is to go against the diviner law of his being and maim his higher potentiality. Material and vital Nature is only a first form of our being and to overcome and rise beyond its formula is the very sense of a human evolution. Another and greater Power than hers is the master of this effort, and human reason or human science is not that Godhead, but can only be at best one and not the greatest of its ministers. It is not human reason and human science which have been working out their

ends in or through the tempest that has laid low so many of their constructions. A greater Spirit awaits a deeper questioning to reveal his unseen form and his hidden purpose.

Something of this truth we have begun to see dimly, in the return to more spiritual notions and in the idea of a kingdom of God to be built in the life of humanity. On the old sense of a Power in the universe of which the world that we live in is the field, is supervening the nearer perception of a Godhead in man, the unseen king of whom the outer man is the veil and of whom our mind and life can be the servants and living instruments and our perfected souls the clear mirrors. But we have to see more lucidly and in the whole before we can know this Godhead. There are three powers and forms in which the Being who is at work in things presents himself to our vision. There is first the form of him that we behold in the universe, but that, or at least what we see of it in the appearances of things, is not the whole truth of him; it is indeed only a first material shape and vital foundation which he has offered for the starting-point of our growth, an initial sum of preliminary realisations from which we have to proceed and to transcend them. The next form is that of which man alone here has the secret, for in him it is progressively revealing itself in a partial and always incomplete accomplishing and unfolding. His thoughts, his ideals, his dreams, his attempts at a high self-exceeding are the clues by which he attempts to discover the Spirit, the moulds in which he tries to seize the form of the Divinity. But they too are only a partial light and not the whole form of the Godhead. Something waits beyond which the human mind approaches in a shapeless aspiration to an ineffable Perfection, an infinite Light, an infinite Power, an infinite Love, a universal Good and Beauty. This is not something that is not yet in perfect being, a God who is becoming or who has to be created by man; it is the Eternal of whom this infinite ideal is a mental reflection. It is beyond the form of the universe and these psychological realisations of the human being and yet it is here too in man and subsists surrounding him in all the powers of the world he lives in. It is both the Spirit who is in the universe and the invisible king in man who is the master of his works. It

develops in the universe through laws which are not complete here or not filled in in their sense and action until humanity shall have fully evolved in its nature the potentialities of the mind and spirit. It works in man, but through his individual and corporate ego so long as he dwells within the knot of his present mentality. Only when his race knows God and lives in the Divine, will the ideal sense of his strivings begin to unfold itself and the kingdom be founded, *rājyam samrddham*.

When we try to build our outer life in obedience to our ego, our interests, our passions or our vital needs only or else in a form of our vital needs served and enlarged by our intellect, but not enlightened with a greater spiritual meaning, we are living within the law of the first cosmic formulation. It is as insistent Rudra that the unseen Power meets us there, the Master of the evolution, the Lord of Karma, the King of justice and judgment, who is easily placated with sacrifice and effort, for even to the Asura and Rakshasa, the Titan and the giant he gives the fruit of their *tapasyā*, but who is swift also to wrath and every time that man offends against the law, even though it be in ignorance, or stands stiff in his ego against the urge of the evolution or provokes the rebound of Karma, he strikes without mercy; through strife and stumbling, through passioning and yearning and fierce stress of will and giant endeavour, construction and destruction, slow labour of evolution and rushing speed of revolution Rudra works out the divine purpose. When on the contrary we seek to shape our life by the Ideal, it is the severe Lord of Truth who meets us with his questioning. Then in so far as we work in the sincerity of the inner truth, we shall live in an increasing harmony of the result of a divine working. But if the measures of our ideal are false or if we cast into the balance the unjust weights of our egoism and hypocrisy and self-deceiving or if we misuse the truth for our narrower ends, if we turn it into a lie or a convention or an outward machinery without the living soul of the truth in it, then we must pay a heavy reckoning. For as before we fell into the terrible hand of Rudra, so now we fall into the subtler more dangerous noose of Varuna. Only if we can see the Truth and live in it, shall our aspiration be satisfied.

Then it is the Master of Freedom, the Lord of Love, the Spirit of unity who shall inform the soul of the individual and take up the world's endeavour. He is the great Liberator and the strong and gentle founder of Perfection.

It is the wrath of Rudra that has swept over the earth and the track of his footprints can be seen in these ruins. There has come as a result upon the race the sense of having lived in many falsehoods and the need of building according to an ideal. Therefore we have now to meet the question of the Master of Truth. Two great words of the divine Truth have forced themselves insistently on our minds through the crash of the ruin and the breath of the tempest and are now the leading words of the hoped-for reconstruction,— freedom and unity. But everything depends, first, upon the truth of our vision of them, secondly, upon the sincerity with which we apply it, last and especially on the inwardness of our realisation. Vain will be the mechanical construction of unity, if unity is not in the heart of the race and if it be made only a means for safeguarding and organising our interests; the result will then be only, as it was in the immediate past, a fiercer strife and new outbreaks of revolution and anarchy. No paltering mechanisms which have the appearance but not the truth of freedom, will help us; the new structure, however imposing, will only become another prison and compel a fresh struggle for liberation. The one safety for man lies in learning to live from within outward, not depending on institutions and machinery to perfect him, but out of his growing inner perfection availing to shape a more perfect form and frame of life; for by this inwardness we shall best be able both to see the truth of the high things which we now only speak with our lips and form into outward intellectual constructions, and to apply their truth sincerely to all our outward living. If we are to found the kingdom of God in humanity, we must first know God and see and live the diviner truth of our being in ourselves; otherwise how shall a new manipulation of the constructions of the reason and scientific systems of efficiency which have failed us in the past, avail to establish it? It is because there are plenty of signs that the old error continues and only a minority, leaders perhaps

in light, but not yet in action, are striving to see more clearly, inwardly and truly, that we must expect as yet rather the last twilight which divides the dying from the unborn age than the real dawning. For a time, since the mind of man is not yet ready, the old spirit and method may yet be strong and seem for a short while to prosper; but the future lies with the men and nations who first see beyond both the glare and the dusk the gods of the morning and prepare themselves to be fit instruments of the Power that is pressing towards the light of a greater ideal.

Self-Determination

A NEW phrase has recently been cast out from the blood-stained yeast of war into the shifty language of politics,—that strange language full of Maya and falsities, of self-illusion and deliberate delusion of others, which almost immediately turns all true and vivid phrases into a jargon, so that men may fight in a cloud of words without any clear sense of the thing they are battling for,—it is the luminous description of liberty as the just power, the freely exercised right of self-determination. The word is in itself a happy discovery, a thought-sign of real usefulness. For it helps to make definite and manageable what was apt till now to be splendidly vague and nebulous. Its invention is a sign at once of a growing clarity of conception about this great good which man has been striving to achieve for himself through the centuries, as yet without any satisfying success to boast of anywhere, and of the increasing subjectivity of our ideas about life. This clarity and this subjectivity must indeed go together; for we can only get good hold of the right end of the great ideas which should govern our ways of living when we begin to understand that their healthful process is from within outward, and that the opposite method, the mechanical, ends always by turning living realities into formal conventions. No doubt, to man the animal the mechanical alone seems to be real; but to man the soul, man the thinker through whom we arrive at our inner manhood, only that is true which he can feel as a truth within him and feel without as his external self-expression. All else is a deceptive charlatanry, an acceptance of shows for truths, of external appearances for realities, which are so many devices to keep him in bondage.

Liberty in one shape or another ranks among the most ancient and certainly among the most difficult aspirations of our race: it arises from a radical instinct of our being and is yet

opposed to all our circumstances; it is our eternal good and our condition of perfection, but our temporal being has failed to find its key. That perhaps is because true freedom is only possible if we live in the infinite, live, as the Vedanta bids us, in and from our self-existent being; but our natural and temporal energies seek for it at first not in ourselves, but in our external conditions. This great indefinable thing, liberty, is in its highest and ultimate sense a state of being; it is self living in itself and determining by its own energy what it shall be inwardly and, eventually, by the growth of a divine spiritual power within determining too what it shall make of its external circumstances and environment; that is the largest and freest sense of self-determination. But when we start from the natural and temporal life, what we practically come to mean by liberty is a convenient elbow-room for our natural energies to satisfy themselves without being too much impinged upon by the self-assertiveness of others. And that is a difficult problem to solve, because the liberty of one, immediately it begins to act, knocks up fatally against the liberty of another; the free running of many in the same field means a free chaos of collisions. That was at one time glorified under the name of the competitive system, and dissatisfaction with its results has led to the opposite idea of State socialism, which supposes that the negation of individual liberty in the collective being of the State can be made to amount by some mechanical process to a positive sum of liberty nicely distributable to all in a carefully guarded equality. The individual gives up his freedom of action and possession to the State which in return doles out to him a regulated liberty, let us say, a sufficient elbow-room so parcelled out that he shall not at all butt into the ribs of his neighbour. It is admirable in theory, logically quite unexceptionable, but in practice, one suspects, it would amount to a very oppressive, because a very mechanical slavery of the individual to the community, or rather to something indefinite that calls itself the community.

Experience has so far shown us that the human attempt to arrive at a mechanical freedom has only resulted in a very relative liberty and even that has been enjoyed for the most part

by some at the expense of others. It has amounted usually to the rule of the majority by a minority, and many strange things have been done in its name. Ancient liberty and democracy meant in Greece the self-rule — variegated by periodical orgies of mutual throat-cutting — of a smaller number of freemen of all ranks who lived by the labour of a great mass of slaves. In recent times liberty and democracy have been, and still are, a cant assertion which veils under a skilfully moderated plutocratic system the rule of an organised successful bourgeoisie over a proletariat at first submissive, afterwards increasingly dissatisfied and combined for recalcitrant self-assertion. The earliest use of liberty and democracy by the emancipated proletariat has been the crude forceful tyranny of an ill-organised labour oligarchy over a quite disorganised peasantry and an impotently recalcitrant bourgeoisie. And just as the glorious possession of liberty by the community has been held to be consistent with the oppression of four-fifths or three-fifths of the population by the remaining fraction, so it has till lately been held to be quite consistent with the complete subjection of one half of mankind, the woman half, to the physically stronger male. The series continues through a whole volume of anomalies, including of course the gloriously beneficent and profitable exploitation of subject peoples by emancipated nations who, it seems, are entitled to that domination by their priesthood of the sacred cult of freedom. They mean no doubt to extend it to the exploited at some distant date, but take care meanwhile to pay themselves the full price of their holy office before they deliver the article. Even the best machinery of this mechanical freedom yet discovered amounts to the unmodified will of a bare majority, or rather to its selection of a body of rulers who coerce in its name all minorities and lead it to issues of which it has itself no clear perception.

These anomalies, — anomalies of many kinds are inseparable from the mechanical method, — are a sign that the real meaning of liberty has not yet been understood. Nevertheless the aspiration and the effort itself towards the realisation of a great idea cannot fail to bear some fruit, and modern liberty and

democracy, however imperfect and relative, have had this result that for the communities which have followed them, they have removed the pressure of the more obvious, outward and aggressive forms of oppression and domination which were inherent in the systems of the past. They have made life a little more tolerable for the mass, and if they have not yet made life free, they have at least given more liberty to thought and to the effort to embody a freer thought in a more adequate form of life. This larger space for the thought in man and its workings was the necessary condition for a growing clarity which must enlighten in the end the crude conceptions with which the race has started and refine the crude methods and forms in which it has embodied them. The attempt to govern life by an increasing light of thought rather than allow the rough and imperfect actualities of life to govern and to limit the mind is a distinct sign of advance in human progress. But the true turning-point will come with the farther step which initiates the attempt to govern life by that of which thought itself is only a sign and an instrument, the soul, the inner being, and to make our ways of living a freer opportunity for the growing height and breadth of its need of self-fulfilment. That is the real, the profounder sense which we shall have to learn to attach to the idea of self-determination as the effective principle of liberty.

The principle of self-determination really means this that within every living human creature, man, woman and child, and equally within every distinct human collectivity growing or grown, half developed or adult there is a self, a being, which has the right to grow in its own way, to find itself, to make its life a full and a satisfied instrument and image of its being. This is the first principle which must contain and overtop all others; the rest is a question of conditions, means, expedients, accommodations, opportunities, capacities, limitations, none of which must be allowed to abrogate the sovereignty of the first essential principle. But it can only prevail if it is understood with a right idea of this self and its needs and claims. The first danger of the principle of self-determination, as of all others, is that it may be interpreted, like most of the ideals of our human

existence in the past, in the light of the ego, its interests and its will towards self-satisfaction. So interpreted it will carry us no farther than before; we shall arrive at a point where our principle is brought up short, fails us, turns into a false or a half-true assertion of the mind and a convention of form which covers realities that are quite the opposite of itself.

For the ego has inalienably the instinct of a double self-assertion, its self-assertion against other egos and its self-assertion by means of other egos; in all its expansion it is impelled to subordinate their need to its own, to use them for its own purpose and for that purpose to establish some kind of control or domination or property in what it uses, whether by force or by dexterity, openly or covertly, by absorption or by some skilful turn of exploitation. Human lives cannot run upon free parallels; for they are compelled by Nature continually to meet, impinge on each other, intermix, and in the ego life that means always a clash. The first idea of our reason suggests that our human relations may be subjected to a mechanical accommodation of interests which will get rid of the clash and the strife; but this can only be done up to a certain point: at best we diminish some of the violence and crude obviousness of the clashing and the friction and give them a more subtle and less grossly perceptible form. Within that subtler form the principle of strife and exploitation continues; for always the egoistic instinct must be to use the accommodations to which it is obliged or induced to assent, as far as possible for its own advantage, and it is only limited in this impulse by the limits of its strength and capacity, by the sense of expediency and consequence, by the perception of some necessity for respecting other egoisms in order that its own egoism too may be respected. But these considerations can only tone down or hedge in the desire of a gross or a subtle domination and exploitation of others; they do not abrogate it.

The human mind has resorted to ethics as a corrective; but the first laws of ethical conduct also succeed at best in checking only the egoistic rule of life and do not overcome it. Therefore the ethical idea has pushed itself forward into the other and

opposite principle of altruism. The main general results have been a clearer perception of collective egoisms and their claim on the individual egoism and, secondly, a quite uncertain and indefinable mixture, strife and balancing of egoistic and altruistic motive in our conduct. Often enough altruism is there chiefly in profession or at best a quite superficial will which does not belong to the centre of our action; it becomes then either a deliberate or else a half-conscious camouflage by which egoism masks itself and gets at its object without being suspected. But even a sincere altruism hides within itself the ego, and to be able to discover the amount of it hidden up in our most benevolent or even self-sacrificing actions is the acid test of sincere self-introspection, nor can anyone really quite know himself who has not made ruthlessly this often painful analysis. It could not be otherwise; for the law of life cannot be self-immolation; self-sacrifice can only be a step in self-fulfilment. Nor can life be in its nature a one-sided self-giving; all giving must contain in itself some measure of receiving to have any fruitful value or significance. Altruism itself is more important even by the good it does to ourselves than by the good it does to others; for the latter is often problematical, but the former is certain, and its good consists in the growth of self, in an inner self-heightening and self-expansion. Not then any general law of altruism, but rather a self-recognition based upon mutual recognition must be the broad rule of our human relations. Life is self-fulfilment which moves upon a ground of mutuality; it involves a mutual use of one by the other, in the end of all by all. The whole question is whether this shall be done on the lower basis of the ego, attended by strife, friction and collision with whatever checks and controls, or whether it cannot be done by a higher law of our being which shall discover a means of reconciliation, free reciprocity and unity.

A right idea of the rule of self-determination may help to set us on the way to the discovery of this higher law. For we may note that this phrase self-determination reconciles and brings together in one complex notion the idea of liberty and the idea of law. These two powers of being tend in our first conceptions,

as in the first appearances of life itself, to be opposed to each other as rivals or enemies; we find therefore ranged against each other the champions of law and order and the defenders of liberty. There is the ideal which sets order first and liberty either nowhere or in an inferior category, because it is willing to accept any coercion of liberty which will maintain the mechanical stability of order; and there is the ideal which on the contrary sets liberty first and regards law either as a hostile compression or a temporarily necessary evil or at best a means of securing liberty by guarding against any violent and aggressive interference with it as between man and man. This use of law as a means of liberty may be advocated only in a minimum reducible to the just quantity necessary for its purpose, the individualistic idea of the matter, or raised to a maximum as in the socialistic idea that the largest sum of regulation will total up to or at least lead up to or secure the larger sum of freedom. We have continually too the most curious mixing up of the two ideas, as in the old-time claim of the capitalist to prevent the freedom of labour to organise so that the liberty of contract might be preserved, or in the singular sophistical contention of the Indian defenders of orthodox caste rigidity on its economic side that coercion of a man to follow his ancestral profession in disregard not only of his inclinations, but of his natural tendencies and aptitudes is a securing to the individual of his natural right, his freedom to follow his hereditary nature. We see a similar confusion of ideas in the claim of European statesmen to train Asiatic or African peoples to liberty, which means in fact to teach them in the beginning liberty in the school of subjection and afterwards to compel them at each stage in the progress of a mechanical self-government to satisfy the tests and notions imposed on them by an alien being and consciousness instead of developing freely a type and law of their own. The right idea of self-determination makes a clean sweep of these confusions. It makes it clear that liberty should proceed by the development of the law of one's own being determined from within, evolving out of oneself and not determined from outside by the idea and will of another. There remains the problem of relations, of the individual and

the collective self-determination and of the interaction of the self-determination of one on the self-determination of another. That cannot be finally settled by any mechanical solution, but only by the discovery of some meeting-place of the law of our self-determination with the common law of mutuality, where they begin to become one. It signifies in fact the discovery of an inner and larger self other than the mere ego, in which our individual self-fulfilment no longer separates us from others but at each step of our growth calls for an increasing unity.

But it is from the self-determination of the free individual within the free collectivity in which he lives that we have to start, because so only can we be sure of a healthy growth of freedom and because too the unity to be arrived at is that of individuals growing freely towards perfection and not of human machines working in regulated unison or of souls suppressed, mutilated and cut into one or more fixed geometrical patterns. The moment we sincerely accept this idea, we have to travel altogether away from the old notion of the right of property of man in man which still lurks in the human mind where it does not possess it. The trail of this notion is all over our past, the right of property of the father over the child, of the man over the woman, of the ruler or the ruling class or power over the ruled, of the State over the individual. The child was in the ancient patriarchal idea the live property of the father; he was his creation, his production, his own reproduction of himself; the father, rather than God or the universal Life in place of God, stood as the author of the child's being; and the creator has every right over his creation, the producer over his manufacture. He had the right to make of him what he willed, and not what the being of the child really was within, to train and shape and cut him according to the parental ideas and not rear him according to his own nature's deepest needs, to bind him to the paternal career or the career chosen by the parent and not that to which his nature and capacity and inclination pointed, to fix for him all the critical turning-points of his life even after he had reached maturity. In education the child was regarded not as a soul meant to grow, but as brute psychological stuff to be

shaped into a fixed mould by the teacher. We have travelled to another conception of the child as a soul with a being, a nature and capacities of his own who must be helped to find them, to find himself, to grow into their maturity, into a fullness of physical and vital energy and the utmost breadth, depth and height of his emotional, his intellectual and his spiritual being. So too the subjection of woman, the property of the man over the woman, was once an axiom of social life and has only in recent times been effectively challenged. So strong was or had become the instinct of this domination in the male animal man, that even religion and philosophy have had to sanction it, very much in that formula in which Milton expresses the height of masculine egoism, "He for God only, she for God in him," — if not actually indeed for him in the place of God. This idea too is crumbling into the dust, though its remnants still cling to life by many strong tentacles of old legislation, continued instinct, persistence of traditional ideas; the fiat has gone out against it in the claim of woman to be regarded, she too, as a free individual being. The right of property of the rulers in the ruled has perished by the advance of liberty and democracy; in the form of national imperialism it still indeed persists, though more now by commercial greed than by the instinct of political domination; intellectually this form too of possessional egoism has received its death-blow, vitally it still endures. The right of property of the State in the individual which threatened to take the place of all these, has now had its real spiritual consequence thrown into relief by the lurid light of the war, and we may hope that its menace to human liberty will be diminished by this clearer knowledge. We are at least advancing to a point at which it may be possible to make the principle of self-determination a present and pressing, if not yet an altogether dominant force in the whole shaping of human life.

Self-determination viewed from this subjective standpoint carries us back at once towards the old spiritual idea of the Being within, whose action, once known and self-revealed, is not an obedience to external and mechanical impulses, but proceeds in each from the powers of the soul, an action self-determined by

the essential quality and principle of which all our becoming is the apparent movement, *svabhāva-niyatam karma*. But it is only as we rise higher and higher in ourselves and find out our true self and its true powers that we can get at the full truth of this swabhava. Our present existence is at the most a growth towards it and therefore an imperfection, and its chief imperfection is the individual's egoistic idea of self which reappears enlarged in the collective egoism. Therefore an egoistic self-determination or a modified individualism, is not the true solution; if that were all, we could never get beyond a balance and, in progress, a zigzag of conflict and accommodation. The ego is not the true circle of the self; the law of mutuality which meets it at every turn and which it misuses, arises from the truth that there is a secret unity between our self and the self of others and therefore between our own lives and the lives of others. The law of our self-determination has to wed itself to the self-determination of others and to find the way to enact a real union through this mutuality. But its basis can only be found within and not through any mechanical adjustment. It lies in the discovery within by the being in the course of its self-expansion and self-fulfilment that these things at every turn depend on the self-expansion and self-fulfilment of those around us, because we are secretly one being with them and one life. It is in philosophical language the recognition of the one self in all who fulfils himself variously in each; it is the finding of the law of the divine being in each unifying itself with the law of the divine being in all. At once the key of the problem is shifted from without to within, from the visible externalities of social and political adjustment to the spiritual life and truth which can alone provide its key.

Not that the outer life has to be neglected; on the contrary the pursual of the principle in one field or on one level, provided we do not limit or fix ourselves in it, helps its disclosure in other fields and upon other levels. Still if we have not the unity within, it is in vain that we shall try to enforce it from without by law and compulsion or by any assertion in outward forms. Intellectual assertion too, like the mechanical, is insufficient; only the spiritual can give it, because it alone has the secure

power of realisation. The ancient truth of the self is the eternal truth; we have to go back upon it in order to carry it out in newer and fuller ways for which a past humanity was not ready. The recognition and fulfilment of the divine being in oneself and in man, the kingdom of God within and in the race is the basis on which man must come in the end to the possession of himself as a free self-determining being and of mankind too in a mutually possessing self-expansion as a harmoniously self-determining united existence.

A League of Nations

ANCIENT tradition believed in a golden age of mankind which lay in the splendid infancy of a primeval past; it looked back to some type or symbol of original perfection, Saturnian epoch, Satya Yuga, an age of sincere being and free unity when the sons of heaven were leaders of the human life and mind and the law of God was written, not in ineffective books, but on the tablets of man's heart. Then he needed no violence of outer law or government to restrain him from evil or to cut and force his free being into the machine-made Procrustean mould of a social ideal; for a natural divine rule in his members was the spontaneous and sufficient safeguard of his liberty. This tradition was once so universal that one might almost be tempted to see in it the race memory of some golden and splendid realisation, not perhaps a miraculous divine beginning, but some past spiral cusp and apex, some topmost gloriously mounting arc of the cycles,—if there were not the equal chance of its being no more than a heightened example of that very common ideally retrospective tendency in the human mind which glorifies the past out of all perspective or proportion, blots out its shadows and sees it in some haze or deceiving light against the dark immediate shadow of the present, or else a projection from his sense of the something divine, pure and perfect within him from which he has fallen, placed by symbolic legend not in the eternal but in time, not inwardly in his spiritual being, but outwardly in his obscure existence on this crude and transient crust of Earth. What concerns us more is that we find often associated with this memory or this backward-looking illusion, a vague hope far or near, or even a more precise prophetic or religious forward-looking tradition of a coming back to us of that golden perfection, *Astraea redux, Saturnia regna*,—let us say, a return from the falling line of the cycle to another similar, perhaps even

greater high-glowing cusp and apex. Thus in the human mind which looks always before and after, its great dream of the ideal past completed itself by a greater dream of the ideal future.

These things modern man with his scientific and secularised mentality finds it difficult to believe in unless he has first theosophsised or mysticised himself into a fine freedom from the positive scientific intelligence. Science which traces so confidently the nobly complete and astonishing evolution of our race in a fairly swift straight line from the ape man to the dazzlingly unfixable brilliancy of Mr. Lloyd George and the dyspeptic greatness of Rockefeller, rejects the old traditions as dreams and poetic figments. But to recompense us for our loss it has given us instead a more practicable, persistent and immediate vision of modern progress and the future hope of a rational and mechanically perfectible society: that is the one real religion still left, the new Jerusalem of the modern creed of a positivist sociology. The ideal past has lost its glamour, but a sober glamour of the future is brought near to us and takes on to the constructive human reason a closer hue of reality. The Asiatic mind is indeed still incurably prone to the older type of imagination which took and still takes so many inspiring forms, second coming of Christ, City of God, the Divine Family, advent of Messiah, Mahdi or Avatar,—but whatever the variety of the form, the essence is the same, a religious or spiritual idealisation of a possible future humanity. The European temperament—and we are all trying to become for the moment, superficially at least, white, brown, yellow or black Europeans,—demands something more familiarly terrestrial and tangible, a secular, social, political dream of evolving humanity, a perfected democracy, socialism, communism, anarchism. But whichever line we take and whether it be truth or illusion, the thing behind is the same and would seem to be a necessity of our human mind and will to action. We cannot do without some kind of futurist idealism. Something we must labour to build individually and collectively out of ourselves and our life, unless we would be content with the commonness and stumbling routine of a half-made and half-animal manhood,—a self-dethronement

to which that which is greatest in us will never consent,—and man cannot build greatly whether in art or life, unless he can conceive an idea and form of perfection and, conceiving, believe in his power to achieve it out of however rebellious and unductile a stuff of nature. Deprive him of this faith in his power for perfection and you slay or maim his greatest creative or self-creative faculty. In the absence then of any immediate practicability of that higher and profounder dream of a spiritually united and perfected humanity, the dream of social and political meliorism may be accepted as the strongest available incentive to keep humanity going forward. It is better that it should have the ideal of a saving machinery than that it should have no ideal at all, no figure of a larger, better and sweeter life.

This secular dream of a future golden or half-golden age of a more perfected, rational and peacefully cooperative society has taken recently a singular step forward in the effectuating imagination of mankind and even got as far as some attempt at a first step towards actual effectuation. In ideal and imagination it has assumed the form of a political and economic society of the nations which will get rid of the cruel and devastating device of war, establish a reign of international law and order and solve without clash, strife or collision, by reason, by cooperation, by arbitration, by mutual accommodation all the more dangerous problems which still disturb or imperil the comfortable peace, amity and organised productiveness which should be the reasonable state of mankind. International peace, an ordered legality and arrangement of the world's affairs, a guaranteed liberty,—or for the unfit a preparation and schooling for liberty,—an organised unity of the life of the race, this is the figure of the golden age which we are now promised. At the first sight one has some sense of a lacuna somewhere, a suspicion of a perfection too external and too well-regulated by clockwork and a timidly insistent idea that it may perhaps be neither so readily feasible nor so lyrically enchanting as its prophets pretend. One may be disposed to ask, what of the spirit and soul of man, the greatness of the inner perfection which can

alone support and give security and some kind of psychological reality to even the most ideal arrangement of his outer life,— how far that has gone or is likely to go in the near future, or what means or opportunities the new order proposes to offer for its growth and satisfaction. But this is no doubt too esoteric a way of looking at things. The practical western mind does not trouble itself overmuch with these subtleties; it prefers, and rightly enough, since to get something done seems to be the chief actual business of man in life, to hasten to the matter in hand and realise something useful, visible and tangible, good enough for a practical beginning or step forward. It believes besides in the omnipotence of law and institution to make the life of man conformable to his intellectual or spiritual ideals; it is satisfied if it can write down and find sanctions for a good and convenient system of laws, a compact or constitution, set up the mechanical means for the enforcement of its idea, build into effective form a workable institution. Other less palpable things, if they are at all indispensable, are expected to develop of themselves, as surely they ought under good mechanical conditions.

Good philosophical as well as practical justification may be put forward for this attitude. Form after all is an effective suggestion to the soul; machinery, as even churches and religions have been prone to believe, is all-powerful and can be trusted to create whatever you may need of the spirit. God himself or contriving Nature had first to invent the machinery and form of a universe and could only then work out in its mould some figure of the spirit. Therefore the sign of great hope, the good tidings of peace and good will unto men is not that a new and diviner or simply a more human spirit has been born into humanity, seized upon its leaders and extended itself among its ego-ridden, passion-driven, interest-governed millions, but that an institution has been begotten at Paris with the blessings of Premiers and Presidents,— the constitution of an international society, supported by the armed force of great nations and empires and therefore sure to be practicable, prosper and succeed, has been got into shape which will make war, militarism, oppression, exploitation an ugly dream of the past, induce Capital and Labour, lion and

lamb, to lie down side by side in peace and not, as a wicked Bolshevism proposes, one well digested inside the other, and in fact bring about before long, sooner it is hoped rather than later, the grand fraternity of mankind. This is good news, if true. Still, before we enter the house of thanksgiving, let us pause a little and cast an eye of scrutiny on this new infant phenomenon.

A just, generous, cordial and valid League of nations is the thing which has been created, it seems, to replace the old unjust Balances of Power and stumbling, quarrelsome Concerts. And if it is to succeed better than the loose, ineffective and easily dissoluble things which it supplants, it must satisfy, one would think, certain conditions which they did not even attempt to fulfil. And one would at first sight fix something like the following as the indispensable conditions. First, this League must draw into its circle in one way or another all the existing nations of the earth; and that it must do on both just and agreeable terms so that they may join willingly and gladly and without any serious misgivings, reservations or heart-burnings; it must satisfy each and all by a fair and effective and, one must add in these democratic days, an honourable and equal position in this new society of the peoples. Since it should command and retain their moral assent and support, if it is to maintain in being an otherwise insecure material adhesion, it must, in order to do that constantly, not only at the moment of formation but in the future, base itself on no self-regarding law or established table of institutions fixed by any arbitrary will of those who for the moment are the strongest but on some firm, recognisable and always evolvable principle of equity and justice, for only where these things are is there a moral guarantee and security. The constitution of the League must provide a trustworthy means for the solution of all difficult, delicate and embarrassing questions which may hereafter endanger the infant and precarious framework of international society, and for that purpose it must establish a permanent, a central and a strong authority which all nations can readily recognise and accept as a natural head and faithful dynamic expression of the corporate being of mankind. These, one would think, are not at all nebulous, fanciful or too

idealistic demands, but the practical necessities of any system of yet loose unification such as now is contemplated, conditions it must from the first and increasingly satisfy if it is to survive the enormous difficulties of an enterprise which, as it proceeds, will have to work out of being most of the natural egoistic instincts and rooted past habits of the international mentality of the race.

This new gigantic bantling which has come into existence with War for its father and an armed and enforced Peace for its mother, with threatening and bloodily suppressed revolutions, a truncated internationalistic idealism and many half-curbed, just snaffled rearing national egoisms for its witnesses and god-parents, has not, when looked at from this standpoint, in spite of certain elements of promise, an altogether reassuring appearance. The circumstances of its inception were adverse and except by a tremendous effort of self-conquest in the minds of the rulers and statesmen of the victorious nations, a self-conquest rendered a thousand times more difficult by the stupendous magnitude and the intoxicating completeness of their victory, any at all complete result and auspicious new beginning could not be hoped for. This league now in the last throes of formation has not been a spontaneous creation of a peaceful, equal and well-combined will towards unity of all the world's peoples. It comes into being overshadowed by the legacy of hatreds, reprisals, apprehensions, ambitions of a murderous world war chequered by revolutions which have opened a new and alarming vista of world-wide unrest and disturbance. It has grown out of a vague but strong aspiration,—more among the rank and file of the nations, and even so not equally common to all of them, than among their governing men or classes,—to find some means for the future avoidance of violent catastrophes in the international life of mankind. It has been precipitated into actual and immediate being by the determination of an eminent idealistic statesman with the modified and in some cases unwilling assent of others who shared only partially or not at all his idealism, one man of strong will who aided by a commanding position given to him by circumstances and a flexible obstinacy in his use of them, has been able to impose some shadow or some first incomplete

form of his ideal — the future alone can show which it is to be — on the crude course of events and the realistic egoism of governments and imperial nations. But in present fact the large and complete ideal with which he began his work, has been so impinged upon by the necessities of national passions, ambition, self-interest and by pressure of the force of circumstances — still in spite of all idealism the chief determining factors of life — that it is difficult to put one's hand on anything in the concrete arrangement formulated and say without doubt or qualm that here is the very embodiment of the high principles in whose name the great war was fought and won. This is not surprising, nor should it be disappointing except to those who trusted more to their hopes than to experience. All we have to see is whether those high original principles were indeed necessary to the future security and evolution of this new association of the peoples and, if so, what chance they have of emerging from the forms in which they now seem to have been rather buried than given a body. And that will depend on the extent to which the conditions already suggested are realised or evolvable from the league's incipient constitution.

An effective League of Nations must draw into itself all the existing nations of mankind; for any considerable omission or exclusion will bring in almost inevitably an element of future danger, of possible disagreements and collisions, perhaps of a rival grouping with jealousies which must lead to another and more colossal catastrophe. In its ostensible figure this new League does not by any means wear a catholic appearance. Professedly, it is nothing but an association of actual friends and allies. In the front rank stand confident and masterful five great and powerful empires or nations, — the sole great powers left standing by the hurricane in unimpaired strength, and two of them indeed with an enormously increased power, influence and dominion: behind crowd in dimly and ineffectively a number of smaller European and American peoples, those who were allied to them or otherwise on their side in the war, and one feeble and disjointed oriental leviathan; but all these seem to partake only with a passive assent or a subordinate cooperation, — and

in fact with very much of the first and very little of the latter,—whether in the determining of the form of the League or in its control and government. And the immediate professed object of the association is not to knit the world together in the beginnings of a well-conceived unity,—that could only have been done if all the peoples had taken a free and equal part in these deliberations, whereas in fact the whole thing has been hastily constructed in semi-secret conference by the victors of the war, and chiefly by the will of the five leading powers. Its object is to regulate the interests and mutual relations of the members of the League by rule, agreement, deliberation and arbitration and their relations with other states outside the League as much as may be by the same means; it is this only and in the beginning it is nothing more. But a door is left open for the nations still outside to enter in a given time, provided they subscribe unquestioningly to a system which they will have had no hand in framing, though under it they will have to live. On the other hand a door of egress is also provided for any nation wishing to recede hereafter from the League, and if disunion should set in among the greater powers, this dangerous, though under the circumstances perhaps unavoidable provision, may easily lead to the automatic dissolution of even this hesitating first frame of a partial unity.

But the facts and forces of the situation are perhaps more favourable than ostensible paper provisions. The nations not yet included are with two great and perilous exceptions small and inconsiderable and their position outside will be so disadvantageous, they will be at every turn so much at the mercy of this formidable combination,—for the five dominant powers will easily be able, if they are determined and united, to enforce their will vigorously against all dissidents,—that they may be expected to subscribe more or less readily to its terms or at any rate to enter in after a few years' experience of exclusion. The Great Powers too are not likely to have strong reasons for breaking asunder for some years to come, and time may perhaps, provided no new revolutions sweep across the world, confirm the habit of united action. We may assume that here we have in

fact, though not yet in name, the beginnings of a council or an imperfect federation of the world's peoples.

But the constitution of this Council and the conditions under which the variously circumstanced nations are admitted into or brought under it, have a still more baffling appearance. They do not at all correspond with the democratic idealism of the human mind of today but rather strike one as a structure of almost mediaeval irregularity, complexity, incoherent construction, a well-nigh feudal political building with some formal concessions on its ground floor to the modern canon of liberty and equality. A unification of mankind may proceed very much on the same lines as past unifications of smaller peoples into nations or empires. It might have been brought about by the military force or the political influence of some powerful king-state preponderant by land and sea, — *pampotent par terre et mer*, as Nostradamus prophetically described the British Empire, — not necessarily despotic and absolute but easily first among equals; and that I suppose is what would have happened if Germany had come up top dog in the struggle instead of a very much mutilated and flattened undermost. Nor is it at all certain that something of the sort will not eventually come about if the present attempt or crude sketch of a system should come to grief; but for the moment this contingency has been prevented or at least postponed. That possibility eliminated, the unification may still take the form of an oligarchy or hegemony of great powers, leaders and masters of the herd, with the weaker rabble rest hanging on the flanks or posteriors of their mighty bellwethers and following them and their omnipotent decisions in sometimes a submissive and approbatory, sometimes a mutinous and discordant chorus; something very much of this kind is what this new league has certainly been in its formation and is likely to turn out in its execution. But there was also the vain present hope or dream, the strong future though far-off possibility of an equal, just and democratic federation of the peoples in which the dwarf and Goliath nations, the strong and the weak, the wealthy and the less wealthy, the immediately successful and the long or temporarily unfortunate, — who may yet have better gifts, have

done really more for mankind than the arrivistes among the nations,—will have, as is the rule or the ideal in all democratic bodies, in law and in initial fact an equal position, and there will be only a natural leadership and influence to differentiate by a freely accorded greater weight and voice. These were the three possibilities, and they represent respectively the ideal of the past which is said to have been buried in the grave of imperial Germany, the fact of the present which is a fact only and to none an ideal, and the ideal of the future, loudly trumpeted during the war, though there is none now, except the vanquished, the subject and the revolutionary, so poor and weak as to do it reverence.

The initial constitution of the League is almost frankly oligarchic in its disposal of the international balance of power,—not quite an absolute oligarchy, indeed, for there is certainly a general assembly which is so far democratic that all its members will exult in the dignifying possession of an equal vote. Honduras and Guatemala may, if the fancy pleases them, indulge themselves in some feeling of being lifted up to an equality with imperial England, America, the new arbiter of the world, and victorious France. But this is an illusion, a *trompe l'oeil*. For we find that this general assembly is in no sense the governing body but only a secondary authority, a court of approval and reference, to which the powerful executive nations will refer, mostly at their own discretion, this or that doubtful question for discussion. In practice and fact the new sovereign of the world under this constitution,—*jagadīśvaro vā?*—will be the executive body of the League of Nations. But there the five great powers will sit in a secure and formidable permanence, while a changeable selection of representatives picked out from the common herd will diminutively assist their deliberations, assisting or discussing in the giant obscurity of their shadow. One can easily see how the superior management of the world's affairs will go under these conditions and in fact have already had a taste of its quality in the process of this formation and this building of a basis for what it is still hoped by many will be a long or even a permanent peace. Evidently in such a governing body the Great

Five will determine the whole policy and action; nothing will readily pass which will be at all displeasing to these new masters of the earth, or let us say, to this new composite hegemony,—for its decisions will at no time be guided by that perilous, ductile and variable thing, a majority, but must be by unanimity. What in principle is this system but a novel, an improved, an enlarged and regularised edition of the Concert of Powers—liberalised a little in form because buttressed by a democratic general assembly which may, indeed, as circumstances develop and conditions change, become something, but may equally remain a dignified or undignified cypher,—but still in essence another and firmer Avatar of that old loose and dubious body? Even something of that historic device, the balance of power, though now much changed, shifted, disjointed and perilously lopsided, still remains subtly concealed in this form of a novel order. And that element is likely to pronounce itself later on; for where there is no impersonal governing principle and no clear original structure in the international body, its motions must be determined by a balance of interests, and the balance of interests can only be kept reasonably steady by carefully preserving an established balance of power. That was the justification of the old armed order; it is likely to be a necessity of this new system for regulating chaos.

This creation is a realistic practical construction with a very minimum concession to the new idealism: it has been erected by statesmen who have been concerned to legalise the actual facts and organise the actual forces which have emerged from the world-war; a few inconveniently new-born and of a menacing significance have been barred and boycotted, blockaded or pressed out of existence: it is hoped also to secure their system against attack by any resuscitable ghost of the past or violently subversive genius of the future. From that point of view it has been constructed with a remarkable skill and fidelity to present realities, though one may be tempted to think with an insufficient allowance for obscure but already visible potentialities. The correspondence between fact and form is accurate to perfection. Five powers have been the real victors of the war, three of them

central and decisive forces who now actually control the world by their will, and two others who intervened as less powerful subsidiary strengths, but can put in some effective claim and material weight into the future balance of forces. This fact is reproduced in the constitution of the governing body; it is these five who by virtue of their wealth and force are to have in it a permanent voice, the three great ones to strike the major chords and determine the general harmony of the concert, the two others to bring in, as best they can and when they can, minor chords and unessential variations. Then there are the great number of small or weaker nations who have at their command minor material effectives and, though incapable of being principals in any very great conflict may be useful as minor auxiliaries, the free peoples, allies included from the beginning by right, neutrals invited to participate in a settled organisation of peace though they did not throw their weight into the decision of war, enemies, old or new, who may be admitted when they have satisfied more or less onerous or crushing and disabling conditions. These will make the general assembly: some of them will have from time to time an uncertain voice in the governing body; the rest will be the mass, the commons, the general body who will possess some limited amount of actual power and some kind of moral force behind the executive. Labour too has been made by the War a great though as yet incoherent international power, and the League, wishing evidently to be wise in time and make terms with this formidable new fact, recognises at its side Labour in a special separate conference.

But there are also new Asiatic peoples who cannot now be admitted, because they are infants and unripe; there are subject and protected nations for whom the war was not fought and who cannot share in the once hoped-for general freedom, but must trust to the generous and unselfish liberalism of their rulers and protectors; there are African tribes who are the yet unmanufactured raw material of humanity. These are to be left under the old or put under a new control or are to be entrusted to the paternal hands of this or that governing power who will be in the legal style of the new dispensation, not masters and conquerors,—for

in this just and miraculous peace there are no annexations, only rectified arrangements of control and territory,— but trustees, mandatories. A mandate from the League will be the safeguard of these less fortunate peoples. For we are, it seems, about to live in quite a new moralised world in which the general conscience of mankind will be wide awake and effective and the League is there to represent it. As its representative it will take a periodical report of their trust from the trustees,— who also as the great powers of the League will be themselves at once mandatories, leaders and deputies of this same general conscience. All existing forces are represented in just proportions in this very remarkable constitution.

The idealist may find much to object against the perpetuation and hardening of the unideal existent fact on which the system of the League is founded, but undoubtedly that system has a good deal to say for itself, can urge very urgent considerations from the point of view of practical possibility. One indispensable condition of its success is a solid central authority, strong and permanent, capable of enforcing its decisions, and it must be an organ which all nations can accept as the natural head and faithful dynamic expression of the corporate being of mankind. As far as is at all practicable at the moment, here is, it may be said, just such an authority. The international body of mankind is still an amorphous mass, its constituent peoples unaccustomed to act together, heterogeneous by virtue of their various degrees of development, organised power, experience, civilisation: a free general assembly, a parliament of the world, an equal federation of mankind, is out of the question; even an equal federation of free and civilised peoples is likely to be an incoherent and futile body incapable of effective corporate action. What is to enforce and give practicality to the general needs and desires if not the power, influence, authority and, where need is, the strong arm of the great nations and empires acting in concert but with a due regard for the common interests and general voice? Who else are to determine preponderatingly the decisions they will have to enforce or can give to them a permanent principle or sustained practical policy? No combination of little American republics

and minor European powers could dictate a world policy to the United States, France and the British Empire or could be allowed to play by the blind rule of a majority with these great interests. But in the League the various constituents of the corporate body are so ranked and related as to give precisely a faithful dynamic expression of it in its present conditions; whatever evolution is necessary can be worked out through a general control and a periodical revision of treaties and relations. In brief, the whole international condition of the world is a chaos that has to be brought into order and shape, and that is a work which cannot be done by an idyllic idealism or an abstract perfection of principles which are not in correspondence with the actualities of things and, if prematurely applied, are likely to bring in a worse confusion, but can only be accomplished by a strong and capable organised Force which will take things as they stand, impose a new system of law and order on this chaos, some firm however imperfect initial framework, and watch over its development with a strict eye on the practical possibilities of progress. On that safe and firm basis a slow but sure and deliberate advance can be made towards a future better law and ideal order. There is another side to the question, but let us suppress it for the moment and give full value and weight to these considerations.

But all the more indispensable does it then become that the principles of the progress to be made shall be recognised from the beginning in the law and constitution of the League, or at least indicated in such a way and so impressed on its system as to ensure that on those lines or towards the fulfilment of those principles its action should proceed and not be diverted to other, baser, reactionary or obstructive uses. The declaration of general principles and their embodiments and safeguards in the democratic constitutions promulgated in the eighteenth century were no barren ideologists' formularies,—any more than the affirmation of constitutional principles in earlier documents like the Magna Charta,—but laid down the basis on which government and progress must proceed in the new-born order of the world and were at once a signpost and an effective moral guarantee for the assured march of Democracy.

We look in vain in the constitution of the League for any such great guiding principles. The provisions for the diminution of the possibilities of war, the creation of some new small nations and the safety given to those that already existed can hardly be called by that name. There is here no hint of any charter of the international rights and duties of the peoples in a new order making at once for liberty and union. The principle of self-determination over which the later stages of the war were fought has been ruthlessly thrown overboard and swallowed up in the jaws of a large pot-bellied diplomatic transaction,—it may be only for a time like the prophet in the stomach of the whale, but for the nonce there is an almost perfect disappearance. Some infinitesimal shadow of it we see in petty transactions like the arrangement about Schleswig-Holstein, but for the rest the map of the world has been altered very much in the old familiar fashion without any consistent regard to nationality or choice, but rather by the agreement and fiat of armed victorious nations. A famous pronouncement during the war had denounced the theory of trusteeship, that cloak which can cover with so noble a grace the hard reality of domination and exploitation,—things now too gross in their nakedness to be presented undraped to the squeamish moral sense of a modern humanity. But in this after-war system that very theory of trusteeship is glorified and consecrated, though with the gloss of a mandate subject to examination—by a body whose action and deliberation will be controlled by the trustees. Subject nations are still to exist in this world; for the system of mandates is only to be applied where a previous subjection has been abrogated, it is to be applied to some of the Asiatic or African peoples who lay under the uplifted scourge of the now fallen empires; the rest who had the advantage of milder masters, the remaining subject peoples from Ireland to Korea, have no need of any such safeguard!

It may be that all this denial of a too ideal principle of liberty was inevitable; for we must, we are now told, not be in too great a hurry to get from midnight to midday; the law of the times and seasons must be observed, a mitigated darkness must first come and then twilight and then dawn and then the

glad confident morning before we can live in the golden noon of a universalised liberty and justice. But meanwhile what other guiding principle, what embodied idea of law and right, what equitable and equal balance of obligations is to be the firm basis of the new order? We find none, only a machinery for the diminution of the chances of war, not for their removal, by compulsory arbitration, by the threat or actuality of armed force and economic pressure; for the revision of treaties; for the secured possession of colonies, dependencies, markets, frontiers, ports, mandates; for the international discussion and settlement of the conflicting claims of Capital and Labour. There is a system of immediately practicable relations, an attempt to affirm and to secure a new *status quo*, a provision for minor manipulations and alterations; but there is little actual foundation for a new and nobler world-order. A preparation for it may have been the intention of the institutors, but the fulfilment of their intention is left very much at the mercy of the uncertain chances of the future. The idealism of the founder has so far triumphed as to get some limited form of a League of Nations admitted and put into shape, but at every other point the idealist has gone under and the stamp of the politician and diplomat is over this whole new modern machine,—of the mere practical man with his short sight and his rough and ready methods. It is a leaky and ill-balanced ship launched on waters of tempest and chaos without a chart or compass or sailing instructions.

Well, but in other times devices as rough and unbecoming have been the foundations of great structures, and if this League can be kept in being there may be some chance of getting it suffused with the principles and ideals for whose realisation the vague heart and conscience of mankind, baffled always by its own lax complicities, is beginning to thirst and weary. But to the eye of the critic this new pact would seem to carry in itself the ominous seeds of its own future mutability and perhaps dissolution. For first of all the League is entering into being with a very limited and feeble enthusiasm on its behalf even in the nations which are interested in its maintenance; America does not seem to be in a quite flawless harmony of agreement

with its President in his self-satisfaction over the shapely beauty of his nursling; the world of Labour and socialism is critical, dissatisfied, distrustful, uneasy, simmering over into brief and uncertain but wide-spread and menacing strikes and formidable demands and murmurings. These are not favourable signs. The League will need all the support and hearty acquiescence it can get to overcome the difficulties that it will meet in constructing the world according to its own idea and fashion, a task which will not end but only be just beginning when peace is concluded, and it is doubtful whether it will have what it needs in any but the most grudging measure. Not enthusiastic support, but a sort of muttering acquiescence for want of any chance of a better thing at the moment is the general mood of the world's peoples whose interests it proposes to manage. A poor starting wind for so momentous a voyage.

But let us suppose the system accepted and under way,—what are the actual facts which will meet it in the future? Its system will stand for a long time to come for the nations conquered in the war as a perpetuation of their downfall, diminution and disgrace; it will be to them a gaoler and inflicter of penalties, a guardian of tasks and payments with an uplifted scourge. It need not have been so, if a generous and equal peace had been made or, better, if apart from all such questions, there had been a peace based not on the will of a conquering might, even though better-minded than the might it conquered, but on clear and undeniable principles, such as the utmost possible self-determination, equal opportunity, equal position for the world's peoples; that would have been indeed a peace without any other victors or vanquished than vanquished force and wrong and victorious equity. But the leading nations have chosen to impose a diplomatic peace in which the league which imposes it figures as an administrator of criminal justice. The vanquished nations, now for the most part democracies and no longer the old aggressive militarisms which made the war, were, it is said, criminals and breakers of peace and the penalty inflicted is far too light in comparison with their crimes. It may be so in literal terms,—though a criminal justice inflicted by one of two parties

in a quarrel on his beaten opponent and not by an impartial judge is apt rightly or wrongly to be suspect to the mere human reason and at best much of what is called justice is only legalised revenge,— but still it may be that nothing but justice or even less than justice has been done. But that makes no difference to the fact that a number of new democracies, vigorous and intellectual peoples, born to a new life which should have been one of hope and good will to the coming order, will be there inevitably as a source of revolt and disorder, eager to support any change which will remove their burdens, gratify their resentment and heal their festering wounds. They may be held down, kept weak and maimed, even though one of them is laborious, skilful, organised Germany, but that will mean a weakness and an ill-balance in the new order itself, and if they recover strength, it will not be to acquiesce in their inferior place and the perpetual triumph and greatness of their ancient rivals. Only in a legalised system of equal democracies can there be some true chance of the cessation of these jealousies, enmities, recurrent struggles. Otherwise war will break out again or in some other form the old battle continue. An unequal balance can never be a security for a steady and peaceful world-system.

Pass, if this were the only peril of the newly inaugurated system. But this league seems also to stand for a perpetuation of a new *status quo* to be arrived at by the peace which is being made its foundation. The great powers, it would seem, have arrived at a compact to secure their dominions and holdings against any future menace of diminution. This arrangement is of the nature at once of a balance of power — but with all the dangers of an unequal balance — and of an attempt to perpetuate for ever certain at present preponderating influences and established greatnesses. That attempt is against all the teaching of history and all the perennial movement of Nature; the league which stands committed to it is committed to a jealously guarded insecurity and the preservation of an unstable equilibrium. It is not certain that the constructing powers will themselves remain consistently satisfied with the terms of their compact or able to resist that urge of national and of human destiny which is

greater than any diplomatic arrangement or the wills of governments and statesmen. But even if that unheard-of thing be realised between them, a durable international friendship and alliance, it may serve for a time, but will it serve for a very long time against the world's urge towards change? Power rots by having and security, and those who are powerful today to impose their will on the nations, may not always keep that force in spite of their bulk and wealth and armed magnitudes. Then there are old sores perpetuated and new sores opened by this arrangement of a hastily made peace of devices and compromises. Whether the Balkan question will be permanently settled is at least dubious; but there will be now the question of a German Bohemia, a particoloured Poland, perhaps a Saar region with its wealth in the possession of a foreign power, an insoluble question of Yugoslav and Italian, a new question of Tyrol, an Irish trouble and a Korean trouble in which the League cannot interfere without deep offence to England and Japan and which yet clamour more and more for a settlement, a Russian chaos. There is a Mahomedan world which will one day have a word to say about the new *status quo*. There is the whole question of Asia and Africa, which is the most formidable but of which much need not be said, for its issues are patent to every eye. The partition of Africa between a few European powers with all its economic advantages can be no permanent solution. Asia is arising in the surge of an upward wave and cannot always be kept in a condition of weakness, tutelage and vassalage. When the time comes, how will a league mainly of European and American peoples deal with her claims? Will Europe be content to recede from Asia? Will the mandatories be in any haste to determine their mandate? Can there be any modified perpetuation of present conditions which will be at all compatible with an equality between the two continents? These are questions which no imperfect sketch of a league of nations on the existing basis can decide according to its phantasy; only the onward moving world-spirit can give them their answer.

None of these dangers and difficulties are as yet formidable in their immediate incidence, but there is another problem of a

pressing, immediate insistency and menace which touches with its close foreshadowing finger the very life of any new international system and that is the approaching struggle for supremacy between Capital and Labour. This is a far other matter than the clash of conflicting imperialisms in the broad spaces or the wrangle of quarrelsome nationalisms snarling at each other's heels or tearing each other in the narrower ways of the Earth; for those are questions at most of division of power, territory and economic opportunity on the present basis of society, but this means a questioning of that basis and a shaking of the very foundations of the European world-order. This League is a league of governments, and all these governments are bourgeois monarchies or republics, instruments of a capitalistic system assailed by the tides of socialism. Their policy is to compromise, to concede in detail, but to prolong their own principle so that they may survive and capitalism be still the dominant power of a new mixed semi-socialistic order, very much as the governments which formed the Holy Alliance sought to save the dominance of the old idea of aristocratic monarchy by a compromise with the growing spirit of democracy. What they offer is better and more human conditions for the labourer, even a certain association in the government of the society, but still a second and not a primary place in the scale. This was indeed all to which Labour itself formerly aspired, and it is all to which the rear of its army still looks forward, but it is already ceasing to be the significance of the Labour movement; a new idea has arisen, the dominance, the rule of labour, and it has already formulated itself and captured a great portion of the forces of socialism. It has even established for a while in Russia a new kind of government, a dictatorship of the proletariat, which aspires to effect a rapid transition to another order of society.

Against this novel idea and its force the existing governments are compelled by the very principle of their being to declare war and to struggle against its coming with all the strength at their disposal and strive to mobilise against it whatever faith in existing things still remains in the mind of the peoples. The old order has still no doubt strength enough to crush out of

existence, if it wills, the form which this coming of Demogorgon has already taken and to make a more or less speedy end of Russian Bolshevism. The Bolshevik system, isolated in a single country, weakened by its own initial crudities and revolutionary violences, struggling fiercely against impracticable odds, may well be annihilated; but the thing which is behind Bolshevism and has given it its unexpected virility and vitality, cannot be so easily conjured or pressed out of being. That thing is the transference of the basis of society from wealth to labour, from the power of money to the simple power of the man and his work, and that cannot be stopped or prevented,—though it may be for a time put off,—not because labour any more than wealth is the true basis of society, but because this is the logical and inevitable outcome of the whole evolution of European society. The rule of the warrior and aristocrat, the Kshatriya, founded upon power has given place to the rule of the Vaishyas, the professional and industrial classes, founded upon wealth and legalism, and that again must yield to the rule of the Shudra, the proletariat, founded upon work and association. This change like the others cannot be accomplished without much strife and upheaval and there is every sign that its course will be attended with the shattering violence of revolution.

It is proposed indeed to the new force that it shall work itself out calmly, slowly, peacefully by the recognised means of Parliamentarism; but Parliamentarism is passing through a phase of considerable discredit, and a doubt has arisen in the minds of the workers whether it is at all a right or possible means for their object and whether by a reliance upon it they will not be playing into the hands of their opponents: for Parliament is actually a great machine of the propertied classes and even the Parliamentary socialist tends easily to become a semi-disguised or a half and half bourgeois. The new order of society would seem to demand the institution of a new system of government. If then a new order of society is bound to come with its inevitable reversal of existing conditions, and still more if it comes by a revolutionary struggle, how will a system of a League of Nations based upon existing conditions, a League

not really of nations but of governments, and of governments committed to the maintenance of the old order and using their closer association as a means for combating the new idea which is hostile to their own form of existence, be likely to fare in this earth-shaking or this tornado? It is more likely to disappear than to undergo a gentle transformation, and if it disappears, another system of international comity may replace it, but it will not be a League of Nations.

We will suppose, however, or even trust, that the League, embodying in spite of appearances the best combined statesmanship of the world, circumvents all these perils, weathers every storm and leads forward the destinies of mankind in the paths of an at first more or less uneasy, but eventually firmer increasing peace and mutual accommodation. What is it then that it will have at the beginning or in the end actually accomplished? It will have made some beginning of the substitution of a state of law for the older international status which alternated and oscillated between outbreaks of war and an armed peace. That, no doubt, if at all firmly done, will be a great step forward in the known history of human civilisation. For it will mean that what was founded in the unit of the nation centuries ago, will be now at last founded in the society of the nations. But let us not leap too easily at what may well be an unsound parallel. What civilised society has done most effectively from the beginning is to substitute some kind of legalised relation, legalised offence and defence, legalised compensation or revenge for injuries in place of the state of insecure peace and frequent private or tribal warfare in which each man had to claim what he considered to be justice by the aid of his kin or the strength of his own hand. At present the persistent survival of crime is the only remnant of that earlier pre-legal state of natural violence. But for an organised society to deal with the refractory individual is a comparatively facile task; here the units are nations with a complex corporate personality, great masses of men themselves too organised, representing the vital interests, claims, passions of millions of men divided by corporate, powerful and persistent exclusivenesses, hatreds, jealousies, antipathies which the

founding of this would-be all-healing League and new society of peoples finds much acerbated, much more pronounced than in the days before the deluge when a tolerant and easy cosmopolitanism was more in fashion, and which its dispositions seem calculated to deepen and perpetuate rather than to heal and abolish. And it is on this incoherent mass of peoples void of all living principle or urgent will of union that a status of peace and settled law has to be imposed and this in a period of increasing chaos, upheaval and menace of revolution.

The national society succeeded only in proportion as it developed an indivisible unity and a single homogeneous authority which could both legislate, or at least codify and maintain law, and see to the rigorous execution of its settled rules, decrees, and ordinances. Here the work has to be done by an institution which represents no embodied unity, but rather a jamming or stringing together of very strongly separate units, and which does not legislate, but only passes very partial and opportunist special decrees *ad hoc*, and to enforce them has constantly to resort to intimidation, blockade, economic pressure, menace of a wholesale starvation of peoples, menace of violent military occupation,—things which prolong the after-war state of unrest and recoil in their secondary effects upon the countries whose governments are engaged in this singular international pastime. It is not difficult to see that a better system and a better means must be found if the latest strong hope of humanity is to turn out anything more than one other generous illusion of the intellectuals and one other chimerical wave of longing in the vague heart of the peoples.

Even the national society has not been able after so long a time and so much experience to eliminate in its own body the disease of strife between its members, class war, bitter hostility of interests and ideas breaking out at times into bloody clashes, civil wars, sanguinary revolutions or disastrous, grimly obstinate and ruthless economic struggles which are the preparers of an eventual physical conflict. And the reason is not far to seek. Law for all its ermine of pomp and solemn bewigged pretension of dignity was in its origin nothing but the law of the stronger

and the more skilful and successful who imposed their rule on the acquiescent or subjugated rest of the people. It was the decrees of the dominant class which were imposed on the previous mass of existing customs and new-shaped them into the mould of the prevailing idea and interest; Law was itself a regulated and organised Force establishing its own rules of administration and maintaining them by an imminent menace of penalty and coercion. That is the sense of the symbolic sword of Justice, and as for her more mythical balance, a balance is a commercial and artificial sign, not a symbol of either natural or ideal equity, and even so this balance of Justice had for its use only a theoretical or not always even a theoretical equality of weights and measures. Law was often in great measure a system of legalised oppression and exploitation and on its political side has had often enough plainly that stamp, though it has assumed always the solemn face of a sacrosanct order and government and justice.

The history of mankind has been very largely a long struggle to get unjust law changed into justice,—not a mystic justice of an imposed decree and rule “by law established” claiming to be right because it is established, but the intelligible justice of equality and equity. Much has been done, but as much or more still remains to be done, and so long as it is not established, there can be no sure end to civil strife and unrest and revolution. For the injustice of law can only be tolerated so long as there is either in those who suffer by it a torpid blindness or acquiescent submission or else, the desire of equity once awakened, a ready means to their hand of natural and peaceful rectification. And a particular unjust law may indeed be got altered with less of effort and difficulty, but if injustice or, let us say simply, absence of just equality and equity pervades a state of things, a system, then there must be grave trouble and there can be no real equilibrium and peace till it is amended. Thus in modern society strikes and lockouts are its form of civil war, disastrous enough to both sides, but still they are constantly resorted to and cannot be replaced by a better way, because there is no confidence in any possible legal award or “compulsory” arbitration which can be provided for under the existing conditions. The stronger side

relies on the advantage which it enjoys under the established system, the weaker feels that the legalised balance of the State exists by a law which still favours the capitalist interest and the domination of wealth and that at most it can get from this State only inadequate concessions which involve by their inadequacy more numerous struggles in the future. They cling to the strike as their natural weapon and one trustworthy resource. For that reason all ingeminations and exhortations to economic peace and brotherhood are a futile counsel. The only remedy is a better, more equal and more equitable system of society. And this is only a particular instance of a situation common enough in different forms under the present world-order.

The application is evident to the present international attempt and its hopes of a legalised and peaceful human society. The League of Nations has been established by victorious Force, claiming no doubt to be the force of victorious right and justice, but incapable by the vice of its birth of embodying the real non-combatant justice of an equal and impartial equity. Its decrees and acts are based on no ascertainable impersonal principle, but are mainly the decrees, the *sic volo, sic jubeo* of three or four mighty nations. Even if they happen to be just, they have this fatal vice that there is nothing to convince the mind of the losing parties or even the common mind that there is behind them any surety of a general and reliable equity, and as a matter of fact many of them have aroused very generally grave dissatisfaction and hostile criticism. And the Supreme Council, that veiled hieratic autocrat of the situation, does not seem itself to appeal to any distinct higher principles in its action, even when such do actually exist and could be insisted on with force and clarity. At the time of writing, there has been a case of the denudation of a suffering and now half-starved country by the army of a small occupying power—victorious not by its own arms, but by the moral and economic pressure of the League—and the council has very rightly interfered. But it has not done that publicly on grounds that have anything to do with international justice or humanity or even the rudiments of international ethics, such as they are, but on this ground that the property of the

vanquished country is the common spoil, or, let us say, means of compensation of the victors and this one little rapacious ally cannot be allowed to appropriate it all by main force to the detriment of its greater fellow-administrators of a self-regarding justice,—who may even as a result find Hungary thrown as a starving pauper on their hands instead of serving their will as a solvent debtor! If this realistic spirit is to be the spirit of the new international system and that is to persist, its success is likely to be more formidable to humanity than its failure. For it may mean to the suffering portions of mankind the legalisation and perpetuation of intolerable existing injustices for which there could have been a hope of more easy remedy and redress in the previous looser conditions. If this league of nations is to serve and not merely to dominate mankind, if it is to raise and free, as it claims and professes, and not to bind and depress humanity, it must be cast in another mould and animated by another spirit. This age is not like that in which the reign of law was established in individual nations; men are no longer inclined, as then they were, to submit to existing conditions in the idea that they are an inevitable dispensation of nature. The idea of equity, of equality, of common rights has been generalised in the mind of the race, and human society must move henceforward steadily towards its satisfaction on peril of constant unrest and a rising gradation of catastrophe.

That means that the whole spirit and system of the league will have to be remodelled, the initial mistakes of its composition rectified and the defects inherent in its origin got rid of, before it can be brought into real consonance with the nobler hopes or even the pressing needs of the human race. At present it is, to reverse the old phrase, a pouring of an old and very musty wine into showy new bottles,—the old discredited spirit of the diplomacy of concert and balance and the government of the strongest, of the few dominant kingdoms, states and empires. That must disappear in a more just and democratic international system. The evil legacy of the war with its distinctions between “enemy”, allied and friendly nations or more favoured or less favoured peoples, will have to be got out of the system of the

league, for so long as it is there, it will act as a virus which will prevent all healthy growth and functioning. A league of nations which is to bring a real peace and beginning of justice and ordered comity in progress to the world and a secret council of allied governments imposing as best they can their irresponsible will on a troubled and dissatisfied Europe, Asia and Africa are two very different things, and while one lasts, the other cannot be got into being. The haphazard make of the League will have to be remoulded into a thing of plain and candid structure and meaning and made to admit that element of clear principle which it has omitted from its constitution. An equal system of international rights and obligations, just liberties and wholesome necessary restrictions can alone be a sound basis of international law and order. And there can be no other really sound basis of the just and equal liberty of the peoples than that principle of self-determination which was so loudly trumpeted during the war, but of which an opportunist statesmanship has made short work and reduced to a deplorable nullity. A true principle of self-determination is not at all incompatible with international unity and mutual obligation, the two are rather indispensable complements, even as individual liberty in its right sense of a just and sufficient room for healthy self-development and self-determination is not at all incompatible with unity of spirit and mutual obligation between man and man. How to develop it out of present conditions, antipathies, ambitions, grievances, national lusts, jealousies, egoisms is indeed a problem, but it is a problem which will have to be attended to today or tomorrow on peril of worse things. To say that these developments are impossible is to say that a league of nations in the real sense as opposed to a league of some nations for their common benefit, a dominant alliance, is an impossibility. In that case the present institution called by that imposing name can only be an enlarged and more mechanised edition of the old Concert or a latter-day Holy Alliance of the governments and will sooner or later go the way of its predecessors. If that is so, then the sooner we recognise it, the better for all concerned; there will be less of false hopes and misdirected energies with their burden of

disappointment, unrest, irritation and perilous reaction. To go on upon the present lines is to lead straight towards another and greater catastrophe.

To insist on these things is not to discourage unduly the spirit of hope which humanity needs for its progress; it is necessary in order that that hope may not nourish itself on illusions and turn towards misdirecting paths, but may rather see clearly the right conditions of its fulfilment and fix its energy on their realisation. It is a comfortable but a dangerous thing to trust with a facile faith that a bad system will automatically develop into a good thing or that some easy change is bound to come which will make for salvation, as for instance that Europe will evolve true democracy and that the League of Nations, now so imperfectly established, will be made perfect by its better spirit. The usual result of this temper of sanguine acceptance or toleration is that the expected better state makes indeed some ameliorations when it comes, but takes into it too a legacy of the past, much of its obscure spirit and a goodly inheritance of its evils, while it adds to the burden new errors of its own making. Certainly, the thing which was behind this new formation, this league of governments, is bound in some way or other to come; for I take it that a closer system of international life is sooner or later inevitable because it is a necessary outcome of modern conditions, of the now much closer relations and interactions of the life of the human race, and the only alternative is increasing trouble, disorder and ultimate chaos. But this inevitable development may take, according to the way and principle we follow, a better or a worse turn. It may come in the form of a mechanical and oppressive system as false and defective as the industrial civilisation of Europe which in its inflated and monstrous course brought about the present wreck, or it may come in the form and healthy movement of a sounder shaping force which can be made the basis or at least the starting-point for a still greater and more beneficial human progress. No system indeed by its own force can bring about the change that humanity really needs; for that can only come by its growth into the firmly realised possibilities of its own higher nature, and this growth depends on an

inner and not an outer change. But outer changes may at least prepare favourable conditions for that more real amelioration, — or on the contrary they may lead to such conditions that the sword of Kalki can alone purify the earth from the burden of an obstinately Asuric humanity. The choice lies with the race itself; for as it sows, so shall it reap the fruit of its Karma.

And that brings us back to the idea with which we started and with it we may as well close, however remote it may sound to the practical mind of a still materialistic generation. The idea which Europe follows of an outer political and social perfection reposes, as far as it goes, on a truth, but only on one half of the truth and that the lower half of its periphery. A greater side of it is hidden behind the other older idea, still not quite dead in Asia and now strong enough to be born again in Europe, that as with the individual, so with the community of mankind, salvation cannot come by the outer Law alone; for the Law is only an intermediate means intended to impose a rein of stringent obligation and a better standard on the original disorder of our egoistic nature. Salvation for individual or community comes not by the Law but by the Spirit.¹ The conditions of individual and social perfection are indeed the same, freedom and unity; the two things are complements and to follow one at the expense of the other is a vain heresy. But real unity cannot come to the race, until man surmounting his egoistic nature is one in heart and spirit with man and real freedom cannot be till he is free from his own lower nature and finds the force of the truth which has been so vainly taught by the saints and sages that the fullness of his perfected individuality is one thing with a universality by which he can embrace all mankind in his heart, mind and spirit. But at present individuals and nations are equally remote from accepting any such inner mantra of unity and we can only hope at most that the best will increasingly turn their minds in that direction and create again and this time with a newer and more luminous insistence a higher standard of human aspiration. Till then jarring leagues of nations and some mechanical dissolute

¹ We in India have also yet to realise that truth — not by the Shastra, but by the Atman.

federation of the race must serve our turn for practice and for a far-off expectation. But only then can the dream of a golden age of a true communal living become feasible and be founded on a spiritual and therefore a real reign of freedom and unity when the race learns to turn its eyes inward and not any longer these things, but mankind, the people of God and a soul and body of the Divine, becomes the ideal of our perfection.

1919

THE YEAR 1919 comes to us with the appearance of one of the most pregnant and historic dates of the modern world. It has ended the greatest war in history, begotten a new thing in the history of mankind, a League of Nations which claims to be the foundation-stone for the future united life of the human race, and cleared the stage for fresh and momentous other constructions or destructions, which will bring us into another structure of society and of the framework of human life than has yet been known in the recorded memory of the earth's peoples. This is record enough for a single year and it looks as if there were already sufficient to give this date an undisputed pre-eminence in the twentieth century. But it is possible that things are not quite what they look to the contemporary eye and that posterity may see them in a very different focus. 1815 must have seemed the date of dates to the men of the day whose minds were filled with the view of the long struggle between the ancient regimes and revolutionary France and then between Europe and Napoleon. But when we look back at present, we see that it was only a stage, the end of the acutest phase of struggle, the commencement of a breathing-time, the date of a makeshift which could not endure. We look back from it to 1789 which began the destruction of an old order and the birth of a new ideal and beyond it to later dates which mark the progress of that ideal towards its broadening realisation. So too posterity may look back beyond this year 1919 to the beginning of the catastrophe which marks the first collapse of the former European order and forward beyond it to dates yet in the womb of the future which will mark the progress towards realisation of whatever order and ideal is destined to replace it. This year too may be only the end of an acute phase of a first struggle, the commencement of a breathing-time, the year of a makeshift, the

temporary halt of a flood in motion. That is so because it has not realised the deeper mind of humanity nor answered to the far-reaching intention of the Time-Spirit.

In the enthusiasm of the struggle a hope arose that it would sweep away all the piled-up obstacles to human progress and usher in with a miraculous immediateness a new age. A vague ideal also syllabled eloquently of peace, of brotherhood, of freedom, of unity, which for the moment partly enlightened and kindled the soul of the race and gave its intellect a broader vista. Men spoke of the powers of good and evil separated on opposite sides and locked in a decisive conflict. These ideas were the exaggerations of sentiment and idealistic reason and in their excessive and blinding light many things took covert which were of a very different nature. The hope could not but be an illusion, a halo scene of the dream mind when it sees a future possibility in its own light apart from existing conditions. Human mind and action are too much of a tangled coil to admit of such miraculous suddennesses; the physical shock of war and revolution can break down stifling obstructions, but they cannot of themselves create either the kingdom of good or the kingdom of God; for that a mental and spiritual change is needed to which our slowly moving human nature takes time to shape its customary being. The ideal, a thing of the intellect and the sentiment only, cannot so easily bring about its own effectuation; force of circumstance, the will to survive of existing actualities, the insistent past of our own nature are not so easily blown away by the eager shouting of a few high and great words or even by the breath of the thought behind them, however loudly blare the trumpets of the ideal. Nor was the war itself precisely a definite issue between pure good and pure evil,—such distinctions belong to the world of the idealistic reason of which our actual intricate existence in whose net opposites are very bafflingly fused together, is as yet at least no faithful reproduction,—but a very confused clash and catastrophe of the intertwined powers of the past, present and future. The result actually realised is only such as might have been expected from the balance of the forces at work. It is not the last result nor the end of the whole matter, but it

represents the first sum of things that was ready for working out in the immediateness of the moment's potency. More was involved which will now press for its reign, but belongs to the future.

The cataclysm of the last five years had a Janus face, one side turned towards the past, one turned towards the future. In its dealings with the past it was a conflict between two forces, one represented by Germany and the central Powers, the other by America and the western nations of Europe. Outwardly, imperial Germany represented a very nakedly brutal imperialism and militarism satisfied of its own rightful claim and perfection and opposed to the broader middle-class democracy—but democracy tainted with a half-hearted, uneasy, unwilling militarism and a liberalised, comfortably half-idealistic imperialism—of western Europe. But this was only the outside of the matter, in itself it would not have been a sufficient occasion for so great a catastrophe. Imperial Germany and all it represented had to go because it was the worst side of European civilisation enthroned in all the glory of a perfect mechanical and scientific efficiency. Its figure was a composite godhead of Moloch and Mammon seated between the guardian figures of Intelligence and Science. It had its ideal, a singular combination of the remnants of the old spirit of monarchy and feudalism now stripped of all its past justification, of a very modern burdensome organised aggressive commercialism and industrialism and of a mechanised State socialism administered by an empire and a bureaucracy, all guided by an expert intelligence and power of science. This triple-headed caricature of a future ideal for the world with its claim to take possession of the race and mechanise its life for it had to be broken, and with it passed away almost all the old phantoms of aristocracy and survivals of aristocratic monarchy which still lived on in an increasingly democratic Europe. So much the war has swept away; but its more important and positive result is not the destruction of the past, but a shaking even of the present bases and a clearing of the field for the forces of the future.

The future does not belong to that hybrid thing, a middle-

class democracy infected with the old theory of international relations, however modified by concessions to a new broader spirit of idealism. The peace which closes the war is evidently in part a prolongation of the past and a thing of the moment, its only importance for the future is its association with the plan for a league of nations. But this league also is a makeshift, a temporary device awaiting the possibility of a more perfect formation. Its insecurity lies in the degree to which it is a concession to the past and founded on a present which is indeed still dominant, but very evidently doomed to a rapid passing. The future destined to replace this present is evident enough in some of its main outward tendencies, in society away from plutocracy and middle-class democracy to some completeness of socialism and attempt at a broad and equal commonalty of social living, in the relations of the peoples away from aggressive nationalism and balances of power to some closer international comity. But these are only symptoms, feelings out, mechanical tendencies, not likely by themselves, whatever changes they bring, to satisfy for long the soul of humanity. Behind them lies a greater question of the spirit and ideal which are to govern the relations of man with man and people with people in the age that is opening, the most critical because the most far-reaching in its hopes of all the historic ages of humanity.

Meanwhile much is gone that had to go, though relics and dregs of it remain for destruction, and the agony of a sanguinary struggle is ended, and for that there may well be rejoicing. But if something is ended, all has yet to be begun. The human spirit has still to find itself, its idea and its greater orientation.

After the War

THE GREAT war has for some time been over: it is already receding into the near distances of the past. Around us is a black mist and welter of the present, before us the face of a dim and ambiguous future. It is just possible, however, to take some stock of the immediate results of the war, although by no stretch of language can the world situation be called clear, for it is marked rather by chaotic drift and an unexampled confusion. The ideals which were so loud of mouth during the collision — mainly as advertising agents of its conflicting interests — are now discredited and silent: an uneasy locked struggle of irreconcilable forces entangled in an inextricable clasp of enmity, but too weak or too exhausted to prevail against each other and unable to separate, a bewildered opportunism incapable of guiding itself or finding an issue is the character of the present situation. Humanity has the figure of a derelict with broken mast and rudder drifting on a sea still upheaved by the after swell of the tempest, the statesmen of the Supreme Council figuring as its impotent captains and shouting directions that have not the least chance of useful execution and have to be changed from moment to moment. Nowhere is there a guiding illumination or a just idea that is at all practicable. A great intellectual and moral bankruptcy, an immense emptiness and depression has succeeded to the delirium of massacre.

This is indeed the most striking immediate after result of the war, the atmosphere of a world-wide disappointment and disillusionment and the failure of great hopes and ideals. What high and large and dazzling things were promised us during the war, and where are they now? Rejected, tarnished, dishonoured they lie cast aside dead and stripped and desecrated on the blood-stained refuse heap that the war has left behind it. Not one remains to us. The war that was fought to end war has been only

the parent of fresh armed conflict and civil discord and it is the exhaustion that followed it which alone prevents as yet another vast and sanguinary struggle. The new fair and peaceful world-order that was promised us has gone far away into the land of chimeras. The League of Nations that was to have embodied it hardly even exists or exists only as a mockery and a byword. It is an ornamental, a quite helpless and otiose appendage to the Supreme Council, at present only a lank promise dangled before the vague and futile idealism of those who are still faithful to its sterile formula, a League on paper and with little chance, even if it becomes more apparently active, of being anything more than a transparent cover or a passive support for the domination of the earth by a close oligarchy of powerful governments or, it may be even, of two allied and imperialistic nations. The principle of self-determination once so loudly asserted is now openly denied and summarily put aside by the victorious empires. In its place we have the map of Europe remade on old diplomatic principles, Africa appropriated and partitioned as the personal property of two or three great European powers and western Asia condemned to be administered under a system of mandates that are now quite openly justified as instruments of commercial exploitation and have to be forced on unwilling peoples by the sovereign right of the machine-gun and the bayonet. The spectacle of subject peoples and "protected" nations demanding freedom and held down by military force continues to be a principal feature of the new order. The promised death of militarism is as far off as ever: its spirit and its actuality survive everywhere, and only its centre of strength and main operation has shifted westward — and eastward. All these things were foreseen while yet the war continued by a few who even while holding to the ideal persisted in seeing clearly: they are now popular commonplaces.

This however is only one side of the situation, the most present, insistent and obvious, but not therefore the most important and significant. It marks a stage, it is not the definite result of the great upheaval. The expectation of an immediate and magically complete transformation and regeneration of the

world by the radical operation of the war was itself an error. It was an error to imagine that the power of the past rooted in the soil of long-seated human custom and character would disappear in one fierce moment or abdicate at once to the virgin power of the future. The task to be accomplished is too great to be so easy: the regeneration of man and his life, his rebirth into a higher nature is not to be effected by so summary and outward a process. It was an error to suppose that the war was or could be the painful, the terrible, but in the end the salutary crisis by which that great change would be decisively effected,—a change that would mean a complete renovation and purification of the soul, mind and life of humanity. The war came only as a first shock and overturn, an opportunity for certain clearances, a death-blow to the moral though not as yet to the material hold of certain ideas and powers that were till then confident and throned, sure of the present and hopeful of their possession of the future. It has loosened the soil, but the uprooting of all the old growths was more than it could effectuate. It has cleared a certain amount of ground, but the fruitful filling of that ground is an operation for other forces: it has ploughed and upturned much soil, but it is as yet a far cry to the new sowing and the harvest. It was, finally, and it still continues a cherished error to imagine that the mere alteration, however considerable, of political or other machinery is the sufficient panacea for the shortcomings of civilisation. It is a change of spirit, therefore a spiritual change, that can alone be the sanction and the foundation of a greater and better human existence.

The survival of old principles and conditions is still not the important matter. However great their appearance of outward and material strength, inwardly they are sick, weakened and have forfeited the promise of the future: all their intellectual and moral hold is gone and with that disappearance there is evident a notable failing of their practical effectuating wisdom and of their sustaining self-confidence. The instinct of self-continuation, the impetus of their past motion keeps them going, and they must last so long as they have some hold in the inert continuity of the

past mental and vital habit of the peoples and are not pushed over by the growing and arising strength of the new forces that belong to the future. All their movements only serve to increase that strength, and whether they seek to perpetuate themselves by a violent insistence on their own principle or haggle and compromise with the quite opposite principles that are destined to replace them, each step they take brings them nearer to their ending. It is more fruitful to regard rather the new things that are not yet in possession of the present but already struggling to assert themselves against its ponderous and effective but ephemeral pressure.

It was very evident during the progress of the war that there were two great questions that it would not solve but rather must prepare for an acute stage of crisis, the growing struggle between Capital and Labour and the Asiatic question, no longer a quarrel now between rival exploiters but the issue between invading Europe and a resurgent Asia. The war itself was in its immediate aspect a battle between the German idea and the middle-class liberalism represented by the western peoples, France, England, America, and during the settlement of that present issue the other two questions more momentous for the future had to be held in abeyance. There was a truce between Capital and Labour, a truce determined only by a violent concentration of national feeling that proved too strong for the vague idealistic internationalism of the orthodox socialistic idea, not by any essential issue; for the futile idyllic promise of a rapprochement and a reconciliation between the hostile classes was too hollow an unreality to count as a factor. At the same time the Asiatic question too was in suspension and even enticing prospects of self-determination and independence or more qualified but still tempting allurements were proffered by the liberal empires to peoples who had been till then held as beyond the pale of civilisation. The Asiatic peoples too weak for an independent action ranged themselves on the side whose success seemed to offer to them the greater hope or else the least formidable menace. All this is now of the past: the natural and inevitable relations have reasserted themselves and these great questions are coming to a head. The modern contest

between Capital and Labour has entered into a new phase and the two incurably antagonistic principles are evidently moving in spite of many hesitations and indecisions towards the final and decisive battle. In Asia the issue has already been joined between the old rule of dependency and protectorate with their new particoloured variation the mandate and the clear claim of the Asiatic peoples to equality and independence. All other things still in the forefront belong to the prolongation of the surviving or else to the liquidation of the dead past: these two alone are living questions of the immediate future.

The forces of Socialism and Capitalism now look each other in the face all over Europe,— all other distinctions are fading, the old minor political quarrels within the nation grow meaningless,— but have not yet joined battle. The old middle-class regime still holds the material power, keeps by the prestige of possession and men's habit of preferring present ills to an insecure adventure the mind of the uncertain mass and summons all its remaining forces to maintain its position. It is faced by the first actuality of a successful socialistic and revolutionary regime in Russia, but hitherto, although its repeated efforts to stifle it in its birth have been in vain, it has succeeded in isolating, in blockading and half starving it, in erecting against its westward urge an artificial frontier and in stemming the more rapid propagation of its master ideas by a constant campaign of discredit. Attempts at any soviet revolution west of the Russian line have been put an end to for the moment by legal or military repression. On the other hand, the economic condition of the world becomes worse and not better every year and it is becoming more and more evident that Capitalism has not only lost its moral credit but that it is unable to solve the material problems it has itself raised and brought to a head, while it blocks the way to any other solution. Every year that passes in this deadlock sees an enormous increase in the strength of the socialistic idea and the number and quality and the extremist fervour of its adherents. There is undoubtedly almost everywhere a temporary stiffening and concentration of the old regime; this as a phenomenon very much resembles the similar stiffening and concentration of the

old monarchic and aristocratic regime that was the first result of the war between revolutionary France and Europe: but it has less reality of force and little chance of an equal duration; for the current of revolution is now only checked and not as then temporarily fatigued and exhausted and the accumulated rush of the ideas and forces that make for change is in our day immeasurably greater. The materials of an immense political, social and economic overturn, perhaps of a series of formidable explosions strengthened in force by each check and compression, everywhere visibly accumulate.

The outstanding portent of things to come is the continued existence, success, unbroken progress of the Russian revolution. This event promises to be as significant in human history as the great overturn of established ideas and institutions initiated in France in the eighteenth century, and to posterity it may well be this and not the downfall of Germany for which the great war will be ever memorable. Its importance is quite independent of the merits and demerits or the chances of survival of the present Bolshevik regime. The Bolshevik dictatorship is admittedly only an instrument of transition, a temporary concentration of revolutionary force, just as the Supreme Council and all that it supports is a temporary concentration of the opposing conservative forces. The achievements of this extraordinary government have been of a sufficiently astonishing character. Assailed continually from within and without, ruthlessly blockaded and starved and deprived of all means of sustenance and action except those it could create for itself out of itself or else conquer, repeatedly brought to the verge of downfall, it has survived all difficulties and dangers and rather derived always new strength from misfortune, overcome its internal and withstood its external enemies, spread itself in Asia beyond its own borders, organised out of chaos a strong civil and military instrument, and has had the force in the midst of scarcity, civil strife and foreign menace to lay the initial basis of a new type of society. This miracle of human energy is in itself no more than that, a repetition under more unfavourable circumstances of the extraordinary achievement of the Jacobins during the French Revolution. More important

is the power of the idea that is behind these successes and has made them possible. It is a fact of only outward significance that the Bolsheviks not so long ago threatened with the loss of Moscow are now on the road to Warsaw. It is of much more significance that the western Powers find themselves driven at last to negotiate with the first successful communist government of modern times still denounced by them as a monstrosity to be destroyed and a danger to civilisation. But the thing of real significance is not these events that might have gone and might still go otherwise and might turn out to be only an episode; it is rather this fundamental fact affecting future possibilities that a great nation marked out as one of the coming leaders of humanity has taken a bold leap into the hidden gulfs of the future, abolished the past foundations, made and persisted in a radical experiment of communism, replaced middle-class parliamentarism by a new form of government and used its first energy of free life to initiate an entirely novel social order. It is acts of faith and audacities of this scale that change or hasten the course of human progress. It does not follow necessarily that what is being attempted now is the desirable or the definite form of the future society, but it is a certain sign that a phase of civilisation is beginning to pass and the Time-Spirit preparing a new phase and a new order.

It may well take time for the communistic idea to make its way westward and it may too undergo considerable modifications in the passage, but there is already a remarkable evolution in that sense. The Labour movement is everywhere completing its transformation from a reformist into a socialistic and therefore necessarily, in spite of present hesitations, a revolutionary type. The struggle of Labour for a better social status and a share in the government has grown obsolete: the accepted ideal is now the abolition of the capitalistic structure of society and the substitution of labour for wealth as the social basis and the governing power. The differences within the body of the movement touch no longer the principle but the means and process of the change and the precise form to be given to the coming socialistic government and society. It is only this division of counsels that

still retards the onward motion and prevents the joining of the decided issue of battle. It is noticeable that the strength of the socialist and communistic idea increases as one goes eastward, diminishes in the opposite direction: the movement of progress is no longer from the west eastwards but from the east towards the occident. The more extreme forces are however daily increasing everywhere and are making themselves felt even in plutocratic America. In any case, whatever retardation of pace there may be, the direction of the stream is already clear and the result hardly doubtful. The existing European system of civilisation at least in its figure of capitalistic industrialism has reached its own monstrous limits, broken itself by its own mass and is condemned to perish. The issue of the future lies between a labour industrialism not very different except in organisation from its predecessor, some greater spirit and form of socialistic or communistic society such as is being attempted in Russia or else the emergence of a new and as yet unforeseen principle.

The upcoming force that opens a certain latitude for this last possibility is the resurgence of Asia. It is difficult to believe that Asia once free to think, act and live for herself will be for long content merely to imitate the past or the present evolution of Europe. The temperament of her peoples is marked off by too deep-seated a difference, the build and movement of their minds is of another character. At present, however, the movement of resurgence in Asia is finding expression more by a preface, an attempt to vindicate her bare right to live for herself, than by any pregnant effort of independent creative thought or action. The Asiatic unrest is still the second prominent feature of the situation. It is manifest in different forms from Egypt to China. It takes the shape in the Moslem world of a rejection of protectorates and mandates and a ferment of formation of independent Asiatic states. It manifests in India in a growing dissatisfaction with half methods and a constantly accentuated vehemence of the demand for complete and early self-government. It is creating in the Far East obscurer movements the sense of which has yet to emerge. This unrest envisages as yet little beyond the beginnings of a free action and existence. It appeals to the ideas of liberty

that have long been fully self-conscious and the formulas that are systematically applied in Europe, self-government, Home Rule, democracy, national independence. At the same time there is involved, subconscious as yet in the great Asiatic masses but already defining itself in more awakened minds, another issue that may seem at first sight incompatible or at least disparate with this imitative seizing on principles associated with the modern forms of freedom and progress,—an ideal of spiritual and moral independence and the defence against the European invasion of the subtle principle of Asiatic culture. In India the notion of an Asiatic, a spiritualised democracy has begun to be voiced, though it is as yet vague and formless. The Khilafat agitation has a religious and therefore a cultural as well as a political motive and temper. The regime of the mandate is resisted because it signifies the political control and economic exploitation of Asia by Europe, but there is another more latent source of repugnance. The effective exploitation is impossible without the breaking and recasting of Asiatic life into the harsh moulds of European capitalism and industrialism and, although Asia must learn to live no longer in the magnificent but insufficient past but in the future, she must too demand to create that future in her own image. It is this twofold claim carrying in it the necessity of a double, an inner and an outer resistance that is the present meaning of the Asiatic unrest and the destined meaning of the Asiatic resurgence.

The capitalistic governments of Europe embarrassed by Asiatic unrest and resistance attempt to meet it with a concession in form and a denial in fact and principle. India is granted not the beginning of responsible government, but a first "substantial" step towards it; but it is a step hedged in with a paralysing accumulation of safeguards for British political and capitalistic interests and a significant condition that her farther progress must depend on the extent to which she is prepared to reform herself politically, economically and socially in the image of the British spirit. A French military force occupies Damascus, expels the king and government elected by the people, but promises to establish an indigenous government subservient to the European

interest and its mandate. England offers Mesopotamia an Arab government saddled with an Anglo-Indian administration and the moral and material benefits of the exploitation of the oil of Mosul; meanwhile she is fighting the insurgent population in order to force on it its own greater good against its own barbarous and ignorant will to independence. A British control is to guarantee the integrity of Persia. Palestine is to be colonised by a Jewish immigration from Europe and to be administered by a High Commissioner in the interests — but against the will — of all its races. The Turkish people stripped of temporal empire and the prestige of the Caliphate are to be free under a strict and close international control and to be compelled by a Greek army to accept this unprecedented happiness and this unequalled opportunity of becoming a civilised modern nation. Here much more than against the organised forces of Labour the old regime has the material power to enforce its dictates. It remains none the less certain that a solution of this kind will not put an end to the unrest of Asia. The attempt is likely to recoil upon itself, for these new burdens must impose a greatly added strain on an already impossible financial condition and hasten the social and economic revolution in Europe. And even if it were otherwise, the resurgence of a great continent cannot be so held under. One day it will surely prevail against whatever difficulties and possess its inevitable future.

These two predestined forces of the future, socialism and the Asiatic resurgence, tend for the moment to form at least a moral alliance. The Labour and socialistic parties in the now dominant nations are strongly opposed to the policy of their governments and extend their support to the claims of subject or menaced nationalities in Asia as well as in Europe. In the more advanced Asiatic countries, as in Ireland, the national movement allies itself closely with a nascent labour movement. Bolshevik Russia is in alliance with or sovietises and controls the policy of the existing independent states of central Asia, casts a ferment into Persia and lends whatever moral support it can to the Turk or the Arab. This tendency may have in itself little meaning beyond the sympathy created by reaction against a common pressure.

Forces and interests in action are always opportunist and grasp in emergency at help or convenience from whatever quarter; but these alliances of pure interest, unless they find some more permanent support, are fragile and ephemeral combinations. Bolshevik Russia may set up Soviet governments in Georgia and Azerbaijan, but if these are only governments of occasion, if Sovietism does not correspond to or touch something more profound in the instinct, temperament and idea of these peoples, they are not likely to be durable. British Labour, although it makes no present conditions, expects a self-governing India to evolve in the sense of its own social and economic idea, but it is conceivable that a self-governing India may break away from the now normal line of development and discover her own and an unexpected social and economic order. All that we can say certainly at present is that the dominant governments of Europe have so managed that they find their scheme of things in opposition at once to the spirit and menaced by the growth of two great world forces, both compressed and held back by it and both evident possessors of the future.

That means that we are as yet far from a durable order and can therefore look forward to no suspension of the earth's troubles. The balance of the present, if such a chaotic fluctuation of shifts and devices can be called a balance, has no promise of duration, is only a moment of arrest, and we must expect, as soon as the sufficient momentum can come or circumstance open a door of escape for the release of compressed forces, more surprising and considerable movements, radical reversals and immense changes. The subject of supreme interest is not the circumstance that will set free their paths, for fate when it is ready takes advantage of any and every circumstance, but the direction they will take and the meaning they will envelop. The evolution of a socialistic society and the resurgence of Asia must effect great changes and yet they may not realise the larger human hope. Socialism may bring in a greater equality and a closer association into human life, but if it is only a material change, it may miss other needed things and even aggravate the mechanical burden of humanity and crush more heavily towards

the earth its spirit. The resurgence of Asia, if it means only a redressing or shifting of the international balance, will be a step in the old circle, not an element of the renovation, not a condition of the step forward and out of the groove that is now felt however vaguely to be the one thing needful. The present international policy of Labour carries in itself indeed at its end, — provided Labour in power is faithful to the mind of Labour in opposition,— one considerable promise, a juster equation between the national and the international idea, an international comity of free nations, a free, equal and democratic league of peoples in place of the present close oligarchy of powers that only carries the shadow of an unreal League as its appendage. An international equality and cooperation in place of the past disorder or barbaric order of domination and exploitation is indeed a first image that we have formed of the better future. But that is not all: it is only a framework. It may be at lowest a novel machinery of international convenience, it may be at most a better articulated body for the human race. The spirit, the power, the idea and will that are meant to inform or use it is the greater question, the face and direction of destiny that will be decisive.

The two forces that are arising to possess the future represent two great things, the intellectual idealism of Europe and the soul of Asia. The mind of Europe laboured by Hellenism and Christianity and enlarging its horizons by free thought and science has arrived at an idea of human perfectibility or progress expressed in the terms of an intellectual, material and vital freedom, equality and unity of close association, an active fraternity or comradeship in thought and feeling and labour. The difficulty is to make of the component parts of this idea a combined and real reality in practice and the effort of European progress has been a labour to discover and set up a social machinery that shall automatically turn out this production. The first equation discovered, an individualistic democracy, a system of political liberty and equality before the law, has helped only to a levelling as between the higher orders, the competitive liberty of the strongest and most skilful to arrive, an inhuman social in-

equality and economic exploitation, an incessant class war and a monstrous and opulently sordid reign of wealth and productive machinery. It is the turn now of another equation, an equality as absolute as can be fabricated amid the inequalities of Nature by reason and social science and machinery,— and most of all an equal association in the labour and the common profits of a collective life. It is not certain that this formula will succeed very much better than its predecessor. This equality can only be presently secured by strict regulation, and that means that liberty at least for a time must go under. And at any rate the root of the whole difficulty is ignored, that nothing can be real in life that is not made real in the spirit. It is only if men can be made free, equal and united in spirit that there can be a secure freedom, equality and brotherhood in their life. The idea and sentiment are not enough, for they are incomplete and combated by deep-seated nature and instinct and they are besides inconstant and fluctuate. There must be an immense advance that will make freedom, equality and unity our necessary internal and external atmosphere. This can come only by a spiritual change and the intellect of Europe is beginning to see that the spiritual change is at least a necessity; but it is still too intent on rational formula and on mechanical effort to spare much time for discovery and realisation of the things of the spirit.

Asia has made no such great endeavour, no such travail of social effort and progress. Order, a secure ethical and religious framework, a settled economic system, a natural, becoming fatally a conventional and artificial, hierarchy have been her ordinary methods, everywhere indeed where she reached a high development of culture. These things she founded on her religious sense and sweetened and made tolerable by a strong communal feeling, a living humanity and sympathy and certain accesses to a human equality and closeness. Her supreme effort was to discover not an external but a spiritual and inner freedom and that carried with it a great realisation of spiritual equality and oneness. This spiritual travail was not universalised nor any endeavour made to shape the whole of human life in its image. The result was a disparateness between the highest inner

individual and the outward social life, in India the increasing ascetic exodus of the best who lived in the spirit out of the secure but too narrow walls of the ordinary existence and the sterilising idea that the greatest universal truth of spirit discovered by life could yet not be the spirit of that life and is only realisable outside it. But now Asia enduring the powerful pressure of Europe is being forced to face the life problem again under the necessity of another and a more active solution. Assimilative, she may reproduce or imitate the occidental experiment of industrialism, its first phase of capitalism, its second phase of socialism; but then her resurgence will bring no new meaning or possibility into the human endeavour. Or the closer meeting of these two halves of the mind of humanity may set up a more powerful connection between the two poles of our being and realise some sufficient equation of the highest ideals of each, the inner and the outer freedom, the inner and the outer equality, the inner and the outer unity. That is the largest hope that can be formed on present data and circumstance for the human future.

But also, as from the mixing of various elements an unforeseen form emerges, so there may be a greater unknown something concealed and in preparation, not yet formulated in the experimental laboratory of Time, not yet disclosed in the design of Nature. And that then, some greater unexpected birth from the stress of the evolution, may be the justifying result of which this unquiet age of gigantic ferment, chaos of ideas and inventions, clash of enormous forces, creation and catastrophe and dissolution is actually amid the formidable agony and tension of this great imperfect body and soul of mankind in creative labour.

Appendices

The two pieces that follow are connected with *The Ideal of Human Unity* and *War and Self-Determination*. Appendix I is a note Sri Aurobindo wrote during the 1930s or 1940s with reference to a proposed solution of international problems on the basis of principles put forward in *The Ideal of Human Unity*. Appendix II consists of a fragment found in a notebook containing miscellaneous writings by Sri Aurobindo. It appears to be a draft for the opening of an essay like those included in *War and Self-Determination*. It is clear from its content that it was written not long after the end of World War I, perhaps in 1919.

APPENDIX I

We seem at the present moment to be very far away from such a rational solution¹ and indeed at the opposite pole of human possibility; we have swung back to an extreme of international disorder and to an entire application of the vital and animal principle of the struggle for survival, not of the humanly fittest, but of the strongest.

But the very intensity of this struggle and disorder may be the path Nature has chosen towards the true escape from it; for it is becoming more and more evident that a long continuance of the present international state of humanity will lead not to any survival, but to the destruction of civilisation and the relapse of the race towards barbarism, decadence, an evolutionary failure. The antipathy or hostility or distrust of nations, races, cultures, religions towards each other is due to the past habit of egoistic self-assertion, desire for domination, for encroachment upon the lebensraum one of another and the consequent sense of unfriendly pressure, the fear of subjugation or domination and the oppression of the individuality of one by the other. A state of things must be brought about in which mutual toleration is the law, an order in which many elements, racial, national, cultural, spiritual can exist side by side and form a multiple unity; in such an order all these antipathies, hostilities, distrusts would die from lack of nourishment. That would be a true state of perfectly developed human civilisation, a true basis for the higher progress of the race. In this new order India with her spiritual culture turned towards the highest aims of humanity would find her rightful place and would become one of the leaders of the human evolution by the greatness of her ideals and the capacity of her peoples for the spiritualisation of life.

¹ The “rational solution” referred to was a proposal for solving international problems along the lines sketched by Sri Aurobindo in chapter 18 of *The Ideal of Human Unity*, “The Ideal Solution — A Free Grouping of Mankind”.

APPENDIX II

The war is over, though peace still lingers, her way sadly embarrassed by blockades, armistices, secret negotiations, conferences where armed and victorious national egoisms dispute the blood-stained spoils of the conflict, political and other advantages, captured navies, indemnities, colonies, protectorates, torn fragments of dismembered States and nations, embarrassed most of all perhaps by the endeavour of the world's rulers and wise men to found upon the ephemeral basis of the results of war an eternal peace for humanity. But still the cannon at least is silent except where the embers of war still smoke and emit petty flames in distracted Poland and Russia, and peace though a lame and perhaps much mutilated peace must before long arrive. The great war is over and that may seem the main thing to [*sentence left incomplete*]

Note on the Texts

The chapters that make up the principal contents of *The Human Cycle*, *The Ideal of Human Unity* and *War and Self-Determination* were first published in the monthly review *Arya* between 1915 and 1920. The three works subsequently were revised by the author and published as books.

The Human Cycle. The twenty-four chapters making up this work appeared in the *Arya* under the title *The Psychology of Social Development* between August 1916 and July 1918. Sri Aurobindo began with a discussion of the psychological theory of social and political development put forward by the German historian Karl Lamprecht (1856–1915), about which he had read in an article published in the May/June 1916 issue of the *Hindustan Review*. Retaining some of Lamprecht's terminology, he went on to develop his own theory of “the cycle of society”. During the 1930s, probably around 1937, he revised the *Arya* text of *The Psychology of Social Development* in two stages: the first revision was marked on a set of pages from the *Arya*, the second revision on a typed copy of the first. The revised text remained unpublished until 1949. At that time Sri Aurobindo considered making extensive alterations and additions to bring it up to date, but abandoned the idea and dictated only minor changes in the final stage of revision.

The book was published in 1949 by the Sri Aurobindo Ashram under the new title *The Human Cycle*. An American edition was brought out the next year. In 1962 a combined edition of *The Human Cycle*, *The Ideal of Human Unity* and *War and Self-Determination* was published by the Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education. In 1971 the three works were published under the title *Social and Political Thought* as volume 15 of the Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary Library. This has been reprinted several times under the combined titles of the constituent works. A separate edition of *The Human Cycle* was published in 1977.

The Ideal of Human Unity first appeared in the *Arya* in thirty-five chapters between September 1915 and July 1918. At the time he commenced the series, Sri Aurobindo wrote to the Mother:

I have begun in the issue of the *Arya* which is just out a number of articles on the Ideal of Human Unity. I intend to proceed very cautiously and not go very deep at first, but as if I were leading the intelligence of the reader gradually towards the deeper meaning of unity—especially to discourage the idea that mistakes uniformity and mechanical association for unity.

The *Arya* text of *The Ideal of Human Unity* was brought out as a book by the Sons of India, Ltd., Madras, in 1919. Sri Aurobindo revised this during the late 1930s, apparently in 1938. (The date is inferred partly from a footnote he added while revising Chapter 5—later replaced by a different footnote—referring to the “Anschluss”, Germany’s annexation of Austria in March 1938. Sri Aurobindo is unlikely to have worked on the revision after his accident in November 1938.) The revised text remained unpublished for more than a decade. In June 1949, asked about the possibility of publishing this book and *The Psychology of Social Development* (which had not yet been renamed *The Human Cycle*), Sri Aurobindo answered that

they have to be altered by the introduction of new chapters and rewriting of passages and in *The Ideal* changes have to be made all through the book in order to bring it up to date, so it is quite impossible to make these alterations on the proofs. I propose however to revise these two books as soon as possible; they will receive my first attention.

Sri Aurobindo did not revise either book to the extent he had proposed. Although he made minor changes throughout *The Ideal of Human Unity*, his attempt to bring it up to date was largely confined to adding and revising footnotes (see the next paragraph). The only new chapter introduced was a long Postscript Chapter reviewing the book’s conclusions in the light of recent international developments. The second edition of *The Ideal of Human Unity* was published by the Sri Aurobindo Ashram in 1950; it was followed by an American edition

later the same year. (In the American edition the Postscript Chapter appeared as an Introduction.) In 1962, 1971 and subsequently this work was included in the combined editions mentioned above under *The Human Cycle*.

Footnotes to *The Ideal of Human Unity*. The seventy-eight footnotes in the present edition of *The Ideal of Human Unity* reflect the complex history of the text. Only three of these can be traced to the *Arya* (two other footnotes found in the *Arya* were deleted during revision). Sri Aurobindo added more than fifty footnotes in his first revision, many of them referring to political developments of the 1930s such as the rise of Fascism. In his second, lighter revision, undertaken more than ten years later, he also made extensive use of footnotes for updating the text. Some two dozen new footnotes were added at this time and an equal number of the earlier ones revised. Thus the majority of the footnotes in the final version may be taken to represent the standpoint of 1949–50. Detailed information on the dating of footnotes and other significant revision is provided in the reference volume (volume 35).

War and Self-Determination. Sri Aurobindo published five articles on current political topics in the *Arya*: “The Passing of War?” (April 1916), “Self-Determination” (September 1918), “The Unseen Power” (December 1918), “1919” (July 1919) and “After the War” (August 1920). In 1920 the first three of these, along with a Foreword and a newly written essay, “The League of Nations”, were brought out as a book by S. R. Murthy & Co., Madras. A second edition was published by Sarojini Ghose (Sri Aurobindo’s sister) in 1922. Sri Aurobindo dictated a few scattered revisions to these essays during the late 1940s or in 1950. A third edition of the book was brought out in 1957. “After the War”, which had been published as a separate booklet in 1949, was added to this edition. Since 1962 *War and Self-Determination* has appeared in the combined editions mentioned above under *The Human Cycle*. “1919” was first reproduced in the 1962 edition, where it was placed at the end. In the present edition, “1919” and “After the War” are printed in the order in which they were written.

The present edition. This edition of *The Human Cycle*, *The Ideal of Human Unity* and *War and Self-Determination* has been thoroughly

checked against the *Arya* and the texts of all revised editions. A note written with reference to *The Ideal of Human Unity* and a fragment related thematically to *War and Self-Determination* have been included as Appendixes.

The Future Poetry



Sri Aurobindo

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The Future Poetry

with

On Quantitative Metre

Publisher's Note

The Future Poetry was first published in the monthly review *Arya* in thirty-two instalments between December 1917 and July 1920. These instalments were written immediately before their publication.

Sri Aurobindo twice undertook to revise *The Future Poetry*. During the late 1920s or early 1930s he revised seventeen chapters; in 1950 he dictated changes and additions to twenty chapters, thirteen of which had been revised earlier. The work of revision was never completed and *The Future Poetry* was not published in the form of a book during Sri Aurobindo's lifetime.

In 1953 the *Arya* text of *The Future Poetry* was brought out as a book, with only two passages of the later revision added. In 1985 an edition incorporating all available revision was published.

On Quantitative Metre was published in 1942 as an appendix to *Collected Poems and Plays* and as a separate book. It was written shortly before its publication.

This edition of *The Future Poetry with On Quantitative Metre* has been checked against the author's manuscripts and the original printed texts.

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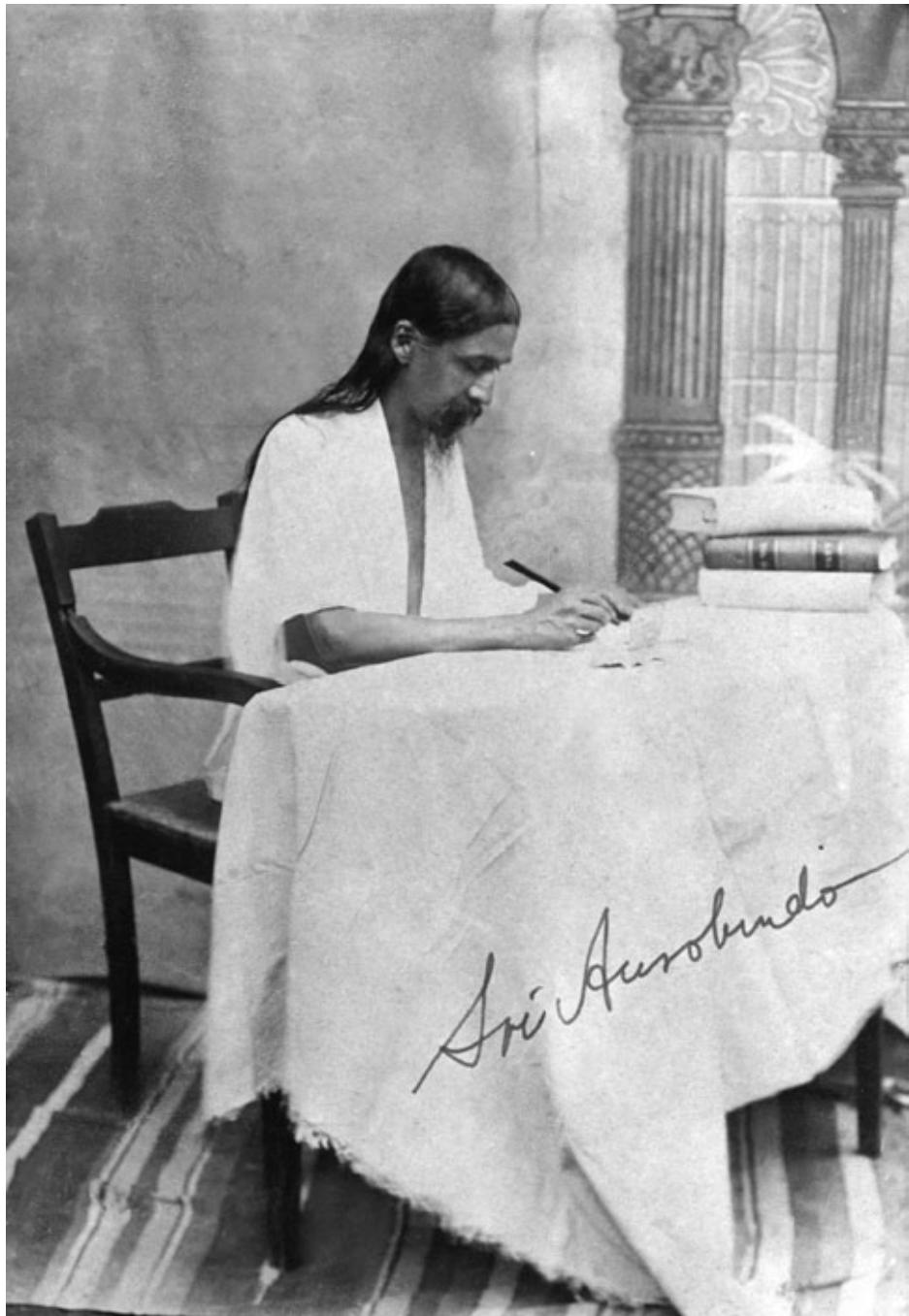
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The Future Poetry

Part I



Sri Aurobindo in Pondicherry

Chapter I

The Mantra

IT IS not often that we see published in India literary criticism which is of the first order, at once discerning and suggestive, criticism which forces us both to see and think. A book which recently I have read and more than once reperused with a yet unexhausted pleasure and fruitfulness, Mr. James Cousins' *New Ways in English Literature*, is eminently of this kind. It raises thought which goes beyond the strict limits of the author's subject and suggests the whole question of the future of poetry in the age which is coming upon us, the higher functions open to it — as yet very imperfectly fulfilled, — and the part which English literature on the one side and the Indian mind and temperament on the other are likely to take in determining the new trend. The author is himself a poet, a writer of considerable force in the Irish movement which has given contemporary English literature its two greatest poets, and the book on every page attracts and satisfies by its living force of style, its almost perfect measure, its delicacy of touch, its fineness and depth of observation and insight, its just sympathy and appreciation.

For the purpose for which these essays have been, not indeed written, but put together, the criticism, fine and helpful as it is, suffers from one great fault, — there is too little of it. Mr. Cousins is satisfied with giving us the essential, just what is necessary for a trained mind to seize intimately the spirit and manner and poetic quality of the writers whose work he brings before us. This is done sometimes in such a masterly manner that even one touch more might well have been a touch in excess. The essay on Emerson is a masterpiece in this kind; it gives perfectly in a few pages all that should be said about Emerson's poetry and nothing that need not be said. But some of the essays, admirable in themselves, are too slight for our need. The book is not indeed intended to be exhaustive in its range. Mr. Cousins

wisely takes for the most part,—there is one notable exception,—writers with whom he is in close poetical sympathy or for whom he has a strong appreciation; certain names which have come over to our ears with some flourish of the trumpets of renown, Thompson, Masefield, Hardy, do not occur at all or only in a passing allusion. But still the book deals among contemporary poets with Tagore, A. E. and Yeats, among recent poets with Stephen Phillips, Meredith, Carpenter, great names all of them, not to speak of lesser writers. This little book with its 135 short pages is almost too small a pedestal for the figures it has to support, not, be it understood, for the purposes of the English reader interested in poetry, but for ours in India who have on this subject a great ignorance and, most of us, a very poorly trained critical intelligence. We need something a little more ample to enchain our attention and fix in us a permanent interest; a fingerpost by the way is not enough for the Indian reader, you will have to carry him some miles on the road if you would have him follow it.

But Mr. Cousins has done a great service to the Indian mind by giving it at all a chance to follow this direction with such a guide to point out the way. The English language and literature is practically the only window the Indian mind, with the narrow and meagre and yet burdensome education given to it, possesses into the world of European thought and culture; but at least as possessed at present, it is a painfully small and insufficient opening. English poetry for all but a few of us stops short with Tennyson and Browning, when it does not stop with Byron and Shelley. A few have heard of some of the recent, fewer of some of the contemporary poets; their readers are hardly enough to make a number. In this matter of culture this huge peninsula, once one of the greatest centres of civilisation, has been for long the most provincial of provinces; it has been a patch of tilled fields round a lawyer's office and a Government cutcherry, a cross between a little district town and the most rural of villages, at its largest a dried-up bank far away from the great stream of the world's living thought and action, visited with no great force by occasional and belated waves, but for the rest a bare field for

sluggish activities, the falsest possible education, a knowledge always twenty-five or fifty years behind the time. The awakening brought by the opening years of the twentieth century has chiefly taken the form of a revival of cultural patriotism, highly necessary for a nation which has a distinctive contribution to make to the human spirit in its future development, some new and great thing which it must evolve out of a magnificent past for the opening splendours of the future; but in order that this may evolve rapidly and surely, it needs a wide and sound information, a richer stuff to work upon, a more vital touch with the life and master tendencies of the world around it. Such books as this will be of invaluable help in creating what is now deficient.

The helpfulness of this suggestive work comes more home to me personally because I have shared to the full the state of mere blank which is the ordinary condition of the Indian mind with regard to its subject. Such touch as in the intellectual remoteness of India I have been able to keep up with the times, had been with contemporary continental rather than contemporary English literature. With the latter all vital connection came to a dead stop with my departure from England a quarter of a century ago; it had for its last events the discovery of Meredith as a poet, in his *Modern Love*, and the perusal of *Christ in Hades*, — some years before its publication, — the latter an unforgettable date. I had long heard, standing aloof in giant ignorance, the great name of Yeats, but with no more than a fragmentary and mostly indirect acquaintance with some of his work; A. E. only lives for me in Mr. Cousins' pages; other poets of the day are still represented in my mind by scattered citations. In the things of culture such a state of ignorance is certainly an unholy state of sin; but in this immoral and imperfect world even sin has sometimes its rewards, and I get that now in the joy and light of a new world opening to me all in one view while I stand, Cortez-like, on the peak of the large impression created for me by Mr. Cousins' book. For the light we get from a vital and illuminative criticism from within by another mind can sometimes almost take the place of a direct knowledge.

There disengages itself from these essays not so much a

special point of view as a distinctive critical and literary temperament, which may be perhaps not so much the whole mind of the critic as the response to his subject in a mind naturally in sympathy with it. Mr. Cousins is a little nervous about this in his preface; he is apprehensive of being labelled as an idealist. The cut and dried distinction between idealism and realism in literature has always seemed to me to be a little arbitrary and unreal, and whatever its value in drama and fiction, it has no legitimate place in poetry. What we find here is a self-identification with what is best and most characteristic of a new spirit in the age, a new developing aesthetic temper and outlook,—or should we rather say, inlook? Its mark is a greater (not exclusive) tendency to the spiritual rather than the merely earthly, to the inward and subjective than the outward and objective, to the life within and behind than to the life in front, and in its purest, which seems to be its Irish form, a preference of the lyrical to the dramatic and of the inwardly suggestive to the concrete method of poetical presentation. Every distinctive temperament has naturally the defect of an insufficient sympathy, often a pronounced and intolerant antipathy towards all that departs from its own motives. Moreover contemporary criticism is beset with many dangers; there is the charm of new thought and feeling and expression of tendency which blinds us to the defects and misplaces or misproportions to our view the real merits of the expression itself; there are powerful cross-currents of immediate attraction and repulsion which carry us from the true track; especially, there is the inevitable want of perspective which prevents us from getting a right vision of things too near us in time. And if in addition one is oneself part of a creative movement with powerful tendencies and a pronounced ideal, it becomes difficult to get away from the standpoint it creates to a larger critical outlook. From these reefs and shallows Mr. Cousins' sense of measure and justice of appreciation largely, generally indeed, preserve him, though not, I think, quite invariably. But still it is not a passionless, quite disinterested criticism which we get or want from this book, but a much more helpful thing, an interpretation of work which embodies the creative tendencies of the time by one who has

himself lived in them and helped both to direct and to form.

Mr. Cousins' positive criticism is almost always fine, just and inspired by a warm glow of sympathy and understanding tempered by discernment, restraint and measure; whatever the future critic, using his scales and balance, may have to take away from it, will be, one would imagine, only by way of a slight alteration of stress here and there. His deprecations, though generally sound enough, are not, I think, invariably as just as his appreciations. Thus his essay on the work of J. M. Synge, "The Realist on the Stage", is, in sharp distinction from the rest of the book, an almost entirely negative and destructive criticism, strong and interesting, but written from the point of view of the ideals and aims of the Irish literary movement against a principle of work which seemed entirely to depart from them; yet we are allowed to get some glimpse of a positive side of dramatic power which the critic does not show us, but leaves us rather to guess at. Mr. Cousins seems to me to take the dramatist's theory of his own art more seriously than it should be taken; for the creator can seldom be accepted — there may of course be exceptions, rare instances of clairvoyant self-sight — as a sound exponent of his own creative impulse. He is in his central inspiration the instrument of a light and power not his own, and his account of it is usually vitiated, out of focus, an attempt to explain the workings of this impersonal power by motives which were the contribution of his own personal effort, but which are often quite subordinate or even accidental side-lights of the lower brain-mind, not the central moving force.

Mr. Cousins has pointed out clearly enough that art can never be a copy of life. But it is also true, I think, that that is not the secret object of most realism, whatever it may say about itself; realism is in fact a sort of nether idealism, or, perhaps more correctly, sometimes an inverse, sometimes a perverse romanticism which tries to get a revelation of creative truth by an effective force of presentation, by an intensity, often an exaggeration at the opposite side of the complex phenomenon of life. All art starts from the sensuous and sensible, or takes it as a continual point of reference or, at the lowest, uses it as a

symbol and a fount of images; even when it soars into invisible worlds, it is from the earth that it soars; but equally all art worth the name must go beyond the visible, must reveal, must show us something that is hidden, and in its total effect not reproduce but create. We may say that the artist creates an ideal world of his own, not necessarily in the sense of ideal perfection, but a world that exists in the idea, the imagination and vision of the creator. More truly, he throws into significant form a truth he has seen, which may be truth of hell or truth of heaven or an immediate truth behind things terrestrial or any other, but is never merely the external truth of earth. By that ideative truth and the power, the perfection and the beauty of his presentation and utterance of it his work must be judged.

Some occasional utterances in this book seem to spring from very pronounced idiosyncrasies of its distinctive literary temperament or standpoint and cannot always be accepted without reservation. I do not myself share its rather disparaging attitude towards the dramatic form and motive or its comparative coldness towards the architectural faculty and impulse in poetry. When Mr. Cousins tells us that "its poetry and not its drama, will prove to be the thing of life" in Shakespeare's work, I feel that the distinction is not sound all through, that there is a truth behind it, but it is overstated. Or when still more vivaciously he dismisses Shakespeare the dramatist to "a dusty and reverent immortality in the libraries" or speaks of the "monstrous net of his life's work" which but for certain buoys of line and speech "might sink in the ocean of forgetfulness," I cannot help feeling that this can only be at most the mood of the hour born of the effort to get rid of the burden of its past and move more freely towards its future, and not the definitive verdict of the poetic and aesthetic mind on what has been so long the object of its sincere admiration and a powerful presence and influence. Perhaps I am wrong, I may be too much influenced by my own settled idiosyncrasies of an aesthetic temperament and being impregnated with an early cult for the work of the great builders in Sanskrit and Greek, Italian and English poetry. At any rate, this is true that whatever relation we may keep with the great

masters of the past, our present business is to go beyond and not to repeat them, and it must always be the lyrical motive and spirit which find a new secret and begin a new creation; for the lyrical is the primary poetical motive and spirit and the dramatic and epic must wait for it to open for them their new heaven and new earth.

I have referred to these points which are only side issues or occasional touches in Mr. Cousins' book, because they are germane to the question which it most strongly raises, the future of English poetry and of the world's poetry. It is still uncertain how that future will deal with the old quarrel between idealism and realism, for the two tendencies these names roughly represent are still present in the tendencies of recent work. More generally, poetry always sways between two opposite trends, towards predominance of subjective vision and towards an emphasis on objective presentation, and it can rise too beyond these to a spiritual plane where the distinction is exceeded, the divergence reconciled. Again, it is not likely that the poetic imagination will ever give up the narrative and dramatic form of its creative impulse; a new spirit in poetry, even though primarily lyrical, is moved always to seize upon and do what it can with them,—as we see in the impulsion which has driven Maeterlinck, Yeats, Rabindranath to take hold of the dramatic form for self-expression as well as the lyrical in spite of their dominant subjectivity. We may perhaps think that this was not the proper form for their spirit, that they cannot get there a full or a flawless success; but who shall lay down rules for creative genius or say what it shall or shall not attempt? It follows its own course and makes its own shaping experiments. And it is interesting to speculate whether the new spirit in poetry will take and use with modifications the old dramatic and narrative forms, as did Rabindranath in his earlier dramatic attempts, or quite transform them to its own ends, as he has attempted in his later work. But after all these are subordinate issues.

It will be more fruitful to take the main substance of the matter for which the body of Mr. Cousins' criticism gives a

good material. Taking the impression it creates for a starting-point and the trend of English poetry for our main text, but casting our view farther back into the past, we may try to sound what the future has to give us through the medium of the poetic mind and its power for creation and interpretation. The issues of recent activity are still doubtful and it would be rash to make any confident prediction; but there is one possibility which this book strongly suggests and which it is at least interesting and may be fruitful to search and consider. That possibility is the discovery of a closer approximation to what we might call the *mantra* in poetry, that rhythmic speech which, as the Veda puts it, rises at once from the heart of the seer and from the distant home of the Truth,—the discovery of the word, the divine movement, the form of thought proper to the reality which, as Mr. Cousins excellently says, “lies in the apprehension of a something stable behind the instability of word and deed, something that is a reflection of the fundamental passion of humanity for something beyond itself, something that is a dim shadowing of the divine urge which is prompting all creation to unfold itself and to rise out of its limitations towards its Godlike possibilities.” Poetry in the past has done that in moments of supreme elevation; in the future there seems to be some chance of its making it a more conscious aim and steadfast endeavour.

Chapter II

The Essence of Poetry

WHAT THEN is the nature of poetry, its essential law? what is the highest power we can demand from it, what the supreme music that the human mind, reaching up and in and out to its own widest breadths, deepest depths and topmost summits, can extract from this self-expressive instrument? and how out of that does there arise the possibility of its use as the *mantra* of the Real? Not that we need spend any energy in a vain effort to define anything so profound, elusive and indefinable as the breath of poetic creation; to take the myriad-stringed harp of Saraswati to pieces for the purpose of scientific analysis is a narrow and barren amusement. But we stand in need of some guiding intuitions, some helpful descriptions which will serve to enlighten our search; to fix in that way, not by definition, but by description, the essential things in poetry is neither an impossible, nor an unprofitable endeavour.

We meet here two common enough errors, to one of which the ordinary uninstructed mind is most liable, to the other the too instructed critic or the too intellectually conscientious artist or craftsman. To the ordinary mind, judging poetry without really entering into it, it looks as if it were nothing more than an aesthetic pleasure of the imagination, the intellect and the ear, a sort of elevated pastime. If that were all, we need not have wasted time in seeking for its spirit, its inner aim, its deeper law. Anything pretty, pleasant and melodious with a beautiful idea in it would serve our turn; a song of Anacreon or a plaint of Mimnermus would be as satisfying to the poetic sense as the Oedipus, Agamemnon or Odyssey, for from this point of view they might well strike us as equally and even, one might contend, more perfect in their light but exquisite unity and brevity. Pleasure, certainly, we expect from poetry as from all art; but the external sensible and even the inner imaginative pleasure

are only first elements. For these must not only be refined in order to meet the highest requirements of the intelligence, the imagination and the ear; but afterwards they have to be still farther heightened and in their nature raised beyond even their own noblest levels, so that they may become the support for something greater beyond them; otherwise they cannot lead to the height on which lives the Mantra.

For neither the intelligence, the imagination nor the ear are the true or at least the deepest or highest recipients of the poetic delight, even as they are not its true or highest creators; they are only its channels and instruments: the true creator, the true hearer is the soul. The more rapidly and transparently the rest do their work of transmission, the less they make of their separate claim to satisfaction, the more directly the word reaches and sinks deep into the soul, the greater the poetry. Therefore poetry has not really done its work, at least its highest work, until it has raised the pleasure of the instrument and transmuted it into the deeper delight of the soul. A divine Ananda,¹ a delight interpretative, creative, revealing, formative,—one might almost say, an inverse reflection of the joy which the universal Soul felt in its great release of energy when it rang out into the rhythmic forms of the universe the spiritual truth, the large interpretative idea, the life, the power, the emotion of things packed into an original creative vision,—such spiritual joy is that which the soul of the poet feels and which, when he can conquer the human difficulties of his task, he succeeds in pouring also into all those who are prepared to receive it. This delight is not merely a godlike pastime; it is a great formative and illuminative power.

The critic — of a certain type — or the intellectually conscientious artist will, on the other hand, often talk as if poetry were mainly a matter of a faultlessly correct or at most an exquisite technique. Certainly, in all art good technique is the first step towards perfection; but there are so many other steps, there is

¹ Ananda, in the language of Indian spiritual experience, is the essential delight which the Infinite feels in itself and in its creation. By the infinite Self's Ananda all exists, for the Self's Ananda all was made.

a whole world beyond before you can get near to what you seek; so much so that even a deficient correctness of execution will not prevent an intense and gifted soul from creating great poetry which keeps its hold on the centuries. Moreover, technique, however indispensable, occupies a smaller field perhaps in poetry than in any other art,—first, because its instrument, the rhythmic word, is fuller of subtle and immaterial elements; then because, the most complex, flexible, variously suggestive of all the instruments of the artistic creator, it has more—almost infinite—possibilities in many directions than any other. The rhythmic word has a subtly sensible element, its sound value, a quite immaterial element, its significance or thought value, and both of these again, its sound and its sense, have separately and together a soul value, a direct spiritual power, which is infinitely the most important thing about them. And though this comes to birth with a small element subject to the laws of technique, yet almost immediately, almost at the beginning of its flight, its power soars up beyond the province of any laws of mechanical construction: and this form of speech carries in it on its summits an element which draws close to the empire of the ineffable.

Poetry rather determines its own form; the form is not imposed on it by any law mechanical or external to it. The poet least of all artists needs to create with his eye fixed anxiously on the technique of his art. He has to possess it, no doubt; but in the heat of creation the intellectual sense of it becomes a subordinate action or even a mere undertone in his mind, and in his best moments he is permitted, in a way, to forget it altogether. For then the perfection of his sound-movement and style come entirely as the spontaneous form of his soul: that utters itself in an inspired rhythm and an innate, a revealed word, even as the universal Soul created the harmonies of the universe out of the power of the word secret and eternal within him, leaving the mechanical work to be done in a surge of hidden spiritual excitement by the subconscious part of his Nature. It is this highest speech which is the supreme poetic utterance, the immortal element in his poetry, and a little of it is enough to save the rest of his work from oblivion. *Svalpam apyasya dharmasya!*

This power makes the rhythmic word of the poet the highest form of speech available to man for the expression whether of his self-vision or of his world-vision. It is noticeable that even the deepest experience, the pure spiritual which enters into things that can never be wholly expressed, still, when it does try to express them and not merely to explain them intellectually, tends instinctively to use, often the rhythmic forms, almost always the manner of speech characteristic of poetry. But poetry attempts to extend this manner of vision and utterance to all experience, even the most objective, and therefore it has a natural urge towards the expression of something in the object beyond its mere appearances, even when these seem outwardly to be all that it is enjoying.

We may usefully cast a glance, not at the last inexpressible secret, but at the first elements of this heightening and intensity peculiar to poetic utterance. Ordinary speech uses language mostly for a limited practical utility of communication; it uses it for life and for the expression of ideas and feelings necessary or useful to life. In doing so, we treat words as conventional signs for ideas with nothing but a perfunctory attention to their natural force, much as we use any kind of common machine or simple implement; we treat them as if, though useful for life, they were themselves without life. When we wish to put a more vital power into them, we have to lend it to them out of ourselves, by marked intonations of the voice, by the emotional force or vital energy we throw into the sound so as to infuse into the conventional word-sign something which is not inherent in itself. But if we go back earlier in the history of language and still more if we look into its origins, we shall, I think, find that it was not always so with human speech. Words had not only a real and vivid life of their own, but the speaker was more conscious of it than we can possibly be with our mechanised and sophisticated intellects. This arose from the primitive nature of language which, probably, in its first movement was not intended,—or shall we say, did not intend,—so much to stand for distinct ideas of the intelligence as for feelings, sensations, broad indefinite mental impressions with minute shades of quality in them which we do

not now care to pursue. The intellectual sense in its precision must have been a secondary element which grew more dominant as language evolved along with the evolving intelligence.

For the reason why sound came to express fixed ideas, lies not in any natural and inherent equivalence between the sound and its intellectual sense, for there is none,—intellectually any sound might express any sense, if men were agreed on a conventional equivalence between them; it started from an indefinable quality or property in the sound to raise certain vibrations in the life-soul of the human creature, in his sensational, his emotional, his crude mental being. An example may indicate more clearly what I mean. The word *wolf*, the origin of which is no longer present to our minds, denotes to our intelligence a certain living object and that is all, the rest we have to do for ourselves: the Sanskrit word *vrka*, “tearer”, came in the end to do the same thing, but originally it expressed the sensational relation between the wolf and man which most affected the man’s life, and it did so by a certain quality in the sound which readily associated it with the sensation of tearing. This must have given early language a powerful life, a concrete vigour, in one direction a natural poetic force which it has lost, however greatly it has gained in precision, clarity, utility.

Now, poetry goes back in a way and recovers, though in another fashion, as much as it can of this original element. It does this partly by a stress on the image replacing the old sensational concreteness, partly by a greater attention to the suggestive force of the sound, its life, its power, the mental impression it carries. It associates this with the definitive thought value contributed by the intelligence and increases both by each other. In that way it succeeds at the same time in carrying up the power of speech to the direct expression of a higher reach of experience than the intellectual or vital. For it brings out not only the definitive intellectual value of the word, not only its power of emotion and sensation, its vital suggestion, but through and beyond these aids its soul-suggestion, its spirit. So poetry arrives at the indication of infinite meanings beyond the finite intellectual meaning the word carries. It expresses not only the life-soul of man as did

the primitive word, not only the ideas of his intelligence for which speech now usually serves, but the experience, the vision, the ideas, as we may say, of the higher and wider soul in him. Making them real to our life-soul as well as present to our intellect, it opens to us by the word the doors of the Spirit.

Prose style carries speech to a much higher power than its ordinary use, but it differs from poetry in not making this yet greater attempt. For it takes its stand firmly on the intellectual value of the word. It uses rhythms which ordinary speech neglects, and aims at a general fluid harmony of movement. It seeks to associate words agreeably and luminously so as at once to please and to clarify the intelligence. It strives after a more accurate, subtle, flexible and satisfying expression than the rough methods of ordinary speech care to compass. A higher adequacy of speech is its first object. Beyond this adequacy it may aim at a greater forcefulness and effectiveness by various devices of speech, by many rhetorical means for heightening the stress of its intellectual appeal. Passing beyond this first limit, this just or strong, but always restrained measure, it may admit a more emphatic rhythm, more directly and powerfully stimulate the emotion, appeal to a more vivid aesthetic sense. It may even make such a free or rich use of images as to suggest an outward approximation to the manner of poetry; but it employs them decoratively, as ornaments, *alaṅkāra*, or for their effective value in giving a stronger intellectual vision of the thing or the thought it describes or defines; it does not use the image for that profounder and more living vision for which the poet is always seeking. And always it has its eye on its chief hearer and judge, the intelligence, and calls in other powers only as important aids to capture his suffrage. Reason and taste, two powers of the intelligence, are rightly the supreme gods of the prose stylist, while to the poet they are only minor deities.

If it goes beyond these limits, approaches in its measures a more striking rhythmic balance, uses images for sheer vision, opens itself to a mightier breath of speech, prose style passes beyond its normal province and approaches or even enters the confines of poetry. It becomes poetical prose or even poetry

itself using the apparent forms of prose as a disguise or a loose apparel. A high or a fine adequacy, effectivity, intellectual illuminativeness and a carefully tempered aesthetic satisfaction are the natural and proper powers of its speech. But the privilege of the poet is to go beyond and discover that more intense illumination of speech, that inspired word and supreme inevitable utterance, in which there meets the unity of a divine rhythmic movement with a depth of sense and a power of infinite suggestion welling up directly from the fountain-heads of the spirit within us. He may not always or often find it, but to seek for it is the law or at least the highest trend of his utterance, and when he can not only find it, but cast into it some deeply revealed truth of the spirit itself, he utters the *mantra*.

But always, whether in the search or the finding, the whole style and rhythm of poetry are the expression and movement which come from us out of a certain spiritual excitement caused by a vision in the soul of which it is eager to deliver itself. The vision may be of anything in Nature or God or man or the life of creatures or the life of things; it may be a vision of force and action, or of sensible beauty, or of truth of thought, or of emotion and pleasure and pain, of this life or the life beyond. It is sufficient that it is the soul which sees and the eye, sense, heart and thought-mind become the passive instruments of the soul. Then we get the real, the high poetry. But if what acts is too much an excitement of the intellect, the imagination, the emotions, the vital activities seeking rhythmical and forceful expression, without that greater spiritual excitement embracing them, or if all these are not sufficiently sunk into the soul, steeped in it, fused in it, and the expression does not come out purified and uplifted by a sort of spiritual transmutation, then we fall to lower levels of poetry and get work of a much more doubtful immortality. And when the appeal is altogether to the lower things in us, to the mere mind, we arrive outside the true domain of poetry; we approach the confines of prose or get prose itself masking in the apparent forms of poetry, and the work is distinguished from prose style only or mainly by its mechanical elements, a good verse form and perhaps a more compact, catching or energetic

expression than the prose writer will ordinarily permit to the easier and looser balance of his speech. It will not have at all or not sufficiently the true essence of poetry.

For in all things that speech can express there are two elements, the outward or instrumental and the real or spiritual. In thought, for instance, there is the intellectual idea, that which the intelligence makes precise and definite to us, and the soul-idea, that which exceeds the intellectual and brings us into nearness or identity with the whole reality of the thing expressed. Equally in emotion, it is not the mere emotion itself the poet seeks, but the soul of emotion, that in it for the delight of which the soul in us and the world desires or accepts emotional experience. So too with the poetical sense of objects, the poet's attempt to embody in his speech truth of life or truth of Nature. It is this greater truth and its delight and beauty for which he is seeking, beauty which is truth and truth beauty and therefore a joy for ever, because it brings us the delight of the soul in the discovery of its own deeper realities. This greater element the more timid and temperate speech of prose can sometimes shadow out to us, but the heightened and fearless style of poetry makes it close and living and the higher cadences of poetry carry in on their wings what the style by itself could not bring. This is the source of that intensity which is the stamp of poetical speech and of the poetical movement. It comes from the stress of the soul-vision behind the word; it is the spiritual excitement of a rhythmic voyage of self-discovery among the magic islands of form and name in these inner and outer worlds.

Chapter III

Rhythm and Movement

THE MANTRA, poetic expression of the deepest spiritual reality, is only possible when three highest intensities of poetic speech meet and become indissolubly one, a highest intensity of rhythmic movement, a highest intensity of interwoven verbal form and thought-substance, of style, and a highest intensity of the soul's vision of truth. All great poetry comes about by a unison of these three elements; it is the insufficiency of one or another which makes the inequalities in the work of even the greatest poets, and it is the failure of some one element which is the cause of their lapses, of the scoriae in their work, the spots in the sun. But it is only at a certain highest level of the fused intensities that the Mantra becomes possible.

It is from a certain point of view the rhythm, the poetic movement that is of primary importance; for that is the first fundamental and indispensable element without which all the rest, whatever its other value, remains unacceptable to the Muse of poetry. A perfect rhythm will often even give immortality to work which is slight in vision and very far from the higher intensities of style. But it is not merely metrical rhythm, even in a perfect technical excellence, which we mean when we speak of poetic movement; that perfection is only a first step, a physical basis. There must be a deeper and more subtle music, a rhythmical soul-movement entering into the metrical form and often flooding it before the real poetic achievement begins. A mere metrical excellence, however subtle, rich or varied, however perfectly it satisfies the outer ear, does not meet the deeper aims of the creative spirit; for there is an inner hearing which makes its greater claim, and to reach and satisfy it is the true aim of the creator of melody and harmony.

Nevertheless metre, by which we mean a fixed and balanced system of the measures of sound, *mātrā*, is not only the

traditional, but also surely the right physical basis for the poetic movement. A recent modern tendency — that which has given us the poetry of Whitman and Carpenter and the experimentalists in *vers libre* in France and Italy,— denies this tradition and sets aside metre as a limiting bondage, perhaps even a frivolous artificiality or a falsification of true, free and natural poetic rhythm. That is, it seems to me, a point of view which cannot eventually prevail, because it does not deserve to prevail. It certainly cannot triumph, unless it justifies itself by supreme rhythmical achievements beside which the highest work of the great masters of poetic harmony in the past shall sink into a clear inferiority. That has not yet been done. On the contrary, *vers libre* has done its best when it has either limited its aim in rhythm to a kind of chanting poetical prose or else based itself on a sort of irregular and complex metrical movement which in its inner law, though not in its form, recalls the idea of Greek choric poetry.

Milton disparaging rhyme, which he had himself used with so much skill in his earlier, less sublime, but more beautiful poetry, forgot or ignored the spiritual value of rhyme, its power to enforce and clinch the appeal of melodic or harmonic recurrence which is a principal element in the measured movement of poetry, its habit of opening sealed doors to the inspiration, its capacity to suggest and reveal beauty to that supra-intellectual something in us which music is missioned to awake. The Whitmanic technique falls into a similar, but wider error. When mankind found out the power of thought and feeling thrown into fixed and recurring measures of sound to move and take possession of the mind and soul, they were not discovering a mere artistic device, but a subtle truth of psychology, of which the conscious theory is preserved in the Vedic tradition. And when the ancient Indians chose more often than not to throw whatever they wished to endure, even philosophy, science and law, into metrical form, it was not merely to aid the memory, — they were able to memorise huge prose Brahmanas quite as accurately as the Vedic hymnal or the metrical Upanishads,— but because they perceived that metrical speech has in itself not only an easier durability, but a greater natural power than

unmetrical, not only an intenser value of sound, but a force to compel language and sense to heighten themselves in order to fall fitly into this stricter mould. There is perhaps a truth in the Vedic idea that the Spirit of creation framed all the movements of the world by *chandas*, in certain fixed rhythms of the formative Word, and it is because they are faithful to the cosmic metres that the basic world-movements unchangingly endure. A balanced harmony maintained by a system of subtle recurrences is the foundation of immortality in created things, and metrical movement is nothing else than creative sound grown conscious of this secret of its own powers.

Still there are all sorts of heights and gradations in the use of this power. General consent seems indeed to have sanctioned the name of poetry for any kind of effective language set in a vigorous or catching metrical form, and although the wideness of this definition is such that it has enabled even the Macaulays and Kiplings to mount their queer poetic thrones, I will not object: catholicity is always a virtue. Nevertheless, mere force of language tacked on to the trick of the metrical beat does not answer the higher description of poetry; it may have the form or its shadow, it has not the essence. There is a whole mass of poetry,—the French metrical romances and most of the mediaeval ballad poetry may be taken as examples,—which relies simply on the metrical beat for its rhythm and on an even level of just tolerable expression for its style; there is hardly a line whose rhythm floats home or where the expression strikes deep. Even in later European poetry, though the art of verse and language has been better learned, essentially the same method persists, and poets who use it have earned not only the popular suffrage, but the praise of the critical mind. Still the definitive verdict on their verse is that it is nothing more than an effective jog-trot of Pegasus, a pleasing canter or a showy gallop. It has great staying-power,—indeed there seems no reason why, once begun, it should not go on for ever,—it carries the poet easily over his ground, but it does nothing more. Certainly, no real soul-movement can get easily into this mould. It has its merits and its powers; it is good for metrical romances of a sort, for

war poetry and popular patriotic poetry, or perhaps any poetry which wants to be an “echo of life”; it may stir, not the soul, but the vital being in us like a trumpet or excite it like a drum. But after all the drum and the trumpet do not carry us far in the way of music.

But even high above this level we still do not get at once the greater sound-movement of which we are speaking. Poets of considerable power, sometimes even the greatest in their less exalted moments, are satisfied ordinarily with a set harmony or a set melody, which is very satisfying to the outward ear and carries the aesthetic sense along with it in a sort of even, indistinctive pleasure, and into this mould of easy melody or harmony they throw their teeming or flowing imaginations without difficulty or check, without any need of an intenser heightening, a deeper appeal. It is beautiful poetry; it satisfies the aesthetic sense, the imagination and the ear; but there the charm ends. Once we have heard its rhythm, we have nothing new to expect, no surprise for the inner ear, no danger of the soul being suddenly seized and carried away into unknown depths. It is sure of being floated along evenly as if upon a flowing stream. Or sometimes it is not so much a flowing stream as a steady march or other even movement: this comes oftenest in poets who appeal more to the thought than to the ear; they are concerned chiefly with the thing they have to say and satisfied to have found an adequate rhythmic mould into which they can throw it without any farther preoccupation.

But even a great attention and skill in the use of metrical possibilities, in the invention of rhythmical turns, devices, modulations, variations, strong to satisfy the intelligence, to seize the ear, to maintain its vigilant interest, will not bring us yet to the higher point we have in view. There are periods of literature in which this kind of skill is carried very far. The rhythms of Victorian poetry seem to me to be of this kind; they show sometimes the skill of the artist, sometimes of the classical or romantic technician, of the prestigious melodist or harmonist, sometimes the power of the vigorous craftsman or even the performer of robust metrical feats. All kinds of instrumental faculties have

been active; but the one thing that is lacking, except in moments or brief periods of inspiration, is the soul behind creating and listening to its own greater movements.

Poetic rhythm begins to reach its highest levels, the greater poetic movements become possible when, using any of these powers but rising beyond them, the soul begins to make its direct demand and yearn for a profounder satisfaction: they awake when the inner ear begins to listen. Technically, we may say that this comes in when the poet becomes, in Keats' phrase, a miser of sound and syllable, economical of his means, not in the sense of a niggardly sparing, but of making the most of all its possibilities of sound. It is then that poetry gets farthest away from the method of prose-rhythm. Prose-rhythm aims characteristically at a general harmony in which the parts are subdued to get the tone of a total effect; even the sounds which give the support or the relief, yet to a great extent seem to be trying to efface themselves in order not to disturb by a too striking particular effect the general harmony which is the whole aim. Poetry on the contrary makes much of its beats and measures; it seeks for a very definite and insistent rhythm. But still, where the greater rhythmical intensities are not pursued, it is only some total effect that predominates and the rest is subdued to it. But in these highest, intensest rhythms every sound is made the most of, whether in its suppression or in its swelling expansion, its narrowness or its open wideness, in order to get in the combined effect something which the ordinary harmonic flow of poetry cannot give us.

But this is only the technical side, the physical means by which the effect is produced. It is not the artistic intelligence or the listening physical ear that is most at work, but something within that is trying to bring out the echo of a hidden harmony, to discover a secret of rhythmic infinities within us. It is not a labour of the devising intellect or the aesthetic sense which the poet has achieved, but a labour of the spirit within itself to cast something out of the surge of the eternal depths. The other faculties are there in their place, but the conductor of the

orchestral movement is the soul suddenly and potently coming forward to get its own work done by its own higher and unanalysable methods. The result is something as near to wordless music as word-music can get, and with the same power of soul-life, of soul-emotion, of profound supra-intellectual significance. In these higher harmonies and melodies the metrical rhythm is taken up by the spiritual; it is filled with or sometimes it seems rolled away and lost in a music that has really another unseizable and spiritual secret of movement.

This is the intensity of poetic movement out of which the greatest possibility of poetic expression arises. It is where the metrical movement remains as a base, but either enshrines and contains or is itself contained and floats in an element of greater music which exceeds it and yet brings out all its possibilities, that the music fit for the Mantra makes itself audible. It is the triumph of the embodied spirit over the difficulties and limitations of the physical instrument. And the listener seems to be that other vaster and yet identical eternal spirit whom the Upanishad speaks of as the ear of the ear, he who listens to all hearings; "behind the instabilities of word and speech" it is the profound inevitable harmonies of his own thought and vision for which he is listening.

Chapter IV

Style and Substance

RHYTHM is the premier necessity of poetical expression because it is the sound-movement which carries on its wave the thought-movement in the word; and it is the musical sound-image which most helps to fill in, to extend, subtilise and deepen the thought impression or the emotional or vital impression and to carry the sense beyond itself into an expression of the intellectually inexpressible,— always the peculiar power of music. This truth was better understood on the whole or at least more consistently felt by the ancients than by the modern mind and ear, perhaps because they were more in the habit of singing, chanting or intoning their poetry while we are content to read ours, a habit which brings out the intellectual and emotional element, but unduly depresses the rhythmic value. On the other hand modern poetry has achieved a far greater subtlety, minute fineness and curious depth of suggestion in style and thought than was possible to the ancients,— at the price perhaps of some loss in power, height and simple largeness. The ancients would not so easily as the moderns have admitted into the rank of great poets writers of poor rhythmic faculty or condoned, ignored or praised in really great poets rhythmic lapses, roughnesses and crudities for the sake of their power of style and substance.

In regard to poetic style we have to make, for the purpose of the idea we have in view, the starting-point of the Mantra, precisely the same distinctions as in regard to poetic rhythm,— since here too we find actually everything admitted as poetry which has some power of style and is cast into some kind of rhythmical form. But the question is, what kind of power and in that kind what intensity of achievement? There is plenty of poetry signed by poets of present reputation or lasting fame which one is obliged to consign to a border region of half-poetry,

because its principle of expression has not got far enough away from the principle of prose expression. It seems to forget that while the first aim of prose style is to define and fix an object, fact, feeling, thought before the appreciating intelligence with whatever clearness, power, richness or other beauty of presentation may be added to that essential aim, the first aim of poetic style is to make the thing presented living to the imaginative vision, the responsive inner emotion, the spiritual sense, the soul-feeling and soul-sight. Where the failure is to express at all with any sufficient power, to get home in any way, the distinction becomes palpable enough, and we readily say of such writings that this is verse but not poetry. But where there is some thought-power or other worth of substance attended with some power of expression, false values more easily become current and even a whole literary age may dwell on this borderland or be misled into an undue exaltation and cult for this half-poetry.

Poetry, like the kindred arts of painting, sculpture, architecture, appeals to the spirit of man through significant images, and it makes no essential difference that in this case the image is mental and verbal and not material. The essential power of the poetic word is to make us see, not to make us think or feel; thought and feeling¹ must arise out of the sight or be included in it, but sight is the primary consequence and power of poetic speech. For the poet has to make us live in the soul and in the inner mind and heart what is ordinarily lived in the outer mind and the senses, and for that he must first make us see by the soul, in its light and with its deeper vision, what we ordinarily see in a more limited and halting fashion by the senses and the intelligence. He is, as the ancients knew, a seer and not merely a maker of rhymes, not merely a jongleur, rhapsodist or troubadour, and not merely a thinker in lines and stanzas. He sees beyond the sight of the surface mind and finds the revealing word, not merely the adequate and effective, but the illumined and illuminating, the

¹ I speak here of the outer emotional or sensational feeling, not of the spiritual sense and soul-stir which is the invariable concomitant of the soul's sight.

inspired and inevitable word, which compels us to see also. To arrive at that word is the whole endeavour of poetic style.

The modern distinction is that the poet appeals to the imagination and not to the intellect. But there are many kinds of imagination; the objective imagination which visualises strongly the outward aspects of life and things; the subjective imagination which visualises strongly the mental and emotional impressions they have the power to start in the mind; the imagination which deals in the play of mental fictions and to which we give the name of poetic fancy; the aesthetic imagination which delights in the beauty of words and images for their own sake and sees no farther. All these have their place in poetry, but they only give the poet his materials, they are only the first instruments in the creation of poetic style. The essential poetic imagination does not stop short with even the most subtle reproductions of things external or internal, with the richest or delicatest play of fancy or with the most beautiful colouring of word or image. It is creative, not of either the actual or the fictitious, but of the more and the most real; it sees the spiritual truth of things,—of this truth too there are many gradations,—which may take either the actual or the ideal for its starting-point. The aim of poetry, as of all true art, is neither a photographic or otherwise realistic imitation of Nature, nor a romantic furbishing and painting or idealistic improvement of her image, but an interpretation by the images she herself affords us, not on one but on many planes of her creation, of that which she conceals from us, but is ready, when rightly approached, to reveal.

This is the true, because the highest and essential aim of poetry; but the human mind arrives at it only by a succession of steps, the first of which seems far enough from its object. It begins by stringing its most obvious and external ideas, feelings and sensations of things on a thread of verse in a sufficient language of no very high quality. But even when it gets to a greater adequacy and effectiveness, it is often no more than a vital, an emotional or an intellectual adequacy and effectiveness. There is a strong vital poetry which powerfully appeals to our sensations and our sense of life, like much of Byron or the less inspired

mass of the Elizabethan drama; a strong emotional poetry which stirs our feelings and gives us the sense and active image of the passions; a strong intellectual poetry which satisfies our curiosity about life and its mechanism, or deals with its psychological and other "problems", or shapes for us our thoughts in an effective, striking and often quite resistlessly quotable fashion. All this has its pleasures for the mind and the surface soul in us, and it is certainly quite legitimate to enjoy them and to enjoy them strongly and vividly on our way upward; but if we rest content with these only, we shall never get very high up the hill of the Muses.

The style of such poetry corresponds usually to its substance; for between the word and the vision there tends to be, though there is not by any means perfectly or invariably, a certain equation. There is a force of vital style, a force of emotional style, a force of intellectual style which we meet constantly in poetry and which it is essential to distinguish from the language of the higher spiritual imagination. The forceful expression of thought and sentiment is not enough for this higher language. To take some examples, it is not enough for it to express its sense of world-sorrow in a line of cheap sentimental force like Byron's

There's not a joy the world can give like that it takes away,
or to voice an opposite truth in the sprightly-forceful manner of
Browning's

God's in his heaven,
All's right with the world,

or to strike the balance in a sense of equality with the pointed
and ever quotable intellectuality of Pope's

God sees with equal eyes as lord of all
A hero perish or a sparrow fall.

This may be the poetical or half-poetical language of thought and sentiment; it is not the language of real poetic vision. Note that all three brush the skirts of ideas whose deeper expression from the vision of a great poet might touch the very

heights of poetic revelation. Byron's line is the starting-point in the emotional sensations for that high world-pessimism and its spiritual release which finds expression in the Gita's

*Anityam asukham lokam imam prāpya bhajasva mām;*²

and one has only to compare the manner of the two in style and rhythm, even leaving the substance aside, to see the difference between the lesser and the greater poetry. Browning's language rises from a robust cheerfulness of temperament, it does not touch the deeper fountain-heads of truth in us; an opposite temperament may well smile at it as vigorous optimistic fustian. Pope's actually falsifies by its poetical inadequacy that great truth of the Gita's teaching, the truth of the divine equality, because he has not seen and therefore cannot make us see; his significant images of the truth are, like his perception of it, intellectual and rhetorical, not poetic figures.

There is a higher style of poetry than this which yet falls below the level to which we have to climb. It is no longer poetical language of a merely intellectual, vital or emotional force, but instead or in addition a genuinely imaginative style, with a certain, often a great beauty of vision in it, whether objective or subjective, or with a certain, often a great but indefinite soul-power bearing up its movement of word and rhythm. It varies in intensity: for the lower intensity we can get plenty of examples from Chaucer, when he is indulging his imagination rather than his observation, and at a higher pitch from Spenser; for the loftier intensity we can cite at will for one kind from Milton's early poetry, for another from poets who have a real spiritual vision like Keats and Shelley. English poetry runs, indeed, ordinarily in this mould. But this too is not that highest intensity of the revelatory poetic word from which the Mantra starts. It has a certain power of revelation in it, but the deeper vision is still coated up in something more external; sometimes the poetic intention of decorative beauty, sometimes some other deliberate intention of the poetic mind overlays with the more outward

² "Thou who hast come to this transient and unhappy world, love and turn to Me."

beauty, beauty of image, beauty of thought, beauty of emotion, the deeper intention of the spirit within, so that we have still to look for that beyond the image rather than are seized by it through the image. A high pleasure is there, not unspiritual in its nature, but still it is not that point where pleasure passes into or is rather drowned in the pure spiritual Ananda, the ecstasy of the creative, poetic revelation.

That intensity comes where everything else may be present, but all is powerfully carried on the surge of a spiritual vision which has found its inspired and inevitable speech. All or any of the other elements may be there, but they are at once subordinated and transfigured to their highest capacity for poetic light and rapture. This intensity belongs to no particular style, depends on no conceivable formula of diction. It may be the height of the decorative imaged style as often we find it in Kalidasa or Shakespeare; it may be that height of bare and direct expression where language seems to be used as a scarcely felt vaulting-board for a leap into the infinite; it may be the packed intensity of language which uses either the bare or the imaged form at will, but fills every word with its utmost possible rhythmic and thought suggestion. But in itself it depends on none of these things; it is not a style, but poetic style itself, the Word; it creates and carries with it its elements rather than is created by them. Whatever its outward forms, it is always the one fit style for the Mantra.

Chapter V

Poetic Vision and the Mantra

THIS HIGHEST intensity of style and movement which is the crest of the poetical impulse in its self-expression, the point at which the aesthetic, the vital, the intellectual elements of poetic speech pass into the spiritual, justifies itself perfectly when it is the body of a deep, high or wide spiritual vision into which the life-sense, the thought, the emotion, the appeal of beauty in the thing discovered and in its expression — for all great poetic utterance is discovery, — rise on the wave of the culminating poetic inspiration and pass into an ecstasy of sight. In the lesser poets these moments are rare and come like brilliant accidents, angels' visits; in the greater they are more frequent outbursts; but in the greatest they abound because they arise from a constant faculty of poetic vision and poetic speech which has its lesser and its greater moments, but never entirely fails these supreme masters of the expressive word.

Vision is the characteristic power of the poet, as is discriminative thought the essential gift of the philosopher and analytic observation the natural genius of the scientist. The Kavi¹ was in the idea of the ancients the seer and revealer of truth, and though we have wandered far enough from that ideal to demand from him only the pleasure of the ear and the amusement of the aesthetic faculty, still all great poetry instinctively preserves something of that higher turn of its own aim and significance. Poetry, in fact, being Art, must attempt to make us see, and since it is to the inner senses that it has to address itself, — for the ear is its only physical gate of entry and even there its real appeal is to an inner hearing, — and since its object is to make us live

¹ The Sanskrit word for poet. In classical Sanskrit it is applied to any maker of verse or even of prose, but in the Vedic it meant the poet-seer who saw the Truth and found in a subtle truth-hearing the inspired word of his vision.

within ourselves what the poet has embodied in his verse, it is an inner sight which he opens in us, and this inner sight must have been intense in him before he can awaken it in us.

Therefore the greatest poets have been always those who have had a large and powerful interpretative and intuitive vision of Nature and life and man and whose poetry has arisen out of that in a supreme revelatory utterance of it. Homer, Shakespeare, Dante, Valmiki, Kalidasa, however much they may differ in everything else, are at one in having this as the fundamental character of their greatness. Their supremacy does not lie essentially in a greater thought-power or a more lavish imagery or a more penetrating force of passion and emotion; these things they may have had, one being more gifted in one direction, another in others, but these other powers were aids to their poetic expression rather than its essence or its source. There is often more thought in a short essay of Bacon's than in a whole play of Shakespeare's, but not even a hundred cryptograms can make him the author of the dramas; for, as he showed when he tried to write poetry, the very nature of his thought-power and the characteristic way of expression of the born philosophic thinker hampered him in poetic expression. It was the constant outstreaming of form and thought and image from an abundant inner vision of life which made Shakespeare, whatever his other deficiencies, the sovereign dramatic poet. Sight is the essential poetic gift. The archetypal poet in a world of original ideas is, we may say, a Soul that sees in itself intimately this world and all the others and God and Nature and the life of beings and sets flowing from its centre a surge of creative rhythm and word-images which become the expressive body of the vision. The great poets are those who repeat in some measure this ideal creation, *kavayah satyaśrutah*, seers of the poetic truth and hearers of its word.

The tendency of the modern mind at the present day seems to be towards laying a predominant value on the thought in poetry. We live still in an age which is in a great intellectual trouble and ferment about life and the world and is developing enormously the human intelligence,—often at the expense of

other powers which are no less necessary to self-knowledge,—in order to grapple with life and master it. We are seeking always and in many directions to decipher the enigma of things, the cryptogram of the worlds which we are set to read, and to decipher it by the aid of the intellect; and for the most part we are much too busy living and thinking to have leisure to be silent and see. We expect the poet to use his great mastery of language to help us in this endeavour; we ask of him not so much perfect beauty of song or largeness of creative vision as a message to our perplexed and seeking intellects. Therefore we hear constantly today of the “philosophy” of a poet, even the most inveterate beautifier of commonplaces being forcibly gifted by his admirers with a philosophy, or of his message,—the message of Tagore, the message of Whitman. We are asking then of the poet to be, not a supreme singer or an inspired seer of the worlds, but a philosopher, a prophet, a teacher, even something perhaps of a religious or ethical preacher. It is necessary therefore to say that when I claim for the poet the role of a seer of Truth and find the source of great poetry in a great and revealing vision of life or God or the gods or man or Nature, I do not mean that it is necessary for him to have an intellectual philosophy of life or a message for humanity, which he chooses to express in verse because he has the metrical gift and the gift of imagery, or that he must give us a solution of the problems of the age, or come with a mission to improve mankind, or, as it is said, “to leave the world better than he found it.” As a man, he may have these things, but the less he allows them to get the better of his poetic gift, the happier it will be for his poetry. Material for his poetry they may give, an influence in it they may be, provided they are transmuted into vision and life by the poetic spirit, but they can be neither its soul nor its aim, nor give the law to its creative activity and its expression.

The poet-seer sees differently, thinks in another way, voices himself in quite another manner than the philosopher or the prophet. The prophet announces the Truth as the Word, the Law or the command of the Eternal, he is the giver of the message; the poet shows us Truth in its power of beauty, in its symbol or

image, or reveals it to us in the workings of Nature or in the workings of life, and when he has done that, his whole work is done; he need not be its explicit spokesman or its official messenger. The philosopher's business is to discriminate Truth and put its parts and aspects into intellectual relation with each other; the poet's is to seize and embody aspects of Truth in their living relations, or rather — for that is too philosophical a language — to see her features and, excited by the vision, create in the beauty of her image.

No doubt, the prophet may have in him a poet who breaks out often into speech and surrounds with the vivid atmosphere of life the directness of his message; he may follow up his injunction "Take no thought for the morrow," by a revealing image of the beauty of the truth he enounces, in the life of Nature, in the figure of the lily, or link it to human life by apostrophe and parable. The philosopher may bring in the aid of colour and image to give some relief and hue to his dry light of reason and water his arid path of abstractions with some healing dew of poetry. But these are ornaments and not the substance of his work; and if the philosopher makes his thought substance of poetry, he ceases to be a philosophic thinker and becomes a poet-seer of Truth. Thus the more rigid metaphysicians are perhaps right in denying to Nietzsche the name of philosopher; for Nietzsche does not think, but always sees, turbidly or clearly, rightly or distortedly, but with the eye of the seer rather than with the brain of the thinker. On the other hand we may get great poetry which is full of a prophetic enthusiasm of utterance or is largely or even wholly philosophic in its matter; but this prophetic poetry gives us no direct message, only a mass of sublime inspirations of thought and image, and this philosophic poetry is poetry and lives as poetry only in so far as it departs from the method, the expression, the way of seeing proper to the philosophic mind. It must be vision pouring itself into thought-images and not thought trying to observe truth and distinguish its province and bounds and fences.

In earlier days this distinction was not at all clearly understood and therefore we find even poets of great power attempting

to set philosophic systems to music or even much more prosaic matter than a philosophic system, Hesiod and Virgil setting about even a manual of agriculture in verse! In Rome, always a little blunt of perception in the aesthetic mind, her two greatest poets fell a victim to this unhappy conception, with results which are a lesson and a warning to all posterity. Lucretius' work lives only, in spite of the majestic energy behind it, by its splendid digressions into pure poetry, Virgil's *Georgics* by fine passages and pictures of Nature and beauties of word and image; but in both the general substance is lifeless matter which has floated to us on the stream of Time, saved only by the beauty of its setting. India, and perhaps India alone, managed once or twice to turn this kind of philosophic attempt into a poetic success, in the Gita, in the Upanishads and some minor works modelled upon them. But the difference is great. The Gita owes its poetical success to its starting from a great and critical situation in life, its constant keeping of that in view and always returning upon it, and to its method which is to seize on a spiritual experience or moment or stage of the inner life and throw it into the form of thought; and this, though a delicate operation, can well abide within the limits of the poetic manner of speech. Only where it overburdens itself with metaphysical matter and deviates into sheer philosophic definition and discrimination, which happens especially in two or three of its closing chapters, does the poetic voice sink under the weight, even occasionally into flattest versified prose. The Upanishads too, and much more, are not at all philosophic thinking, but spiritual seeing; these ancient stanzas are a rush of spiritual intuitions, flames of a burning fire of mystic experience, waves of an inner sea of light and life, and they throw themselves into the language and cadence of poetry because that is their natural speech and a more intellectual utterance would have falsified their vision.

Nowadays we have clarified our aesthetic perceptions sufficiently to avoid the mistake of the Roman poets; but in a subtler form the intellectual tendency still shows a dangerous spirit of encroachment. For the impulse to teach is upon us, the inclination to be an observer and critic of life, — there could

be no more perilous definition than Arnold's poetic "criticism of life", in spite of the saving epithet,—to clothe, merely, in the forms of poetry a critical or philosophic idea of life to the detriment of our vision. Allegory with its intellectual ingenuities, its facile wedding of the abstract idea and the concrete image, shows a tendency to invade again the domain of poetry. And there are other signs of the intellectual malady of which we are almost all of us the victims. Therefore it is well to insist that the native power of poetry is in its sight, not in its intellectual thought-matter, and its safety is in adhering to this native principle of vision; its conception, its thought, its emotion, its presentation, its structure must rise out of that or else rise into it before it takes its finished form. The poetic vision of things is not a criticism of life, not an intellectual or philosophic view of it, but a soul-view, a seizing by the inner sense. The Mantra too is not in its substance or its form a poetic enunciation of philosophic verities, but a rhythmic revelation or intuition arising out of the soul's sight of God and Nature and itself and of the world and of the inner truth—occult to the outward eye—of all that peoples it, the secrets of their life and being.

In the attempt to fix the view of life which Art must take, distinctions are constantly laid down, such as the necessity of a subjective or an objective treatment or of a realistic or an idealistic view, which mislead more than they enlighten. Certainly, one poet may seem to excel in the concrete presentation of things and falter or be less sure in his grasp of the purely subjective, while another may move freely in the more subjective worlds and be less at home in the concrete; and both may be poets of a high order. But when we look closer, we see that just as a certain objectivity is necessary to make poetry live and the thing seen stand out before our eyes, so on the other hand even the most objective presentation starts from an inner view and subjective process of creation or at least a personal interpretation and transmutation of the thing seen. The poet really creates out of himself and not out of what he sees outwardly: that outward seeing only serves to excite the inner vision to its work. Otherwise his work would

be a mechanical construction and putting together, not a living creation.

Sheer objectivity brings us down from art to photography; and the attempt to diminish the subjective view to the vanishing-point so as to get an accurate presentation is proper to science, not to poetry. We are not thereby likely to get a greater truth or reality, but very much the reverse; for the scientific presentation of things, however valid in its own domain, that of the senses and the observing reason, is not true to the soul. It is not the integral truth or the whole vision of things, for it gives only their process and machinery and mechanic law, but not their inner life and spirit. That is the error in realism,—in its theory, at least, for its practice is something other than what it intends or pretends to be. Realistic art does not and cannot give us a scientifically accurate presentation of life, because Art is not and cannot be Science. What it does do, is to make an arbitrary selection of motives, forms and hues, here of dull blues and greys and browns and dingy whites and sordid yellows, there of violent blacks and reds, and the result is sometimes a thing of power and sometimes a nightmare. Idealistic art makes a different selection and produces either a work of nobly-coloured power or soft-hued beauty or else a high-pitched and false travesty or a specious day-dream. In these distinctions there is no safety; nor can any rule be laid down for the poet, since he must necessarily go by what he is and what he sees, except that he should work from the living poetic centre within him and not exile himself into artificial standpoints.

From our present point of view we may say that the poet may do as he pleases in all that is not the essential matter. Thought-matter may be prominent in his work or life-substance predominate. He may proceed by sheer force of presentation or by direct power of interpretation. He may make this world his text, or wander into regions beyond, or soar straight into the pure empyrean of the infinite. To arrive at the Mantra he may start from the colour of a rose, or the power or beauty of a character, or the splendour of an action, or go away from all these into his own secret soul and its most hidden movements.

The one thing needful is that he should be able to go beyond the word or image he uses or the form of the thing he sees, not be limited by them, but get into the light of that which they have the power to reveal and flood them with it until they overflow with its suggestions or seem even to lose themselves and disappear into the revelation and the apocalypse. At the highest he himself disappears into sight; the personality of the seer is lost in the eternity of the vision, and the Spirit of all seems alone to be there speaking out sovereignly its own secrets.

But the poetic vision, like everything else, follows necessarily the evolution of the human mind and according to the age and environment, it has its ascents and descents, its high levels and its low returns. Ordinarily, it follows the sequence of an abrupt ascent pushing to a rapid decline. The eye of early man is turned upon the physical world about him, the interest of the story of life and its primary ideas and emotions; he sees man and his world only, or he sees the other worlds and their gods and beings, but it is still his own physical world in a magnified and heightened image. He asks little of poetry except a more forceful vision of familiar things, things real and things commonly imagined, which will help him to see them more largely and feel them more strongly and give him a certain inspiration to live them more powerfully. Next,—but this transition is sometimes brief or even quite overleaped,—there comes a period in which he feels the joy and curiosity and rich adventure of the expanding life-force within him, the passion and romance of existence and it is this in all its vivid colour that he expects art and poetry to express and satisfy him through the imagination and the emotions with its charm and power. Afterwards he begins to intellectualise, but still on the same subject-matter; he asks now from the poet a view of things enlightened by the inspired reason and beautifully shaped by the first strong and clear joy of his developed aesthetic sense. A vital poetry appealing to the imagination through the sense-mind and the emotions and a poetry interpretative of life to the intelligence are the fruit of these ages. A later poetry tends always to return on these forms with a more subtilised intellect and a richer life-experience. But, having got so far, it can go no

farther and there is the beginning of a decadence.

Great things may be done by poetry within these limits and the limited lifetime it gives to a literature; but it is evident that the poet will have a certain difficulty in getting to a deeper vision, because he has to lean entirely on the external thought and form; he must be subservient to them because they are the only safe support he knows, and he gets at what truth he can that may be beyond them with their veil still thickly interposing between him and a greater light. A higher level can come, bringing with it the possibility of a renewed and prolonged course for the poetic impulse, if the mind of man begins to see more intimately the forces behind life, the powers concealed by our subjective existence. The poet can attempt to reveal these unsuspected ranges and motives and use the outward physical and vital and thought symbol only as a suggestion of greater things. Yet a higher level can be attained, deeper depths, larger horizons when the soul in things comes nearer to man or when other worlds than the physical open themselves to him. And the entire liberation of the poetic vision to see most profoundly and the poetic power to do its highest work will arrive when the spiritual itself is the possession of the greatest minds and the age stands on the verge of its revelation.

Therefore it is not sufficient for poetry to attain high intensities of word and rhythm; it must have, to fill them, an answering intensity of vision and always new and more and more uplifted or inward ranges of experience. And this does not depend only on the individual power of vision of the poet, but on the mind of his age and country, its level of thought and experience, the adequacy of its symbols, the depth of its spiritual attainment. A lesser poet in a greater age may give us occasionally things which exceed in this kind the work of less favoured immortals. The religious poetry of the later Indian tongues has for us fervours of poetic revelation which in the great classics are absent, even though no mediaeval poet can rank in power with Valmiki and Kalidasa. The modern literatures of Europe commonly fall short of the Greek perfection of harmony and form, but they give us what the greatest Greek poets had not and could not have. And

in our own days a poet of secondary power in his moments of inspiration can get to a vision far more satisfying to the deepest soul within us than Shakespeare's or Dante's. Greatest of all is the promise of the age that is coming, if the race fulfils its highest and largest opening possibilities and does not founder in a vitalistic bog or remain tied in the materialistic paddock; for it will be an age in which all the worlds are beginning to withdraw their screens from man's gaze and invite his experience, and he will be near to the revelation of the Spirit of which they are, as we choose, the obscuring veils, the significant forms and symbols or else the transparent raiment. It is as yet uncertain to which of these consummations destiny is leading us.

Chapter VI

The National Evolution of Poetry

THE WORK of the poet depends not only on himself and his age, but on the mentality of the nation to which he belongs and the spiritual, intellectual, aesthetic tradition and environment which it creates for him. It is not that he is or need be entirely limited or conditioned by his environment or that he must regard himself as only a voice of the national mind or bound by some past national tradition and debarred from striking out a novel and original road of his own. In nations which are returning under difficulties to a strong self-consciousness, like the Irish or the Indians at the present moment, this kind of conscious nationalism in literature may be for some time a living idea and a powerful motive. In others which have had a vivid collective life that has exercised a common and intimate influence on all its individuals or in those which have cherished an acute sense of a great national culture and tradition, the more stable elements of that tradition may exert a very conscious influence on the mind of the poets. At once sustaining and limiting the weaker spirits, they give to genius an exceptional power for sustained beauty of form and a satisfying perfection. But this is no essential condition for the birth of great poetry. The poet, we must always remember, creates out of himself and has the indefeasible right to follow freely the breath of the spirit within him, provided he satisfies in his work the law of poetic beauty. The external forms of his age and his nation only give him his starting-point and some of his materials and determine to some extent, by education, by a subconscious and automatic environmental pressure, the room he finds for the free play of his poetic spirit.

Nor is it necessary to subscribe to the theory of the man and his milieu or the dogma of the historical school of criticism which asks of us to study all the precedents, circumstances, influences,

surroundings, all that "created" the man and his work,—as if there were not something in him apart from these which made all the difference, something that made him a man apart and not like others. It is supposed that out of this elaborate scientific study the right estimate of his poetry will arise. But even the right historical or psychological understanding of him need not inevitably arise out of this method; for we may very easily read into him and his work things which may perhaps have been there in front of him or around him, but never really got inside him. And the right estimate of his work we certainly shall not form if we bring in so much that is accidental and unessential to cloud our free and direct impression. Rather the very opposite is the true method of appreciation; we have to go straight to the poet and his poem for all we need essentially to know about them,—we shall get there all that we really want for any true aesthetic or poetic purpose. Afterwards we can go elsewhere, if we like, for any minor elucidations or rummage about laboriously to satisfy our scientific and historical curiosity. In this more natural order things accidental are much more likely to fall into their right place and the freshness and authenticity of our poetic appreciation have some chance of remaining unobscured and still vibrant. But quite apart from its external and therefore unreal method, there is a truth in the historical theory of criticism which is of real help towards grasping something that is important and even essential, if not for our poetic appreciation, yet for our intellectual judgment of a poet and his work.

In poetry, as in everything else that aims at perfection, there are always two elements, the eternal true substance and the limitations and accidents brought in by the time element. The first alone really and always matters, and it is that which must determine our definitive appreciation, our absolute verdict, or rather our essential response to poetry. A soul expressing the eternal spirit of Truth and Beauty through some of the infinite variations of beauty, with the word for its instrument, that is, after all, what the poet is, and it is to a similar soul in us seeking the same spirit and responding to it that he makes his appeal. It is when we can get this response at its purest and in its most

direct and heightened awakening that our faculty of poetic appreciation becomes at once surest and most intense. It is, we may say, the impersonal enjoyer of creative beauty in us responding to the impersonal creator and interpreter of beauty in the poet. For it is the impersonal spirit of Truth and Beauty that is seeking to express itself through his personality; and it is that and not his personal intelligence which finds its own word and seems itself to create through him in his highest moments of inspiration. And this Impersonal is concerned only with the creative idea and the motive of beauty which is seeking expression; its sole purpose is to find the perfect expression, the inevitable word and the rhythm that reveals. All else is subordinate, accidental, the crude material and the conditioning medium of this essential endeavour.

Still there is also the personality of the poet and the personality of the hearer; the one gives the pitch and the form of the success arrived at, the other determines the characteristic intellectual and aesthetic judgment to which its appeal arrives. The correspondence or the dissonance between the two decides the relation between the poet and his reader, and out of that arises whatever is personal in our appreciation and judgment of his poetry. In this personal or time element there is always much that is merely accidental and this rather limits and deflects our judgment than helps usefully to form it. How much it interferes can be seen when we try to value contemporary poetry.¹ It is a matter of continual experience that even critics of considerable insight and sureness of taste are yet capable of the most extraordinarily wrong judgments, whether on the side of appreciation or of depreciation, when they have to pass a verdict on their contemporaries. And this is because a crowd of accidental influences belonging to the effect of the time and the mental environment upon our mentality exercise an exaggerated domination and distort or colour the view of our mental eye

¹ Or even the poetry that has just preceded us, e.g. the nineteenth century's contemptuous estimate of the eighteenth or the twentieth century's equally contemptuous dismissal of the fallen Victorian demigods.

upon its object. But apart from this disabling intrusion there is always something essential to our present personality which is of more value and has a right to be heard. For we are all of us souls developing our unfinished nature in a constant endeavour to get into unity with the spirit in life through its many forms of manifestation and on many different lines. And as there is in Indian Yoga a principle of varying capacity, *adhikāra*, something in the immediate power of a man's nature that determines by its characteristics his right to this or that way of Yoga, of union with the Divine, which, whatever its merits or its limitations, is his right way because it is most helpful to him personally, so in all our activities of life and mind there is this principle of *adhikāra*. That which we can appreciate in poetry and still more the way in which we appreciate it, is that in it and us which is most helpful to us and therefore, for the time being at least, right for us in our attempt to get into union either with universal or transcendent Beauty through the revealing ideas and motives and suggestive forms of poetic creation.

This is the individual aspect of the personal or time element. But there is also a larger movement to which we belong, ourselves and the poet and his poetry; or rather it is the same movement of the general soul of mankind in the same endeavour as the individual's and towards the same objective. In poetry this shows itself in a sort of evolution from the objective to the inward and from the inward to the inmost, the spiritual, — an evolution which has many curves and turns and cycles, many returns upon past motives and imperfect anticipations of future motives, but is on the whole and up to a certain point a growth and progress, a constant labour of self-enlargement and self-finding. It is a clear idea of this evolution which may most helpfully inform the historical element in our judgment and appreciation of poetry; it is a judgment of it from the viewpoint of the evolution of the human spirit and the subtler consciousness and larger experience which that progress brings. We can see this general movement working itself out in different forms and on different lines through the souls of the nations and peoples, not so many after all, who have arrived at a strong self-expression

through the things of the mind, through art and thought and poetry. These things of the mind do not indeed form or express the whole of the movement, even as they do not make up the whole of the life of the people; they represent its highest points,—or in the two or three peoples that have powerfully developed the spiritual force within, the highest with the exception of the spiritual summit. In these few we can best see the inner character and aim of any one line of the movement,—whether it be the line of poetry, the line of art or the line of religious and spiritual endeavour.

This general evolution has its own natural periods or ages; but as with the stone, bronze and other ages discovered by the archaeologists, their time periods do not always correspond, are not the same for all the peoples which have evolved them. Moreover, they do not always follow each other in quite the same rigorous order; there are occasional reversals, extraordinary anticipations, violent returns; for in things psychological the Spirit in the world varies its movements more freely than in physical things. There, besides, the spirit of the race can anticipate the motives of a higher stratum of psychological development while yet it lives outwardly the general life of a lower stratum. So too when it has got well on to a higher level of development, it may go strongly back to a past and inferior motive and see how that works out when altered and uplifted or enlarged or even only subtilised by the motives and powers of the superior medium. There is here, besides, a greater complexity of unseen or half-seen subconscious and superconscious tendencies and influences at work upon the comparatively small part of us which is conscious of what it is doing. And very often a nation in its labour of self-expression is both helped and limited by what has been left behind from the evolution of a past self which, being dead, yet lives.

Thus, the Indian spirit could seize powerfully the spiritual motive in an age in which the mass of the people lived a strenuous external life and was strongly outward-going and objective in its normal mentality. It succeeded in expressing the supreme spiritual experiences, so difficult to put at all into speech, in forms

and images proper to the simplest physical life and the most external customary mentality converting them into physical symbols of the supraphysical and then, by a rapid liberation, in its own proper voice, so producing the sacred poetry of the Veda and Upanishads. An Italy with the Graeco-Roman past in its blood could seize intellectually on the motives of catholic Christianity and give them a precise and supremely poetic expression in Dante, while all Germanised Europe was still stammering its primitive thoughts in the faltering infantile accents of romance verse or shadowing them out in Gothic stone, successful only in the most material form of the spiritual. In another direction, when it seized upon the romantic life-motive, the meeting-place of the Teuton and the Celt, we see it losing entirely the mystically sentimental Celtic element, Italianising it into the sensuousness of Tasso, and Italianising the rest into an intellectualised, a half imaginative, half satiric play with the superficial motives of romance,—the inevitable turn of the Italianised Roman spirit. On the other hand the English spirit, having got rid of the Latin culture and holding the Celtic mind for a long time at bay, exiled into the Welsh mountains or parked beyond the pale in Ireland, followed with remarkable fidelity the natural curve and stages of the psychological evolution of poetry, taking several centuries to arrive at the intellectual motive and more to get at something like a spiritual turn still too intellectualised to find any absolute intensity of the spirit, only the first shimmerings of an outbreak of vision.

Generally, every nation or people has or develops a spirit in its being, a special soul-form of the human all-soul and a law of its nature which determines the lines and turns of its evolution. All that it takes from its environment it naturally attempts to assimilate to this spirit, transmute into stuff of this soul-form, make apt to and governable by this law of its nature. All its self-expression is in conformity with them. And its poetry, art and thought are the expression of this self and of the greater possibilities of its self to which it moves. The individual poet and his poetry are part of its movement. Not that they are limited by the present temperament and outward forms of the national

mind; they may exceed them. The soul of the poet may be like a star and dwell apart; even, his work may seem not merely a variation from but a revolt against the limitations of the national mind. But still the roots of his personality are there in its spirit and even his variation and revolt are an attempt to bring out something that is latent and suppressed or at least something which is trying to surge up from the secret all-soul into the soul-form of the nation. Therefore to appreciate this national evolution of poetry and the relations of the poet and his work with it cannot but be fruitful, if we observe them from the point of view not so much of things external to poetry, but of its own spirit and characteristic forms and motives.

Chapter VII

The Character of English Poetry – 1

OF ALL the modern European tongues the English language—I think this may be said without any serious doubt,—has produced, not always the greatest or most perfect, but at least the most rich and naturally powerful poetry, the most lavish of energy and innate genius. The unfettered play of poetic energy and power has been here the most abundant and brought forth the most constantly brilliant fruits. And yet it is curious to note that English poetry and literature have been a far less effective force in the shaping of European culture than the poetry and literature of other tongues inferior actually in natural poetic and creative energy. At least they have had to wait till quite a recent date before they produced any potent effect and even then their direct influence was limited and not always durable.

A glance will show how considerable has been this limitation. The poetic mind of Greece and Rome has pervaded and largely shaped the whole artistic production of Europe; Italian poetry of the great age has thrown on some part of it at least a stamp only less profound; French prose and poetry—but the latter in a much less degree,—have helped more than any other literary influence to form the modern turn of the European mind and its mode of expression; the shortlived outbursts of creative power in the Spain of Calderón and the Germany of Goethe exercised an immediate, a strong, though not an enduring influence; the newly created Russian literature has been, though more subtly, among the most intense of recent cultural forces. But if we leave aside Richardson and Scott and, recently, Dickens in fiction and in poetry the very considerable effects of the belated continental discovery of Shakespeare and the vehement and sudden wave of the Byronic influence, which did much to enforce the note of revolt and of a half sentimental, half sensual pessimism

which is even now one of the strongest shades in the literary tone of modern Europe,—to the present day Shakespeare and Byron are the only two great names of English poetry which are generally familiar on the continent and have had a real vogue,—we find the literature of the English tongue and especially its poetry flowing in a large side-stream, always receiving much from the central body of European culture but returning upon it in comparison very little. This insularity, not of reception but of reaction, is a marked phenomenon and calls for explanation.

If we look for the causes,—for such a paucity of influence cannot, certainly, be put down to any perversity or obtuseness in the general mind of Europe, but must be due to some insufficiency or serious defect in the literature,—we shall find, I think, if we look with other than English-trained eyes, that there is even in this rich and vigorous poetry abundant cause for the failure. English poetry is powerful but it is imperfect, strong in spirit, but uncertain and tentative in form; it is extraordinarily stimulating, but not often quite satisfying. It aims high, but its success is not as great as its effort. Especially, its imaginative force exceeds its thought-power; it has indeed been hardly at all a really great instrument of poetic thought-vision; it has not dealt fruitfully with life. Its history has been more a succession of individual poetic achievements than a constant national tradition; in the mass it has been a series of poetical revolutions without any strong inner continuity. That is to say that it has had no great self-recognising idea or view of life expressive of the spiritual attitude of the nation or powerful to determine from an early time its own sufficient artistic forms. But it is precisely the possession of such a self-recognising spiritual attitude and the attainment of a satisfying artistic form for it which make the poetry of a nation a power in the world's general culture. For that which recognises its self will most readily be recognised by others. And, again, that which attains the perfect form of its own innate character, will be most effective in forming others and leave its stamp in the building of the general mind of humanity.

One or two examples will be sufficient to show the vast difference. No poetry has had so powerful an influence as Greek

poetry; no poetry is, I think, within its own limits so perfect and satisfying. The limits indeed are marked and even, judged by the undulating many-sidedness and wideness of the modern mind, narrow; but on its own lines this poetry works with a flawless power and sufficiency. From beginning to end it dealt with life from one large view-point; it worked always from the inspired reason, used a luminous intellectual observation and harmonised all it did by the rule of an enlightened and chastened aesthetic sense; whatever changes overtook it, it never departed from this motive and method which are the very essence of the Greek spirit. And of this motive it was very conscious and by its clear recognition of it and fidelity to it it was able to achieve an artistic beauty and sufficiency of expressive form which affect us like an easily accomplished miracle and which have been the admiration of after ages. Even the poetry of the Greek decadence preserved enough of this power to act as a shaping influence on Latin literature.

French poetry is much more limited than the Greek, much less powerful in inspiration. For it deals with life from the standpoint not of the inspired reason, but of the clear-thinking intellect, not of the enlightened aesthetic sense, but of emotional sentiment. These are its two constant powers; the one gives it its brain-stuff, the other its poetical fervour and grace and charm and appeal. Throughout all the changes of the last century, in spite of apparent cultural revolutions, the French spirit has remained in its poetry faithful to these two motives which are of its very essence, and because of this fidelity it has always or almost always found for its work a satisfying and characteristic form. To that combination of a clear and strong motive and a satisfying form it owes the immense influence it has exercised from time to time on other European literatures. The cultural power of the poetry of other tongues may be traced to similar causes. But what has been the distinct spirit and distinguishing form of English poetry? Certainly, there is an English spirit which could not fail to be reflected in its poetry; but, not being clearly self-conscious, it is reflected obscurely and confusedly, and it has been at war within itself, followed a fluctuation of different

motives and never succeeded in bringing about between them a conciliation and fusion. Therefore its form has suffered; it has had indeed no native and characteristic principle of form which would be, through all changes, the outward reflection of a clear self-recognising spirit.

The poetry of a nation is only one side of its self-expression and its characteristics may be best understood if we look at it in relation to the whole mental and dynamic effort of the people. If we so look at the general contribution of the English nation to human life and culture, the eye is arrested by some remarkable lacunae. These are especially profound in the arts: English music is a zero, English sculpture an unfilled void, English architecture only a little better;¹ English painting, illustrated by a few great names, has been neither a great artistic tradition nor a powerful cultural force and merits only a casual mention by the side of the rich achievement of Italy, Spain, France, Holland, Belgium. When we come to the field of thought we get a mixed impression like that of great mountain eminences towering out of a very low and flat plain. We find great individual philosophers, but no great philosophical tradition, two or three remarkable thinkers, but no high fame for thinking, a great multitude of the most famous names in science, but no national scientific culture. Still in these fields there has been remarkable accomplishment and the influence on European thought has been frequently considerable and sometimes capital. But when finally we turn to the business of practical life, there is an unqualified preeminence: in mechanical science and invention, in politics, in commerce and industry, in colonisation, travel, exploration, in the domination of earth and the exploitation of its riches England has been till late largely, sometimes entirely the world's leader, the creator of its forms and the shaper of its motives.

This peculiar distribution of the national capacities finds its root in certain racial characteristics. We have first the dominant Anglo-Saxon strain quickened, lightened and given force, power

¹ Outside the Gothic, and even there there is not the continental magnificence of the past's riches.

and initiative by the Scandinavian and Celtic elements. This mixture has made a national mind remarkably dynamic and practical, with all the Teutonic strength, patience, industry, but liberated from the Teutonic heaviness and crudity, yet retaining enough not to be too light of balance or too sensitive to the shocks of life; therefore, a nation easily first in practical intelligence and practical dealing with the facts and difficulties of life. Not, be it noted, by any power of clear intellectual thought or by force of imagination or mental intuition, but rather by a strong vital instinct, a sort of tentative dynamic intuition. No spirituality, but a robust ethical turn; no innate power of the thought and the word, but a strong turn for action; no fine play of emotion or quickness of sympathy, but an abundant energy and force of will. This is one element of the national mind; the other is the submerged, half-insistent Celtic spirit, gifted with precisely the opposite qualities, inherent spirituality, the gift of the word, the rapid and brilliant imagination, the quick and luminous intelligence, the strong emotional force and sympathy, the natural love of the things of the mind and still more of those beyond the mind, left to it from an ancient mystic tradition and an old forgotten culture, forgotten in its mind, but still flowing in its blood, still vibrant in its subtler nerve-channels. In life a subordinate element, modifying the cruder Anglo-Saxon characteristics, breaking across them or correcting their excess, sometimes refining and toning, sometimes exaggerating the energy of the Norman and the Scandinavian strength and drive, we may perhaps see it emerging at its best, least hampered, least discouraged, in English poetry, coming there repeatedly to the surface and then working with a certain force and vehement but still embarrassed power, like an imprisoned spirit let out for a holiday but within not quite congenial bounds and with an unadaptable companion. From the ferment of these two elements, from the vigorous but chaotic motion created by their fusion and their clash, arise both the greatness and the limitations of English poetry.

Chapter VIII

The Character of English Poetry—2

WHAT KIND or quality of poetry should we naturally expect from a national mind so constituted? The Anglo-Saxon strain is dominant and in that circumstance there lay just a hazardous possibility that there might have been no poetical literature at all. The Teutonic nations have in this field been conspicuous by their silence or the rarity of their speech. After the old rude epics, saga or Nibelungenlied, we have to wait till quite recent times for poetic utterance, nor, when it came, was it rich or abundant. In Germany, so rich in music, in philosophy, in science, the great poetic word has burst out rarely: one brief and strong morning time illumined by the calm, large and steady blaze of Goethe's genius and the wandering fire of Heine, afterwards a long unlighted stillness. In the North here or there a solitary genius, Ibsen, Strindberg. Holland, another Teutonic country which developed an art of a considerable but almost wholly objective power, is mute in poetry.¹ It would almost seem that there is still something too thick and heavy in the strength and depth of the Teutonic composition for the ethereal light and fire of the poetic word to make its way freely through the intellectual and vital envelope. What has saved the English mind from a like taciturnity? It must have been the mixture of other racial strains, sublimating this strong but heavy material temperament with a quicker and more impetuous element; the submerged Celtic genius must have pushed the rest from behind, intervening as a decisive force to liberate and uplift the poetic spirit. And as a necessary aid we have the fortunate accident of the reshaping of a Teutonic tongue

¹ I do not include here any consideration of contemporary names; it would be unsafe to go by the great reputations of today which may sink tomorrow to a much lower status.

by French and Latinistic influences which gave it clearer and more flowing forms and turned it into a fine though difficult linguistic material sufficiently malleable, sufficiently plastic for Poetry to produce in it both her larger and her subtler effects, but also sufficiently difficult to compel her to put forth her greatest energies. A stuff of speech which, without being harsh and inapt, does not tempt by too great a facility, but offers a certain resistance in the material, increases the strength of the artist by the measure of the difficulty conquered and can be thrown into shapes at once of beauty and of concentrated power. That is eminently the character of the English language.

At any rate we have this long continuity of poetic production. And once supposing a predominantly Anglo-Saxon or, more strictly an Anglo-Norman national mind moved to express itself in poetry, we should, ignoring for a moment the Celtic emergence, expect the groundwork to be a strong objective poetry, a powerful presentation of the forms of external life, a ready and energetic portrayal of action and character in action, the pleasant or the melancholy outsides of Nature, the robust play of the will and the passions, a vigorous flow of a strenuous vital and physical verse creation. Even we might look for a good deal of deviation into themes and motives for which prose will always be the more adequate and characteristic instrument; we should not be surprised to meet here a self-styled Augustan age which makes these things the greater part of its realm and indulges with a self-satisfied contentment in a confident and obvious "criticism" of external life, preferring to more truly poetic forms and subjects the poetry of political and ecclesiastical controversy, didactic verse, satire. There would be in this Anglo-Norman poetry a considerable power of narrative and a great energy in the drama of character and incident; but any profounder use of the narrative and dramatic forms we would not look for,—at most we might arrive in the end at some powerful dramatic analysis of character. The romantic element would be of an external Teutonic kind sensational and outward, appealing to the life and the senses; there would be no touch of the delicate and beautiful imaginative, mystic and almost spiritual Celtic

romanticism. We should have perhaps much poetical thinking or even poetical philosophy of a rather obvious kind, sedate or vigorous, prompt and direct or robustly powerful, but not the finer and subtler poetic thought which comes easily to the clear Latin intellect. Form too of a kind we might hope for, though we could not be quite sure of it, but at best bright and plain or strongly balanced and not those greater forms in which a high and deep creative thought presides or those more exquisite of which a delicate sense of beauty or a subtle poetic intuition is the magic builder. Both the greater and more profound depths and magnitudes and the subtler intensities of style and rhythm would be absent; but there would be a boldly forcible or a well-beaten energy of speech and much of the more metallic vigours of verse. This side of the national mind would prepare us for English poetry as it was until Chaucer and beyond, for the ground-type of the Elizabethan drama, the work of Dryden and Pope, the whole mass of eighteenth-century verse, Cowper, Scott, Wordsworth in his more outward moments, Byron without his Titanism and unrest, much of the lesser Victorian verse, Tennyson without his surface aestheticism and elaborate finesse, the poetry of Browning. For this much we need not go outside the Anglo-Norman temperament.

That also would give, but subject to a potent alchemy of transformation, the basic form and substance of most English poetry. That alchemy we can fairly attribute to the submerged Celtic element which emerges, as time goes on, in bright upstreamings and sometimes in exceptional outbursts of power. It comes up in a blaze of colour, light, emotion and imaginative magic; in a passionate hungering for beauty in its more subtle and delicately sensuous forms, for the ideal which escapes definition and yet has to be seized and cast into interpretative lines; in a lyrical intoxication; in a charm of subtle romance. It casts into the mould a higher urge of thought than the vital common sense of the Saxon can give, not the fine, calm and measured poetical thinking of the Greeks and the Latin races which deals sovereignly with life within the limits of the intellect and the inspired reason, but an excitement of thought seeking for

something beyond itself and behind life through the intensities of creative sight. It brings in a look upon Nature which pierces beyond her outsides and her external spirit and lays its touch on the mysteries of her inner life and sometimes on that in her which is most intimately spiritual. It awakens rare outbreaks of mysticism, a vein of subtler sentiment, a more poignant pathos; it refines passion from a violence of the vital being into an intensity of the soul, modifies vital sensuousness into a thing of imaginative beauty by a warmer aesthetic perception. It carries with it a seeking for exquisite lyrical form, touches narrative poetry to finer issues, throws its romantic beauty and force and fire and its greater depth of passion across the drama and makes it something more than a tumultuous external action and heavily powerful character-drawing. At one period it strives to rise beyond the English mould, seems about to disengage itself and reveal through poetry the Spirit in things. In language and music it is always a quickening and refining force; where it can do nothing more, it breathes a more intimate energy; where it gets its free characteristic movement, it creates that intensity of style and rhythm, that sheer force of imaginative vision and that peculiar unseizable beauty of turn which are the highest qualities of English poetry.

The varied commingling and separating of these two elements mark the whole later course of the literature and present as their effect a side of failure and defect and a side of achievement. There are evidently two opposite powers at work in the same field, often compelled to labour in the same mind at a common production; and when two such opposites can coalesce, seize each other's motives and, fusing them, become one, the very greatest achievement becomes possible. For each fills in the other's deficiencies; they light each other up with a new light and bring in a fresh revelation which neither by itself could have accomplished. The greatest things in English poetry have come where this fusion was effected in the creative mind and soul of the poet. But that could not always be done and there results from the failure a frequent uncertainty of motive, a stumbling unsureness of touch, an oscillation, a habit of too often falling

short of the mark. It does not prevent great triumphs of poetic power, but it does prevent a high equality and sustained perfection of self-expression and certainty of form. We must expect inequality in all human work, but not necessarily on this scale nor with so frequent and extensive a sinking below what should be the normal level.

To the same uncertainty may be attributed the rapid starts and turns of the course of English poetry, its want of conscious continuity,—for there is a secret, underground and inevitable continuity which we have to dig for and disengage. It takes a very different course from the external life of the nation which has always been faithful to its inner motive and spirit and escaped from the shattering and suddenly creative changes that have at once afflicted and quickened the life of other peoples. The revolutions of the spirit of English poetry are extreme and violent, astonishing in their decisiveness and abruptness. We can mark off first the early English poetry which found its solitary greater expression in Chaucer; indeed it marks itself off by an absolute exhaustion and cessation, a dull and black Nirvana. The magnificent Elizabethan outburst has another motive, spirit and manner of expression which seem to have nothing to do with the past; it is a godhead self-born under the impulse of a new age and environment. As this fades away, we see standing high and apart the lonely figure of Milton with his strenuous effort at an intellectual poetry cast in the type of the ancients. The age which succeeds, hardly linked to it by a slender stream of Caroline lyrics, is that of a trivial intellectuality which does not follow the lead of Milton and is the exact contrary of the Elizabethan form and spirit, the thin and arid reign of Pope and Dryden. Another violent and impatient breaking away, a new outburst of wonderful freshness gives us the poetry of Wordsworth, Keats, Shelley, Blake with another spirit and another language of the spirit. The Victorian period did not deny their influences; it felt them in the first form of its work, and we might have expected it to have gone nobly forward and brought to some high or beautiful issue what had been only a great beginning that did not arrive at its full fruition. But it did nothing of the kind; it deviated

into a new way which has nothing to do with the finer spirit of the preceding poets. Descending it fell away into an intellectual, half-artistic, carefully but not finely or sovereignly wrought and mostly superficial and external poetry. And afterwards we have this age which is still trying to find itself, but in its most characteristic tendencies seems to start from a summary rejection of the Victorian forms and motives. These reversals and revolutions of the spirit are not in themselves a defect or a disability; on the contrary, they open the door to large opportunities and unforeseen achievements. English poetical literature has been a series of bold experiments less shackled by the past than in countries which have a stronger sense of cultural tradition. Revolutions are distracting things, but they are often good for the human soul; for they bring a rapid unrolling of new horizons.

Here comes in the side of success and greatness in this poetry. There is a force which overrides its defects and compensates richly for its limitations; its lapses and failures are the price it pays for its gains. For nowhere else has individual genius found so free a field; nowhere has it been able to work so directly out of itself and follow so boldly its own line of poetic adventure. Form is a great power, but sureness of form is not everything. A strong tradition of form gives a firm ground upon which genius can work in safety, protected from its own wanderings; but it limits and stands in the way of daring individual adventure. The spirit of adventure, if its path is strewn with accidents, stumblings or fatal casualties, brings, when it does succeed, new revelations which are worth all the price paid for them. English poetry is full of such new revelations. Its richness, its constant freshness, its lavish expenditure of genius exulting in chainless freedom, delivered from all meticulous caution, its fire and penetrating force of imagination, its lambent energy of poetic speech, its constant self-liberation into intensest beauty of self-expression are the rewards of its courage and its liberty. These things are of the greatest value in poetry. They lead besides to possibilities which are of the highest importance to the poetry of the future.

We may briefly anticipate and indicate in what manner. We have to accept one constant tendency of the spirit of English

poetry, which loves to dwell with all its weight upon the presentation of life and action, feeling and passion and to give that its full force and make of it the basis and the source and, not only the point of reference, but the utility of all else. A strong hold upon this life, the earth-life, is the characteristic of the English mind, and it is natural that it should take possession of its poetry. The pure Celtic genius leans towards the opposite extreme: it seems to care little for the earth-life for its own sake and has little hold on it or only a light and ethereal hold; it accepts it as a starting-point for the expression of other-life, but is attracted by all that is hidden and secret. The Latin mind insists on the presentation of life, but for the purposes of thought; its eye is on the universal truths and realities of which life is the visible expression,—not the remoter, the spiritual or soul-truths, but those which present themselves to the clarities of the intelligence. But the English mind looks at life and loves it for its own sake, in all its externalities, its play of outer individualities, its immediate subjective idiosyncrasies. Even when it is strongly attracted by other motives, the intellectual, the aesthetic or the spiritual, it seldom follows these with a completely disinterested fidelity, but comes back with them on the external life and tries to subject them to its mould and use them for its purpose. This turn is not universal,—Blake escapes from it; nor is it the single dominant power,—Keats and Shelley and Wordsworth have their hearts elsewhere: but it is a constant power; it attracts even the poets who have not a real genius for it and vitiates their work by the immixture of an alien motive.

This objective and external turn might be strong enough in some other arts,—fiction, for instance, or painting or sculpture,—to create a clear national tradition and principle of form, but not easily in poetry. For here the mere representation of life cannot be enough, however vivid or however strongly subjected to the law of poetic beauty it may be. Poetry must strive at least towards a presentation from within and not at simple artistic reproduction; and the principle of presentation must be something more than that of the eye on the visible object. It is by a process from within, a passing of all one meets, thinks or feels

through some kind of intimately subjective vision that life is turned into poetry. If this subjective medium is the inspired reason or the intuitive mind, the external presentation of life gives place inevitably to an interpretation, a presentation in which its actual lines are either neglected or subordinated in order that some inner truth of it may emerge. But in English poetry the attempt is to be or at least to appear true to the actual lines of life, to hold up a mirror to Nature. It is the mirror then which has to do the poetising of life; the vital, the imaginative, the emotional temperament of the poet is the reflecting medium and it has to supply unaided the creative and poetical element. We have then a faithfully unfaithful reflection which always amounts to a transformation, because the temperament of the poet lends to life and Nature its own hues, its own lines, its own magnitudes. But the illusion of external reality, of an "imitation" of Nature is created,—the illusion which has been for so long a first canon of Western artistic conceptions,—and the English mind which carries this tendency to an extreme, feels then that it is building upon the safe foundation of the external and the real; it is satisfied of the earth even when it is singing in the heavens.

But this sole reliance on the temperament of the poet has certain strong results. It gives an immense importance to individuality, much greater than that which it must always have in poetical creation: the transformation of life and Nature in the individuality becomes almost the whole secret of this poetry. Therefore English poetry is much more powerfully and consciously personal and individual than that of any other language; it aims much less directly at the impersonal and universal. This individual subjective element creates enormous differences between the work of poets of the same age; they cannot escape from the common tendencies, but give to them a quite independent turn and expression and subordinate them to the assertion of the individuality; in other literatures, until recently, the reverse has oftener happened. Besides, the higher value given to the intensity of the imaginative, vital or emotional response favours and is perhaps a first cause of that greater intensity of speech and immediate vision which is the strength of English poetry.

For since the heightening cannot come mainly from the power and elevation of the medium through which life is seen, as in Greek and ancient Indian poetry, it has to come almost entirely from the individual response in the poet, his force of personal utterance, his intensity of personal vision.

Three general characteristics emerge. The first is a constant reference and return of the higher poetical motives to the forms of external life, as if the enriching of that life were its principal artistic aim. The second is a great force of subjective individuality and personal temperament as a leading power of poetic creation. The third is a great intensity of speech and ordinarily of a certain kind of direct vision. But in the world's literature generally these are the tendencies that have been on the increase and two of them at least are likely to be persistent. There is everywhere a considerable stressing of the individual subjective element, a drift towards making the most of the poet's personality, an aim at a more vivid response and the lending of new powers of colour and line from within to the vision of life and Nature, a search for new intensities of word and rhythm which will translate into speech a deeper insight. In following out the possible lines of the future the defect of the English mind is its inability to follow the higher motives disinterestedly to their deepest and largest creative results, but this is being remedied by new influences. The entrance of the pure Celtic temperament into English poetry through the Irish revival is likely to do much; the contribution of the Indian mind in work like Tagore's may act in the same direction.

If this change is effected, the natural powers of the English spirit will be of the highest value to the future poetry. For that poetry is likely to move to the impersonal and universal, not through the toning down of personality and individuality, but by their heightening to a point where they are liberated into the impersonal and universal expression. Subjectivity is likely to be its greater power, the growth to the universal subjective enriched by all the forces of the personal soul-experience. The high intensity of speech which English poetry has brought to bear upon all its material, its power of giving the fullest and richest

value to the word and the image, is needed for the expression of the values of the spiritual, which will be one of the aims of a supreme intuitive utterance. If the pursuit of the higher godheads into their own sphere will be one of its endeavours, their return upon the earth-life to transform our vision of it will be its other side. If certain initial movements we can even now see in English poetry outline and emphasise themselves in the future, this long stream of strong creation and utterance may arrive at a point where it will discover a supreme utility for all its past powers. It may go deeper within itself and find and live in the greater spirit which has till now only occasionally broken into its full native utterance. Arriving at a more comprehensive spiritual motive it may successfully interweave into it the conflicting lines of its past forces. It may achieve clear and powerful forms of a new intuitive utterance in which the Anglo-Celtic spirit will find its highest harmonised and perfect self-expression. The Elizabethan poet wrote in the spacious days of its first birth into greatness,

Or who can tell for what great work in hand
The greatness of our style is now ordained?
What powers it shall bring in, what spirits command?

It has since brought in many powers, commanded many spirits; but it may be that the richest powers, the highest and greatest spirit yet remain to be found, brought in, commanded, put into the service of the greatest work and achievement of which our evolving humanity is capable.

Chapter IX

The Course of English Poetry – 1

Chaucer and the Poetry of External Life

THE SPIRIT and temper that have stood behind the creative force and come to the front in a literature are the one essential thing that we must discern, for it is these that predestine the course the poetry of a people will take and the turn it gives to its forms. For if the field which poetry covers is common ground and its large general lines the same everywhere, yet each nation has its own characteristic spirit and creative quality which determine the province in which it will best succeed, the turn or angle of its vision and the shape of its work. The genius of English poetry was evidently predestined by the complexity of its spirit and its union of opposite powers to an adventurous consecutive seeking over the whole field, and this is in fact the first character of it that strikes the eye, a series of bold and powerful creative adventures, each quite different in spirit from its predecessor. But in its first natural potentiality certain pronounced limitations point to a facile and vigorous success in a forcefully accurate or imaginative presentation of life and a more difficult and incomplete success in the intellectual or spiritual interpretation of life; most difficult for it would be a direct presentation of the things beyond, a concrete image of mystic realities, a poetic approach to the higher truths of the spirit. Yet on the other hand if this difficulty could once be overcome, then because of the profounder intensity of the power of poetical speech which this literature has developed, the very highest and most penetrating expression of these profoundest things would be possible. A nearer significant imaging of them would be close to the hand here than could easily be achieved without much new fashioning of language in the Latin tongues whose speech has been cast in the mould of a clear

or high intellectuality rather than into the native utterance of imaginative vision adventuring beyond the normal bounds of a high poetic intelligence. We see in modern French creation a constant struggle with this limitation: even we find a poet like Mallarmé driven to break the mould of French speech in his desperate effort to force it to utter what is to its natural clear lucidity almost unutterable. No such difficulty presents itself in English poetry; the depths, the vistas of suggestion, the power to open the doors of the infinite are already there, ready to hand for the mind rightly gifted to evoke them, waiting and almost asking to be used for the highest purposes. Much less naturally fitted for fine prose utterance, this language has developed all the close lights and shades, the heights and depths, the recesses of fathomless sense needed by the poet.

It has to be seen how this has come about; for it has not been accomplished at all easily, but only by much seeking and effort. We observe first that English poetry has covered the rising field that lies before the genius of poetry by strictly successive steps, and these steps have followed the natural ascending order of our developing perceptions as the human consciousness rises from the first physical view of things through the more inward life-vision, through the constructing and pondering intellect and last through a vivid or a brooding intuition to the gateways of the spirit. The English creative genius began by a quite external, a clear and superficial substance and utterance. It proceeded to a deeper vital poetry, a poetry of the power and beauty and wonder and spontaneous thought, the joy and passion and pain, the colour and music of Life, in which the external presentation of life and things was taken up, but heightened, exceeded and given its full dynamic and imaginative content. From that it turned to an attempt at mastering the secret of the Latins, the secret of a clear, measured and intellectual dealing with life, things and ideas. Then came an attempt, a brilliant and beautiful attempt to get through Nature and thought and the veiled mind in life and Nature and its profounder aesthetic suggestions to some large and deep spiritual truth behind these things. This attempt did not come to perfect fruition; it stopped short partly

because there had not been the right intellectual preparation or a sufficient basis of spiritual knowledge and experience; only so much could be given as the solitary individual intuition of the poet could attain by a difficult groping or a sudden sovereign effort. But partly also it failed because after the lapse into an age of reason the spontaneous or the intense language of spiritual poetry could not easily be found or, if found at times, could not be securely kept. So we get a deviation into a second age of intellectualism, an aesthetic or reflective poetry with a much wider range, but much less profound in its roots, much less high in its growth, the creation of a more informed, but less inspired intelligence. And partly out of this increasing wideness of the observing intelligence, partly by a dissatisfaction and recoil from these limitations has come the trend of a recent and contemporary poetry which seems at last to be approaching on some of its lines and in spite of many mistakes and divagations the secret of the utterance of profounder truth and the right magic of a speech and rhythm which will be the apt body and motion of its spirit.

The first definite starting-point of this long movement is the poetry of Chaucer. Then first the rough poverty of the Anglo-Saxon mind succeeded in assimilating the French influence and refined and clarified by it its own rude speech and crude aesthetic sense. It is characteristic of the difficulty of the movement that as in its beginning, so at each important turn, or at least on the three first occasions of a new orientation, it has had thus to go to school, to make almost a fresh start under the influences of a foreign culture and foreign poetic forms and motives. It has needed each time in spite of so much poetic originality and energy and genius a strong light of suggestion from outside to set it upon its way. All modern literatures have had indeed at one time or another to open out to this kind of external help and stimulus; but, once formed and in possession of themselves, they adopt these impresses more or less lightly and only as a secondary assistance. But here we have a remodelling of the whole plan under foreign teaching. Chaucer gives English poetry a first shape by the help of French romance models and the work

of Italian masters; the Elizabethans start anew in dependence on Renaissance influences from France and Italy and a side wind from Spain; Milton goes direct to classical models; the Restoration and the eighteenth century take pliantly the pseudo-classical form from the contemporary French poets and critics. Still this dependence is only in externals; in the essential things of poetry some native character prevails, a new turn is rapidly given, an original power and method emerges; the dynamic vitality of the race was too great not to arrive at an immediate transmutation of the invading force.

The first early motive and style of this poetry as it emerges in Chaucer strikes at once an English note. The motive is a direct and concrete poetic observation of ordinary human life and character. There is no preoccupying idea, no ulterior design; life, the external figure and surface of things is reflected as near as possible to its native form in the individual mind and temperament of the poet. Chaucer has his eye fixed on the object, and that object is the visible action of life as it passes before him throwing its figures on his mind and stirring it to a kindly satisfaction in the movement and its interest, a blithe sense of humour or a light and easy pathos. He does not seek to add anything to it or to see anything below it or behind its outsides. He is not concerned to look at all into the souls or deeply into the minds of the men and women whose appearance, action and easily apparent traits of character he describes with so apt and observant a fidelity. There is no call on the poet yet to ask himself what is the meaning of all this movement of life or the power in it or draw any large poetic idea from its vivid scheme and structure. He is not moved to interpret life; a clear and happy presentation is his business. It is there simply in the sunlight with its familiar lines and normal colours, sufficiently interesting in itself, by its external action, and he has to record it, to give it a shape in lucid poetic speech and rhythm; for to turn it into stuff of poetry that and the sunlight of his own happy poetic temperament in which he bathes it is all he needs. The form he gives to it is within its limits and for its work admirably apt, sufficient and satisfying, — altogether and excellently satisfying

if we ask from it nothing more than it has to offer. Chaucer had captured the secret of ease, grace and lucidity from French romance poetry and had learned from the great Italians more force and compactness of expression than French verse had yet attained, a force diluted and a compactness lightened for his purpose. But neither his poetic speech nor his rhythm has anything of the plastic greatness and high beauty of the Italians. It is an easy, limpid and flowing movement, a well-spring of natural English utterance without depths in it, but limpid and clear and pure. It is a form just fitted for the clear and pleasing poetic presentation of external life as if in an unsoiled mirror. At times it rises into an apt and pointed expression, but for the most part is satisfied with a first primitive power of poetic speech; a subdued and well-tempered even adequacy is its constant gift. Only once or twice does Chaucer, as if by accident, strike out a really memorable line of poetry; yet Dante and Petrarch were among his masters.

No other great poetical literature has had quite such a beginning. Others also started with a poetry of external life, Greek with the poetry of Homer, Latin with the historical epic of Ennius, French with the feudal romances of the Charlemagne cycle and the Arthurian cycle. But in none of these was the artistic aim simply the observant accurate presentation of Greek or Roman or feudal life. Homer gives us the life of man always at a high intensity of impulse and action and without subjecting it to any other change he casts it in lines of beauty and in divine proportions; he deals with it as Phidias dealt with the human form when he wished to create a god in marble. When we read the Iliad and the Odyssey, we are not really upon this earth, but on the earth lifted into some plane of a greater dynamis of life, and so long as we remain there we have a greater vision in a more lustrous air and we feel ourselves raised to a semi-divine stature. Ennius' object was to cast into poetical utterance the masculine and imperial spirit of Rome. So the spirit of catholic and feudal Europe transmutes life in the French romances and gives in its own way an ideal presentation of it which only misses greatness by the inadequacy of its speech and rhythmic

movement and the diffuse prolixity of its form. Chaucer's poetic method has no such great conscious idea or natural uplifting motive or spirit. Whether the colour he gives happens to be realistic or romantic, it falls within the same formula. It is the clear and vivid reflection of external life, with sometimes just a first tinge of romantic illumination, in an observing mind that makes itself a shining poetic mirror.

The spirit of English poetry thus struck its first strong note, a characteristic English note, got as far as the Anglo-Saxon mind refined by French and Italian influence could go in its own proper way and unchanged nature, and then came suddenly to a pause. Many outward reasons might be given for that abrupt cessation, but none sufficient; for the cause lay deeper in the inner destiny of this spirit. The real cause was that to have developed upon this line would have been to wander up and down in a cul-de-sac; it would have been to anticipate in a way in poetry the self-imprisonment of Dutch art in a strong externalism, of a fairer kind indeed, but still too physical and outward in its motive. English poetry had greater things to do and it waited for some new light and more powerful impulse to come. Still this external motive and method are native to the English mind and with many modifications have put their strong impress upon the literature. It is the ostensible method of English fiction from Richardson to Dickens; it got into the Elizabethan drama and prevented it, except in Shakespeare, from equalling the nobler work of other great periods of dramatic poetry. It throws its limiting shade over English narrative poetry, which after its fresh start in the symbolism of the *Faerie Queene* and the vital intensity of Marlowe ought either to have got clear away from this first motive or at least to have transmuted it by the infusion of much higher artistic motives. To give only one instance in many, it got sadly in the way of Tennyson, who yet had no real turn for the reproduction of life, and prevented him from working out the fine subjective and mystic vein which his first natural intuitions had discovered in such work as the *Lady of Shalott* and the *Morte d'Arthur*. Instead

of any deepening of this new original note we have to put up with the *Princess* and *Enoch Arden* and the picturesque triviality of the *Idylls of the King* which give us the impression of gentlemen and ladies of Victorian drawing-rooms masquerading as Celtic-mediaeval knights and dames. If there is a meaning of some kind in it all, that does not come home to us because it is lost in a falsetto mimicking of the external strains of life. Certainly, it is useless to quarrel with national tendencies and characteristics which must show themselves in poetry as elsewhere; but English poetry had opened the gates of other powers and if it could always have lifted up the forms of external life by these powers, the substance of its work might then have meant much more to the world and the strength of its vision of things might constantly have equalled the power and beauty of its utterance. As it is, even poets of great power have been constantly drawn away by this tendency from the fulfilment of their more characteristic potentialities or misled into throwing them into inapt forms, and to this day there continues this confusion and waste of poetic virtue.

The new light and impulse that set free the silence of the poetic spirit in England for its first abundant and sovereign utterance, came from the Renaissance in Italy and Spain and France. The Renaissance meant many things and it meant too different things in different countries, but one thing above all everywhere, the discovery of beauty and joy in every energy of life. The Middle Ages had lived strongly and with a sort of deep and sombre force, but, as it were, always under the shadow of death and under the burden of an obligation to aspire through suffering to a beyond; their life is bordered on one side by the cross and on the other by the sword. The Renaissance brings in the sense of a liberation from the burden and the obligation; it looks at life and loves it in excess; it is carried away by the beauty of the body and the senses and the intellect, the beauty of sensation and action and speech and thought,—but of thought hardly at all for its own sake, but thought as a power of life. It is Hellenism returning with its strong sense of humanity and

things human, *nihil humani alienum*,¹ but at first a barbarised Hellenism, unbridled and extravagant, riotous in its vitalistic energy, too much overjoyed for restraint and measure.

Elizabethan poetry is an expression of this energy, passion and wonder of life, and it is much more powerful, disorderly and unrestrained than the corresponding poetry in other countries; for it has neither a past traditional culture nor an innate taste to restrain its extravagances. It springs up in a chaos of power and of beauty in which forms emerge and shape themselves by a stress within it for which there is no clear guiding knowledge except such as the instinctive genius of the age and the individual can give. It is constantly shot through with brilliant threads of intellectual energy, but is not at all intellectual in its innate spirit and dominant character. It is too vital for that, too much moved and excited; for its mood is passionate, sensuous, loose of rein; its speech sometimes liquid with sweetness, sometimes vehement and inordinate in pitch, enamoured of the variety of its own notes, revelling in image and phrase, a tissue of sweet or violent colours, of many-hued fire, of threads of golden and silver light.

It bestowed on the nation a new English speech, rich in capacity, gifted with an extraordinary poetic intensity and wealth and copiousness, but full also of the excesses of new formation and its disorder. A drama exultant in action and character and passion and incident and movement, a lyric and romantic poetry of marvellous sweetness, richness and force are its strong fruits. The two sides of the national mind threw themselves out for the first time, each with its full energy, but within the limits of a vital, sensuous and imaginative mould, fusing into each other and separating and alternating in outbursts of an unrestrained joy of self-expression, an admirable confusion of their autonomous steps, an exhilarating and stimulating licence. The beauty and colour of one was dominant in its pure poetry, the vigour of the other took the lead in its drama, but both in Shakespeare were welded into a supreme phenomenon of poetic and dramatic genius. It is on the whole the greatest age of utterance, though not

¹ Nothing human is alien to me.

of highest spirit and aim, through which the genius of English poetry has yet travelled, unsurpassed in its spontaneous force and energy, unsurpassed in its brilliance of the expressive word and the creative image.

Chapter X

The Course of English Poetry – 2

Elizabethan Drama

Shakespeare and the Poetry of the Life-Spirit

THE ELIZABETHAN age, perhaps the era of most opulent output in the long history of English poetic genius, is abundant, untrammelled and unbridled in its power, but not satisfying in its performance. Beautiful as are many of its productions, powerful as it is in the mass, if we look at it not in detail, not merely revelling in beauty of line and phrase and image, in snatches of song and outbursts of poetic richness and creative force, but as a whole, in its total artistic creation, it bears a certain stamp of defect and failure. It cannot be placed for a moment as a supreme force of excellence in literary culture by the side of the great ages of Greek and Roman poetry which started with an equal, if different creative impetus, but more self-knowledge. But, unhappily, it falls short too in aesthetic effect and virtue in comparison with other poetic periods less essentially vigorous and mobile in their plastic force; it has an inferior burden of meaning and, if a coursing of richer life-blood, no settled fullness of spirit and a less adequate body of forms. The great magician, Shakespeare, by his marvellous poetic rendering of life and the spell his poetry casts upon us, conceals this general inadequacy of the work of his time: the whole age which he embodies is magnified by his presence and the adjacent paler figures catch something of the light and kinship of his glory and appear in it more splendid than they are. But Shakespeare is an exception, a genius that transcends all laws, a miracle of poetic force; he survives untouched all adverse criticism, not because there are not plenty of fairly large spots in this sun, but because in any complete view of him they disappear in the greatness of

his lustre. Spenser and Marlowe are poets of a high order, great in spite of an eventual failure. But the rest owe their stature to an uplifting power in the age and not chiefly to their own intrinsic height of genius; and that power had many vices, flaws and serious limitations which their work exaggerates wilfully rather than avoids, so that it is only exceptionally free from glaring flaws. The gold of this golden age of English poetry is often very beautifully and richly wrought, but it is seldom worked into a perfect artistic whole; it disappears continually in masses of alloy, and there is on the whole more of a surface gold-dust than of the deeper yield of the human spirit.

The defect of this Elizabethan work is most characteristic and prominent in that part of it which has been vaunted as its chief title to greatness, its drama. Shakespeare and Marlowe can be looked at in their separate splendours; but the rest of Elizabethan dramatic work is a brilliantly smoky nebula, powerful in effort rather than sound and noble in performance. All its vigorous presentation of life has not been able to keep it alive; it is dead or keeps only "the dusty immortality of the libraries", and this in spite of the attention drawn to it in quite recent times by scholars and critics and the hyperbolic eulogies of two or three eminent writers. This is not to say that it has not merits and, in a way, very striking merits. The Elizabethan playwrights were men of a confident robust talent; some of them had real, if an intermittent genius. They had too the use of the language of an age in which the power of literary speech was a common possession and men were handling the language with delight as a quite new and rich instrument, lavishly and curiously, turning it this way and that, moulding and new-moulding it, exulting in its novel capacities of expression. The first elements of the dramatic form, the temper and some of the primary faculties which go to make dramatic creation possible were there in the literary spirit of the age, and all these writers in more or less degree possessed these things and could use them. A certain force of vital creation was common to them all, a vigorous turn for the half romantic, half realistic reproduction of life and manners. The faculty of producing very freely a mass or a stream

of incident and movement was there, much power of exuberant dialogue, a knack of expression both in verse and prose, some skill in the trick of putting the language of the passions into the mouth of cleverly constructed human figures which walk actively about the stage, if not in a quite natural manner, yet with enough of it to give for the time the illusion of living creatures. Especially, it was a time in which there was a fresh and vivid interest in life and man and action, in the adventure and wonder and appeal of the mere vital phenomenon of living and feeling and thinking, and their work is full of this freshness and interest and intense spontaneous delight in living and acting. All this, it might be thought, is quite enough to build a great dramatic poetry; and certainly, if we require no more than this, we shall give a prominent place to the Elizabethan drama, higher perhaps than to the Greek or any other. But these things are enough only to produce plays which will live their time on the stage and in the library; they are not, by themselves, sufficient for great dramatic creation. Something else is needed for that, which we get in Shakespeare, in Racine, Corneille and Molière, in Calderón, in the great Greeks, in the leading Sanskrit dramatists; but these other Elizabethans show themselves in the bulk of their work to be rather powerful writers and playwrights than inspired dramatic poets and creators.

Dramatic poetry cannot live by the mere presentation of life and action and the passions, however truly they may be portrayed or however vigorously and abundantly pushed across the scene. Its object is something greater and its conditions of success much more onerous. It must have, to begin with, as the fount of its creation or in its heart an interpretative vision and in that vision an explicit or implicit seeing idea of life and the human being; and the vital presentation which is its outward instrument, must arise out of that deeper sight harmoniously, whether by a spontaneous creation, as in Shakespeare, or by the compulsion of an intuitive artistic will, as with the Greeks. This interpretative vision and seeing idea have in the presentation to seem to arise out of the inner life of a few vital types of the human soul or individual representatives of its enigma and to

work themselves out through an evolution of speech leading to an evolution of action. And of these two speech in the drama is the first and more important instrument, because through it the poet reveals the action of the soul; outward action and event are only the second, important, but less essential, reducible even to an indispensable minimum, because the outward movements serve only to make visible and concrete to us the result of the inner action and have no other intrinsic purpose. In all very great drama the true movement and result is psychological; and the outward action, even when it is considerable, and the consummating event, even though loud and violent, are either its symbol or else its condition of culmination. All has to be cast into a close dramatic form, a successful weaving of interdependent relations, relations of soul to soul, of speech to speech, of action to action, the more close and inevitable the better, because so the truth of the whole evolution comes home to us. And if it is asked what in a word is the essential purpose of all this creation, I think we might possibly say that drama is the poet's vision of some part of the world-act in the life of the human soul, it is in a way his vision of Karma, in an extended and very flexible sense of the word; and at its highest point it becomes a poetic rendering or illustration of the Aeschylean *drasanti pathein*, "the doer shall feel the effect of his act," in an inner as well as an outer, a happy no less than an austere significance, whether that effect be represented as psychological or vital, whether it comes to its own through sorrow and calamity, ends in a judgment by laughter or finds an escape into beauty and joy, whether the presentation be tragic or comic or tragi-comic or idyllic. To satisfy these conditions is extremely difficult and the great dramatists are few in their number; the entire literature of the world has hardly given us more than a dozen. The difficult evolution of dramatic poetry is always more hard to lead than the lyric which is poetry's native expression, or than the narrative which is its simpler expansion.

The greatness of a period of dramatic poetry can be measured by the extent to which these complex conditions were understood in it or were intuitively practised. But in the mass of the Elizabethan drama the understanding is quite absent and the

practice comes, if at all, only rarely, imperfectly and by a sort of accident. Shakespeare himself seems to have divined these conditions or contained them in the shaping flame of his genius rather than perceived them by the artistic intelligence. The rest have ordinarily no light of interpretative vision, no dramatic idea. Their tragedy and comedy are both oppressively external; this drama presents, but does not at all interpret; it is an outward presentation of manners and passions and lives by vigour of action and a quite outward-going speech; it means absolutely nothing. The tragedy is irrational, the comedy has neither largeness nor subtlety of idea; they are mixed together too without any artistic connection such as Shakespeare manages to give to them so as to justify thoroughly their coexistence. The characters are not living beings working out their mutual Karma, but external figures of humanity jostling each other on a crowded stage, mere tossing drift of the waves of life. The form of the drama too is little more than a succession of speech and incident,¹ as in a story, with a culminating violent or happy ending, which comes not because psychologically it must, but because a story has to have a release of ending, or, if tragic, its point of loud detonation. To make up for their essential defects these poets have to heap up incident and situation and assail us with vehement and often grossly exaggerated speech and passion, frequently tearing the passion into glaringly coloured tatters, almost always overstraining or in some way making too much of it. They wish to pile on us the interest of life in whose presentation their strength lies, to accumulate in a mass, so as to carry us away, things attracting, things amusing, things striking, things horrible; they will get at us through the nerves and the lower emotional being,—and in this they succeed eminently,—since they cannot get at us through a higher intellectual and imaginative appeal. The evolution of the action is rather theatrically effective than poetic, the spirit and the psychology melodramatic rather than dramatic.

¹ Ben Jonson is an exception. He has the idea of construction, but his execution is heavy and uninspired, the work of a robustly conscientious craftsman rather than a creative artist.

Nor are these radical dramatic defects atoned for by any great wealth of poetry, for their verse has more often some formal merit and a great air of poetry than its essence,—though there are exceptions as in lines and passages of Peele and Webster. The presentation of life with some surface poetic touch but without any transforming vision or strongly suffusing power in the poetic temperament is the general character of their work. It is necessary to emphasise these defects because indiscriminate praise of these poets helps to falsify or quite exclude the just artistic view of the aim of sound dramatic creation, and imitation of the catching falsities of this model has been the real root of the inefficacy of subsequent attempts in the dramatic form even by poets of great gifts. It explains the failure of even a mind which had the true dramatic turn, a creator like Browning, to achieve drama of the first excellence.

Marlowe alone of the lesser Elizabethan dramatists stands apart from his fellows, not solely by his strong and magnificent vein of poetry, but because he knows what he is about; he alone has some clearly grasped dramatic idea. And not only is he conscious of his artistic aim, but it is a sound aim on the higher levels of the dramatic art. He knows that the human soul in action is his subject and Karma the power of the theme, and he attempts to create a drama of the human will throwing itself on life, the will egoistic and Asuric, conquering only to succumb to the great adversary Death or breaking itself against the forces its violence has brought into hostile play. This is certainly a high and fit subject for tragic creation and his boldly coloured and strongly cut style and rhythm are well-suited for its expression. Unhappily, Marlowe had the conception, but not any real power of dramatic execution. He is unable to give the last awakening breath of life to his figures; in the external manner so common in English poetry and fiction he rather constructs than evolves, portrays than throws out into life, paints up or sculptures from outside than creates from within,—and yet it is this other inward way that is the sole true method of poetic or at least of dramatic creation. He has not, either, the indispensable art of construction; only in one of his tragedies does he vitally relate

together his characters and their action throughout, and even that, though a strong work, falls far short of the greatness of a masterpiece. He had too, writing for the Elizabethan stage, to adopt a model which was too complex for the strong simplicity of his theme and the narrow intensity of his genius. And he had, working for that semi-barbarous public, to minister to tastes which were quite incongruous with his purpose and which he had not flexibility enough to bring within its scope or to elevate towards its level. In fact, Marlowe was not a born dramatist; his true genius was lyrical, narrative and epic. Limited by his inborn characteristics, he succeeds in bringing out his poetic motive only in strong detached scenes and passages or in great culminating moments in which the lyrical cry and the epic touch break out through the form of drama.

Shakespeare stands out alone, both in his own age when so many were drawn to the form and circumstances were favourable to this kind of genius, and in all English literature, as the one great and genuine dramatic poet; but this one is indeed equal to a host. He stands out too as quite unique in his spirit, method and quality. For his contemporaries resemble him only in externals; they have the same outward form and crude materials, but not the inner dramatic method by which he transformed and gave them a quite other meaning and value. Later romantic drama, not only in England but elsewhere, though it has tried hard to imitate the Shakespearian motive and touch, has been governed by another kind of poetic mind; its intrinsic as distinguished from its external method has been really different. Romantic drama, in Hugo and in others, takes hold of life, strings together its unusual effects and labours to make it out of the way, brilliant, coloured, conspicuous. Shakespeare does not do that, except rarely, in early imitative work or when he is uninspired. He does not need to lay violent hands on life and turn it into romantic pyrotechnics; for life itself has taken hold of him in order to recreate itself in his image, and he sits within himself at its heart and pours out from its impulse a throng of beings, as real in the world he creates as men are in this other world from which he takes his

hints, a multitude, a riot of living images carried on a many-coloured sea of revealing speech and a never failing surge of movement. His dramatic method seems indeed to have usually no other intellectual purpose, aesthetic motive or spiritual secret: ordinarily it labours simply for the joy of a multiple poetic vision of life and vital creation with no centre except the life-power itself, no coordination except that thrown out spontaneously by the unseizable workings of its energy, no unity but the one unity of man and the life-spirit in Nature working in him and before his eyes. It is this sheer creative *ānanda* of the life-spirit which is Shakespeare; abroad everywhere in that age, it incarnates itself in him for the pleasure of poetic self-vision.

All Shakespeare's powers and limitations — for it is now permissible to speak of his limitations — arise from this character of the force that moved him to poetic utterance. He is not primarily an artist, a poetic thinker or anything else of the kind, but a great vital creator and intensely, though within marked limits, a seer of life. His art itself is life arranging its forms in its own surge and excitement, not in any kind of symmetry,—for symmetry here there is none,—nor in fine harmonies, but still in its own way supremely and with a certain intimately metric arrangement of its many loose movements, in mobile perspectives, a succession of crowded but successful and satisfying vistas. While he has given a wonderful language to poetic thought, he yet does not think for the sake of thought, but for the sake of life. His way indeed is not so much the poet himself thinking about life, as life thinking itself out in him through many mouths, in many moods and moments, with a rich throng of fine thought-effects, but not for any clear sum of intellectual vision or to any high power of either ideal or spiritual result. His development of human character has a sovereign force within its bounds, but it is the soul of the human being as seen through outward character, passion, action,—the life-soul, and not either the thought-soul or the deeper psychic being, still less the profounder truth of the human spirit. Something of these things we may get, but only in shadow or as a partial reflection in a coloured glass, not in their own action. In his vision and therefore in his poetic

motive Shakespeare never really either rises up above life or gets behind it; he neither sees what it reaches out to nor the great unseen powers that are active within it. At one time, in two or three of his tragedies, he seems to have been striving to do this, but all that he does see then is the action of certain tremendous life-forces, which he either sets in a living symbol or indicates behind the human action, as in *Macbeth*, or embodies, as in *King Lear*, in a tragically uncontrollable possession of his human characters. Nevertheless, his is not a drama of mere externalised action, for it lives from within and more deeply than our external life. This is not Virat, the seer and creator of gross forms, but Hiranyagarbha, the luminous mind of dreams, looking through those forms to see his own images behind them. More than any other poet Shakespeare has accomplished mentally the legendary feat of the impetuous sage Vishwamitra; his power of vision has created a Shakespearian world of his own, and it is, in spite of its realistic elements, a romantic world in a very true sense of the word, a world of the wonder and free power of life and not of its mere external realities, where what is here dulled and hampered finds a greater enlarged and intense breath of living, an ultra-natural play of beauty, curiosity and amplitude.

It is needful in any view of the evolution of poetry to note the limits within which Shakespeare did his work, so that we may fix the point reached; but still within the work itself his limitations do not matter. And even his positive defects and lapses cannot lower him, because there is an unfailing divinity of power in his touch which makes them negligible. He has, however much toned down, his share of the Elizabethan crudities, violences, extravagances; but they are upborne on a stream of power and end by falling in into the general greatness of his scheme. He has deviations into stretches of half prosaic verse and vagaries of tortured and bad poetic expression, sometimes atrociously bad; but they are yet always very evidently not failures of power, but the wilful errors of a great poet, more careful of dramatic truth and carried on by his force of expression than bound to verbal perfection. We feel obliged to accept his defects, which in another poet our critical sense would be swift to condemn or reject,

because they are part of his force, just as we accept the vigorous errors of a great personality. His limitations are very largely the condition of his powers. Certainly, he is no universal revealer, as his idolators would have him be,—for even in the life-soul of man there are a multitude of things beyond him; but to have given a form so wonderful, so varied, so immortally alive, in so great a surge of the intensest poetical expression, to a life-vision of this kind and this power, is a unique achievement of poetic genius. The future may find for us a higher and profounder, even a more deeply and finely vital aim for the dramatic form than any Shakespeare ever conceived; but until that has been done with an equal power, grasp and fullness of vision and an equal intensity of revealing speech, he keeps his sovereign station. The claim made for him that he is the greatest of poets may very well be challenged,—he is not quite that,—but that he is first among dramatic poets cannot well be questioned.

So far then the English poetic spirit had got in the drama, and it has never got any farther. And this is principally because it has allowed itself to be obsessed by the Elizabethan formula; for it has clung not merely to the Shakespearian form,—which might after due modification still be used for certain purposes, especially for a deeper life-thought expressing itself through the strong colours of a romantic interpretation,—but to the whole crude inartistic error of that age. Great poets, poets of noble subjective power, delicate artists, fine thinkers and singers, all directly they turn to the dramatic form, begin fatally to externalise; they become violent, they gesticulate, they press to the action and forget to have an informing thought, hold themselves bound to the idea of drama as a robust presentation of life and incident and passion. And because this is not a true idea and, in any case, it is quite inconsistent with the turn of their own genius, they fail inevitably. Dryden stumbling heavily through his rhymed plays, Wordsworth of all people, the least Elizabethan of poets, penning with a conscientious dullness his *Borderers*, Byron diffusing his elemental energy in bad blank verse and worse dramatic construction, Keats turning from his unfinished *Hyperion* to wild schoolboy imitations of the worst

Elizabethan type, Shelley even, forgetting his discovery of a new and fine literary form for dramatic poetry to give us the Elizabethan violences of the *Cenci*, Tennyson, Swinburne, even after *Atalanta*, following the same *ignis fatuus*, a very flame of fatuity and futility, are all victims of the same hypnotism. Recently a new turn is visible; but as yet it is doubtful whether the right conditions for a renovation of the dramatic form and a true use of the dramatic motive have come into being. At any rate the predestined creator, if he is to come, is not yet among us.

Chapter XI

The Course of English Poetry – 3

THE ELIZABETHAN drama is an expression of the stir of the life-spirit; at its best it has a great or strong, buoyant or rich or beautiful, passionately excessive or gloomily tenebrous force of vital poetry. The rest of the utterance of the time is full of the lyric joy, sweetness or emotion or moved and coloured self-description of the same spirit. There is much in it of curious and delighted thinking, but little of a high and firm intellectual value. Culture is still in its imaginative childhood and the thinking mind rather works for the curiosity and beauty of thought and even more for the curiosity and beauty of the mere expression of thought than for its light and its vision. The poetry which comes out of this mood is likely to have great charm and imaginative, emotional or descriptive appeal, but may very well miss that depth of profounder substance and that self-possessing plenitude of form which are the other and indispensable elements of a rounded artistic creation. Beauty of poetical expression abounds in an unstinted measure, but for the music of a deeper spirit or higher significance we have to wait; the attempt at it we get, but not often all the success of its presence.

Spenser, the poet of second magnitude of the time, gives us in his work this beauty in its fullest abundance, but also the limited measure of that greater but not quite successful endeavour. The *Faerie Queene* is indeed a poem of unfailing imaginative charm and its two opening cantos are exquisite in execution; there is a stream of liquid harmony, of curiously opulent, yet finely tempered description, of fluid poetical phrase and minutely seen image. For these are Spenser's constant gifts, the native form of his genius which displays more of descriptive vision than of any larger creative power or narrative force. An inspired idea is worked out; a little too much lost in detail and in the diffusion of

a wealthy prolixity, it still holds well together its rather difficult and entangling burden of symbols and forms and achieves in the end some accomplished totality of fine poetic effect. But if we read on after this fine opening and look at the poem as a whole, the effect intended fails, not because it happened to be left unfinished, nor even because the power in it is not equally sustained and is too evidently running thinner and thinner as it proceeds, but because it could not have come to a successful completion. Kalidasa's *Birth of the War-God* was left unfinished, or finished by a very inferior hand, yet even in the fragment there is already a masterly totality of effect; there is the sense of a great and admirable design. Virgil's *Aeneid*, though in a way finished, did not receive those last touches which sometimes make all the difference between perfection and the approach to it; and we feel too, not a failure of art,—for that is a defect which could never be alleged against Virgil,—but a relative thinning of the supporting power and inspiration. Still the consummate artistic intelligence of the poet has been so steadily at work, so complete from the very inception, it has so thought out and harmonised its idea from the beginning that a fine and firm total effect is given. But here there is a defect of the artistic intellect, a vice or insufficiency in its original power of harmonising construction, characteristic of the Elizabethan, almost of the English mind.

Spenser's intention seems to have been to combine in his own way the success of Ariosto with the success of Dante. His work was to have been in its form a rich and beautiful romance; but it must be too at the same time a great interpretation by image and symbol, not here of the religious or spiritual, but of the ethical meaning of human life. A faery-tale and a vivid ethical symbol in one is his conception of his artistic task. That is a kind of combination difficult enough to execute, but capable of a great and beautiful effect in a master hand. But the Elizabethan intellectual direction runs always towards conceit and curious complication; it is unable to follow an idea for the sake of what is essential in it, but tangles it up in all sorts of turns and accessories: seizing on all manner of disparates, it tends to throw them together without any real fusion. Spenser in his idea and its

execution fell a victim to all these defects of the intelligence. He has taken his intellectual scheme from his Hellenism, the virtues to be figured in typical human beings; but he has dressed it up with the obvious and trivial mediaeval ingenuity of the allegory. Nor is he satisfied with a simple form of this combination; he has an ambition of all-including representativeness which far exceeds his or perhaps any possible power of fusing creation. The turn of the allegory must be at once ethical, ecclesiastical and political in one fell complexity; his witch of Faery-land embodies Falsehood, the Roman Catholic Church and Mary Queen of Scots in an irritating and impossible jumble. The subject of a poem of this kind has to be the struggle of the powers of good and evil, but the human figures through whom it works out to its issues, cannot be merely the good or the evil, this or that virtue or vice; they should stand for them as their expressive opportunity of life, not merely as their allegorical body. Spenser, a great poet, is not blind to this elementary condition; but his tangled skein of allegory continually hampers the sounder conception, and the interpretative narration works itself out through the confused maze of its distracting elements which we are obliged to accept, not for their own interest or living force and appeal, but for the beauty of the poetic expression and description to which they give occasion.

Besides this fault of the initial conception, there are defects in the execution. After a time at least the virtues and vices altogether lose their way in faery-land or they become mistily vague and negligible; and this, considering the idea of the poem, ought not to be, but certainly is a great relief to the reader. We are well contented to read the poem or, still better, each canto apart as a romance and leave the ulterior meaning to take care of itself; what was intended as a great ethical interpretative poem of the human soul, lives only as a beautiful series of romantic descriptions and incidents. We can see where the defect is if we make a comparison with the two greater poems of Greece and India which had an intention not altogether unsimilar, the Ramayana fusing something like a vast faery-tale with the story of an immense struggle between

world-powers of good and evil, the *Odyssey* with its magic of romance and its story of the assertion of right and of domestic and personal virtue against unbridled licence and wrong in an epic encounter between these opposite forces. The *Odyssey* is a battle of human will and character supported by divine power against evil men and wrathful gods and adverse circumstance and the deaf opposition of the elements, and its scenes move with an easy inevitability between the lands of romance and the romance of actual human life; but nowhere does the poet lose in the wealth of incident and description either the harmonising aesthetic colour or the simple central idea. The *Ramayana* too is made up of first materials which belong to the world of faery romance; but, lifted into an epic greatness, they support easily a grandiose picture of the struggle of incarnate God and Titan, of a human culture expressing the highest order and range of ethical values with a giant empire of embattled anarchic force, egoistic violence and domination and lawless self-assertion. The whole is of a piece, and even in its enormous length and protracted detail there is a victorious simplicity, largeness and unity. The English poet loses himself in the outward, in romantic incident and description pursued by his imagination for their own sake. His idea is often too much and too visibly expressed, yet in the end finds no successful expression. Instead of relying upon the force of his deeper poetic idea to sustain him, he depends on intellectual device and parades his machinery. The thread of connection is wandering and confused. He achieves a diffuse and richly confused perplexity, not the unity of a living whole.

These are the natural limitations of the Elizabethan age, and we have to note them with what may seem at first a disproportionate emphasis, because they are the key to the immediately following reaction of English poetry with its turn in Milton towards a severe and serious intellectual effort and discipline and its fall in Dryden and Pope to a manner which got away from the most prominent defects of the Elizabethan mind at the price of a complete and disastrous loss of all its great powers. English poetry before Milton had not passed through any training of the poetic and artistic intelligence; it had abounding energy and

power, but no self-discipline of the idea. Except in Shakespeare it fails to construct; it at once loses and finds itself in a luxurious indulgence of its force, follows with a loose sweetness or a vehement buoyancy all its impulses good, bad or indifferent. Still what it does achieve, is unique and often superlative in its kind. It achieves an unsurpassed splendour of imaginative vitality and eager vision of the life spirit, and an unsurpassed intensity of poetical expression; life vents itself in speech, pours its lyric emotion, lavishes its intimate and intuitive description of itself in passionate detail, thinks aloud in a native utterance of poetry packed with expressive image or felicitous in directness. There is no other poetry which has in at all the same degree this achievement.

This poetry is then great in achievement within the limits of its method and substance. That substance and method belong to the second step of the psychological gradations by which poetry becomes a more and more profound and subtle instrument of the self-expression of the human spirit. English poetry, I have remarked, follows the grades of this ascension with a singular fidelity of sequence. At first it was satisfied with only a primary superficial response to the most external appearances of life, its visible figures and incidents, its primary feelings and characteristics. To mirror these things clearly, justly, with a certain harmony of selection and a just sufficient transmutation in the personality and aesthetic temperament is enough for this earlier type of poetry, all the more easily satisfied because everything seen by the eye is fresh, interesting, stimulating, and the liveliness of the poetic impression replaces the necessity of subtlety or depth. Great poetry can be written in early times with this as its substantial method, but not afterwards when the race mind has begun to make an intenser and more inward response to life. It then becomes the resort of a secondary inspiration which is unable to rise to the full heights of poetic possibility. Or else, if this external method still persists as part of the outward manner of a more subjective creation, it is with a demand for more heightened effects and a more penetrating expression. The last was the demand and method of the Elizabethan age.

In Elizabethan poetry the physical and external tendency still persists, but it is no longer sufficient to satisfy either the perceiving spirit or its creative force. Where it is most preserved, it still demands a more vehement response, strong colours, violent passions, exaggerated figures, out-of-the-way or crowding events. Life is still the Muse of this poetry, but it is a Life which demands to feel itself more and is already knocking or trying to knock at the gates of the deeper subjective being. And in all the best work of the time it has already got there, not very deep, but still enough to be initially subjective. Whatever Shakespeare may suggest,—a poet's critical theories are not always a just clue to his inspiration,—there is not here any true or exact holding up of a mirror to life and Nature, but instead a moved and excited reception and evocation. Life throws its impressions, but what seizes upon them is a greater and deeper life-power in the poet which is not satisfied with mirroring or just beautifully responding to what is cast upon it, but begins to throw up at once around them its own rich matter of receptive being and shaping force and so creates something new, something more personal, intimate, fuller of a first inner vision, emotion, passion of self-expression. This is the source of the new intensity; it is this impulse towards an utterance of the creative life-power within which drives towards the dramatic form and acts with such unexampled power in Shakespeare. At another extremity of the Elizabethan mind, in Spenser, it gets much farther away from the actuality of life; it takes the impressions of the surrounding physical world as hints only for a purely imaginative creation which seems to be truly drawn not from the life of earth, but from a more beautiful and harmonious life-scene that exists either within our own unplumbed depths or on other subtler vital or physical planes. This creation has an aim in it at things symbolic, otherwise revelatory, deeper down in the soul itself, and it tries to shadow them out through the magic of romance, since it cannot yet intimately seize and express them. Still even there the method of the utterance, if not altogether its aim, is the voice of Life lifting itself out into waves of word and colour and image and sheer beauty of sound. Imagination, thought, vision

work with the emotional life-mind as their instrument or rather work in it as a medium, accepted as the very form of their being and the very force of their nature.

Great poetry is the result, but there are other powers of the human consciousness which have not yet been mastered, and to get at these is the next immediate step of English poetry. The way it follows is to bring forward the intellect as its chief instrument; the thought-mind is no longer carried along in the wave of life, but detaches itself from it to observe and reflect upon it. At first there is an intermediate manner, that of Milton's early work and of the Carolean poets, in which something of the Elizabethan impulse, something of its intense imaginative sight or its charm of emotion, prolongs itself for a while, but is fast fading away under the stress of an increasing intellectuality, a strong dryness of the light of the reason and a growing hardness of form and concentrated narrowness of the observing eye. This movement rises on one side into the ripened classical perfection of Milton, and falls away on the other through Waller into the reaction in Dryden and Pope.

Chapter XII

The Course of English Poetry – 4

IN THE work of the intellectual and classical age of English poetry, one is again struck by the same phenomenon that we meet throughout, an extraordinary force for achievement limited by a characteristic defect which turns in the actual execution to half-success or a splendid failure. A big streak of rawness somewhere, a wrong turn of the hand or an imperfect balance of the faculties wastes the power spent and makes the total result much inferior to what it should have been with so much nerve of energy to speed it or so broad a wing of genius to raise it into the highest empyrean heights. The mind of this age went for its sustaining influence and its suggestive models to Greece, Rome and France. That was inevitable; for these have been the three typically intellectual nations of Europe. It is these three literatures that have achieved, each following its own different way and peculiar spirit, the best in form and substance that that kind of inspiration can produce. The English mind, not natively possessed of any inborn intellectual depth and subtlety, not trained to a fine classical lucidity and sure aesthetic taste, had to turn to these sources, if the attempt was to be made at all. Steeping itself in these sources, it might hope to blend with the classical clarity and form its own masculine force and strenuousness, its strong imagination, its deeper colour and profounder intuitive suggestiveness and so arrive at something new and great to which the world could turn as another supreme element of its aesthetic culture. But the effect actually obtained did not answer to the possibility offered. To arrive at this perfection, this new turn of poetry ought to have kept, transmuted but not diminished, all that was best in the Elizabethan spirit and to have coloured, enriched and sweetened with its magic touch the classical form and the intellectual motive. There was instead a revolutionary departure, a breaking away, decisive rejection,

and entirely new attempt with no roots in the past. In the end not only was the preceding structure of poetry abolished, but all its strong and brilliant Muses were expelled from their seats. A stucco imitation classical temple, very elegant, very cold and very empty, was erected in the vacant place, and the gods of satire and didactic commonplace set up in a shrine which was built more like a coffee-house than a sanctuary. A sterile brilliance, a set polished rhetoric was the poor final outcome.

The age set out with a promise of better things; for a time it seemed almost on the right path. Milton's early poetry is the fruit of a strong classical intellectuality still touched with a glow and beauty which has been left by a fast receding tide of romantic colour, spontaneous warmth of emotion and passion and vital intuition, gifts of a greater depth and force of life. Many softer influences wove themselves together into his high language and rhythm and were fused in his personality into something wonderfully strong, rich and beautiful. Suggestions and secrets were caught from Chaucer, Peele, Spenser, Shakespeare, and their hints gave a strange grace to a style whose austerity of power had been nourished by great classical influences. A touch of Virgilian beauty and majesty, a poise of Lucretian grandeur, a note of Aeschylean sublimity, the finest gifts of the ancients coloured or mellowed by richer romantic elements and subtly toned into each other, entered in and helped to prepare the early Miltonic manner. Magnified and exalted by the stress of an original personality, noble and austere, their result was the blending of a peculiar kind of greatness and beauty not elsewhere found in English verse. The substance is often slight, for it is as yet Milton's imagination rather than his soul or his whole mind that is using the poetic form; but the form itself is of a faultless beauty. Already, in spite of this slenderness of substance, we can see the coming change; the retreat of the first exuberant life-force and a strong turning of the intelligence upon life to view it sedately from its own intellectual centre of vision are now firmly in evidence. Some of the Elizabethans had tried their hand at this turn, but with no great poetical success; when they wrote their best, even though they tried to think closely and

strongly, life took possession of the thought or itself quivered out into thought-expression. Here on the contrary, even in the two poems that are avowedly expressions of vital moods, it is the intellect and its imaginations that are making the mood a material for reflective brooding; there is no longer here the free and spontaneous life mood chanting its own sight and emotion to its own moved delight. In the minor Carolean poets we have some lingering of the colours of the Elizabethan sunset; something of the life-sense and quick emotional value are still there but too thinned and diluted to support any intensity or greatness of speech or manner, and finally they die away into trivialities of the intelligence playing insincerely with the movements of the emotional nature. For the reflective idea already predominates over sight and intimate emotion; the mind is looking at the thing felt and is no longer taken up and carried away in the wave of feeling. Some of this work is mystic in its subject or motive; but that too, except in some luminous lines or passages, suffers from the same desiccating influence. The opening of an age of intellect was not the time when a great mystical poetry could leap into existence.

This ebb is rapid and the change is soon complete. The colour has faded, the sweetness has vanished, song has fallen into a dead hush. For a whole long dry metallic century the lyrical faculty disappeared from the English tongue. The grandiose epic chant of Milton breaks what would be otherwise a complete silence of all higher or profounder poetic power; but it is a Milton who has turned away from the richer beauty and promise of his youth, lost the Virgilian accent, put away from him all Pagan delicacies of colour and grace and sweetness to express only in fit greatness of speech and form the conception of Heaven and Hell and man and the universe which his imagination had built out of his beliefs and reviewed in the vision of his soul. One is moved to speculate on what we might have had from him if, instead of writing after the long silence of his poetic genius during which he remained absorbed in barren political controversy until public and private calamities compelled him to go back to himself and his true power, he had written his master work in a

ripened continuity and deepened strength of his earlier style and vision. Nothing quite so great perhaps, but surely something more opulent, many-toned and perfect. As things happened, it is by *Paradise Lost* that he occupies his high rank among the poets. That too imperfect grandiose epic is the one supreme fruit left by the attempt of English poetry to seize the classical manner, achieve beauty of poetic expression disciplined by a high intellectual severity and forge a complete balance and measured perfection of architectonic form and structure.

Paradise Lost is one of the few great epic poems in the world's literature; certain qualities in it reach heights which no other of them had climbed, even though as a whole it has defects and elements of failure which are absent in the other great world epics. Rhythm and speech have never attained to a mightier amplitude of epic expression and movement; seldom has there been an equal sublimity of flight. And to a great extent Milton has done in this respect what he had set out to do; he has given English poetic speech a language of intellectual thought which is of itself highly poetic without depending on any of the formal aids of poetic expression except those which are always essential and indispensable, a speech which succeeds by its own intrinsic force and is in its very grain poetry and in its very grain inspired intellectual thought-utterance. This is always the aim of the classical poet in his style and movement, and Milton has fulfilled it. At the same time he has raised this achievement to a highest possible pitch by that peculiar grandeur in the soul and manner of the utterance and that magnificence of sound-tones and amplitude of gait in the rhythm which belong to him alone of poets. These qualities are easily sustained throughout this long work, because with him they are less an art, great artist though he is, than the natural language of his spirit and the natural sound of its motion. His aim is high, his subject loftier than that of any one of his predecessors except Dante. There is nowhere any more magnificently successful opening than the conception and execution of his Satan and Hell; nowhere has there been a more powerful portraiture of the living spirit of egoistic revolt fallen to its natural element of darkness and pain

and yet still sustained by the greatness of the divine principle from which it was born, even when it has lost oneness with it and faces it with dissonance and defiance. If the rest of the epic had been equal to its opening books, there would have been no greater poem, few as great in literature.

But here too the total performance failed and fell below the promise. *Paradise Lost* compels our admiration throughout by its greatness of style and rhythm, but as a whole, in spite of its mighty opening, its whole substance as distinct from its more magnificent or striking parts has failed to enter victoriously either into the mind or into the heart of the world; much of it has not lodged itself deeply in its imagination or enriched sovereignly the acquired stock of its more intimate poetical thought and experience. But the poem that does neither of these things, however noble its powers of language and rhythm, has missed its destiny. The reason is not to be found in the disparity between Milton's professed aim, which was to justify the ways of God to man, and the intellectual means available to him for fulfilling his purpose. The theology of the Puritan religion was a poor enough aid for so ambitious a purpose; but the Scriptural legend treated was poetically sufficient if only it had received throughout a deeper interpretation. Dante's theology had the advantage of the richness of import and spiritual experience of mediaeval Catholicism, but intellectually for so deep and vast a purpose it was not any more satisfying or durable. Still through his primitive symbols Dante has seen and has revealed things which make his work throughout poetically and creatively great and sufficient up to a certain high, if narrow level. It is here that Milton failed altogether. Nor is the failure mainly intellectual; it is of a more radical kind. It is true that he had not an original intellect; his mind was scholastic and traditional to a point that discouraged any free thinking power; but he had an original soul and personality and the vision of a poet. It is not the province of poetry to justify intellectually the ways of God to man; what it can do, is to reveal them: but just here is the point of failure. Milton has seen Satan and Death and Sin and Hell and Chaos; there is a scriptural greatness in his account of these things. But

he has not seen God and heaven and man or the soul embodied in humanity, at once divine and fallen, enslaved to suffering and evil, striving for redemption, yearning for a forfeited bliss and perfection. On this side there is no inner greatness in the poetic interpretation of his materials. In other words, he has ended by stumbling over the rock of offence that always awaits poetry in which the intellectual element is too predominant, the fatal danger of a failure of vision: he has tried to poetise the stock ideas of his religion and not reached through sight to a living figure of Truth and its great expressive thoughts or revelatory symbols.

This failure extends itself to all the elements of his later work; it is definitive and he never, except in passages, recovered from it. His language and rhythm remain unfalteringly great to the end, but they are only a splendid robe and the body they clothe is a nobly carved but lifeless image. His architectural structure is always greatly and classically proportioned; but structure has two elements or two methods,—there is the schematic form that is thought out and there is the incarnating organic body which grows from an inward artistic and poetic vision. Milton's structures are thought out; they have not been seen, much less been lived out into their inevitable measures and free lines of inspired perfection. The difference will become evident if we make a simple comparison with Homer and Dante or even with the structural power, much less inspired and vital than theirs, but always finely aesthetic and artistic, of Virgil. Poetry may be intellectual, but only in the sense of having a strong intellectual strain in it and of putting forward as its aim the play of imaginative thought in the service of the poetical intelligence; but that must be supported very strongly by the quickening emotion or by the imaginative vision to which the idea opens. Milton's earlier work is suffused by his power of imaginative vision; the opening books of *Paradise Lost* are upborne by the greatness of the soul that finds expression in its harmonies of speech and sound and by the greatness of its sight. But in the later books and still more in the *Samson Agonistes* and the *Paradise Regained* this flame sinks; the thought becomes intellectually externalised, the sight is obvious and on the surface. Milton writing poetry

could never fail in greatness and power, nor could he descend, as did Wordsworth and others, in style, turn and rhythm below his well-attained high poetical level; but the supreme vitalising fire has sunk. The method and idea retain sublimity, but the deeper spirit has departed.

Much greater, initial and essential was the defect in the poetry that followed this strong beginning. Here all is unredeemed intellectuality and even the very first elements of the genuine poetic inspiration are for the most part, one might almost say, entirely absent. Pope and Dryden and their school, except now and then and as if by accident,—Dryden especially has lines sometimes in which he suddenly rises above his method,—are busy only with one aim, with thinking in verse, thinking with a clear force, energy and point or with a certain rhetorical pomp and effectiveness, in a well-turned and well-polished metrical system. That seems to have been their sole idea of “numbers”, of poetry, and it is an idea of unexampled poverty and falsity. No doubt this was a necessary phase, and perhaps, the English creative mind being what it then was, rich and strong but confused and lawless and always addicted in its poetry to quite the reverse of a clear intellectual method, it had to go to an opposite extreme. It had to sacrifice for a time many of its native powers in order to learn as best it could how to arrive at a firm and straightforward expression of thought in a just, well-harmonised, precise and lucid speech; an inborn gift in all the Latin tongues, in a half-Teutonic speech attacked by the Celtic richness of imagination this power had to be acquired even at a cost. But the sacrifice made was immense and entailed much effort of recovery in the later development of the language. The writers of this rationalising age got rid of the Elizabethan language with its opulent confusion, its often involved expression, its lapses into trailing and awkward syntax, its perplexed turn in which ideas and images jostle and stumble together, fall into each other's arms and strain and burden the expression in a way which is sometimes stimulating and exhilarating, but sometimes merely embarrassing and awkward; they got rid of the crudeness and extravagance but lost all the rich imagination and vision, the

sweetness, lyrism, grace and colour, and replaced it with acute point and emphatic glitter. They got rid too of Milton's Latinisms and poetic inversions, substituting smaller rhetorical artifices of their own device,—dismissed his great and packed turns of speech, filling in the void left by the departure of this grandeur with what claimed to be a noble style, but was no more than a spurious rhetorical pomp. Still the work they had to do they did effectively, with talent, energy, even an undeniable genius.

If the substance of this poetry had been of a higher worth, it would have been less open to depreciation and need not have excited so vehement a reaction or fallen so low from its exaggerated pride of place. But the substance was too often on a par with the method and often below it. It took for its models the Augustan poets of Rome, but it substituted a certain perfection of polish and brilliance and often an element of superficiality and triviality for the strength and weight of the Latin manner. It followed more sincerely the contemporary French models; but it missed their best normal qualities, their culture, taste, tact of expression, and missed too the greater gifts of the classical French poetry. For, though that poetry may often fall short of the intensest poetic delight by its excessive cult of reason and taste, though it may run often in too thin a stream, though it may indulge the rhetorical turn too consistently to achieve utterly the highest heights of speech, yet it has ideas and a strong or delicate power, a true nobility of character in Corneille, a fine grace of poetic sentiment and a supreme delicacy and fine passion in Racine. But the verse of these pseudo-Augustan writers does not call in these greater gifts: it is occupied with expressing thought, but its thought has most often little or none of the greater values. This Muse is all brain of facile reasoning, but has no heart, no depth or sweetness of character, no high nobility of will, no fine appeal or charm of the joy and sorrow of life. In this flood of brilliant and forcefully phrased commonplace, even ideas which have depths behind them tend to become shallow and external by the way of their expression. The mind of these writers has no great seeing eye on life. Its satire is the part of their work which is still most alive; for here the Anglo-Saxon spirit gets back to itself,

leaves the attempt at a Gallicised refinement, finds its own robust vigour and arrives at a brutal, but still a genuine and sometimes really poetic vigour and truth of expression. Energy and driving force, the English virtues, are, indeed, a general merit of the verse of Pope and Dryden and in this respect they excel their French exemplars. Their expression is striking in its precision; each couplet rings out with a remarkable force of finality and much coin of their minting has passed into common speech and citation. If there is not much gold of poetry here, there is at least much well-gilt copper coin of a good currency, useful for small purchases and petty traffic. But in the end one is tired of a monotonous brilliance of language, wearied out by the always repeated trick of decisiveness and point of rhythm. This verse has to be read by couplets and passages; for each poem is only a long string of them and, except in one or two instances, the true classical gift, the power of structure is absent. There is an almost complete void of the larger genuine thought-power which is necessary for structure. This intellectual age of English poetry did its work, but, as was inevitable with so pronounced a departure from the true or at least the higher line, that work gives the impression, if not of a resonant failure, at least of a fall or a considerable descent to lower levels. This Augustan age not only falls infinitely far below the Roman from which it drew so much of its inspiration, but gives an impression of great inferiority when compared with the work of the Victorians and one is tempted to say that a little of the work of Wordsworth and Keats and Shelley has immeasurably more poetic value than all this silver and tin and copper and the less precious metals of these workers whose superficiality of workmanship was a pride of this age.

But although this much has to be said, it would be by itself too one-sided and depreciative a view of the work of what is after all a period of the most brilliant and energetic writing and a verse which in its own way and its own technique is most carefully wrought and might even claim a title to a supreme craftsmanship: nor can we ignore the fact that in certain types such as satire, the mock heroic, the set didactic poem these writers achieved the highest height of a consummate and often

impeccable excellence. Moreover some work was done especially by Dryden which even on the higher levels of poetry can challenge comparison with the work of the Elizabethans and the greater poets of later times. Even the satire of Pope and Dryden rises sometimes into a high poetic value beyond the level they normally reached and they have some great outbursts which have the power not only to please or delight by their force and incisiveness or their weight of thought or their powerful presentation of life, but to move to emotion, as great poetry moves us. It is not necessary here to say more in vindication of the excelling work of these writers; their fame abides and no belittling can successfully depreciate their work or discount its excellence. We are concerned here only with their place in the development, and mainly, the psychological development of English poetry. Its place there, its value is mostly in the direction of a sheer intellectuality concerned with the more superficial aspects of thought and life deliberately barren of emotion except the more superficial; lyricism has run dry, beauty has become artificial where at all it survives, passion is replaced by rhetoric, the heart is silent, life has civilised, urbanised, socialised and stylised itself too much to have any more a very living contact with Nature. As the literature of an age of this kind this poetry or this powerful verse has an enormous merit of its own and could hardly be better for its purpose. Much more perhaps than any other age of intellectual writing it has restricted itself to its task; in doing so it has restricted its claims to poetic greatness of the highest kind, but it has admirably done its work. That work is not faultless; it has too much of the baser lead of rhetoric, too frequent a pomposity and artifice, too little of Roman nobility and too little of English sincerity to be of the first value. But it stands out well enough on its own lower summit and surveys well enough from that inferior eminence a reach of country that has, if not any beauty, its own interest, order and value. There we may leave it and turn to the next striking and always revolutionary outburst of this great stream of English poetic literature.

Chapter XIII

The Course of English Poetry – 5

WHEN a power of poetry in a highly evolved language describes so low a downward curve as to reach this dry and brazen intellectualism, it is in danger of losing much of its vitality and flexibilities of expression and it may even, if it has lived too long, enter into a stage of decadence and perish by a dull slow decay of its creative force. That has happened more than once in literary history; but there can always be a saving revulsion, a return of life by a shock from without or a liberating impulse from within. And this saving revulsion, when it comes, is likely, if bold enough, to compensate for the past prone descent by an equally steep ascension to an undreamed-of novelty of revealing vision and illumined motive. This is the economy of Nature's lapses in the things of the mind no less than in the movements of life. For when the needed energy is within, these falls are an obscure condition for an unprecedented elevation, these emptyings a preface to large inrushes of plenty. In the recoil, in the rush or upwinging to the opposite extreme, some discovery is made which would otherwise have been long postponed or not have arrived at all; doors are burst open which might have been passed by unseen or would have resisted any less vehement or rapidly illumined effort to unlock them. On the other hand it is a frequent disadvantage of these revolutions or these forced rapidities of evolution, that they carry in them a premature light and an element of quick unripeness and a subsequent reaction and return to lower levels becomes inevitable. For the contemporary mind is not really ready for the complete implanting of this new seed or stock; and what is accomplished is itself rather an intuitive anticipation than a firmly based knowledge or an execution of the thing seen equal to its true significance. All these familiar phenomena are visible in the new swift and far-reaching upward curve, which carries

English poetry from the hard, glittering, well-turned and well-rhymed intellectual superficialities of a thin pseudo-classicism to its second luminous outbreak of sight and beauty and an inspired creative impulse.

Intellect, reason, a firm clarity of the understanding and arranging intelligence are not the highest powers of our nature. If this were our summit, many things which have now a great or a supreme importance for human culture, religion, art, poetry, would either be no more than a lure or a graceful play of the imagination and emotions, or, though admissible and useful for certain human ends, would still be deprived of the truth of their own highest indications. Poetry, even when it is dominated by intellectual tendency and motive, cannot really live and work by intellect alone. Its impetus is not created and its functioning and results are not shaped either wholly or predominantly by reason and judgment; an intuitive seeing and an inspired hearing are its natural means or its native sources. But intuition and inspiration are not only spiritual in their essence, they are the characteristic means of all spiritual vision and utterance; they are rays from a greater and intenser Light than the tempered clarity of our intellectual understanding. Ordinarily these powers are turned in human action and creation to a use which is not spiritual and not perhaps their last or most intrinsic purpose. Their common use in poetry is to give a deeper and more luminous force and a heightened beauty to the perceptions of outward life or to sublimate the more inward but still untransformed and comparatively surface movements of human emotion and passion or to empower thought to perceive and utter certain individual and universal truths which enlighten or which raise to a greater meaning the sensible appearances of the inner and outer life of Nature and man. But every power in the end finds itself drawn towards its own proper home and own highest capacity and field of expression and one day or another the spiritual faculties of intuitive hearing and seeing must climb at last to the expression of things spiritual and eternal and their power and working in temporal things. Poetry will yet find in that supreme interpretation its own richest account, its largest and

most satisfied possible action, its purest zenith of native force. An ideal and spiritual poetry revealing the spirit in itself and in things, showing to us the unseen present in the seen, unveiling ranges of existence which the physical mind ignores, pointing man himself to undreamed capacities of godhead, future heights of being, truth, beauty, power, joy which are beyond the highest of his common or his now realised values of existence,—this will surely appear as the last potentiality of this high and beautiful creative power. When the eye of the poet has seen the life of man and the world externally or penetrated into its more vital inwardness or has risen to the clarities and widenesses of a thought which observantly perceives or intimately understands it, and when his word has caught some revealing speech and rhythm of what he has seen, much has been done, but not all that is possible to poetic vision and utterance. This other and greater realm still remains open for a last transcendence.

For the first time in occidental literature, we get in this fourth turn of the evolution of English poetry some faint initial falling of this higher light upon the poetic intelligence. Some ancient poets may have received something of it through myth and symbol; a religious mystic here and there may have attempted to give his experience rhythmic and imaginative form. But here is the first poetic attempt of the intellectual faculty striving at a high height of its own development to look beyond its own level directly into the unseen and the unknown and to unveil some ideal truth of its own highest universal conceptions hidden behind the veil of the ordinary mind and supporting them in their return to their eternal source. This high departure was not an inevitable outcome of the age that preceded Wordsworth, Blake and Shelley. The intellectual endeavour had been in Milton inadequate in range, subtlety and depth, in those who followed paltry, narrow and elegantly null, in both supported by an insufficient knowledge. A new and larger endeavour in the same field might rather have been expected which would have set before it the aim of a richer, deeper, wider, more curious intellectual humanism, poetic, artistic, many-sided, sounding by the poetic reason the ascertainable truth of God and man and Nature. That was

the line followed by the main stream of European thought and culture, and to that too English poetry had eventually to turn in the intellectual fullness of the nineteenth century. It was already the indistinct and half-conscious drift of the slow transitional movement which intervenes between Pope and Wordsworth; but as yet this movement was obscure, faltering and poor in its achievement. When a greater force came streaming in, the influences that were abroad were those which elsewhere found expression in the revolutionary idealism of the French Revolution and in German transcendentalism and romanticism. Intellectual in their idea and substance, they were in the mind of five or six English poets, each of them a remarkable individuality, carried beyond themselves by the sudden emergence of some half-mystical Celtic turn of the national mind into supra-intellectual sources of inspiration. Insufficiently supported by any adequate spiritual knowledge, unable to find except rarely the right and native word of their own meaning, these greater tendencies faded away or were lost by the premature end of the poets who might, had they lived, have given them a supreme utterance. But still theirs was the dawn of whose light we shall find the noon in the age now opening before us if it fulfils all its intimations. Blake, Shelley, Wordsworth were first explorers of a new world of poetry other than that of the ancients or of the intermediate poets, which may be the familiar realm of the aesthetic faculty in the future, must be in fact if we are not continually to describe the circle of efflorescence, culmination and decay within the old hardly changing circle.

Certain motives which led up to this new poetry are already visible in the work of the middle eighteenth century. There is, first, a visible attempt to break quite away from the prison of the formal metrical mould, rhetorical style, limited subject-matter, absence of imagination and vision imposed by the high pontiffs of the pseudo-classical cult. Poets like Gray, Collins, Thomson, Chatterton, Cowper seek liberation by a return to Miltonic blank verse and manner, to the Spenserian form,—an influence which prolonged itself in Byron, Keats and Shelley,—to lyrical movements, but more prominently the classical ode form, or

to freer and richer moulds of verse. Some pale effort is made to recover something of the Shakespearian wealth of language or of the softer, more pregnant colour of the pre-Restoration diction and to modify it to suit the intellectualised treatment of thought and life which was now an indispensable element; for the old rich vital utterance was no longer possible, an intellectualised speech had become a fixed and a well-acquired need of a more developed mentality. Romanticism of the modern type now makes its first appearance in the choice of the subjects of poetic interest and here and there in the treatment, though not yet quite in the grain and the spirit. Especially, there is the beginning of a direct gaze of the poetic intelligence and imagination upon life and Nature and of another and a new power in English speech, the poetry of sentiment as distinguished from the inspired voice of sheer feeling or passion. But all these newer motives are only incipient and unable to get free expression because there is still a heavy weight of the past intellectual tradition. Rhetoric yet loads the style or, when it is avoided, still the purer intensity of poetic emotion is not altogether found. Verse form tends to be still rather hard and external or else ineffective in its movement; the native lyric note has not yet returned, but only the rhetorical stateliness of the ode, not lyricised as in Keats and Shelley, or else lyrical forms managed with only an outward technique but without any cry in them. Romanticism is still rather of the intellect than in the temperament, sentiment runs thinly and feebly and is weighted with heavy intellectual turns. Nature and life and things are seen accurately as objects and forms, but not with any vision, emotion or penetration into the spirit behind them. Many of the currents which go to make up the great stream of modern poetry are beginning to run in thin tricklings, but still in a hard and narrow bed. There is no sign of the swift uplifting that was to come as if upon the sudden wings of a splendid moment.

In Burns these new-born imprisoned spirits break out from their bounds and get into a free air of natural, direct and living reality, find a straightforward speech and a varied running or bounding movement of freedom. This is the importance of this

solitary voice from the north in the evolution, apart from the intrinsic merits of his poetry. His work has its limitations; the language is often too intellectualised to give the lyrical emotion, though it comes from the frank, unartificial and sturdy intellect of a son of the soil; the view on life is close, almost too close to give the deeper poetic or artistic effect, but it deals much with outsides and surfaces and the commonnesses and realisms of action, sometimes only does it suggest to us the subtler something which gives lyrical poetry not only its form and lilt and its power to stir,—all these he has,—but its more moving inmost appeal. Nevertheless, Burns has in him the things which are most native to the poetry of our modern times; he brings in the new naturalness, the nearness of the fuller poetic mind, intellectualised, informed with the power of clear reflective thought awake to life and nature, the closely observing eye, the stirring force of great general ideas, the spirit of revolt and self-assertion, the power of personality and the free play of individuality, the poignant sentiment, sometimes even a touch of psychological subtlety. These things are in him fresh, strong, initial as in a forerunner impelled by the first breath of the coming air, but not in that finished possession of the new motives which is to be the greatness of the future master-singers. That we begin to get first in Wordsworth. His was the privilege of the earliest initiation.

This new poetry has six great voices who fall naturally in spite of their pronounced differences into pairs, Wordsworth and Byron, Blake and Coleridge, Shelley and Keats. Byron sets out with a strangely transformed echo of the past intellectualism, is carried beyond it by the elemental force of his personality, has even one foot across the borders of the spiritual, but never quite enters into that kingdom. Wordsworth breaks away with deliberate purpose from the past, forces his way into this new realm, but finally sinks under the weight of the narrower intellectual tendencies which he carries with him into its amplitudes. Blake and Coleridge open magical gates, pass by flowering sidelanes with hedges laden with supernatural blooms into a middle world whence their voices come to us ringing with an unearthly melody. In Shelley the idealism and spiritual impulse rise to almost giddy

heights in a luminous ether and are lost there, unintelligible to contemporary humanity, only now beginning to return to us with their message. Keats, the youngest and in many directions the most gifted of these initiators, enters the secret temple of ideal Beauty, but has not time to find his way into the deepest mystic sanctuary. In him the spiritual seeking stops abruptly short and prepares to fall away down a rich sensuous incline to a subsequent poetry which turns from it to seek poetic Truth or pleasure through the senses and an artistic or curiously observing or finely psychologising intellectualism. This dawn has no noon, hardly even a morning.

Chapter XIV

The Movement of Modern Literature – 1

MODERN poetry carrying in it the fullness of imaginative self-expression of the entirely modernised mind begins with the writers of the later eighteenth and the early nineteenth century. Here are the free, impetuous but often narrow sources of these wider flowings. Here we see the initial tendencies which have undergone a rapid growth of meaning and changes of form in the subsequent decades, until now all their sense and seeking have reached in the early twentieth a quite unprecedented subtle intensity, refinement and variety of motives and even a tense straining on many lines to find in everything some last occult truth and hitherto unimagined utterance, to go beyond all that poetry has ever done. This is in its very nature an effort which must end either in a lingering, a hectic extravagant or dull exhausted decadence or in a luminous and satisfied self-exceeding. At the very beginning and still more and increasingly afterwards this modern movement, in literature as in thought and science, takes the form of an ever widening and deepening intellectual and imaginative curiosity, an insatiable passion for knowledge, an eager lust of finding, a seeking eye of intelligence awakened to all the multiform possibilities of an endless new truth and discovery. The Renascence was an awakening of the life spirit to wonder and curiosity and reflection and the stirred discovery of all that is brilliant and curious in the things of the life and the mind on their surface; but the fullness of the modern age has been a much larger comprehensive awakening of the informed and clarified intellect to a wider curiosity, a much more extensive adventure of discovery and an insistent need to penetrate deeper and know and possess the truth of Nature and man and the universe, — both their outer truth and process

and whatever deeper mystery may lie hidden behind their first appearances and suggestions. And now it is culminating in something that promises to go beyond it, to bring about a new futurist rather than modernist age in which the leader of the march shall be intuition rather than the reasoning and critical intelligence. The long intellectual search for truth that went probing always deeper into the physical, the vital and the subjective, into the action of body and life, into the yet ill-grasped motions of mind and emotion and sensation and thought, is now beginning to reach beyond these things or rather through their subtlest and strongest intensities of sight and feeling towards the truths of the Spirit. The soul of the Renascence was a lover of life and an amateur of knowledge; but the modern spirit has been drawn rather by the cult of a clear, broad and minute intellectual and practical Truth: the dominating necessity of its being is a straining after knowledge and a power of life founded on the power of knowledge. Poetry in the modern age has followed intellectually and imaginatively the curve of this great impulse.

Continental literature displays the mass of this movement with a much more central completeness and in a stronger and more consistent body and outline than English poetry. In the Teutonic countries the intellectual and romantic literature of the Germans at the beginning with its background of transcendental philosophy, at the end the work of the Scandinavian and Belgian writers with their only apparently opposite sides of an intellectual or a sensuous realism and a sentimental or a psychological mysticism, the two strands sometimes separate, sometimes mingled, among the Latins the like commencement in the work of Rousseau, Chateaubriand, Chénier, Hugo, the intermediate artistic development of most of the main influences by the Parnassians, the like later turn towards the poetry of Mallarmé, Verlaine, D'Annunzio, stigmatised by some as the beginning of a decadence, give us a distinct view of the curve. In English poetry the threads are more confused, the work has on the whole a less clear and definite inspiration and there is in spite of the greatness of individual poets an inferior total effectivity; but at the beginning and the end it has one higher note, a lifting

of sight beyond the stress of the intellect and the senses, which is reached either not at all or much less directly realised with a less pure vision in the more artistically sound and sufficient poetry of the Continent. Still the principal identical elements are distinguishable, sometimes very strongly pronounced and helped to some fullest expression by the great individual energy of imagination and force of character which are the most distinct powers of the English poetic mind. Often they thus stand out all the more remarkable by the magnificent narrowness of their self-concentrated isolation.

Earliest among these many new forces to emerge with distinctness is an awakening of the eye to a changed vision of Nature, of the imagination to a more perfect and intimate visualisation, of the soul to a closer spiritual communion. An imaginative, scrutinising, artistic or sympathetic dwelling on the details of Nature, her sights, sounds, objects, sensible impressions is a persistent characteristic of modern art and poetry; it is the poetic side of the same tendency which upon the intellectual has led to the immeasurable development of the observing and analysing eye of Science. The poetry of older times directed an occasional objective eye on Nature, turning a side glance from life or thought to get some colouring or decorative effect or a natural border or background for life or something that illustrated, ministered to or enriched the human thought or mood of the moment, at most for a casual indulgence of the imagination and senses in natural beauty. But the intimate subjective treatment of Nature, the penetrated human response to her is mostly absent or comes only in rare and brief touches. On the larger scale her subjective life is realised not with an immediate communion, but through myth and the image of divine personalities that govern her powers. In all these directions modern poetry represents a great change of our mentality and a swift and vast extension of our imaginative experience. Nature now lives for the poet as an independent presence, a greater or equal power dwelling side by side with him or embracing and dominating his existence. Even the objective vision and interpretation of her has developed, where it continues at all the older poetic method, a much more

minute and delicate eye and touch in place of the large, strong and simply beautiful or telling effects which satisfied an earlier imagination. But where it goes beyond that fine outwardness, it has brought us a whole world of new vision; working sometimes by a vividly suggestive presentation, sometimes by a separation of effects and an imaginative reconstruction which reveals aspects the first outward view had hidden in, sometimes by a penetrating impressionism which in its finest subtleties seems to be coming back by a detour to a sensuously mystical treatment, it goes within through the outward and now not so much presents as recreates physical Nature for us through the imaginative vision.¹ By that new creation it penetrates through the form nearer to the inner truth of her being.

But the direct subjective approach to Nature is the most distinctly striking characteristic turn of the modern mentality. The approach proceeds from two sides which constantly meet each other and create between them a nexus of experience between man and Nature which is the modern way of responding to the universal Spirit. On one side there is the subjective sense of Nature herself as a great life, a being, a Presence, with impressions, moods, emotions of her own expressed in her many symbols of life and stressing her objective manifestations. In the poets in whom this turn first disengages itself, that is a living conscious view of her to which they are constantly striving to give expression whether in a large sense of her presence or in a rendering of its particular impressions. On the other side there is a sensitive human response, moved in emotion or thrilling in sensation or stirred by sheer beauty or responsive in mood, a response of satisfaction and possession or of dissatisfied yearning and seeking, in the whole an attempt to relate or harmonise the soul and mind and sensational and vital being of the human individual with the soul and mind and life and body of the visible and sensible universe. Ordinarily it is through the imagination

¹ I am speaking here of Western literature. Oriental art and poetry at any rate in the far East had already in a different way anticipated this more intimate and imaginative seeing.

and the intellect and the soul of sensibility that this approach is made; but there is also a certain endeavour to get through these instruments to a closer spiritual relation and, if not yet to embrace Nature by the Spirit in man, to harmonise and unite the spiritual soul of man with the spiritual Presence in Nature.

Another widening of experience which modern poetry renders much more universally and with a constant power and insistence is a greater awakening of man to himself, to man in this warp and weft of Space and Time and in the stress of the universe, to all that is meant by his present, his past and his future. Here too we have a parallel imaginative movement in poetry to the intellectual movement of thought and science with its large and its minute enquiry into the origins and antiquity and history of the race, into the sources of its present development, into all its physical, psychological, sociological being and the many ideal speculations and practical aspirations of its future which have arisen from this new knowledge of the human being and his possibilities. Formerly, the human mind in its generality did not go very far in these directions. Its philosophy was speculative and metaphysical, but with little actuality except for the intellectual and spiritual life of the individual, its science explorative of superficial phenomenon rather than opulent both in detail and fruitful generalisation; its view of the past was mythological, traditional and national, not universal and embracing; its view of the present was limited in objective scope and, with certain exceptions, of no very great subjective profundity; an outlook on the future was remarkable by its absence. The constant self-expansion of the modern mind has broken down many limiting barriers; a vast objective knowledge, an increasingly subtle subjectivity, a vivid living in the past, present and future, a universal view of man as of Nature are its strong innovations. This change has found inevitably its vivid reflections in the wider many-sided interests, the delicate refinements, fine searchings, large and varied outlook and profound inlook of modern poetry.

The first widening breadth of this universal interest in man, not solely the man of today and our own country and type or of the past tradition of our own culture, but man in himself in

all his ever-changing history and variety, came in the form of an eager poetic and romantic valuing of all that had been ignored and put aside as uncouth and barbarous by the older classical or otherwise limited type of mentality. It sought out rather all that was unfamiliar and attractive by its unlikeness to the present; its imagination was drawn towards the primitive, the savage, to mediaeval man and his vivid life and brilliant setting, to the Orient very artificially seen through a heavily coloured glamour, to the ruins of the past, to the life of the peasant or the solitary, the outlaw, to man near to Nature undisguised by conventions and uncorrupted by an artificial culture or man in revolt against conventions: there is a willed preference for these strange and interesting aspects of humanity, as in Nature for her wild and grand, savage and lonely scenes or her rich and tropical haunts or her retired spots of self-communion. On one side a sentimental or a philosophic naturalism, on the other a flamboyant or many-hued romanticism, superficial mediaevalism, romanticised Hellenism, an interest in the fantastic and the supernatural, tendencies of an intellectual or an ideal transcendentalism, are the salient constituting characters. They make up that brilliant and confusedly complex, but often crude and unfinished literature, stretching from Rousseau and Chateaubriand to Hugo and taking on its way Goethe, Schiller and Heine, Wordsworth, Byron, Keats and Shelley, which forms a hasty transition from the Renascence and its after-fruits to the modernism of today which is already becoming the modernism of yesterday. Much of it we can now see to have been ill-grasped, superficial and tentative; much, as in Chateaubriand and in Byron, was artificial, a pose and affectation; much, as in the French Romantics, merely bizarre, overstrained and overcoloured; a later criticism condemned in it a tendency to inartistic excitement, looseness of form, an unintellectual shallowness or emptiness, an ill-balanced imagination. It laid itself open certainly in some of its more exaggerated turns to the reproach,—not justly to be alleged against the true romantic element in poetry,—that the stumbling-block of romanticism is falsity. Nevertheless behind this often defective frontage was the activity of a considerable

force of new truth and power, much exceedingly great work was done, the view of the imagination was immensely widened and an extraordinary number of new motives brought in which the later nineteenth century developed with a greater care and finish and conscientious accuracy, but with crudities of its own and perhaps with a less fine gust of self-confident genius and large inspiration.

The recoil from these primary tendencies took at first the aspect of a stress upon artistic execution, on form, on balance and design, on meticulous beauty of language and a minute care and finished invention in rhythm. An unimpassioned or only artistically impassioned portraiture and sculpture of scene and object and idea and feeling, man and Nature was the idea that governed this artistic and intellectual effort. A wide, calm and impartial interest in all subjects for the sake of art and a poetically intellectual satisfaction,—this poise had already been anticipated by Goethe,—is the atmosphere which it attempts to create around it. There is here a certain imaginative reflection of the contemporary scientific, historic and critical interest in man, in his past and present, his creations and surroundings, a cognate effort to be unimpassioned, impersonal, scrupulous, sceptically interested and reflective. In poetry, however, it loses the cold accuracy of the critical intellect and assumes the artistic colour, emphasis, warmth of the constructive imagination: but even here there is the same tendency to a critical observation of man and things and world tendencies and a reflective judgment sometimes overweighting the natural tendency of poetry to the living and creative presentation which is its native power. There is amidst a wide atmosphere of sceptical or positive thinking an attempt to enter into the psychology of barbaric and civilised, antique, mediaeval, and modern, occidental and oriental humanity, to reproduce in artistic form the spirit of the inner truth and outer form of its religions, philosophic notions, societies, arts, monuments, constructions, to reflect its past inner and outer history and present frames and mentalities. This movement too was brief in duration and soon passed away into other forms which arose out of it, though they seemed a revolt against its

principles. This apparent paradox of a development draped in the colours of revolt is a constant psychological feature of all human evolution.

In this turn we are struck by its most glaring feature, the vehement waving of the revolutionary red flag of realism. Realism is in its essence an attempt to see man and his world as they really are without veils and pretences; it is imagination turning upon itself and trying to get rid of its native tendency to give a personal turn or an enhanced colouring to the object, art trying to figure as a selective process of scientific observation and synthetised analysis. Necessarily, whenever it is art at all, it betrays itself in the process. Its natural movement is away from the vistas of the past to a preoccupation with the immediate present, although it began with a double effort, to represent the past with a certain vividness of hard and often brutal truth, not in the colours in which the ideally constructive imagination sees it through the haze of distance, and to represent the present too with the same harsh and violent actuality. But success in this kind of representation of the past is impossible; it carries in it always a sense of artificiality and willed construction. Realism tends naturally to take the present as its field; for that alone can be brought under an accurate because an immediate observation. Scientific in its inspiration, it subjects man's life and psychology to the scalpel and the microscope, exaggerates all that strikes the first outward view of him, his littlenesses, imperfections, uglinesses, morbidities, and comes easily to regard these things as the whole or the greater part of him and to treat life as if it were a psychological and physiological disease, a fungoid growth upon material Nature: it ends, indeed almost begins, by an exaggeration and overstressing which betrays its true character, the posthumous child of romanticism perverted by a pseudo-scientific preoccupation. Romanticism also laid a constant stress on the grotesque, diseased, abnormal, but for the sake of artistic effect, to add another tone to its other glaring colours. Realism professes to render the same facts in the proportions of truth and science, but being art and not science, it inevitably seeks for pronounced effects by an evocative stress which falsifies the

dispositions and shades of natural truth in order to arrive at a conspicuous vividness. In the same movement it falsifies the true measure of the ideal, which is a part of the totality of human life and nature, by bringing the idealism in man down to the level of his normal daily littlenesses; in attempting to show it as one strand in his average humanity, it reduces it to a pretension and figment; it ignores the justification of the idealistic element in art which is that the truth of the ideal consists essentially in its aspiration beyond the limitations of immediate actuality, in what our strain towards self-exceeding figures and not in the moment's failure to accomplish. Realism on both those sides, in what it ignores and what it attempts, lies open to the reproach aimed at romanticism; its stumbling-block is a falsity which pursues both its idea and its method. Nevertheless this movement too behind its crudities has brought in new elements and motives. It has done very considerable work in fiction and prose drama; in poetry, even, it has brought in some new strains and greater powers, but here it cannot dominate without risking to bring about the death of the very spirit of poetry whose breath of life is the exceeding of outward reality. Realism is still with us, but has already evolved out of itself another creative power whose advent announces its own passing.

Chapter XV

The Movement of Modern Literature—2

OUT OF the period of dominant objective realism what emerges with the strongest force is a movement to quite an opposite principle of creation, a literature of pronounced and conscious subjectivity. There is throughout the nineteenth century an apparent contradiction between its professed literary aim and theory and the fundamental unavoidable character of much of its inspiration. In aim throughout,—though there are notable exceptions,—it professes a strong objectivity. The temper of the age has been an earnest critical and scientific curiosity, a desire to see, know and understand the world as it is: that requires a strong and clear eye turned on the object and it would seem to require also as far as possible an elimination of one's own personality; a strongly personal view of things would appear to be the very contrary of an accurate observation, for the first constructs and colours the object from within, the second would allow it to impress its own colour and shape on the mind,—we have to suppose, of course, that, as the modern intellect has generally held, objects exist in themselves and not in our own consciousness of them. Goethe definitely framed this theory of literary creation when he laid it down that the ideal of art and poetry was to be beautifully objective. With the exception of some of the first initiators and until yesterday, modern creation has followed more or less this line: it has tried to give either a striking, moving and exciting or an aesthetically sound or a realistically powerful presentation,—all three methods often intermingling or coalescing,—rather than a subjective interpretation; thought, feeling, aesthetic treatment of the object are supposed to intervene upon and arise from a clear or strong objective observation.

But on the other hand an equally strong characteristic of the modern mind is its growing subjectivity, an intense consciousness of the I, the soul or the self, not in any mystic withdrawal within or inward meditation, or not in that pre-eminently, but in relation to the whole of life and Nature. This characteristic distinguishes modern subjectivism from the natural subjectivity of former times, which either tended towards an intense solitary inwardness or was superficial and confined to a few common though often strongly emphasised notes. Ancient or mediaeval individuality might return more self-assertive or violent responses to life, but the modern kind is more subtly and pervasively self-conscious and the stronger in thought and feeling to throw its own image on things, because it is more precluded from throwing itself out freely in action and living. This turn was in fact an inevitable result of an increasing force of intellectualism; for great intensity of thought, when it does not isolate itself from emotion, reactive sensation and aesthetic response, as in science and in certain kinds of philosophy, must be attended by a quickening and intensity of these other parts of our mentality. In science and critical thought, where this isolation is possible, the objective turn prevailed,—though much that we call critical thought is after all a personal construction, a use of the reason and the observation of things for a view of what is around us which, far from being really disinterested and impersonal, is a creation of our own temperament and a satisfaction of our intellectualised individuality. But in artistic creation where the isolation is not possible, we find quite an opposite phenomenon, the subjective personality of the poet asserting itself to a far greater extent than in former ages of humanity.

Goethe himself, in spite of his theory, could not escape from this tendency; his work, as he himself recognised, is always an act of reflection of the subjective changes of his personality, a history of the development of his own soul in the guise of objective creation. From the work of a poet like Leconte de Lisle who attempted with the most deliberate conscientiousness a perfect fidelity to the ideal of an impersonal artistic objectiveness, there disengages itself in the mass an almost poignant impression of

the strong subjective personality shaping everything into a mask-reflection of its own characteristic moods; the attempt to live in the thoughts and feelings of other men, other civilisations betrays itself as only the multiple imaginative and sympathetic extension of the poet's own psychology. This peculiarity of the age is noticeable even in many creators whose aim is deliberately realistic or their method founded upon a minute psychological observation, Ibsen or Tolstoy and the Russian novelists. The self of the creator very visibly overshadows the work, is seen everywhere like the conscious self of Vedanta both containing and inhabiting all his creations. Shakespeare succeeds, as far as a poet can, in veiling himself behind his creatures; he gives us at least the illusion of mirroring the world around him, a world universally represented rather than personally and individually thought and imaged, and at any rate the Life-spirit sees and creates in him through a faithful reflecting instrument, quite sufficiently universal and impersonal for its dramatic purpose even in his personality. Browning, the English poet who best represented the spirit of the age in its temperament of curious observation and its aim at a certain force of large and yet minute reality, who was eminently a poet of life observed and understood and of thought playing around the observation, as Shakespeare was the poet of life seen through an identity of feeling with it and of thought arising up out of the surge of life,—Browning, though he seems to have considered this self-concealment especially admirable and the essence of the Shakespearian method of creation, fails himself to achieve it in anything like the same measure. The self-conscious thinking of the modern mind which brings into prominent relief the rest of the mental personality and stamps the whole work with it, gets into his way; everywhere we feel the presence of the creator bringing forward his living puppets, analysing, commenting, thinking about them or else about life through a variation of many voices so that they become as much his masks as his creations.

Thus both the subjective personality of the man and the artistic personality of the creator tend to count for much more in modern work than at any previous time; the poet is a much

greater part of his work. It is doubtful whether we have not altogether lost the old faculty of impersonal self-effacement in the creation which was so common in the ancient and mediaeval ages when many men working in one spirit could build great universal works of combined architecture, painting and sculpture or in literature the epic or romantic cycles or lyric cycles like the Vedic Mandalas or the mass of Vaishnava poetry. Even when there are definite schools marked by a common method, we do not find, as in the old French romance writers or the Elizabethan dramatists or the poets of the eighteenth century, a spiritual resemblance which overshadows individual differences; in the moderns the technical method may have in all similar motives, but difference of subjective treatment so stresses its values as to prevent all spiritual unity. There is here a gain which more than compensates any loss; but we have to note the cause, a growth of subjectivism, an enhanced force, enrichment and insistence of the inner personality.

This trend, though for some time held back from its full development by the aim at the objective method, betrays itself in that love of close and minute psychological observation which pervades the work of the time. There too the modern mind has left far behind all the preceding ages. Although most prominent in fiction and drama, the characteristic has laid some hold too on poetry. Compared with its work all previous creation seems psychologically poor both in richness of material and in subtlety and the depth of its vision; half the work of Shakespeare in spite of its larger and greater treatment hardly contains as much on this side as a single volume of Browning. Realism has carried this new trend to the farthest limit possible to a professedly objective method, stressing minute distinctions, forcing the emphasis of extreme notes, but in so doing it has opened to the creative mind of the age a door of escape from realism. For, in the first place, while in the representation of outward objects, of action, of character and temperament thrown out in self-expressive movement we may with success affect the method of a purely objective observation, from the moment we begin to psychologise deeply, we are at once preparing to go back into

ourselves. For it is only through our own psychology, through its power of response to and of identification with the mind and soul in others that we can know their inner psychology; for the most part our psychological account of others is only an account of the psychological impressions of them they produce in our own mentality. This we see even in the realistic writers in the strongly personal and limited way in which they render the psychology of their creatures in one or two always recurring main notes upon which they ring minute variations. In the end the creative mind could not fail to become conscious of this self within which was really doing the whole work and to turn to it for a theme or for the mould of its psychological creations, to a conscious intimate subjectivism. Again, the emphasising of extreme notes brings us to a point where to go farther we have to go within and to make ourselves a sort of laboratory of new psychological experiment and discovery.

This is the turn we get in the poetry of Verlaine which is throughout a straining after an intimate and subtle experience of the senses, vital sensations, emotions pushed beyond ordinary limits into a certain vivid and revealing abnormality, in the earlier work of Maeterlinck which is not so much an action of personalities as the drama of a childlike desire-soul uttering half inarticulate cries of love and longing, terror and distress and emotion, in the work of Mallarmé where there is a constant seeking for subjective symbols which will reveal to our own soul the soul of the things that we see. The rediscovery of the soul is the last stage of the round described by this age of the intellect and reason. It is at first mainly the perceptions of a desire-soul, a soul of sense and sensation and emotion, and an arriving through them at a sort of psychological mysticism, a psychism which is not yet true mysticism, much less spirituality, but is still a movement of the lower self in that direction. The movement could not stop here: the emergence of the higher perceptions of a larger and purer psychical and intuitive entity in direct contact with the Spirit could not but come, and this greater impulse is represented by the work of the Irish poets. It is the sign of the end, now in sight, of a purely intellectual modernism and the

coming of a new age of creation, intellectualism fulfilled ceasing by a self-exceeding in a greater motive of intuitive art and poetry.

Thus this wide movement of interests, so many-sided and universal, in man past and present after embracing all that attracts the observing eye in his life and history and apparent nature comes back to a profounder interest in the movements of his deeper self which reveals itself to an extended psychological experience and an intuitive sense. But an insistent interest in future man has been the most novel, the most fruitfully distinguishing characteristic of the modern mind. Once limited to the far-off dream of religions or the distant speculation of isolated thinkers, the attempt to cast a seeing eye as well as a shaping will on the future is now an essential side of the human outlook. Formerly the human mentality of the present lived in the great shadow thrown on it by its past, nowadays on the contrary it turns more to some image of coming possibility. The colour of this futurism has changed with the changes of modern intellectualism. At first it came in on the wave of a partly naturalistic, partly transcendentalist idealism, a reverie of the perfected individual and the perfected society, and was commonly associated with the passion for civic or the idea of a spiritual and personal liberty. A more sober colouring intervened, the intellectual constructions of positivism, liberalism, utilitarian thought which were soon in their turn followed by broader democratic and socialistic utopias. Touched sometimes with an aesthetic and idealistic colouring, they have grown for a time more scientific, economic, practical with the advance of realism and rationalism. But the new force of subjectivism will have probably the effect of rehabilitating the religious and spiritually idealistic element in our vision of the future of the race. Poetry, which has been less able to follow this stream of thought than prose literature, will find its account in the change; for it will be the natural interpreter of this more inner and intuitive vision. The futurist outlook has never been more pronounced than at the present day; on all sides, in thought, in life, in the motives and forms of literary and artistic creation, we are swinging violently away from the past into an unprecedented adventure of new teeming

possibilities. Never has the past counted so little for its own sake,—its tradition is still effectual only when it can be made a power or an inspiration for the future; never has the present looked so persistently and creatively forward.

But Nature and man in his active, intellectual and emotional life and physical environment are not the whole subject of man's thought or of his creative presentment of his mind's seeings and imaginings. He has been even more passionately occupied by the idea of things beyond, other worlds and an after life, symbols and powers of that which exceeds him or of his own self-exceeding, the cult of gods of nature and supernature, the belief in or the seeking after God. On this side of the human mind modern literature, though not a blank, has been during the greater part of the nineteenth century inferior in its matter and in its power, because it has been an age of scepticism and of denial or else of a doubtful and tormented, a merely intellectual or a conventional clinging to the residuum of past beliefs. They have not formed a real and vital part of its inner life and what is not real or vital to thought, imagination and feeling cannot be powerfully creative. At first this ebb of positive faith was to some extent compensated by the ideal element of a philosophic transcendentalism, vague and indefinite but with its own large light and force of inspiration. As scepticism became more positive, this light fades, the most poetic notes of the age which deal with the foundations of life are either the poignant expression of a regretful scepticism, or a defiant atheism exulting in the revolt of the great denial, the hymn of the Void, an eternal Nihil which has taken the place of God, or else the large idea of Nature as a universal entity, the Mother of our being. To Science this Nature is only an unconscious Force; the poetic mind with its natural turn for finding a reality even behind what are to the intellect abstract conceptions, has passed through this conception to a new living sense of the universal, the infinite. It has even evolved from it now and then a vivid pantheism. The difficult self-defence or reaction of the old faiths against the prevalent scepticism and intellectualism has given too some minor notes; but these are the greater voices of negation and affirmation in this sphere

of poetic thought and creation which have added some novel and powerful strains to poetry. With the return to subjective intuition and a fresh adventuring of knowledge and imagination into the beyond modern poetry, freed from the sceptical attitude, is beginning in this field too to turn the balance in its favour as against the old classical and mediaeval literature. The vision of the worlds beyond which it is gaining is nearer, less grossly human, more supernatural to physical Nature; the symbols it is beginning to create and its reinterpretation of the old symbols are more adequate and more revealing; rid of the old insufficient forms and limiting creeds, it is admitting a near, direct and fearless seeing and experience of God in Nature, God in man, God in the universal and the eternal. From faith it has advanced through the valley of doubt to the heights of a more luminous knowledge. These are the main movements of the modern mind constituting the turns of a psychological evolution of the most rapid and remarkable kind which have dominated the literature of Europe, now more than ever before growing into a single though varied whole. We have to see how they have worked themselves out in English poetry during this period. We shall then be able to form a clearer idea of the dominant possibilities of the future: for though it has been a side stream and not the central current, yet in the end the highest and most significant, though not yet the strongest forces of the future poetry have converged here and given their first clearest and most distinct sounds. The continent is still overshadowed by the crepuscule of the intellectual age sick unto death but unable to die. Here there are some clear morning voices, English precursors, the revived light of Celtic spirituality, not least significant the one or two accents of a more self-assured message which have broken across the mental barrier between East and West from resurgent India.

Chapter XVI

The Poets of the Dawn – 1

THE SUPERIORITY of the English poets who lead the way into the modern age is that sudden almost unaccountable spiritual impulse, insistent but vague in some, strong but limited in one or two, splendid and supreme in its rare moments of vision and clarity, which breaks out from their normal poetic mentality and strives constantly to lift their thought and imagination to its own heights, a spirit or Daemon who does not seem to trouble at all with his voice or his oestrus the contemporary poets of continental Europe. But they have no clearly seen or no firmly based constant idea of the greater work which this spirit demands from them; they get at its best only in an inspiration over which they have not artistic control, and they have only an occasional or uncertain glimpse of its self motives. Thus they give to it often a form of speech and movement which is borrowed from their intellect, normal temperament or culture rather than wells up as the native voice and rhythm of the spirit within, and they fall away easily to a lower kind of work. They have a greater thing to reveal than the Elizabethan poets, but they do not express it with that constant fullness of native utterance or that more perfect correspondence between substance and form which is the greatness of Shakespeare and Spenser.

This failure to grasp the conditions of a perfect intuitive and spiritual poetry has not yet been noted, because the attempt itself has not been understood by the critical mind of the nineteenth century. That mind was heavily intellectualised, sometimes lucid, reasonable and acute, sometimes cloudily or fierily romantic, sometimes scientific, minutely delving, analytic, psychological, but in none of these moods and from none of these outlooks capable of understanding the tones of this light which for a moment flushed the dawning skies of its own age

or tracing it to the deep and luminous fountains from which it welled. Taine's grotesquely misproportioned appreciation in which Byron figures as the colossus and Titan of the age while the greater and more significant work of Wordsworth and Shelley is dismissed as an ineffective attempt to poetise a Germanic transcendentalism, Carlyle's ill-tempered and dyspeptic depreciation of Keats, Arnold's inability to see in Shelley anything but an unsubstantially beautiful poet of cloud and dawn and sunset, a born musician who had made a mistake in taking hold of the word as his instrument, are extreme, but still characteristic misunderstandings. In our own day we see the singers who lead the van of the future entering with a nearer intimacy into the domains of which these earlier poets only just crossed the threshold, but the right art and technique of this poetry have been rather found by the intuitive sense of their creators than yet intellectually understood so as to disengage their form from the obstruction of old-world ideas and standards of appreciation.

Each essential motive of poetry must find its own characteristic speech, its own law of rhythms,—even though metrically the mould may appear to be the same,—its own structure and development in the lyric, dramatic, narrative and, if that can still be used, the epic form and medium. The objective poetry of external life, the vital poetry of the life-spirit, the poetry of the intellect or the inspired reason, each has its own spirit and, since the form and word are the measure, rhythm, body of the spirit, must each develop its own body. There may be a hundred variations within the type which spring from national difference, the past of the civilisation, the cultural atmosphere, the individual idiosyncrasy, but some fundamental likeness of spirit will emerge. Elizabethan poetry was the work of the life-spirit in a new, raw and vigorous people not yet tamed by a restraining and formative culture, a people with the crude tendencies of the occidental mind rioting almost in the exuberance of a state of nature. The poetry of the classical Sanskrit writers was the work of Asiatic minds, scholars, court-poets in an age of

immense intellectual development and an excessive, almost over-cultivated refinement, but still that too was a poetry of the life-spirit. In spite of a broad gulf of difference we yet find an extraordinary basic kinship between these two very widely separated great ages of poetry, though there was never any possibility of contact between that earlier oriental and this later occidental work,—the dramas of Kalidasa and some of the dramatic romances of Shakespeare, plays like the Sanskrit *Seal of Rakshasa* and *Toy-Cart* and Elizabethan historic and melodramatic pieces, the poetry of the *Cloud-Messenger* and erotic Elizabethan poetry, the romantically vivid and descriptive narrative method of Spenser's *Faerie Queene* and the more intellectually romantic vividness and descriptive elaborateness of the *Line of Raghu*, the tone and manner of Drayton and that of the much greater work of Bharavi. This kinship arises from the likeness of essential motive and psychological basic type and emerges and asserts itself in spite of the enormous cultural division. A poetry of spiritual vision and the sense of things behind life and above the intellect must similarly develop from its essence a characteristic voice, cry, mould of speech, natural way of development, habits of structure.

The great poets of this earlier endeavour had all to deal with the same central problem of creation and were embarrassed by the same difficulty of a time which was not ready for work of this kind, not prepared for it by any past development, not fitted for it by anything in the common atmosphere of the age. They breathed the rarity of heights lifted far beyond the level of the contemporary surrounding temperament, intellect and life. But each besides had an immense development of that force of separate personality which is in art at least the characteristic of our later humanity. Each followed his own way, was very little influenced by the others, was impelled by a quite distinct spiritual idea, worked it out in a quite individual method and, when he fell away from it or short of it, failed in his own way and by shortcomings peculiar to his own nature. There is nothing of that common aim and manner which brings into one category

the Elizabethan dramatists or the contemporaries of Pope and Dryden. We have to cast an eye upon them successively at their separate work and see how far they carried their achievement and where they stopped short or else deviated from the path indicated by their own highest genius.

Chapter XVII

The Poets of the Dawn—2

Byron and Wordsworth

A POETRY whose task is to render truth of the Spirit by passing behind the appearances of the sense and the intellect to their spiritual reality, is in fact attempting a work for which no characteristic power of language has been discovered,—except the symbolic, but the old once established symbols will no longer entirely serve, and the method itself is not now sufficient for the need,—no traditional form of presentation native to the substance, no recognised method of treatment or approach, or none at once sufficiently wide and subtle, personal and universal for the modern mind. In the past indeed there have been hieratic and religious ways of approaching the truths of spirit which have produced some remarkable forms in art and literature. Sufi poetry, Vaishnava poetry are of this order, in more ancient times the symbolic and mystic way of the Vedic singers, while the unique revelatory utterance of the Upanishads stands by itself as a form of inspired thought which penetrates either direct or through strong unveiling images to the highest truths of self and soul and the largest seeing of the Eternal. One or two modern poets have attempted to use in a new way the almost unworked wealth of poetical suggestion in Catholic Christianity. But the drift of the modern mind in this direction is too large in its aim and varied in its approach to be satisfied by any definite or any fixed symbolic or hieratic method, it cannot rest within the special experience and figures of a given religion. There has been too universal a departure from all specialised forms and too general a breaking down of the old cut channels; in place of their intensive narrowness we have a straining through all that has been experienced by an age of wide intellectual curiosity to the ultimate sense of that experience. The truth behind man

and Nature and things, behind intellectual and emotional and vital perception is sought to be seized by a pressure upon these things themselves, and the highly intellectualised language and way of seeing developed by this age is either used as it is with more meaning or strained or moulded anew or given some turn or transformation which will bring in the intensity of the deeper truth and vision. An intellectualism which takes this turn can choose one of three methods. It may prolong the language and forms it already possesses and trust to the weight of the thing it has to say and the power of its vision to inform this vehicle with another spirit. It may strain, heighten, transfigure the language and forms into a more intensive force of image, mould and expression. Or it may strive for some new and direct tone, some sheer cry of intuitive speech and sound born from the spirit itself and coming near to its native harmonies. The moulds too may either be the established moulds turned or modified to a greater and subtler use or else strange unprecedented frames, magical products of a spiritual inspiration. On any of these lines the poetry of the future may arrive at its objective and cross the borders of a greater kingdom of experience and expression.

But these earlier poets came in an age of imperfect, unenriched and uncompleted intellectuality. The language which they inherited was admirable for clear and balanced prose speech, but in poetry had been used only for adequate or vigorous statement, rhetorical reasoning, superficial sentimentalising or ornate thought, narrative, description in the manner of a concentrated, elevated and eloquent prose. The forms and rhythmical movements were unsuitable for any imaginative, flexible or subtly feeling poetry. The new writers dealt with the forms of the preceding literary age by a clear and complete rejection; they swept them aside and created new forms or took old ones from the earlier masters or from song and ballad moulds modified or developed to serve a more fluid and intellectualised mind and imagination. But the language was a more difficult problem and could not be entirely solved by such short cuts as Wordsworth's recipe of a resort to the straightforward force of the simplest speech dependent on the weight of the substance and thought

for its one sufficient source of power. We find the tongue of this period floating between various possibilities. On its lower levels it is weighted down by some remnant of the character of the eighteenth century and proceeds by a stream of eloquence, no longer artificial, but facile, fluid, helped by a greater force of thought and imagination. This turn sometimes rises to a higher level of inspired and imaginative poetic eloquence. But beyond this pitch we have a fuller and richer style packed with thought and imaginative substance, the substitute of this new intellectualised poetic mind for the more spontaneous Elizabethan richness and curiosity; but imaginative thought is the secret of its power, no longer the exuberance of the life-soul in its vision. On the other side we have a quite different note, a sheer poetical directness, which sometimes sinks below itself to poverty and insufficiency or at least to thinness, as in much of the work of Wordsworth and Byron, but, when better supported and rhythmed, rises to quite new authenticities of great or perfect utterance, and out of this there comes in some absolute moments a native voice of the spirit, in Wordsworth's revelations of the spiritual presence in Nature and its scenes and peoples, in Byron's rare forceful sincerities, in the luminous simplicities of Blake, in the faery melodies of Coleridge, most of all perhaps in the lyrical cry and ethereal light of Shelley. But these are comparatively rare moments, the mass of their work is less certain and unequal in expression and significance. Finally we get in Keats a turning away to a rich, artistic and sensuous poetical speech marvellous in its perfection of opulence, resource and colour which prepares us for the more various but lower fullnesses of the intellectual and aesthetic epoch that had to intervene. The greatest intuitive and revealing poetry has yet to come.

Byron and Wordsworth are the two poets who are the most hampered by this difficulty of finding and keeping to the native speech of their greater self, most often depressed in their elevation, because they are both drawn by a strong side of their nature, the one to a forceful, the other to a weighty intellectualised expression; neither of them are born singers or artists of word and sound, neither of them poets in the whole grain of their

mind and temperament, not, that is to say, always dominated by the aesthetic, imaginative or inspired strain in their being, but doubled here by a man of action and passion, there by a moralist and preacher, in each too a would-be "critic of life", who gets into the way of the poet and makes upon him illegitimate demands; therefore they are readily prone to fall away to what is, however interesting it may otherwise be, a lower, a not genuinely poetic range of substance and speech. But both in the deepest centre or on the highest peak of their inspiration are moved by powers for which their heavily or forcibly intellectualised language of poetry was no adequate means. It is only when they escape from it that they do their rare highest work. Byron, no artist, intellectually shallow and hurried, a poet by compulsion of personality rather than in the native colour of his mind, inferior in all these respects to the finer strain of his great contemporaries, but in compensation a more powerful elemental force than any of them and more in touch with all that had begun to stir in the mind of the times, — always an advantage, if one knows how to make use of it, for a poet's largeness and ease of execution, — succeeds more amply on the inferior levels of his genius, but fails more in giving an adequate voice to his highest possibility. Wordsworth, meditative, inward, concentrated in his thought, is more often able by force of brooding to bring out the voice of his greater self, but flags constantly, brings in a heavier music surrounding his few great clear tones, drowns his genius at last in a desolate sea of platitude. Neither arrives at that amplitude of achievement which might have been theirs in a more fortunate time, if ready forms had been given to them, or if they had lived in the stimulating atmosphere of a contemporary culture harmonious with their personality.

Byron's prodigious reputation, greater and more prolonged on the continent than in his own country, led perhaps to too severely critical an undervaluing when his defects became nakedly patent in the fading away of the helpful glamour of contemporary sympathies. That is the penalty of an exaggerated fame lifted too high on the wings or the winds of the moment. But his fame was no accident or caprice of fortune; it was his due

from the Time-Spirit. His hasty vehement personality caught up and crowded into its work in a strong though intellectually crude expression an extraordinary number of the powers and motives of the modern age. The passion for liberty found in him its voice of Tyrrhenian bronze. The revolt and self-assertion of the individual against the falsities and stifling conventions of society, denial, unbelief, the scorn of the sceptic for established things, the romance of the past, the restlessness of the present, the groping towards the future, the sensuous, glittering, artificial romance of the pseudo-East, the romance of the solitary, the rebel, the individual exaggerated to himself by loneliness, the immoral or amoral superman, all that flawed romanticism, passionate sentimentalism, insatiable satiety of sensualism, cynicism, realism which are the chaotic fermentation of an old world dying and a new world in process of becoming,—a century and a half's still unfinished process,—caught hold of his mood and unrolled itself before the dazzled, astonished and delighted eyes of his contemporaries in the rapid succession of forcibly ill-hewn works impatiently cut out or fierily molten from his single personality in a few crowded years from its first rhetorical and struggling outburst in *Childe Harold* to the accomplished ease of its finale in *Don Juan*. Less than this apparent plenitude would have been enough to create the rumour that rose around the outbreak of this singular and rapid energy. No doubt, his intellectual understanding of these things was thin and poverty-stricken in the extreme, his poetic vision of the powers that moved him had plenty of force, but wanted depth and form and greatness. But he brought to his work what no other poet could give and what the mentality of the time, moved itself by things which it had not sufficient intellectual preparation to grasp, was fitted to appreciate, the native elemental force, the personality, the strength of nervous and vital feeling of them which they just then needed and which took the place of understanding and vision. To this pervading power, to this lava flood of passion and personality, were added certain preeminent gifts, a language at first of considerable rhetorical weight and drive, afterwards of great nervous strength, directness, precision, force

of movement, a power of narrative and of vivid presentation, and always, whatever else might lack, an unfailing energy. It was enough for the immediate thing he had to do, though not at all enough for the highest assured immortality.

These things which Byron more or less adequately expressed, were the ferment of the mind of humanity in its first crude attempt to shake off the conventions of the past and struggle towards a direct feeling of itself and its surrounding world in their immediate reality. But behind it there is something else which seems sometimes about to emerge vaguely, an element which may be called spiritual, a feeling of the greatness of man the individual spirit commensurate with Nature and his world, man in communion with the greatness of Nature, man able to stand in the world in his own strength and puissance, man affirming his liberty, the claim to freedom of a force as great within as the forces which surround and seem to overwhelm him. One feels oneself as if in the presence of a Titan striving to be born, a Titanism of the spirit of man awake in its soul of desire, in a passion of seeking without conquest of finding, in revolt, not in self-possession, man the fallen archangel, not man returning to godhead: but it reposes on, it is the obscure side of a spiritual reality. He could not break through the obstructions of his lower personality and express this thing that he felt in its native tones of largeness and power. If he could have done so, his work would have been of a lasting greatness. But he never found the right form, never achieved the liberation into right thought and speech of the Daemon within him. The language and movement he started from were an intellectual and sentimental rhetoric, the speech of the eighteenth century broken down, melted and beaten into new shape for stronger uses; he went on to a more chastened and rapid style of great force, but void of delicacy, subtlety and variety; he ended in a flexible and easy tongue which gave power to even the most cynical trivialities and could rise to heights of poetry and passion: but none of these things, however adapted to his other gifts, was the style wanted for this greater utterance. Art, structure, accomplished mould were needs of which he had no idea; neither the weight of a deep

and considered, nor the sureness of an inspired interpretation were at his command. But sometimes language and movement rise suddenly into a bare and powerful sincerity which, if he could have maintained it, would have given him the needed instrument: but the patience and artistic conscientiousness or the feeling for poetic truth which could alone have done this, were far from him. Considerable work of a secondary kind he did, but he had something greater to say which he never said, but only gave rare hints of it and an obscured sense of the presence of its meaning.

Wordsworth, with a much higher poetic mind than Byron's, did not so entirely miss his greatest way, though he wandered much in adjacent paths and finally lost himself in the dry desert sands of the uninspired intellectual mentality. At the beginning he struck in the midst of some alloy full into his purest vein of gold. His earliest vision of his task was the right vision, and whatever may be the general truth of his philosophy of childhood in the great Ode, it seems to have been true of him. For as intellectuality grew on him, the vision failed; the first clear intimations dimmed and finally passed leaving behind an unillumined waste of mere thought and moralising. But always, even from the beginning, it got into the way of his inspiration. Yet Wordsworth was not a wide thinker, though he could bring a considerable weight of thought to the aid of the two or three great things he felt and saw lucidly and deeply, and he was unfitted to be a critic of life of which he could only see one side with power and originality,—for the rest he belongs to his age rather than to the future and is limited in his view of religion, of society, of man by many walls of convention. But what the poet sees and feels, not what he opines, is the real substance of his poetry. Wordsworth saw Nature and he saw man near to Nature, and when he speaks of these things, he finds either his noblest or his purest and most penetrating tones. His view of them is native to his temperament and personality and at the opposite pole to Byron's. Not that which is wild, dynamic or tumultuously great in Nature, but her calm, her serenity, the soul of peace, the tranquil Infinite, the still, near,

intimate voice that speaks from flower and bird, sky and star, mountain and stream, this he knew, felt and lived in as no poet before or after him has done, with a spiritual closeness and identity which is of the nature of a revelation, the first spiritual revelation of this high near kind to which English poetry had given voice. Some soul of man, too, he sees, not in revolt,—he has written unforgettable lines about liberty, but a calm and ordered liberty,—in harmony with this tranquil soul in Nature, finding in it some original simplicity and purity of his being and founding on it a life in tune with the order of an eternal law. On this perception the moralist in Wordsworth finds a rule of simple faith, truth, piety, self-control, affection, grave gladness in which the sentimental naturalism of the eighteenth century disappears into an ethical naturalism, a very different idealisation of humanity in the simplicity of its direct contact with Nature unspoiled by the artifice and corruption of a too developed society. All that Wordsworth has to say worth saying is confined to these motives and from them he draws his whole genuine thought inspiration.

But it is in the Nature strain of which he is the discoverer that he is unique, for it is then that the seer in him either speaks the revelatory thought of his spirit or gives us strains greater than thought's, the imperishable substance of spiritual consciousness finding itself in sight and speech. At other times, especially when he fuses this Nature-strain with his thought and ethical motive, he writes sometimes poetry of the very greatest; at others again it is of a varying worth and merit; but too often also he passes out from his uninspired intelligence work with no stamp of endurance, much less of the true immortality. In the end the poet in him died while the man and the writer lived on; the moralist and concentrated thinker had killed the singer, the intellect had walled up the issues of the imagination and spiritual vision. But even from the beginning there is an inequality and uncertainty which betray an incomplete fusion of the sides of his personality, and the heavy weight of intellectual shadows over and threatens the spiritual light which it eventually extinguished. A certain number of his shorter poems rank among the greatest things

in poetry and this number is not inconsiderable. But elsewhere he rises high, sometimes astonishingly high, for a few lines but cannot keep long to the high poetic expression and sometimes can sink low and sometimes astonishingly low, even to bathos and triviality, especially when he strains towards an excessive simplicity which can become puerile or worse. He intellectualises his poetic statement overmuch and in fact states too much and sings too little, has a dangerous turn for a too obvious sermonising, pushes too far his reliance on the worth of his substance and is not jealously careful to give it a form of beauty. In his works of long breath there are terrible stretches of flattest prose in verse with lines of power, sometimes of fathomless depth like that wonderful

Voyaging through strange seas of Thought, alone,

interspersed or occurring like a lonely and splendid accident, *rari nantes in gurgite vasto*.¹ It has been said with justice that he talks too much in verse and sings too little; there is a deficient sense of the more subtle spirit of rhythm, a deficiency which he overcomes when moved or lifted up, but which at other times, hampers greatly his effectiveness. His theory of poetic diction, though it has a certain truth in it, was, as he practised it, narrow and turned to unsoundness; it betrayed him into the power of the prosaic and intellectual element in his mind. These defects grew on him as the reflective moralist and monk and the conventional citizen,—there was always in him this curious amalgam,—prevailed over the seer and poet.

But still one of the seer-poets he is, a seer of the calm spirit in Nature, the poet of man's large identity with her and serene liberating communion: it is on this side that he is admirable and unique. He has other strains too of great power. His chosen form of diction, often too bare and trivial in the beginning, too heavy afterwards, helps him at his best to a language and movement of unsurpassed poetic weight and gravity charged with imaginative insight, in which his thought and his ethical

¹ "Rare swimming in the vast surge."

sense and spiritual sight meet in a fine harmony, as in his one great Ode, in some of his sonnets, in *Ruth*, even in *Laodamia*, in lines and passages which uplift and redeem much of his less satisfying work, while when the inner light shines wholly out, it admits him to the secret of the very self-revealing voice of Nature herself speaking through the human personality in some closest intimacy with her or else uttering the greatness of an impersonal sight and truth. He has transparencies in which the spirit gets free of the life-wave, the intelligence, the coloured veils of the imagination, and poetic speech and rhythm become hints of the eternal movements and the eternal stabilities, voices of the depths, rare moments of speech direct from our hidden immortality.

Chapter XVIII

The Poets of the Dawn – 3

IF WORDSWORTH and Byron failed by an excess of the alloy of untransmuted intellect in their work, two other poets of the time, Blake and Coleridge, miss the highest greatness they might otherwise have attained by an opposite defect, by want of the gravity and enduring substance which force of thought gives to the poetical inspiration. They are, Coleridge in his scanty best work, Blake almost always, strong in sight, but are unable to command the weight and power in the utterance which arises from the thinking mind when it is illumined and able to lay hold on and express the reality behind the idea. They have the faculty of revelatory sense in a high degree, but little of the revelatory thought which should go with it; or at least though they can suggest this sometimes with the intense force which comes from spiritual feeling, they cannot command it and constantly give it greatness and distinctness of body. And their sight is only of the middle kind; it is not the highest things they see, but only those of a borderland or middle region. Their poetry has a strange and unique quality and charm, but it stops short of something which would have made it supreme. They are poets of the supernatural and of such spiritual truth as may be shadowed by it or penetrate through it, but not of the greatest truths of the spirit. And this supernature remains in them a thing seen indeed and objectively real, but abnormal; but it is only when supernature becomes normal to the inner experience that it can be turned into material of the very greatest poetry.

Coleridge more than any of his great contemporaries missed his poetic crown; he has only found and left to us three or four scattered jewels of a strange and singular beauty. The rest of his work is a failure. There is a disparateness in his gifts, an inconsequence and incoherence which prevented him from bringing them together, aiding one with the other and producing

great work rich in all the elements of his genius. Intellectuality he had in abundance, a wide, rich and subtle intellect, but he squandered rather than used it in discursive metaphysics and criticism and was most at home when pouring it out in the spontaneity of conversation or rather monologue, an outlet in which the labour of giving it the firmness of an enduring form could be avoided. The poet in him never took into himself the thinker. The consequence is that very much the greater part of his poetry, though his whole production is small enough in bulk, is unconvincing in the extreme. It has at best a certain eloquence or a turn of phrase and image which has some intellectual finish but not either force or magic, or a fluidity of movement which fails to hold the ear. But there are three poems of his which are unique in English poetry, written in moments when the too active intellect was in abeyance, an occult eye of dream and vision opened to supraphysical worlds and by a singular felicity the other senses harmonised, the speech caught strange subtleties and marvellous lights and hues and the ear the melodies of other realms. It is indeed only just over the mystic border that his sight penetrates and to its most inferior forms, and he does not enter into these worlds as did Blake, but catches only their light and influence upon the earth life; but it is caught with a truth and intensity which makes magical the scenes and movements of the earth life and transforms light of physical nature into light of supernature. This is to say that for the first time, except for rare intimations, the middle worlds and their beings have been seen and described with something of reality and no longer in the crude colours of vulgar tradition or in the forms of myth. The Celtic genius of second sight has begun to make its way into poetry. It is by these poems that he lives, though he has also two or three others of a more human charm and grace; but here Coleridge shows within narrow limits a superlative power and brings in a new element and opens a new field in the realms of poetic vision.

Blake lives ordinarily far up in this middle world of which Coleridge only catches some glimpses or at most stands occasionally just over its border. Blake's seeing teems with images of

this other world, he hears around him the echoes of its sounds and voices. He is not only a seer, but almost an inhabitant of other planes, another domain of being; or at least this second subtle sight is his normal sight. His power of expression is akin in its strangeness to his eye of vision. His speech like his seeing has a singular other-world clarity and sheerness of expression in it, the light of supernature. When he prophetises as in some of his more ambitious efforts, he mentalises too much the mystic and misses the marvel and the magic. It is when he casts into some echo of the language of the luminous children of those shores the songs of their childhood and their innocence, that he becomes limpid to us and sheds upon our earth some clear charm, felicity, wonder of a half divine otherwhere. Here again we have something unique, a voice of things which had not been heard before nor has it been heard since; for the Celtic poets who sometimes give us something that is in its source akin, bring a ripe reflective knowledge and a colour of intellectuality into their speech and vision, but Blake seeks to put away from him as much as possible the intellectual mind, to see only and sing. By this effort and his singularity and absorption he stands apart solitary and remote, a unique voice among the poets of the time; he occupies indeed a place unique in the poetry of the English language, for there is no other singer of the beyond who is like him or equal to him in the strangeness, supernatural lucidity, power and directness of vision of the beyond and the rhythmic clarity and beauty of his singing.

A greater poet by nature than almost any of these, Shelley was alone of them all very nearly fitted to be a sovereign voice of the new spiritual force that was at the moment attempting to break into poetry and possess there its kingdom. He has on the one hand, one feels, been a native of the heights to which he aspires and the memory of them, not indeed quite distinct, but still environing his imagination with its luminous ethereality, is yet with him. If the idea of a being not of our soil fallen into the material life and still remembering his skies can be admitted as an actual fact of human birth, then Shelley was certainly a living example of one of these luminous spirits half obscured by earth;

the very stumbling of his life came from the difficulty of such a nature moving in the alien terrestrial environment in which he is not at home nor capable of accepting its muddy vesture and iron chain, attempting impatiently to realise there the law of his own being in spite of the obstruction of the physical clay. This mind and nature cannot live at ease in their dusk day and time, but escape to dwell prophetically in a future heaven and earth in which the lower life shall have accepted the law of his own celestial worlds. As a poet his intellect is suffused with their light and his imagination is bathed in it; they are steeped in the brilliances of a communion with a higher law, another order of existence, another meaning behind Nature and terrestrial things. But in addition he possesses the intellectual equipment possible in his age and can speak with a subtle beauty and perfect melody the tongue of the poetic intelligence. He is a seer of spiritual realities, much more radiantly near to them than Wordsworth, has, what Coleridge had not, a poetic grasp of metaphysical truths, can see the forms and hear the voices of higher elemental spirits and natural godheads than those seen and heard by Blake, while he has a knowledge too of some fields of the same middle realm, is the singer of a greater and deeper liberty and a purer and nobler revolt than Byron, has the constant feeling of a high spiritual and intellectual beauty, not sensuous in the manner of Keats, but with a hold on the subtler beauty of sensible things which gives us not their glow of vital warmth and close material texture, but their light and life and the rarer atmosphere that environs them on some meeting line between spirit and body. He is at once seer, poet, thinker, prophet, artist. In his own day and after, the strangeness of his genius made him unintelligible to the rather gross and mundane intellectual mind of the nineteenth century; those who admired him most, were seized only by the externalities of his work, its music, delicacy, diffusely lavish imaginative opulence, enthusiasm, but missed its inner significance. Now that we are growing more into the shape of his ideas and the forms of his seeing, we can get nearer to the hidden heart of his poetry. Still high-pinnacled as is his flight, great as is his work and his name, there is in him too a limitation

which prevents the perfect self-expression that we find only in the few supreme poets.

This was due to the conditions under which the evolution of his poetry had to take place and to the early death which found him at the time when it was rounding towards the full orb of its maturity. His earlier poetry shows him striving with the difficulty of the too intellectual manner of speech from which these poets of supra-intellectual truth had to take their departure. Shelley uses language throughout as a poet; he was incapable of falling into the too hard and outward manner of Byron or yielding to the turn towards mere intellectuality which always beset Wordsworth. The grain of his mind was too saturated with the hues of poetic vision, he had too splendid and opulent an imagination, too great a gift of flowing and yet uplifted and inspired speech for such descents, and even in his earlier immature poetry, *Queen Mab*, *Alastor*, *The Revolt of Islam*, these powers are there and sustain him, but still the first form of his diction is a high, sometimes a magnificent poetic eloquence, which sometimes enforces the effect of what he has to say, but more often loses it in a flood of diffuse and overabundant expression. It is not yet the native language of his spirit. As his power develops, the eloquence remains, but is subdued to the growing splendour of his vision and its hints and images, but the thought seems almost to disappear from the concrete grasp of the intelligence into a wonder of light and a music of marvellous sound. The *Prometheus* and *Epipsychedion* show this turn of his genius at its height; they are two of the three greatest things he has left to us on the larger scale. Here he does come near to something like the natural speech of his strange, beautiful and ethereal spirit; but the one thing that is wanting is a more ascetic force of *tapasyā* economising and compressing its powers to bring in a new full and seizing expression of the thought element in his poetry, not merely opulent and eloquent or bright with the rainbow hues of imagination, but sovereign in poetic perfection and mastery. Towards this need his later style is turning, but except once in *Adonais* he does not seize on the right subject matter for his genius. Only in the lyric of which he has always

the secret,— for of all English poets he has perhaps the most natural, spontaneous, sweet and unfailing gift of melody, and his emotion and lyrical cry are at once of the most delicate and the most intense,— is he frequently and constantly equal alike in his thought, feeling, imagery, music. But it is not often that he uses the pure lyrical form for his greatest sight, for what would now be called his “message”. When he turns to that, he attempts always a larger and more expansive form. The greatness of *Prometheus Unbound* which remains, when all is said, his supreme effort and one of the masterpieces of poetry, arises from the combination of this larger endeavour and profounder substance with the constant use of the lyrical mould in which he most excelled, because it agreed with the most intimate turn of his temperament and subtly exalted spirit.

The spiritual truth which had possession of Shelley's mind was higher than anything opened to the vision of any of his contemporaries, and its power and reality which was the essence of his inspiration can only be grasped, when it is known and lived, by a changed and future humanity. Light, Love, Liberty are the three godheads in whose presence his pure and radiant spirit lived; but a celestial light, a celestial love, a celestial liberty. To bring them down to earth without their losing their celestial lustre and hue is his passionate endeavour, but his wings constantly buoy him upward and cannot beat strongly in an earthlier atmosphere. The effort and the unconquered difficulty are the cause of the ethereality, the want of firm earthly reality that some complain of in his poetry. There is an air of luminous mist surrounding his intellectual presentation of his meaning which shows the truths he sees as things to which the mortal eye cannot easily pierce or the life and temperament of earth rise to realise and live; yet to bring about the union of the mortal and the immortal, the terrestrial and the celestial is always his passion. He is himself too much at war with his age to ignore its contradictions and pass onward to the reconciliation. He has to deny God in order to affirm the Divine, and his denial brings in a note too high, discordant and shrill. He has not the symbols or the thought-forms through which he can make the spirit of

light, love and freedom intimate and near to men; he has, as in the *Prometheus*, to go for them to his imagination or to some remote luminous experience of ideal worlds and to combine these beautiful ideal images, too delicately profound in their significance, too veiled in robe upon robe of light to be distinct in limb and form, with traditional names and symbols which are converted into this other sense and fail to be perfect links because by the conversion they cease to be familiar to the mind. To bring his difficult significance home he lavishes inexhaustibly image on radiant image, line on dazzling beauty of line, the sense floats in a storm of coruscations and dissolving star-showers; the more we look and accustom our eyes to this new kind of light, the more loveliness and light we see, but there is not that immediate seizing and taking captive of the whole intelligence which is the sign of an assured and sufficient utterance.

He is in revolt too against the law of earth, in arms against its dominations and powers, and would substitute for it by some immediate and magical change the law of heaven; but so he fails to make the needed transition and reconciliation and his image of the thing to be remains too ideal, too fine and abstract in spite of the beauty of the poetical forms he gives it as its raiment or atmosphere. Heaven cannot descend to take possession of the gross, brute and violent earth he sees around him, therefore he carries up the delivered earth into a far and ideal heaven. Something of the same excess of another light than ours surrounds and veils his intercourse with the spirit in Nature. He sees her earthly forms in a peculiar radiance and light and through them the forms and spirits of his ideal world. He has not Wordsworth's distinctness and intimate spiritual communion with Nature as she is on earth; the genii of the worlds of dream and sleep cluster too thickly round all that his waking eye seizes. He tries to let them in through the force of crowding images, brilliant tossings aside of the lucent curtain, *tiraskarini*, which veils them from us: but they remain half-hidden in their means of revelation. The earth-nature is seen in the light of another nature more than in its own, and that too is only half visible in the mixed luminosity, "burning through the vest that hides it." Tradition governs very

largely his choice of rhythms, but wonderfully melodious as is his use or conversion of them to the mould of his spirit, one feels that he would have done better to seek more often for self-formed movements. Shelley is the bright archangel of this dawn and he becomes greater to us as the light he foresaw and lived in returns and grows, but he sings half concealed in the too dense halo of his own ethereal beauty.

As with Wordsworth and Byron, so too we find Shelley and Keats standing side by side, but with a certain antinomy. They are perhaps the two most purely poetic minds that have used the English tongue; but one sings from the skies earthwards, the other looks from earth towards Olympus. Keats is the first entire artist in word and rhythm in English poetry,—not grandiose, classical and derived like Milton, but direct and original in his artistry, he begins a new era. His astonishing early performance leaves us wondering what might have been the masterpieces of his prime, of which even *Hyperion* and the Odes are only the unfulfilled promise. His death in the beginning of his powers is the greatest loss ever suffered by human achievement in this field. Alone of all the chief poets of his time he is in possession of a perfect or almost perfected instrument of his native temperament and genius, but he had not yet found the thing he had to say, not yet seen what he was striving to see. All the other high things that interested his great equals, had for him no interest; one godhead only he worshipped, the image of divine Beauty, and through this alone he wished to see Truth and by her to achieve spiritual delight and not so much freedom as completeness. And he saw her in three of her four forms, sensuous beauty, imaginative beauty, intellectual and ideal beauty. But it is the first only which he had entirely expressed when his thread was cut short in its beginning; the second he had carried far, but it was not yet full-orbed; towards the third and highest he was only striving, “to philosophise he dared not yet”, but it was from the first the real sense and goal of his genius.

On life he had like the others — Byron alone excepted — no hold; such work as *Lamia*, *Isabella*, *The Eve of St. Agnes*, in which he followed the romantic tendency of the time, was not

his own deeper self-expression; they are wonderful richly woven robes of sound and word and image curiously worked and brocaded, but they clothe nothing. The Odes, where fulfilment of imaginative beauty rises out of a higher sensuous seeking and satisfaction to an admirable sweetness, fullness, largeness and opulence and admits intimations of the ideal goddess, are almost all of them among the scanty number of the chief masterpieces in this high and deliberate lyrical form. But the real soul of Keats, his inner genius, the thing he was striving to bring out of himself is not to be altogether found even here; it lay in that attempt which, first failing in *Endymion*, was again resumed in *Hyperion*. It was the discovery of the divine Idea, Power and living norm of Beauty which by its breath of delight has created the universe, supports it and moves towards a greater perfection, inspires the harmonies of inward sight and outward form, yearns and strives towards the fullness of its own self-discovery by love and delight. Not yet in possession of his idea, he tries to find and to figure it in *Endymion* by sensuous images of a rich and dim moonlit dream with a sort of allegory or weft of symbols behind the words and thoughts, but his hand is still inexpert and fails in the execution. In *Hyperion* the idea is clearer and in bolder relief, but it is misconceived under a too intellectual, external and conventionally epic Miltonic influence, and in his second version he turns not quite happily to a renewal of the form of his first attempt. He has found a clue in thought and imagination, but not quite its realisation in the spiritual idea, has already its imaginative, sensuous, something of its intellectual suggestion, but not yet what the spirit in him is trying to reveal, its mystically intellectual, mystically sensuous, mystically imaginative vision, form and word. The intimation of it in his work, his growing endeavour to find it and the unfulfilled promise of its discovery and unique fullness of expression are the innermost Keats and by it he belongs in spirit to these prophetic, but half-foiled singers of the dawn. He lives more than any other poet in the very temple of Beauty, traverses its sculptured and frescoed courts with a mind hued and shaped to her forms and colours and prepares, but is never permitted, to enter the innermost sanctuary. The

time had not yet come when these spiritual significances could be more than hinted. Therefore Keats and Shelley were taken before their powers could fully expand, Byron led far out of the path, Blake isolated in his own splendour of remoteness, Coleridge and Wordsworth drawn away to lose the poet and seer in the mere intellectual mind. All wandered round their centre of inspiration, missed something needed and stopped or were stopped short. Another age had to arrive which worshipped other and lesser godheads.

Chapter XIX

The Victorian Poets

THE EPOCH associated in England with the name of Victoria was in poetry, like that of Pope and Dryden, an age of dominant intellectualism; but, unlike that hard and sterile period, it has been an imaginative, artistic intellectualism, touched with the greater and freer breath of modern thought and its wide interest and fullness of matter, not brass-bound in furbished and narrow bands of social ease and polite refinement, but alive, astir, capable of personal energy and inspiration, aesthetical in its refinements, above all not entirely satisfied with itself, but opened up to some mountain-top prospects, struck across by some moments of prophecy. But still whether we compare it with the inspirations from which it turned or with the inspiration which followed and replaced it, it is a depression, not a height, and without being either faultily faultless or splendidly null, as epochs of a too self-satisfied intellectual enlightenment tend to appear to be in the eyes of the more deeply thinking ages, it fails to satisfy, unlike the Roman Augustan, the French grand century, or even in its own kind the English Augustan. It leaves an impression of a too cramped fullness and a too level curiosity. It is a descent into a comfortable and pretty hollow or a well-cultured flatness between high, wild or beautiful mountain ranges behind and in front a great confused beginning of cliff and seashore, sands and rocks and breakers and magic of hills and sea-horizons. There is much in this work to admire, something here and there to stimulate, but only a little that lifts off the feet and carries to the summits of the poetic enthusiasm.

The descent from the uncertain but high elevations of the first romantic, half spiritual outbreak is very marked, baffling and sudden. This is not in the nature of a revolt, an energetic audacity of some new thing,—except for a moment in Swinburne,—but a change of levels, a transition to other more varied but

less elevated interests, the substitution of a more curious but less impetuous movement. The rich beauty of Keats is replaced by the careful opulent cultivated picturesqueness of Tennyson, the concentrated personal force of Byron by the many-sided intellectual robustness and energy of Browning, the intense Nature poetry and the strong and grave ethical turn of Wordsworth by the too intellectually conscious eye on Nature and the cultured moralising of Arnold, the pure ethereal lyricism of Shelley by Swinburne's turgid lyrical surge and all too self-conscious fury of foam-tossing sound, and in place of the supernatural visions of Blake and Coleridge we have the mediaeval glamour and languorous fields of dream of Rossetti and Morris. There is a considerable gain, but a deep loss; for this poetry has a more evolved richness, but in that greater richness a greater poverty. The gain is in fullness of a more varied use of language, a more conscious and careful art, a more informed and varied range of thought and interest; but the loss is in spiritual substance and the Pythian height of inspiration. There is a more steady working, but with it a clogged and heavier breath; a wealth of colour and nearer strain of thinking, but a lower flame of the spirit. This labour is assured and careful enough in its workmanship but, less inspired, it has a paucity of greatness and a too temperate impulsion.

The intellectual preparation of the previous poetry, the depth and wealth of experience which must found the greatest and most successful audacities of spiritual vision, had been insufficient, coming as it did after a shallow and superficial age of the acute, but limited cult of Reason. The work of the middle nineteenth century was to prepare anew the intellectual ground and to lead up to a more conscious, enriched and careful artistic execution. But it was a tract of intellectual effort in which there was much width of a kind and considerable invention, but a very insufficient height and profundity. In England there was the added misfortune of a reign of rampant philistinism. The Victorian period for all its activity and fruitfulness was by no means one of those great intellectual humanistic ages which the world will look back to with a satisfied sense of clarity or of

uplifting. The great flood of free thinking, free inquiry, scientific and artistic vivacity, the rapid breaking of fresh ground, the noble political enthusiasms which stirred France and Germany and Italy and created a new force of democratic humanism in Russia, swept in vain past the English shores defended by their chalk cliffs and downs of self-content or only broke across them in a few insignificant waves. It is the most unlovely and uninspiring period of the English spirit. Never was the aesthetic sense so drowned in pretentious ugliness, seldom the intelligence crusted in such an armoured imperviousness to fine and subtle thinking, the ebb of spirituality so far out and low. It was a period of smug commercial middle-class prosperity, dull mechanism, hard utilitarianism and a shoddy liberalism bursting and running over with self-content in its narrow practical rationality, spiritual poverty and intellectual ineptitude. Unteachable, it bore with a scornful complacency or bewildered anger or a listening ear of impervious indulgence the lightning shafts of Arnold's irony, the turbid fulminations of Carlyle, the fiery raids of Ruskin or saw unaffected others of its fine or great spirits turn for refuge to mediaevalism or socialistic utopias. The work of these forerunners was done in a wilderness of intellectual commonness and busy mediocre energy; it bore fruit afterwards, but only when the century was in its wane and other infant powers of the immenser future were beginning to raise their heads of cloud and light.

But this work of revolt and preparation was done chiefly in prose. Poetry flourishes best when it is the rhythmical expression of the soul of its age, of what is greatest and deepest in it, but still belongs to it, and the poetry of this period suffers by the dull smoke-laden atmosphere in which it flowered; though it profited by the European stir of thought and seeking around and held its own, achieved beauty, achieved in one or two poets a considerable energy, some largeness, occasional heights, there is still something sickly in its luxuriance, a comparative depression and poverty in its thought, a lack in its gifts, in its very accomplishment a sense of something not done. It cannot compare in power, wing, abundance of genius and talent with

the contemporary work done in France: as in all intellectual ages the grand stream of poetical achievement is to be found, in spite of the greater poetic energy of the Anglo-Celtic mind, on the continent, in the clear and competent labour of the Latin intelligence. There is certainly much imaginative beauty, much artistic or fine or strong technical execution,—a great deal more in fact of this element than at any previous time,—much excellent work high enough in the second rank, but the inner surge and satisfaction of a free or deep spirit, the strong high-riding pinion or the skyward look, these things are rare in Victorian poetry.

The fame of Tennyson, now a little dimmed and tarnished by the breath of Time, occupied this epoch with a great and immediate brilliance. He is unquestionably the representative English poet of his time. He mirrors its ordinary cultivated mind as it shaped in the English temperament and intelligence, with an extraordinary fidelity and in a richly furnished and heavily decorated mirror set round with all the art and device that could be appreciated by the contemporary taste. There has been no more consummate master of the language, and this mastery is used with a careful, sure and unfailing hand. Whatever has to be expressed, whether it be of considerable, mediocre or no worth, is yet given a greater than its intrinsic value by a power of speech which without any such remarkable or astonishing energy as would excite or exalt the mind or disturb it from a safe acquiescence and a luxurious ease of reception, has always a sufficient felicity, curiously worked even when it affects simplicity, but with a chastened if not quite chaste curiosity. The turn of phrase almost always hits the mind with a certain, sometimes easy, sometimes elaborate poetic device. It turns always to find and does find the pictorial value of the thing to be described, and even, if such a phrase can be used, the pictorial value of the thought to be seized. There is a similar happiness of device and effect in the verse; if there are no great lyrical, odic or epic outbursts to sweep us out of ourselves, there is the same well-governed craft of effective turn and invention as in the language, the same peculiar manner of easily carried elaborateness, a leisurely but never sluggish self-considering self-adorning flow

which succeeds in being immediately received and accepted. The art with which the subject matter is dressed up is of the same kind; a restrained elaborateness, a curious picturesqueness of presentation, a taking, sometimes opulent and effective form. The refinement and felicity are not of a kind which call for any unusual receptive power or aesthetic fineness to meet it and feel all its beauty; there is enough and to spare to attract the cultured, nothing to baffle or exceed the ordinary mind. This art is that of a master craftsman, a goldsmith, silversmith, jeweller of speech and substance with much of the decorative painter in his turn, who never travels beyond general, well-understood and popular ideas and forms, but gives them by his fineness of manner and felicity of image a charm and distinction which belong more properly to rarer and greater or lovelier motives. The achievement is of a kind which would hardly be worth doing more than once, but done that once and with such mastery it takes its place and compels admiration. The spirit is not filled and satisfied, much less uplifted, but the outer aesthetic mind is caught and for a time held captive.

But it is doubtful whether the future will attach to Tennyson's poetry anything at all near to the value it assumed for the contemporary English mind. When we try to estimate the substance and see what it permanently gives or what new thing it discovers for the poetic vision, we find that there is extraordinarily little in the end. Tennyson wrote much narrative poetry, but he is not a great narrative poet. There is a curious blending of incompatible intentions in all his work of this kind and even his exceptional skill could not save him from a brilliant failure. He has on the one side a will to convey some high spiritual and ethical intention of life through the imaginative use of tale and legend, and that could give a scope for a very noble kind of poetry, but he has not the power to lay a great hold on the ancient figures and recreate them to be symbols of a new significance. The *Idylls of the King* miss both the romantic and the idyllic beauty and arrive only at a graceful decorated effective triviality. The grand old Celtic myths and traditions already strangely mediaevalised by Malory, but full still of life and large humanity

and colour are modernised into a baffling and disappointing superficiality and miss all greatness and power of life. There is no congruity between the form and symbol and the feeling and substance. They seem solely to be used to frame a conventional sentimentalism of Victorian domesticity and respectable social ethics. But the wearing of the white and scentless flower of a blameless life in a correct button-hole and a tepid sinning without the least tinge of passion or conviction by decorated puppets who are too evidently lay-figures of very modern ladies and gentlemen disguised as knights and dames, was hardly a sufficient justification for evoking the magic figures of old legend and romance. The life so masqueraded misses reality and it does not arrive at any great compensating imaginative or interpretative representation; modernism and the affectation of mediaevalism, conventional reality and the falsetto tones of pseudo-romance destroy each other and produce a glittering incongruity. There is a void of the true sincerity of poetic vision at the heart of the original conception and no amount of craft and skill in language or descriptive detail and picture can cure that original deficiency. The poet has no meditative, no emotional or impassioned, no close or revealing grasp on life, and on the other hand no deep interpretative idea, and without one or other of these things narrative poetry of the modern kind cannot succeed; it becomes a body without soul or life-breath. Even when Tennyson confines himself to the poetic modern tale without these disguises or any motive but the ethically pointed telling, he arrives at the same result, a richly coloured triviality.

This principal work of his maturity fails; its popularity springs from its work of detail and its appeal to the superficial sentiment of the time: but some earlier work of the kind had a nobler success. In the *Morte d'Arthur* there is some natural magic and vision which if it had been sustained and kept the same delicate and mystic strain, might have made the cycle of idylls a new poetic revelation. In other poems, in the *Lotos-Eaters*, *Ulysses*, *Oenone*, where set narrative is avoided and the legend is a starting-point or support for thought, vision and beauty, some fullness of these things is reached; but still

the form is greater than the substance which has no heights and only occasionally strikes depths. Tennyson does not figure largely as a lyrical poet in spite of one or two inspired and happy moments; for he has neither the lyrical passion and intoxication nor the profounder depth of lyrical feeling. In his description of Nature there is no greater seeing, but a painting of vivid details detached for simile and ornament, and though he worked up a great accuracy of observation and colour, the deeper sincerity of the born Nature-poets is absent. Finally he gives us a good deal of thinking of a kind in often admirably telling phrase and with much art of setting, but he is not a revealing poetical thinker. His thought seldom escapes from the conventional limits of a cultivated, but not a large or original Victorian mind; it beautifies most often the obvious and commonplace or the current and acceptable ideas; with rare exceptions he has neither exaltations nor profundities nor subtleties nor surprises. A great poetical craftsman turning many forms to account for the displaying of an unusual power of descriptive and decorative language and a verse of most skilled device, but no very great purpose and substance, this he is from beginning to end of his creation. His art suffers from the excess of value of form over value of content; it incurs a liability to a besetting note of artificiality, a frequent falsetto tone of prettiness, an excessive stress, a colouring which is often too bright for the stuff it hues and is unevenly laid, but it is always taking and effective. By his very limitation of mind he becomes the representative poet of a certain side of the English mentality, not in its originality and adventurous power, but in its temperate convention and fixity, renders its liberalism and its conservatism, its love of freedom and dislike of idealism, its surface common sense of doubt and traditional belief, its successful way of dealing with its material, its formal ethicism and its absence of passion. But to all these things he brings an artistic decorative quality which is new in English poetry. He has left his stamp on the language and has given starting-points and forms for poets of a rarer force to turn to greater uses and pass beyond them to a new construction.

Tennyson is the most representative and successful poet of

the Victorian epoch. Others who have not the same limitations, either fall below him in art or have a less sustained and considerable bulk and variety of work. Swinburne brings in into the poetry of the time elements to which the rest are strangers. He has a fire and passion and vehemence of song which is foreign to their temperament. He brings in too the continental note of denial, atheistic affirmation, sceptical revolt, passionate political idealism, but to these things he gives the Anglo-Celtic aggressiveness and violence, not the Latin sureness and clarity. He is a great lyrist, but like many of his contemporaries revels too much in device and virtuosities of form and his lyrical thought and sentiment turn easily to the dithyrambic note, are marred by excess, diffuseness, an inequality in the inspiration and the height and tone. But he has especially in his earlier poetry done work of a perfect and highly wrought beauty, a marvellous music. There is often a captivatingly rich and sensuous appeal in his language and not unoften it rises to a splendid magnificence. *Atalanta in Calydon*, *Dolores*, *Hertha*, *The Garden of Proserpine* and numerous other poems with the same perfect workmanship will always stand among the consummate achievements of English poetry. He is at his best one of the great lyrical singers; he writes in a flood and sweep and passion of melody: he is unique as a voice of all-round revolt, political, moral and of every kind, and in this lies his main significance. But he exhausts himself too soon; the reproach of emptiness can be brought against much of his work and his later voice becomes empty of significance but not of resonance. The quieter classical power of Arnold which voices the less confident search of a self-doubting scepticism, has lucidity, balance and grace, a fine though restricted and tenuous strain of thought and a deep and penetrating melancholy, the mediaevalism and aesthetic mysticism of Rossetti, the slow dreamy narrative of Morris which takes us to a refuge from the blatancy and ugliness of the Victorian environment into the gracious world of old story and legend, bring in each their own significance for the age and help towards that enrichment of the language of thought and artistic poetical feeling which is the chief work of this intervening time. They have all three this

characteristic that they are studious artists,—it is significant that two of them are painters and decorative craftsmen,—who are concerned to give beauty and finish to the material of poetry rather than original poets with a large power of inspiration. Their range is small, but they have brought into English poetry a turn for fine execution which is likely to be a long-abiding influence.

Among the Victorians Browning stands next to Tennyson in the importance of his poetic work and station as a representative figure of the age and creator. He surpasses him indeed in the mass and force and abundant variety of his work and the protean energy of his genius. His inventiveness of form and range and variety of subject are prodigious; he turns to every quarter of the world, seizes on every human situation, seems to be trying to exhaust a study of all possible human personalities and minds and characters and turn his eye on every age and period of history and many countries and all possible scenes and extract from them their meaning and their interest for the satisfaction of his universal curiosity and his living and inexhaustible interest in the vividness and abundance of the life of earth and man. He has an equal interest in the human mind and its turns of thinking of all kinds and its human aims, ambitions, seekings and wants to pursue it everywhere in its ramifications, in its starts of individuality, peaks, windings, even all manner of borrowings of thought and feeling, nothing human is foreign to his research and pursuit, all enters into this prodigious embrace. This gives to his poetry a range and unceasing interest and richness of attraction which surpasses immeasurably all that his contemporaries can give us in wideness of the call of life, even though in them the poetic height to which they draw us may be greater than his. In his mass of creation he can be regarded as the most remarkable in invention and wideness, if not the most significant builder and narrator of the drama of human life in his time.

Browning stands apart also from the other contemporary poets in the character and personality of his work. He is in many ways the very opposite of them all. He is the one robust and masculine voice among these artists, sceptics, idealists or

dreamers, always original, vigorous, inexhaustible; with a great range of interests, a buoyant hold on life, a strong and clear eye, an assured belief and hope but no traditional conventionality, he alone adequately represents the curious, critical, eager, exploring mind of the age. He has depth and force and abundance of a certain kind of thought, which if not of the very first greatness and originality, is open to all manner of questioning and speculation and new idea. His regard ranges over history and delights in its pictures of the stir and energy of life and its changing scenes, over man and his thought and character and emotion and action, looks into every cranny, follows every tortuous winding, seizes on each leap and start of the human machine. He is a student, critic, psychologist, thinker. He seeks to interpret, like certain French poets, the civilisations and the ages. His genius is essentially dramatic; for though he has written in many lyrical forms, the lyric is used to represent a moment in the drama of life or character, and though he uses the narrative, his treatment of it is dramatic and not narrative, as when he takes an Italian *fait-divers* and makes each personage relate or discuss it in such a way as to reveal his own motive, character, thought and passion. He does not succeed except perhaps once as a dramatist in the received forms because he is too analytic, too much interested in the mechanism of temperament, character, emotion and changing idea to concentrate sufficiently on their results in action; but he has an unrivalled force in seizing on a moment of the soul or mind and in following its convolutions as they start into dramatic thought, feeling and impulse. He of all these writers has hold of the substance of the work marked out for a poet of the age. And with all these gifts we might have had in him the great interpretative poet, one might almost say, the Shakespeare of his time. But by the singular fatality which so often pursues the English poetical genius, the one gift needed to complete him was denied. Power was there and the hold of his material; what was absent was the essential faculty of artistic form and poetic beauty, so eminent in his contemporaries, a fatal deficiency. This great creator was no artist; this strength was too robust and direct to give forth sweetness. There was no lack of

a certain kind of skill. If not an artist in verse, Browning is a consummate technician, one might almost say a mechanician in verse; his very roughnesses and crudities and contortions have the appearance of device and calculation. He had an immense command of language and was never at a lack for forcible and efficient expression, but in its base though not in all its turns it was the language of a vigorous and vivid and colourful prosaist rather than of a poet, of the intellect and not the imagination. He could throw into it strong hues of the imagination, has sometimes though too seldom a vigorous richness and strong grace, achieves often a lyric elevation, but they supervene upon this base and do not ordinarily suffuse and change it or elevate it to a high customary level. Much strong and forceful work he did of a great and robust substance, won many victories, but the supreme greatness cannot come in poetry without the supreme beauty.

Arnold is a third considerable Victorian poet of the epoch, though he bulks less than the two more abundant writers who have till now held the first place. But as time goes on his figure emerges and assumes in quality though not in mass of work a first importance. His poetic work and quality may even be regarded as finer in its essence of poetic value if more tenuous in show of power than that of his two contemporaries. There is a return to the true classic style of poetry in the simplicity and straightforward directness of his diction and turn of thought that brings us back to the way of the earlier poets and gives a certain seriousness and power which we do not find in the over-consciousness and the too studied simplicity or elaborate carefulness and purposeful artistry of the other poets of the time. This imparts a note of depth and sincerity to his passion and his pathos, a character of high seriousness to his reflection and meditative thought, a greatness and strength to his moments of height and elevated force which raise him above the ordinary levels around him and create an impression of the truest poetry, the most genuine in poetic value, if not in effect the greatest of this Victorian age. His simplicity is a true thing and not the over-studied false simplicity of Tennyson; his thought is free from

the conventionality and platitude which constantly meets us in Tennyson's thinking; he can achieve the strongest effects, even the romantic effect without the overwrought romantic colour of Rossetti, Swinburne's overpitch or Tennyson's too frequent overcharge and decorative preciousity of expression. We are at ease with him and can be sure that he will not say too much but just what the true poet in him has to say and no more. For this reason he was able to bring into Victorian poetry the expression of the most characteristic trains of thought expressing the contemporary mind and temperament at its highest and best. Tennyson voices the conventional English mind, Swinburne a high-pitched cry of revolt or a revolutionary passion for freedom or even for licence; Rossetti and Morris take refuge in mediaevalism as they saw it: Arnold strikes out the more serious notes of contemporary thinking. He fails however to look beyond to the future. In one respect of literary workmanship he does however anticipate future trends; for he makes a departure towards certain tendencies of modernist forms of verse. He made the first attempt at any regular free verse and thus anticipated the modernist departure from metrical forms. He attempted also an imitation of the Greek dramatic form but not with Swinburne's originality and the success achieved in *Atalanta in Calydon*.

This is the balance of the Victorian epoch; a considerable intellectual and artistic endeavour, contradicting, overcoming but still hampered by an ungenial atmosphere; two remarkable poets held back from the first greatness, one by imperfection of form, the other by imperfection of substance; four artists of less range, but with work of an accomplished, but overpitched or thin or languorous beauty; an enrichment and strengthening of the language which makes it more capable of fine and varied and curious thought, and the creation of an artistic conscience which may impose in the future a check on the impulse of an overabundant energy to imperfection of eager haste and vagary in execution. If the promise of the coming age is fulfilled, it may be remembered as a fine, if limited period of preparation for the discovery of new, more beautiful and grander fields of poetry.

Chapter XX

Recent English Poetry – 1

THE MOVEMENT away from the Victorian type in recent and contemporary English poetry cannot be said to have yet determined its final orientation. But we may distinguish in its uncertain fluctuations, its attempts in this or that direction certain notes, certain strong tones, certain original indications which may help us to disengage the final whither of its seekings. In the mass it appears as a broadening of the English poetic mind into a full oneness with the great stream of modern thought and tendency, an opening up out of the narrower Victorian insularity to admit a greater strength, subtlety and many-sidedness of the intelligence. For this very reason it is still in the nature of a very uncertain feeling out in several directions which has not found itself and decided what shall be the centre and guide of its inspiration. There are experiments of all kinds in language and rhythm and subject and treatment, many notable names each with his special turn and personality, but no supreme decisive speech and no gathering up of the many threads into a great representative work. The whole of European literature at the present time is of this character; it is a fluid mass with a hundred conflicting tendencies, a multitude of experiments, many minor formations, which has not yet run into any clear universal mould. All that can be done is to distinguish some common characteristics of an indicative value which emerge in the more significant work and have touched more or less the performance of the lesser writers. Here we can get at least at a certain persistent element, certain potential issues.

The thing that strikes at once in a general view is that it is a period of transition, not yet a new age, but the preparation for a new age of humanity. Everywhere there is a seeking after some new thing, a discontent with the moulds, ideas and powers of the past, a spirit of innovation, a desire to get at deeper powers

of language, rhythm, form, because a subtler and vaster life is in birth, there are deeper and more significant things to be said than have yet been spoken, and poetry, the highest essence of speech, must find a fitting voice for them. The claim of tradition is still strong, but even those who keep most in the old ways, are impelled to fill in their lines with more searching things of a more compelling substance, to strike from their instrument sounds, variations, meanings for which it had not before the capacity. The attempt has not yet been supremely successful in its whole purpose, in spite of some poetic achievement of considerable beauty, originality and compass, but it has liberated at least with some initial force novel powers and opened fresh paths; a few bright streams of initiation meet the eye running to form some mighty Brahmaputra or Ganges which is not yet in sight, though we get here and there a blue Yamuna or white Saraswati or some large impetuous torrent making its way through open plain or magic woodland towards the great unseen confluence. There are many widely separate attempts, some fine or powerful beginnings, as yet no large consummation.

The straining for a new power of rhythm is the first indication of the coming change. Not quite so marked, not by any means so successful as the change in the type and power of poetical expression, it is still indicative; rhythm is the subtle soul of poetry and a change in the spirit of the rhythm must come if this change in the spirit of the poetry is fully to discover itself and altogether realise its own characteristic greatness and perfection. Mankind is moving to another spirit in its thought and life founded on another and deeper and larger truth of its inner being than it has yet in the mass been able to see, hold and put into form of living. This change must find its echo and interpretation or even some of its power of revelation and initiation in poetry, and poetry to express this greater spirit must find out a deeper, larger, more flexible, or, if one may say so, more multitudinously expressive rhythm than the great poets of the past were under the necessity of using; something of the same change has to be achieved as has been successfully accomplished in music. We see accordingly some attempt to break or enlarge,

deepen or subtilise the traditional moulds, to substitute others of a more delicate character or with a more varied and flexible principle, to search out new packed or dissolved movements. There have been some considerable successes, but nothing of such a complete, sweeping and satisfying force as would quite content a certain eagerness and impatient urge of the arriving age to find a full rhythmic basis for its own way of self-expression. And so we find too the attempt to initiate a violent and unprecedented revolution in the whole fundamental method of poetic rhythm.

This tendency in some writers goes no farther than an irregular use of metre which does not really carry us any farther towards the desired result and is in no way an improvement on the past since it has no true artistic principle to guide us to freer and more consummate harmonies. But pushed to its logical issue it has created the still growing form of free verse of which we now find examples in most of the great literary languages and coupled with it a theory that this is the one future chance for poetry. Metre and rhyme are said to be played out, things of the past, which can no longer be allowed to chain and hamper the great and free movement which the enlarging spirit of poetry demands; as rhyme was in Milton's later view only a dainty trifle which he flung aside for the organ harmonies of his blank verse, so metre itself is a petty thing, half ornament, half fetter, which has to be flung aside for some nobly self-governed democratic anarchy that is to develop from this new type. That is a theory of very doubtful validity. In the hands of most of its exponents it seems to be in practice nothing but a licence for writing prose in variously cut lengths, prose breaking off at the end of a clause or in the middle of it to go on refreshed in the line below,— I have seen even a line of free verse consisting of a majestic solitary pronoun,— and that is more an eccentric method of printing than a new rhythm. But without accepting the theory in its intolerant entirety one can appreciate the motive which moved the greater masters and more skilful craftsmen of this form, if form it can be called, to make the innovation. There is something large and many-sided and constantly mutable in the life, thought and spirit of today which needs, to express it

sympathetically, vast and flowing movements or on the contrary brief, sudden and abrupt paces or the alternation of these and intermediate and variant lengths and turns: there is something at the same time densely full and singularly and minutely subtle in the modern thinking mind which is with difficulty accommodable by the restricted range of subtleties, variations and fullnesses of any given poetic measure. Why not then break away from all the old hampering restrictions and find a new principle of harmony in accordance with the freedom, the breadth and largeness of view, the fineness of feeling and sensation of the modern spirit, some form which shall have the liberty of prose and yet command the intensified heights and fluctuations and falls of the cadence of poetry? There is no reason why not, if the thing can be done,—the proof of these things lies in the execution; but it may be doubted whether the method used is the right method. At any rate it has not been fully justified even in the hands of its greatest or most skilful exponents. It is used, as in Whitman, to give the roll of the sea of life or the broad and varying movements of the spirit of humanity in its vigorous experience and aspiration, or, as in Carpenter, to arrive at the free and harmonious accession of the human intelligence to profound, large and powerful truths of the spirit, or, as in certain French writers, to mould into accurate rhythm the very substance and soul and characteristic movement of soul-states, ideas or objects described and seen. These are things that need to be done, but it remains to be seen whether they cannot be done in the recognised and characteristic movement of poetry, rather than in a compromise with prose cadences. The genius of poetic measure walking in the path opened by the ancient discovery of cadenced beat and concentrated rhythm has not yet exhausted itself, nor is there any proof that it cannot accommodate its power to new needs or any sign that it can only survive in an arrested senility or fall into a refined decadence.

The most considerable representatives of this new and free form of poetic rhythm are English and American, Carpenter and Whitman. Tagore's translations of his lyrics have come in as a powerful adventitious aid, but are not really to the point

in the question at issue; for these translations are nothing but a rhythmically poetic prose and that kind of writing, cadenced prose poetry, a well recognised form, cannot and does not try to compete with the established principle of measure; it is an indulgence, a minor variation which has yet its definite place and serves certain purposes which could not otherwise be fulfilled with any adequacy. It is perhaps the only method for the work Tagore intended, a poetic translation of poetry reproductive of the exact thought and spiritual intention of the original; for a version in the fixed measures of another language not only substitutes another mould for the original movement, but by the substitution gives it almost another soul, so powerful, distinct and creative a thing is poetic rhythm; but the more flexible, less insistent cadence of poetic prose does not so seize on and recast the spirit of the original movement; it may even give a far-off minimised shadow, echo, illusion of it, if the same or a similar spirit is at work: it can never have the same power, but it may have some echo of a similar suggestion. When for instance Tagore writes in English,—

Thou settest a barrier in thine own being and thou callest thy severed self in myriad notes. This thy self-separation has taken body in me. The great pageant of thee and me has overspread the sky. With the tune of thee and me all the air is vibrant, and all ages pass with the hiding and seeking of thee and me.—

we have a very beautiful delicately cadenced poetic prose and nothing more. Tagore is what some of the French writers of *vers libre* are and Whitman and Carpenter are not, a delicate and subtle craftsman, and he has done his work with a perfect grace and spiritual fineness; but there is no attempt to do anything more than the just work in hand, no intention of displacing the old way of poetry in which he has done in his own language such wonderful things, by a new principle of poetic movement. If there were any such intention, it would have to be pronounced a failure. One has only to compare this English prose, beautiful as it is, with the original poetry to see how much has gone out with the change; something is successfully substituted which

may satisfy the English reader, but can never satisfy the ear or the mind that has once listened to the singer's own native and magical melodies. And this is so even though the intellectual substance, the intellectual precision and distinctness of the thought are often more effective, carry home more quickly in the translation, because in the original the intellectual element, the thought limits are being constantly overborne and are sometimes almost swallowed up by the waves of suggestion that come stealing in with the music: so much more is heard than is said that the soul listening goes floating into that infinity and counts the definite contribution of the intelligence as of a lesser value. Precisely there lies the greatest power of poetic rhythm for the very highest work that the new age has to do, and that it can be done by a new use of the poetic method without breaking the whole form of poetry, Tagore's own lyrical work¹ in his mother tongue is the best evidence.

Whitman's aim is consciously, clearly, professedly to make a great revolution in the whole method of poetry, and if anybody could have succeeded, it ought to have been this giant of poetic thought with his energy of diction, this spiritual crowned athlete and vital prophet of democracy, liberty and the soul of man and Nature and all humanity. He is a great poet, one of the greatest in the power of his substance, the energy of his vision, the force of his style, the largeness at once of his personality and his universality. His is the most Homeric voice since Homer, in spite of the modern's ruder less elevated aesthetics of speech and the difference between that limited Olympian and this broad-souled Titan, in this that he has the nearness to something elemental which makes everything he says, even the most common and prosaic, sound out with a ring of greatness, gives a force even to his barest or heaviest phrases, throws even upon the coarsest, dullest, most physical things something of the divinity; and he has the elemental Homeric power of sufficient straightforward

¹ This cannot quite be said or not in the same degree about other work of Tagore's where this great lyrist is not so much himself in his movement, though he is always a master of rhythm.

speech, the rush too of oceanic sound though it is here the surging of the Atlantic between continents, not the magic roll and wash of the Aegean around the isles of Greece. What he has not, is the unfailing poetic beauty and nobility which saves greatness from its defects — that supreme gift of Homer and Valmiki — and the self-restraint and obedience to a divine law which makes even the gods more divine. Whitman will remain great after all the objections that can be made against his method or his use of it, but the question is whether what served his unique personality, can be made a rule for lesser or different spirits, and whether the defects which we see but do not and cannot weigh too closely in him, will not be fatal when not saved by his all-uplifting largeness. A giant can pile up Pelion and Ossa and make of it an unhewn chaotic stair to Olympus, but others would be better and more safely employed in cutting steps of marble or raising by music a ladder of sapphires and rubies to their higher or their middle heavens. Personality, force, temperament can do unusual miracles, but the miracle cannot always be turned into a method or a standard.

Whitman's verse, if it can be so called, is not simply a caded prose, though quite a multitude of his lines only just rise above the prose rhythm. The difference is that there is a constant will to intensify the fall of the movement so that instead of the unobtrusive ictus of prose, we have a fall of the tread, almost a beat, and sometimes a real beat, a meeting and parting, sometimes a deliberate clash or even crowding together of stresses which recall the spirit of the poetical movement, though they obey no recognised structural law of repetitions and variations. In this kind of rhythm we find actually three different levels — the distinction may be a little rough, but it will serve, — a gradation which is very instructive. First we have a movement which just manages to be other than prose movement, but yet is full of the memory of a certain kind of prose rhythm. Here the first defect is that the ear is sometimes irritated, sometimes disappointed and baulked by a divided demand, memory or expectation, hears always the prose suggestion behind pursuing and dragging down the feet of the poetic enthusiasm. It is as if

one were watching the “aerial walk” of a Hathayogin who had just conquered the force of gravitation, but only to the extent of a few inches, so that one is always expecting the moment which will bring him down with a bump to mother earth. It is something like a skimming just above the ground of prose, sometimes a dragging of the feet with a frequent touch and upkicking of the dust, for inevitably the poetic diction and imaginative power of style fall to the same level. Much of Whitman’s work is in this manner; he carries it off by the largeness and sea-like roll of the total impression, but others have not the same success,—even the French craftsmen are weighed down,—and in them the whole has a draggled and painful effect of an amphibious waddling incertitude. But there is a nobler level at which he often keeps which does not get out of sight of the prose plain or lift up above all its gravitation, but still has a certain poetic power, greatness and nobility of movement. But it is still below what an equal force would have given in the master measures of poetry.

But the possibilities of an instrument have to be judged by its greatest effects, and there are poems, lines, passages in which Whitman strikes out a harmony which has no kinship to nor any memory of the prose gravitation, but is as far above it as anything done in the great metrical cadences. And here, and not only in Whitman, but in all writers in this form who rise to that height, we find that consciously or unconsciously they arrive at the same secret principle, and that is the essential principle of Greek chorric and dithyrambic poetry turned to the law of a language which has not the strong resource of quantity. Arnold deliberately attempted such an adaptation but, in spite of beautiful passages, with scant success; still when he writes such a line as

The too vast orb of her fate,

it is this chorric movement that he reproduces. Whitman’s first poem in *Sea-Drift* and a number of others are written partly or throughout in this manner. When he gives us the dactylic and spondaic harmony of his lines,

Out of the cradle endlessly rocking,
Out of the mocking-bird's throat, the musical shuttle,
Out of the ninth-month midnight,

one of them wanting only one foot to be a very perfect hexameter
or the subtly varied movement of this other passage,

Over the hoarse surging of the sea,
Or flitting from brier to brier by day,
I saw, I heard at intervals the remaining one, the he-bird,
The solitary guest from Alabama,

one has almost the rhythmical illusion of listening to a Sophoclean or Aeschylean chorus. In the opening stanzas of the noble *Prayer of Columbus*, there is a continuous iambic metrical stress, but with the choric movement. One finds the same thing sometimes in French *vers libre*, — one poem at least of the kind I have seen of wonderful beauty, — though the success is not so easy in that language. Tagore has recently attempted a kind of free verse in Bengali, not so good as his regular metres, though melodious enough, as everything must be that is written by this master musician of the word, and throughout there is the same choric or dithyrambic principle of movement. This then seems to be the natural high-water mark of free poetical rhythm; it is a use of the poetic principle of measure in its essence without the limitations of a set form. Evidently much can be done in this rhythmical method. But it is yet doubtful whether in languages which lack the support of quantitative measure, poetical expression in this form can carry home with at all the same force as in the received ways of word-music.

We may get some idea of the limitations of the form by one or two examples from the poetry of Carpenter I find quoted by Mr. Cousins in his essay. Carpenter with a poetic faculty of a high order, a prophet of democracy and of the Self, like Whitman, but of a higher more spiritual truth of the Self, has like him found it impossible to restrain the largeness of his vision and personality in the bonds of metrical poetry. In both we see that the prophet and thinker predominate over the poet and artist. Less rough and

great than the epic voice from the other side of the ocean, his poetry has a more harmonious, limpid and meditative fullness. But the lesser abundance of force and drive makes us feel more the limitations of his form. The thought is not only great, but poetically great and satisfying, the expression as form of thought is noble and admirable, but we miss the subtler rhythmic uplift of the poetic enthusiasm which is given to minds of much less power by the inspiring cadence and the ordered measures of the poetic spirit, *chandas*. His flow is ordinarily of the middle kind with occasional chorric turns and movements, but the latter do not carry with them the full force of the intenser poetic cadence. To cite one passage,—

There in the region of equality in the world of Freedom
no longer limited, standing on a lofty peak in heaven above
the clouds,

From below hidden. Yet to all who pass into that region
most clearly visible
He the Eternal appeared.

Whitman would have broken that up into five lines and got by it a more distinct and forcible effect,—for the breath of poetry best rises and falls in brief and intense lengths; so printed, it would be at once apparent that we have a varied chorric movement, a little stumbling into half-prose just before the end, but otherwise admirable, with two sudden turns of great poetic force, where the movement is precisely that of the Greek chorus. But the total effect is the sense of what one might almost call a noble and chanting superprose rhythm.

This appears more clearly in another passage where Carpenter's movement is more at its normal level. He begins with a strain which is only just distinguishable from the prose strain, but suddenly rises from it to the beginning of a chorric elevation,

As one shuts a door after a long confinement in the house
—so out of your own plans and purposes escaping,—

then comes the full chorric rise,

Out of the mirror-lined chambers of self (grand though they be, but O how dreary!) in which you have hitherto spent your life,—

where, if the line had only ended with the parenthesis, it would have been a strain of perfect choric poetry, magnificently thought, imaged and cadenced, but the closing words spoil the effect, for they are a sharp descent towards the prose level. There are too elevations rising up from a rhythmical prose cadence but lifted high by the scriptural nobility of phrase and spiritual turn which we get so often in Carpenter. These fluctuations appear then to be inherent in the form and it seems to me that being in their nature a constant fall from the striving after a sustained perfection, they take away altogether from the claims of this "free verse". In lesser writers there is a similar but much more pronounced inadequacy; they rise little and fall or drag along with the most easily satisfied self-content in lowness. But that poets of great power should be satisfied with these deficiencies of their instrument and their most cultured readers accept them without question, indicates an inferiority, almost a depravation in the modern ear, or at least a great remissness in the austerity of the search after perfection. It is now sometimes said that the lines of poetry should follow the lines of life, and life, it might be contended, is of this kind, thought itself is of this kind, and the rhythm of poetry gains in sincerity by following them. But art is not of this kind, the poetic spirit is not of this kind; the nature of art is to strive after a nobler beauty and more sustained perfection than life can give, the nature of poetry is to soar on the wings of the inspiration to the highest intensities and keep winging, as far as may be, always near to them. A form which in the name of freedom remits and relaxes this effort, whatever its other merits and advantages, means a laxity of effort and is a dangerous downward concession.

But there is another objection which may be denied, but seems to me true, that this kind of verse does not give its full spiritual value to the poet's speech. Carpenter has a power of substance, thought-vision, image, expression which is very rare

and in all these respects he would have been recognised as not only equal but superior to many who have enjoyed in their own day the reputation of poets of the first rank. That he is not so recognised is due to the inferior form, a form legitimate enough for lesser uses, but not easily capable of the greatest poetic effects. Whitman too for all his energy loses in this way; even his greatest things do not go absolutely and immediately home, or having entered they do not so easily seize on the soul, take possession and rest in a calm, yet vibrating mastery. The real poetic cadence has that power, and to make the full use of it is the sign of the greatest masters; it has in it then something magical, immediate and miraculous, an unanalysable triumph of the spirit. But this other movement has not that stamp, it does only a little more than a highly concentrated prose might do, and this is because of the three indispensable intensities of poetry it may have intensity of thought and soul-substance, intensity of expression, but the intensity of rhythm, which is poetry's primal need, is lowered and diluted,—even, one feels, to a certain extent in its choric movements: by that lowering the two other intensities suffer, the poet himself tends to loosen them to the level of his movement. If that is so, those who use the form to meet the demands of the new age, are on the wrong track. But a demand is there and it indicates a real need. It is evident that Whitman and Carpenter could not have expressed themselves altogether in the existing forms, even if they had made the attempt. But if the new age is to express itself with the highest poetical power, it must be by new discoveries within the principle of the intenser poetical rhythm. The recent or living masters may not have done this, though we may claim that some beginnings have been made, but the new age is only at its commencement; the decisive departures, the unforeseen creations may yet be due which will equip it with an instrument or many instruments suited to the largeness, depth and subtlety of the coming spirit.

Chapter XXI

Recent English Poetry – 2

THE EFFECTIVE stream of poetry in the English tongue has followed no such strong distinctive turn as would be able to sweep the effort of rhythmic expression along with it in one mastering direction. The poets of this age pursue much more even than their predecessors the bent of their personality, not guided by any uniting thought or standard of form, and have no other connecting link than the subtle similarities which the spirit of the age always gives to its work of creation. But the present age is so loose, fluid and many-motived that this subtler community is not easily tangible and works out in much less of an open family resemblance than in the Victorian poets or their predecessors. Only in the Celtic revival in Ireland have there been a number of considerable writers united by a common artistic motive and ideal, and it may be for that reason that a certain persistent thing which is striving to be and to get expression in the poetry of the time finds itself in a first illumination, emerges as a conscious power and seeks for its adequate form and rhythm. But we find it elsewhere too in obscurer forms; on this element we may pause to lay stress while we leave aside as of less importance the crowding variety of other temperamental and personal emphasis which hides it from view or chokes up its channels of emergence. This subtler element, although far from being yet victorious over the tradition of the past or the more clamorous powers of the present, is the most original, the most unworked and fruitful in promise for the future and represents the highest possibility of a greater coming poetry. A distinct spiritual turn, the straining towards a deeper, more potent, supra-intellectual and supravital vision of things is its innermost secret of creative power. Now increasingly the highest turn of the human mind indicates a large opening of its vision to the self as well as the person of man and the spirit of Nature,

to supernature, to the cosmic, the universal and the eternal, but without any loosing of the hold on life and earth, which is likely to survive and govern thought and creation and the forms of our living when the present multitude of standpoints, all the conflict and chaos of a manifold seeking and new formation, have resolved themselves into the harmony of a centralising and embracing outlook. That infinite self-discovery would be the logical outcome of the movement of the past and the present century and the widest possibility and best chance open to the human spirit: taking up the thought of the ages into a mightier arc of interpretation and realisation, it would be the crowning of one and the opening of a new and greater cycle.

The poets of yesterday and today, Whitman, Carpenter, the Irish poets, Tagore, but also others in their degree are forerunners of this new spirit and way of seeing, prophets sometimes, but at others only illumined by occasional hints or by side rays of a light which has not flooded all their vision. I may take for my purpose four of them whose names stand behind or are still with us and their station already among those whose work endures, Meredith and Phillips among recent English poets, A. E. and Yeats of the Irish singers.¹ There is a very great difference of the degree and power with which the spirit has opened to them its secret and a great difference too in the turn which they give to its promptings. The two English poets have it at moments in a high clarity, but at others it is only a suggestion behind which gives a penetrating, original and profound tone to their work. This is their native secret when they go deepest into themselves, a thing they get sometimes into clear speech perhaps by right of their Celtic inheritance; but they work in the English tradition, follow other attractions, bear the burden of a tendency of aesthetic feeling, form and treatment which lead away from the pursuit of the direct seeking and the perfect manner. The consistent note we get more constantly in the Irish poets who, freer in mind from

¹ I take most of my citations from Mr. Cousins' book, the only source I have at present before me; but though few, they are made from the same standpoint and selected with singular felicity and serve fully my purpose.

this past tradition, though something of it must cling perhaps to all who write in the English tongue, unless they start with the superb revolutionary defiance of Whitman,—are able to strike out with a less encumbered gait into new paths of thought and movement. They have too an original well of inspiration in the Celtic spirit, temperament and tradition from which they draw a magical and delicate draught of other air naturally stimulative of a subtler and more spiritual vision: they escape, and that is another supreme advantage, from the overstress of the intellectual and vital notes which in their English kindred and compeers take from the direct purity of utterance of their spirit. None of them has indeed the large and puissant voice of Whitman or his dominant force of poetic personality, though they have what he has not or did not care to evolve, the artistic faculty and genius, but each has a high peculiar power in his own way of light, is at his best, and the best is not infrequent even in the least of them, a poet of the first rank. The greatness of scope and unified plenitude of power is absent which would have been needed to make any one of them a grand representative voice of the time. But they lead and prepare, they strike great new notes, open or at least give hints of great new ways for a future poetry.

One thing that comes home to us when we take a comparative view of this poetry, when we look at the inmost strands of the expression at which it arrives in these four poets, all of them among its boldest and most original and therefore most revealing representatives, is a certain common element behind their differences; this we find in a novel use of rhythmic movement, a sudden new moving force, turn, stamp and fashion in the minting of the gold and silver of their language and as the secret of this departure a quite other innate or conscious aim, not always manifest in the visible form of the substance, though that too is there in plenty, but in the way of seeing the object on which the inner eye is turned, whether it be idea, thing or person, significant emotion or glint of soul-power in man or revealing object or suggestive hint in Nature. This aim we may perhaps best express if we take up and modify a phrase of Meredith's when

he speaks of the hampered human voice that could never say

Our inmost in the sweetest way—

hampered by the austerity of its wisdom or the excess of its sense and passion. But if it is rarely that this sweetest way is found—yet do we not get near to it sometimes in Yeats and Tagore?—at least this new turn of the poetic voice is characteristically an endeavour to see and to say our inmost in the inmost way.

The natural turn of poetry, that which gives to it its soul of superiority to other ways of human utterance, is the endeavour of the interpretative cast of its mind always to look beyond the object, even to get behind it and evoke from a something that was waiting for us within its own inevitable speech and rhythm. That inwardness is the triumph of great poetical speech, whether the poet has his eye like Homer on physical object and power of action and the externalised thought and emotion which they throw up into the surface roll of life, or else like Shakespeare on the surge of the life-spirit and its forms of character and passion and its waves of self-interpreting thought and reflection, or on the play of the detached or half-detached seeing intellect or the inspired reason, or on the strainings of the desire-soul of man striving to find the delight of things in the thousand-coloured threads of the double web of our existence. The manner and yield of poetry vary according to the depth we penetrate into that inner something which is hidden by layer upon layer of many an intervening medium, but which offers and gives itself wonderfully in all of them, yet seems to retreat always and invites to a profounder pursuit and discovery; it varies according to the insistence of the eye on the object or its liberation into the greater significance of which the object is only the seizable symbol, or according as we are stopped by the medium or break through it to some truth of the one thing in all which throws out in these various sheaths such different richesses of form, colour and suggestion of idea and sound, but is yet one in all things to the soul that can discover its eternal unity.

But this new way of seeing is a first effort to get through the object and the medium and employ them only as suggestive

instruments, to break beyond the life-force and the emotion, the imagination and the idea, not to be stopped by these things, though using the inmost life-stress, the inmost releasing force of the emotion, the inmost plunge of the imagination or its most searching power of form, colour and symbol, the inmost penetrating subtlety of the idea and to arrive at what we may call the soul-sense, the soul-sound and as far as may be the soul-word interpretative of some yet deeper revealing truth in all their objects. There is in most recent poetry that counts, though less here, more there, some element of this kind of straining, force, pressure on sound and word and vision, and though it often turns into strange, obscure and devious paths, obstructed by the insistence of the superficial desire-soul or weighted by the intellect,—the two powers in us which modern humanity has developed into an exaggerated predominance,—still it reaches out towards this effort to see our inmost in the inmost way, and when it gets free, delivers voices of a supreme power, vision and purity. And what it must lead to in the end if it gets to its end, does not stop short or turn aside after some other lure, must be some direct seeing by the soul of the soul or self everywhere in its own delivered force of vision,—the direct vision of Indian aspiration, *ātmani ātmānam ātmanā*,—not the sensuous or the imaginative or the intellectual or the vital insistence, but a greater Potency using and surmounting them, the Soul's own delivered self-vision in all things and delight of its own greatness and light and beauty. That is the turn of mind which is now making itself heard in effort, though not in full mastery, stammered here, there sung with a slight, delicate and subtle sweetness or with an initial load of rare or crowding suggestion, but waiting still the splendour of the master song that shall rise into the light of the spirit,—

So pure that it salutes the suns,
The voice of one for millions,
In whom the millions rejoice
For giving their one spirit voice.

The inmost seeing must bring out of itself to be poetically effective the inmost word and sound, must find out a luminous purity of its steps or a profound depth of its movement, must be said in the inmost way. Rhythm is the most potent, founding element of poetic expression, and though most modern poets depend or at least lean more heavily on force of thought and substance than on the greater musical suggestions of rhythm,—Shelley, Swinburne, Yeats are exceptions,—there must always be a change in this basis of the poet's art when there is a substantial change of the constituting spirit and motive. Especially when there is this more subtle spiritual aim, the rhythmical movement becomes of a new importance. Whether as an aid to help out by the subtle meaning of the cadence the total spiritual suggestion of the speech or, more supremely, to bring in out of the depths, as great music does, some surge or outwelling of the infinite movement and cry of the spirit and bear like a jewel of light on its breast the outbreak of the inevitable revealing word, it must be persuaded to find some new unity of measure and speech, the thought echoing with the very native sound of its Idea. We find accordingly the beginning, sometimes something more, of another spirit in the movement of this poetry. These poets use for the most part old established metrical forms or variations of them; when there are departures, they do not go very far from the familiar base: but in their way of using them we are as far as possible in its intrinsic principle from the method of the older poets. The change may be described as a more complete subordination of the metrical insistence to the inner suggestion of the movement. The old poets depended greatly on the metrical fall, made much of the external mould and its possible devices and filled it with the tones of life or thought or the excitement of the thing that possessed them and moved them to speech. Shakespeare's lines,

Wilt thou upon the high and giddy mast
Seal up the shipboy's eyes and rock his brains
In cradle of the rude imperious surge,

are a supreme instance of the manner, or Milton's

Those thoughts that wander through eternity, or any of his stately rolling lines or periods of organ music will do for a great illustration. Pope and Dryden simply overdid the reliance on measure and chained themselves up in a monotony of pointed metrical effect. The succeeding poets got back to the greater freedoms of tone and used them in a new way, but the principle remains the same,—as in Shelley's

Rarely, rarely comest thou,
Spirit of Delight,

or Wordsworth's

For old unhappy far-off things
And battles long ago,—

both of them examples of the ordinary base used with a deep simplicity of single tone and a melodious insistence; or otherwise, where the tone on the contrary makes the most of the mould,

And wild-roses and ivy serpentine,

or,

Breaking the silence of the seas
Among the farthest Hebrides.

The base of the old poetry is a march, a walk or a lilt, a measured flow, roll or surge,—or it is with less competent metrists a tripping trot, dance or gallop: but even in the freest movements there is a prevailing metrical insistence. In the new movement the old base is there, but whatever show it may make, its real importance tends to drop into a very second place. Insistence of tone has taken full possession of or even conquered the insistence of the fall. A spiritual intonation, not content to fill and at its strongest overflow the metrical mould, but insistent to take it into itself and carrying it rather than carried in it, is the secret of its melody or its harmony. There is here the sound of the coming in, perhaps only the first suggestion of a new music.

The main reliance on the metrical stress can leave room in powerful hands for very great rhythms, but it has its limitations, from which different poets try to get release by different devices. Milton sought it in variations of pause and the engulfing swell of periods of large and resonant harmony, Swinburne by the cymbal clang of his alliterations and a rush and surge of assonant lyrical sound, Browning by a calculated roughness. Shakespeare himself under a great stress of crowding life and thought suggestions simply broke the back and joints of his instrument and tortured it into shapes from which he got out masterfully irregular harmonies sometimes of a great power, a process of which we may perhaps see in Whitmanesque free verse the far-off logical consequence. These more recent poets, whatever metrical devices they may use, depend upon something else, on a method which at its clearest becomes a principle of pure sound intonation.

Phillips' blank verse which is of a very original mould, is built on this principle. The poet first gets as his basis the most simple, direct and easy form possible of the metre, which he can loosen as much as possible, suppress or shift or add as many stresses as he chooses, or on the contrary weigh extraordinarily upon his stresses so as to give an impression of long space or burdened lingering or some echo of infinite duration; but in either case the object is to get free room for the play of tone. Four lines come together,

The history of a flower in the air
Liable but to breezes and to time,
As rich and purposeless as is the rose,
Thy simple doom is to be beautiful,

in which there are only three stresses, in the last one might almost say two and a half, a small number of quantitatively long syllables are the physical support of the verse,—as if quantity were trying to come back to first importance in a language of stresses,—and the rest is made up of varying minor tones. Or the long drawn out syllables are brought in in great abundance,

in a variety of combinations, closely packed and largely spaced, as in

The fiery funeral of foliage old,

or,

With slow sweet surgery restore the brain,

or again,

The vault closed back, woe upon woe, the wheel
Revolved, the stone rebounded, for that time
Hades her interrupted life resumed.

These and others are the means used, but at their back is the principle of a free intonation. It is the tone that builds the verse, gives it its real form and the metrical mould, forced to become and to do whatever the tone chooses, whatever is needed for the intonation of the inmost thought, is a flexible convenience and a needed restraint,—for if loosened or freely spaced, it is not broken,—but no longer a chain and hardly felt even as a limitation. The significance is that the poet has a rhythm of thought and spirit already sounding somewhere within him and in bringing it out he imposes it consciously on his outer instrument with an imperious sovereignty and does not get to it, like the older masters, as the result of a faithful observance of the metrical harmony.

The other poets use a different, less open and forceful outer method, but the same principle emerges in greater or less degree as if by some spiritual necessity. Meredith's poetry belongs to an earlier technique, observes faithfully the metrical law, but the subtler thing is already coming: some curious turn is given to the beat which persistently compels it to serve some dominant soul-tone of the thought and seeing and to dance attendance on that, as in the four lines already quoted from *The Lark Ascending*, or else there is the turn towards long spaces and lingering tones where the metrical sound floats and seems always on the point of drowning in some deep sea of inner intonation,—

Through widening chambers of surprise to where
Throbs rapture near an end that aye recedes,
Because his touch is infinite and lends
A yonder to all ends,—

a description which might well be applied to the whole drift and cause of this spiritual principle of rhythm. A. E. is not a great rhythmist, he is too preoccupied with his vision, more of a truth-seer than a truth-hearer of the Spirit, but when the hearing comes, the *śruti*, somehow or other without any expenditure of device the full spiritual intonation rises up and takes possession of the music,—to give one instance only,

Like winds and waters were her ways:
They heed not immemorial cries;
They move to their high destinies
Beyond the little voice that prays.

And in Yeats, a supreme artist in rhythm, this spiritual intonation is the very secret of all his subtlest melodies and harmonies and reveals itself whether in the use of old and common metres which cease to be either old or common in his hands or in delicate new turns of verse. We get it in his blank verse, taken at random,—

A sweet miraculous terrifying sound,—
or in the mounting flight of that couplet on the flaming multitude

That rise, wing upon wing, flame above flame
And like a storm cry the ineffable name,

or heard through the slowly errant footfalls of that other,

In all poor foolish things that live a day
Eternal Beauty wandering on her way,—

but most of all in the lyrical movements,—

With all the earth and the sky and the water remade, like a
casket of gold
For my dream of your image that blossoms, a rose in the deeps
of my heart.

There we have, very near to the ear of the sense, that inaudible music floating the vocal music, the song unheard, or heard only behind and in the inner silence, to catch some echo of which is the privilege of music but also the highest intention of poetical rhythm.

Beyond all analysis or set provision of means that is the constant attempt to which poetry must move, if this new realm is to open to its footsteps, not to suit the metre to the intellectual or even the emotional sense or to cast it in the moulds of life, but to seize some sound, some intonation of the voice of the soul, the lyric or the epic *chandas* or the large or simple measures of its meditation and creation, which, as the old Vedic theory would say, initiate, roll out and support all the steps of the universe. This intoned music in which the outer form becomes an external subtle means and suggestion, but the building power is other and brings in a spiritual accompaniment which is the real thing we have to listen to, opens at least one line on which we can arrive at that greater hearing whose wave can bring with it the inspiring word of a higher vision. For the musical tone of the older poetry is the simply sensuous, the emotional, the thought or the life tone with the spiritual cadence as the result of some strong intensity of these things, but here is some beginning of a direct spiritual intonation.

Chapter XXII

Recent English Poetry – 3

THE RHYTHMIC change which distinguishes the new poetry, may not be easy to seize at the first hearing, for it is a subtle thing in its spirit more than in its body, commencing only and obscured by the outward adherence to the apparent turn-out and method of older forms; but there is a change too, more readily tangible, in the language of this poetry, in that fusion of a concentrated substance of the idea and a transmuting essence of the speech which we mean by poetic style. But here too, if we would understand in its issues the evolution of poetic speech in a language, it is on the subtler things of the spirit, the significant inner changes that we must keep our eye; for it is these that determine the rest and are the heart of the matter. We take little account of the psychology of poetic genius and are content with saying that the word of the poet is the speech of the imagination or that he works by an inspiration. But this is an insufficient account; for imagination is of many different kinds and inspiration touches the mind at different levels and breaks out through different media before it issues through the gates of the creative imagination. What we mean by inspiration is that the impetus to poetic creation and utterance comes to us from a superconscious source above the ordinary mentality, so that what is written seems not to be the fabrication of the brain-mind, but something more sovereign breathed or poured in from above. That is the possession by the divine *enthousiasmos* of which Plato has spoken. But it is seldom that the whole word leaps direct from that source, that cavern of natal light ready-shaped and with the pure stamp of its divine origin,—ordinarily it goes through some secondary process in the brain-mind itself, gets its impulse and unformed substance perhaps from above, but subjects it to an intellectual or other earthly change; there is in that change always indeed

some superior power born of the excitement of the higher possession, but also some alloy too of our mortality. And the character, value and force of the word of the poet vary according to the action of those parts of our mentality which dominate in the change,—the vital mind, the emotional temperament, the imaginative or reflective intellect or the higher intuitive intelligence. The Tantric theory of Speech, the inspired seeing and creative goddess enthroned in our various soul-centres in her several forms and with her higher and higher stations, becomes here an actual and luminously perceptible truth of our being. But also there is in us a direct medium between that divine and this human mentality, an intuitive soul-mind supporting the rest, which has its share both in the transmission and the formal creation, and it is where this gets out into overt working, discloses its shaping touch or makes heard its transmitting voice that we get the really immortal tones of speech and heights of creation. And it is the epochs when there is in the mind of a race some enthusiastic outburst or some calm august action of this intuitive power, intermediary of the inspirations of the spirit or its revelations, that make the great ages of poetry.

In English literature this period was the Elizabethan. Then the speech of poetry got into it a ring and turn of direct intuitive power, a spontaneous fullness of vision and divine fashion in its utterance which it had not at all before and has hardly had afterwards. Even the lesser poets of the time are touched by it, but in Shakespeare it runs in a stream and condenses to a richly-loaded and crowding mass of the work and word of the intuition almost unexampled in any poetry. The difference can be measured by taking the work of Chaucer or of subsequent poets almost at their best and of Shakespeare at a quite ordinary level and feeling the effect on the poetic listener in our own intuitive being. We take Chaucer with his easy adequate limpidity,—

He was a very parfit gentle knight,

and then pass on to Shakespeare's rapid seizing of the intuitive inevitable word and the disclosing turn of phrase which admits us at once to a direct vision of the thing he shows us,—

Of moving accidents by flood and field,
Of hair-breadth scapes in the imminent deadly breach,

where with quite as simple a thing to say and a perfect force of directness in saying it, it is yet a vastly different kind of directness. The one speaks from the poetic intellect and satisfies by a just and pleasing expression, in the other the words get, one might say, into the entrails of vision and do not stop short at the clear measure of the thing seen, but evoke their very quality and give us immediately the inmost vital fibre and thrill of the life they describe and interpret. It is not merely a difference of the measure of the genius, but of its source. This language of Shakespeare's is a unique and wonderful thing; it has everywhere the royalty of the sovereign intuitive mind looking into and not merely at life and in this most myriad-minded of poets it takes like life itself many tones, but that intuitive readiness to get through, seize the lurking word and bring it out from the heart of the thing itself is almost always its secret. From that, he might have said, could he have given a better account of his own working, and not by any mere mirroring of things in Nature,

It was my hint to speak, such was the process.

We are most readily struck in Shakespeare by the lines and passages in which the word thus seized and brought out is followed swiftly on the heels by another and another of its kind, many crowding together or even fused and run into each other in a single phrase of many suggestions,—for this manner is peculiarly his own and others can only occasionally come near to it. Such passages recur to the mind as those in the soliloquy on sleep or the well-known lines in *Macbeth*,

Pluck from the memory a rooted sorrow,
Raze out the written troubles of the brain,
And with some sweet oblivious antidote
Cleanse the stuffed bosom of that perilous stuff
Which weighs upon the heart.

His is often a highly imaged style, but Shakespeare's images are not, as with so many poets, decorative or brought in to enforce and visualise the intellectual sense, they are more immediately revelatory, intimate to the thing he speaks and rather the proper stuff of the fact itself than images. But he has too a clearer, less crowded, still swifter fashion of speech in which they are absent; for an example,

She should have died hereafter;
There would have been a time for such a word,—

which has yet the same deep and penetrating intuitive spirit in its utterance. Or the two manners meet together and lean on each other,—

I have lived long enough; my way of life
Is fallen into the sere, the yellow leaf,

or become one, as in the last speeches of Antony,—

I am dying, Egypt, dying; only
I here importune death awhile, until
Of many thousand kisses the poor last
I lay upon thy lips.

But all have the same characteristic stamp of the intuitive mind rapidly and powerfully at work; but always too,—and this is the important distinction,—that mediator between the secret spirit and our ordinary surface mentality works in him through and behind the life vision to give the vital impression, the vital psychology, the life-burden of the thought, the emotion, the act or the thing seen in Nature.

The movement that immediately followed, abandoned this power which Shakespeare and the Elizabethans had brought into English poetry; it sought after a language cut into the precision or full with the suggestions of the poetical intellect, and it gained something by its sacrifice; it purified the language, got rid of Elizabethan conceit and extravagance, laid a clearer basis of thought, went back to ordinary speech and raised it into a

fit instrument of the poetical imagination. But it lost this Shakespearian directness of intuitive vision and spontaneous power of utterance. Gray in a notable passage observes and laments the loss, without penetrating into its cause and nature, and he tried sometimes in his own way, within the cadre of an intellectualised language, to recover something of the power. The later poets get a compensation in other directions by a heightening of the clarified thought and imagination, but the basic substance of the speech seems to have irrecoverably changed and its more tenuous spirit and make impose on the searching audacities of the intuition the curbing restraints and limits of the imaginative intelligence. Shelley's

Our sweetest songs are those that tell of saddest thought,
Keats'

A thing of beauty is a joy for ever,
or his
To that large utterance of the early Gods,
or Wordsworth's

the heavy and the weary weight
Of all this unintelligible world,
give the force and pitch and measure of this often clear, strong, large and luminous, but less intensely surprising and uplifting manner. English poetry has got away from the Elizabethan outbreak nearer to a kinship with the mind and manner of the Greek and Latin poets and their intellectual descendants, though still, it is to be noted, keeping something, a subtle and intimate turn, a power of fire and ether which has become native to it, a legacy from the Shakespearian speech which was not there in its beginnings. This imaginatively intellectual basis of speech remains constant down to the end of the Victorian era.

But at the same time there emerges, at times, a certain effort to recapture the Shakespearian potency and intensity accompanied by a new and higher element in the workings of the poetic

inspiration. When we try to put a name on it,—a thing which the poet himself seldom does successfully, for the creative instinct does not usually care to burden itself with a too intellectual self-consciousness,—we can see that this is an attempt to return to the fullness and the awakening turn of the direct intuitive expression on a subtler and more ethereal level. The clarified intellect observing life from above is in itself a higher thing than the vital and emotional mind which responds more immediately and powerfully to life, but is caught in its bonds; and if the direct intuitive power can be got to work on the level just above the ordinary thinking mind where that mind opens through the full intuitive intelligence to a greater supra-intellectual mass and subtlety of light, it will bring in the revelation and inspiration of mightier and profounder things than when it works from behind the mind—even the vividly thinking mind of life and its vital sight and feeling. For here, on the lower level, we get at most, as in Shakespeare, at the spirit in life with all its power of vital thought and its potency of passion and emotion; but there we shall get the greater spirit which embraces life, but shows us too all that is behind it, all that it dimly means and strives in embarrassed act and thought to bring into expression. Of this effort and this new thing we get magical first indications in the pre-Victorian poets, as in Wordsworth's

And beauty born of murmuring sound
Shall pass into her face,

or see the first motion towards it, the first seeking for a suitable style, as in Keats'

Deep in the shady sadness of a vale
Far sunken from the healthy breath of morn,
Far from the fiery noon and eve's one star,

but also though less often, a sudden leaping out of the thing itself,—

Solitary thinkings such as dodge
Conception to the very bourne of heaven,

or

The journey homeward to habitual self.

These lines of Keats are Shakespearian in their quality, they have recovered the direct revealing word and intimate image of the full intuitive manner, but they enter into a world of thought and inner truth other than Shakespeare's; by the passage through the detaching intellect and beyond it they have got to the borders of the realm of another and greater self than the life-self, though there we include and take up life into the deeper self-vision. In the Victorian poets we get occasionally the same tendency in a stronger but less happy force; for it is weighted down by an increased intellectuality, in Browning by the robust strenuousness of the analytic intelligence, in Tennyson by the tendency to mere trimming of expression or glitter and wealth of artistic colour; but we have its voice sometimes, as in this line of the *Lotos-Eaters*, —

Portions and parcels of the dreadful past.

But it has not yet arrived, it is still seeking for itself, beating fitfully at the gates of the greater intuitive vision and expression.

But in more recent work it is precisely the recovery of this supreme power of speech on that loftier and subtler level which to one who comes freshly to this poetry breaks out with a sense of satisfying surprise and discovery. It is not complete; it is not everywhere; it is only just rising from the acquired basis of the previous heights of expression to its own realm; but it is there in a comparative abundance and it is the highest strain of its intensities. We find it in Meredith; when he writes of "Colour, the soul's bridegroom," he has got the intimate revealing image of this fuller and higher intuitive manner, or in his lark's

silver chain of sound
Of many links without a break:

when he writes, again,

Nor know they joy of sight
 Who deem the wave of rapt desire must be
 Its wrecking and last issue of delight,

he has got the perfected turn of the direct intuitive word of thought in its more crowded manner of suggestion,—the kinship in the last line to the Shakespearian manner is close,—as too its more clear and limpid speech in other turns,

The song seraphically free
 From taint of personality;

and in the lines,

Dead seasons quicken in one petal spot
 Of colour unforget,

he has it ready for an intuitive and vivid spiritual interpretation of Nature. We find it in Phillips'

Dreadful suspended business and vast life
 Pausing,

or in his trees

Motionless in an ecstasy of rain.

In the Irish poets it comes with less of the Shakespearian kinship, though Yeats has often enough a different but corresponding manner, but most characteristically in a delicate and fine beauty of the word of vision and of an intuitive entrance into the mystery of things, as in lines like A. E.'s

Is thrilled by fires of hidden day
 And haunted by all mystery,

or passages already quoted from Yeats, or, to give one other instance, his

When God goes by with white footfall.

This is a style and substance which recovers something that had been lost and yet is new and pregnant of new things in English literature.

It is sufficient at present to indicate this new power of language. But we must see whence it arises and to what possibility it points in the widening of the realms of poetic interpretation. It points to a greater thing than has yet been achieved and it is itself a higher achievement,—apart from all question of the force and genius of individual poets. Shakespeare is still—though need he be always?—immeasurably the largest name in English poetry; but still, however preeminent his genius, there remain greater things to be seen by the poet than Shakespeare saw and greater things to be said in poetry than Shakespeare said,—and here we have an indication of the way on which they lie and of the gates which open to their hiding-place and own home of light and self-revelation.

Chapter XXIII

Recent English Poetry – 4

THE INSPIRING spirit and shaping substance of this new poetry, that which gives it its peculiar turn, raises the power of its style to the intuitive closeness or directness and presses on it to bring in another law of its movement, has been indicated to some extent in the core of its meaning, but it is necessary to dwell on it more perusingly, that we may get a closer glimpse of the things towards which we are moving. The change that is coming or at least striving to come, might be described on the surface as a great and subtle deepening and enlarging of the thought-mind in the race and a new profounder, closer, more intimate way of seeing, feeling, appreciating, interpreting life and Nature and existence. The thought of the middle and even the later nineteenth century was wide in its way, especially in its range and breadth of surface or in comparison with the narrower thought of the preceding ages, but it was acute rather than profound, superficial even in its attempt at penetration. It sought for its food over a great country, but it did not wing high in the breadth of the altitudes or plunge down into the largeness of the depths. Perhaps the distinction is best marked by that significant movement of philosophic thought which now repelled by these limitations rejects the supremacy of the intellect and seeks for the secret of things in the intuition, in the inmost suggestions of life, in the innate will and principle of action and points more or less obscurely through these things to a spirit or self or nameless somewhat superconscious to or at least greater than our intellectual mind and reason. The nineteenth century was intellectual, not intuitive, critical rather than creative, or creative mostly by the constructive force of the critical mind,—critically constructive, we may then say, rather than creative by any direct insight and interpretation,—curiously observational of the phenomenon of life and Nature, concerned with many

interests, patient, accurate and analytic in its method of scrutiny, occupied by a stress of many problems, moved by strong human and democratic sympathies, attracted by intellectual ideals, but mechanical and outward in stress and rather curious and inventive than deep or fine in its aesthetic feeling. It has looked much at the body and life and active idea, but little at the deeper soul and spirit of things. Poetry has been affected by the turn of the human mind in this age; it has been brilliant, curious, careful, inventive, interested and interesting, moving over a great range of subjects, closely observational and even sometimes analytical, or elaborately aesthetic, or expressive of some intellectual idealism, but without much height of wing or force from the depths or strong or fine spiritual suggestion. Or there has been only some occasional suggestion or isolated foretaste of these things. There has been much stress of thought, but not much deeply moved or spontaneous greatness of creation.

The mind and soul of the race is now moving forward on the basis of what it has gained by a century of intellectual stir and activity, towards a profounder mood and a more internal force of thought and life. The intellectual way of looking at things is being gradually transcended or is raising itself to a power beyond itself; it is moving through the observing mind and reflective reason towards an intimate self-experience, from thought to vision, from intellectual experiment to intuitive experience, from life and Nature as observed by the eye of the intellect in their appearance to life and Nature as seen and felt by the soul in their spirit and reality. Mankind is still engaged in thinking and searching with an immense stress of mental power, but it is now once more in search of its soul and of the spirit and deeper truth of things, although in a way very different from that of its past cultural ages and on the whole with a greater power and subtlety of the mind, though not as yet, but that too seems predestined to come, with a greater power of the spirit. It is, to return to a phrase already used, in search of our inmost and attempting already to find, though it has not yet altogether found, our inmost way of its sense, vision, idea, expression. This change, reflected in the poetry of the time is

not an abrupt turn or a casting away of the immediate past from which it was born, but a rapid development of new viewpoints, a shedding of restrictions and limitations and husks and externalities, a transformation by the entrance of a new force of the soul into possession of the gains of the intellectual age and a swift completion and filling of them out in a new flood of light and an at once nearer and more extended sense of their meaning. The whole view and sense of existence has deepened into a greater subjectivity. For the subjectivity of the nineteenth century was a matter of the temperament, an activity of the strongly marked psychological individuality turned upon things held under the lens as an object of the intelligence; but now there are coming a universal subjectivity of the whole spirit, an attempt towards closeness and identity, a greater community of the individual with the universal soul and mind. The wider interest in Man has not lessened in breadth, but it is changing its character. More strenuous than before, it is less concentrated on his outer life and creation, and even where it deals with them, it opens more understandingly to his future and to his inner possibilities, to the psychological and the spiritual sense of his past, to the deeper significance of his present, to his self-creation. The profounder ranges of his being are now sounded and there is an initial feeling and even some actual seeing of the greater individual and the communal or universal self of our kind. Nature is seen more in her hidden suggestions and soul meanings and in the finer impressions by which we enter into them and establish with her a spiritual relation or identity. The things that lie behind the material world are almost for the first time being touched and seen with a close and revealing intimacy. The communion of the human soul with the Divine is becoming once more a subject of thought and utterance, not now limited to the old religious and personal form, but enlightened by a sense of the Infinite and Eternal which has arisen from and vivified the larger cosmic sense for which the thinking and discovery of the last century was a training. This change amounts to a revolution of the whole attitude of man towards existence, but it is commencing by an extension of the intellectual stress and a

consequent breaking down of its bounds. A self-exceeding of the intellect and a growth of man into some first freedom and power of an intuitive mentality supported by the liberated intelligence is in its initial travail of new birth. These things have not all arrived, but they are on the way and the first waves of the surge have already broken over the dry beaches of the age of reason.

This considerable change was intellectually anticipated and to some extent prepared in the last century itself by a strain, a little thin in body, but high and continuous, of strenuous intellectuality which strove to rise beyond the level of the ordinary thought of the time to the full height and power of what the intellect of the race could then think out or create in the light of the inheritance of our ages. A small number of writers—in the English language Emerson, Carlyle, Ruskin are the best known among these names,—build for us a bridge of transition from the intellectual transcendentalism of the earlier nineteenth century across a subsequent low-lying scientific, utilitarian, externalised intellectualism, as if from bank to bank across morass or flood, over to the age now beginning to come in towards us. But in the region of poetic thought and creation Whitman was the one prophetic mind which consciously and largely foresaw and prepared the paths and had some sense of that to which they are leading. He belongs to the largest mind of the nineteenth century by the stress and energy of his intellectual seeking, by his emphasis on man and life and Nature, by his idea of the cosmic and universal, his broad spaces and surfaces, by his democratic enthusiasm, by his eye fixed on the future, by his intellectual reconciling vision at once of the greatness of the individual and the community of mankind, by his nationalism and internationalism, by his gospel of comradeship and fraternity in our common average manhood, by almost all in fact of the immense mass of ideas which form the connecting tissue of his work. But he brings into them an element which gives them another potency and meaning and restores something which in most of the literature of the time tended to be overcast and sickled over by an excessive intellectual tendency more leaned to observe life than strong and swift to live it and which in the

practicality of the time was caught up from its healthful soul of nature and converted into a huge grinding mechanism. He has the intimate pulse and power of life vibrating in all he utters, an almost primitive force of vitality, delivered from the enormous mechanical beat of the time by a robust closeness to the very spirit of life,—that closeness he has more than any other poet since Shakespeare,—and ennobled by a lifting up of its earthly vigour into a broad and full intellectual freedom. Thought leads and all is made subject and object and substance of a free and a powerful thinking, but this insistence of thought is made one with the pulse of life and the grave reflective pallor and want of blood of an overburdened intellectualism is healed by that vigorous union. Whitman writes with a conscious sense of his high function as a poet, a clear self-conception and consistent idea of what he has to cast into speech,—

One's-self I sing, a simple separate person
Yet utter the word Democratic, the word En Masse . . .
Of Life immense in passion, pulse and power,
Cheerful, for freest action formed under the laws divine,
The Modern Man I sing.

No other writer of the time has had this large and definite consciousness of the work of a modern poet as a representative voice of his age, this inspiring vital sentiment of the nation conceived as a myriad-souled pioneer of human progress, of mankind, of universal Nature, of the vast web of a universal thought and action. His creation, triumphing over all defect and shortcoming, draws from it a unique broadness of view, vitality of force and sky-wide atmosphere of greatness.

But beyond this representation of the largest thought and life and broadest turn to the future possible to his age, there is something else which arises from it all and carries us forward towards what is now opening to man around or above, towards a vision of new reaches and a profounder interpretation of existence. Whitman by the intensity of his intellectual and vital dwelling on the things he saw and expressed, arrives at some first profound sense of the greater self of the individual, of the greater self in

the community of the race and in all its immense past action opening down through the broadening eager present to an immeasurably future, of the greater self of Nature and of the eternal, the divine Self and Spirit of existence who broods over these things, who awaits them and in whom they come to the sense of their oneness. That which the old Indian seers called the *mahān ātmā*, the Great Self, the Great Spirit, which is seen through the vast strain of the cosmic thought and the cosmic life,—the French poets, influenced in their form and substance by Whitman, have seized on this element with the clear discernment and intellectual precision and lucidity of the Latin mind and given it the name of unanimism,—is the subject of some of his highest strains. He gets to it repeatedly through his vision of the past opening to the ideal future, the organic universal movement of bygone nations and ages and the labour and creation of the present and some nobler coming turn to a freedom of unified completion,—

The journey done, the journeyman come home,
And man and art with Nature fused again . . .
The Almighty leader now for once has signalled with his wand.

And some part of his work, as in the *Passage to India*, opens out even into a fuller and profounder sense of its meaning. He sees it here as a new voyage of the human spirit,—“O farther sail!”

Sail forth, steer for the deep waters only . . .
For we are bound where mariner has not yet dared to go,
And we will risk the ship, ourselves and all . . .
O daring joy, but safe! are they not all the seas of God?

And with a singularly clear first seeing of the ideal goal and the ideal way of the conversion of the intellectual and vital into the spiritual self, he calls the spirit of man to the adventure.

The circumnavigation of the world begin,
Of man, the voyage of his mind’s return,
To reason’s early paradise,
Back, back to wisdom’s birth, to innocent intuitions,
Again with fair creation.

He casts forward too the ideal heart of this wider movement of man into the sense of the divine unity which is its completion, brings out the divinity of the soul in man and its kinship to the divinity of the Eternal,—

O Thou transcendent,
 Nameless, the fibre and the breath,
 Light of the light, shedding forth universes, thou centre of them,
 Thou mightier centre of the true, the good, the loving, . . .
 How should I think, how breathe a single breath, how speak, if
 out of myself
 I could not launch to those superior universes?
 Swiftly I shrivel at the thought of God,
 At nature and its wonders, Time and Space and Death,
 But that I, turning, call to thee, O soul, O actual Me,
 And, lo, thou gently masterest the orbs,
 Thou matest Time, smilest content at Death,
 And fillest, swellest full the vastnesses of space,—

and he foresees the coming of that kinship of God and man to conscious fruition in oneness,

Greater than stars or suns,
 Bounding, O soul, thou journeyest forth;
 What love than thine and ours could wider amplify?
 What aspirations, wishes outvie thine and ours, O soul?
 What dreams of the ideal? what plans of purity, perfection,
 strength?
 What cheerful willingness for others' sake to give up all?
 For others' sake to suffer all?
 Reckoning ahead, O soul, when thou, the time achieved, . . .
 Surrounded, copest, frontest God, yieldest, the aim attained,
 As filled with friendship, love complete, the Elder Brother found,
 The Younger melts in fondness in his arms.

These passages,—one of the seers of old time reborn in ours might so have expressed himself in a modern and intellectualised language,—send forward an arclight of prophetic expression on what is at the very heart of the new movement of humanity. It is

in some degree an indication of that which the twentieth century is slowly turning to lay hold of, to develop and to make its own in a closer actuality of insight and experience.

The idea in these and cognate passages anticipates the new age, but the language and method are still that of the poetic intellect straining to some fullest power of its intelligence and speech-force, and the thought and writing of those who follow Whitman, like the French "unanimist" poets, bear the same character. At the centre of English poetry, in England itself, we have found another turn of intuitive speech which is more native to that closer actuality of experience for which we seek, a turn and power brought about perhaps by the greater fire of poetic genius and imagination, the special gift of the Anglo-Celtic mind, which leaps at once to the forceful, native, instinctive energy of poetic expression of the thing it has to say. The full idea of that thing, the large and clearly conceived substance of thought and vision which should fill this mould of intuitive utterance, we do not get in any considerable degree or range,—again perhaps because of the inferior turn for large and straight thinking on the great scale, a full-orbed thinking with a sustained and total conception, which is the defect of the English mind,—but we have constant partial intuitions in detail and a treatment of life and thought and nature which presses towards the greater coming significance. That is as yet only one strain of recent poetry, but it is the most powerful and original and turns sometimes almost with a full face towards the future. These are strong touches only, but they give already some impression and mould of the thing that has to be, the ultimate creation. A new intuitive interpretation of the soul and mind of man, of the soul and mind in Nature, a thought which casts its fathom beyond the passion of life and the clarity of the intelligence and starts sounding a suggestion of the hidden and the infinite in all it touches is the shaping power and the mode of this utterance.

The citations I have already given to illustrate the new rhythm and language indicate also this power and thought-turn in the substance. A few more citations from the same poets may help to bring it out with more precision. The early and greater

poetry of Phillips has much of this stamp,—afterwards he unhappily turned to a more outward dramatic motive which was not the true and original bent of his genius, but even there his best is that which prolongs the high beauty of his first inspiration. He has no great conscious range of poetical thinking, but all the more remarkable is the power with which this new influence comes out in what he can give us. We note a new treatment of life and human emotion. The love of Idas for Marpessa is not satisfied with the old forms of passion and feeling and imaginative idealism, there are here other notes which carry the individual emotion out of itself and strive to cast it into unity with the life of Nature and the whole past life and love of humanity and the eternal continuity of passion and seeking and all the suggestion of the Infinite. The very passion for physical beauty takes on this almost mystic character; it is the passion for a body

packed with sweet
Of all this world, that cup of brimming June,
That jar of violet wine set in the air,
That palest rose sweet in the night of life.

But, says Idas,

Not for this only do I love thee, but
Because Infinity upon thee broods,
And thou art full of whispers and of shadows.
Thou meanest what the sea has striven to say
So long, and yearned up to the cliffs to tell;
Thou art what all the winds have uttered not,
What the still night suggesteth to the heart.
Thy voice is like to music heard ere birth,
Some spirit lute touched on a spirit sea;
Thy face remembered is from other worlds.
It has been died for though I know not where,
It has been sung of though I know not when.
I am aware of other times and lands,
Of births far back, of lives in many stars.

Here we have the reconciliation, already suggested by Whitman, of the full power and meaning of the individual with the full power and meaning of the universal, eternal and infinite, but it is concentrated and brought to bear on a single feeling for its enlargement with a great power of intuitive and revealing suggestion. This enlarging of the particular to meet and become one with the universal and infinite — Tennyson's knowing of what God and man is from a deep and intimate perception of all that is meant by Nature in a single little flower in the crannies — is a very characteristic and indicative feature of this new poetry.

The same turn emerges in a more indirect and subtle, but not less significant way of treatment even in lines which apparently seek only to concentrate for the thought the essence of a common human idea and emotion. When the poet speaks of

Beautiful friendship tried by sun and wind,
Durable from the daily dust of life,

or of Marpessa's maternal human longing,

And he shall give me passionate children, not
Some radiant god that will despise me quite,
But clambering limbs and little hearts that err,

the thought in itself is not uncommon, but what makes it uncommon is the turn of the utterance which by an intuitive pressure towards some deeper significance of the personal thought and emotion carries it beyond the personality of the idea and feeling into a suggestion of profound universality, a rhythm and light of some entire vibration from the depths of life caught up and held by a human self-knowledge. The same force of suggestion emerges in the treatment of Nature, whether it takes the form of an intensity of sensation,

the moment deep
When we are conscious of the secret dawn
Amidst the darkness that we feel is green,

or passes through that intensity to the sense of the very soul and emotion of what seems to us in less seeing moods an inconscient and inanimate Nature, as in the

trees
Motionless in an ecstasy of rain.

Meredith with his greater force of thinking gives us the clear significance of what is here only a powerful indication, a seeing identity of the soul of man with the hidden soul in earth-nature.

I neighbour the invisible
So close that my consent
Is only asked for spirits masked
To leap from trees and flowers.
And this because with them I dwell
In thought, while calmly bent
To read the lines dear earth designs
Shall speak her life on ours.

And the same turn emerges too in direct thought on the large aspects of life, as in such a phrase as

Lonely antagonist of destiny,
or that which describes

The listless ripple of oblivion,

lines which give us by some deep suggestion to the spiritual sight a whole abiding soul aspect of man and the universe in a single revealing expression. The effort of poetry of this kind of inspiration may be defined by adapting another expression of Meredith's,

To spell the letters of the sky and read
A reflex upon earth else meaningless.

And the fullness of that which it points to beyond itself, is a movement to unite the life of the earth, not lessened, not denied, not cast away, but accepted, with its own hidden spiritual reality, the one crucial movement necessary for man before he can reach that perfection which the race shall have on its heights, when

The vile plucked out of them, the unlovely slain,
Not forfeiting the beast with which they are crossed,
To stature of the Gods they shall attain.
They shall uplift their earth to meet her Lord,
Themselves the attuning chord.

This is in substance the same strain that arises finally from the more puissant voice of Whitman, but it has if a less forceful, a profounder touch,—a more delicate, intimate and spiritual closeness of seeing, experience and utterance is its charm and distinction.

The indications that we get in these and other English poets open to a clearer totality in the two great Irish voices. They have, helped by the strand of a spiritual lucidity of thought in the finer Celtic mind, a sustained and conscious idea of the thing that is most inwardly stirring them to utterance. That shapes into a singular light, delicacy and beauty the whole of Yeats' poetry. Here I must be content to note three of its more distinctive features, the remarkable interweaving into one, whether against a background of Irish tradition and legend or by a directer thought, of the earthly life of man with the unseen psychical life which, if we could only see it, as we can when we go back from the frontage of things into the inner soul-spaces, presses upon the earth-life and supports it, so that at times our world seems only its detached projection; the reading through the signs of life of the brighter letters of an ideal and eternal Beauty; the insistence, even when touching exclusively our external life, on the suggestion of finer soul-values which exceed its material meanings. The poetry of A. E. is still more remarkable. What the others suggest or give us in more or less luminous glimpses, he casts into concentrated expression from a nearer spiritual knowledge,—as when he

strikes out in a brief verse the living spiritual perception of the universal and infinite source of love,—

We bade adieu to love the old,
We heard another lover then,
Whose forms are myriad and untold,
Sigh to us from the hearts of men.

He lives on the spiritual plane to which so much of this poetry is an indistinct or a less distinct aspiration, and his whole self-expression is bathed, perhaps rendered sometimes a little remote and unseizable by its immersing, in an unusual light, the light of the spirit breaking through the veils of the intelligence in which it has to find its means of speech. This is not the frank marriage and close unity of the earth and heavens of which Whitman and Meredith speak, but a rare, high and exclusive pinnacle of the soul's greater sight. The rest of this side of recent poetry is a climbing or pointing up from the earth-levels to the heights of Truth; but from one region of those loftiest elevations this sight looks down and opens its eye of light on the life of man and the cycles of the universe.

Chapter XXIV

New Birth or Decadence?

AT THIS point we stand in the evolution of English poetry. Its course, we can see, is only one line of a common evolution, and I have singled it out to follow because, for two reasons, it seems to me the most complete and suggestive. It follows most faithfully the natural ascending curve of the human spirit in this kind of rhythmic imaginative self-expression and, again, because of all the modern European languages it has the largest freest poetic energy and natural power, it responds on the whole most directly of all of them—in spite of certain serious limitations of the English mind—to the fountain motives, the essential impetus of the soul of poetry in its ascent and shows them, if not always in their greatest or most perfect, yet almost always in their most characteristic and revealing form. Poetry like everything else in man evolves. Its fundamental nature, function and law are no doubt always the same, because each thing and each activity too in our being must be faithful to the divine idea in it, to its dharma, and can try to depart from it only on peril, whatever momentarily it may seem to gain, of eventual inferiority and futility, or even of disintegration and death. But still there is an evolution within this law of its being. And evolution means a bringing out of new powers which lay concealed in the seed or the first form; the simple develops to the more complex,—more complex even in some apparent simplicity,—the superficial gives place to the more and more profound, the lesser gives place to the greater nature of the common manifestation. But poetry is a psychological phenomenon, the poetic impulse a highly charged force of expression of the mind and soul of man, and therefore in trying to follow out its line of evolution it is the development of the psychological motive and power, it is the kind of feeling, vision, mentality which is seeking in it for its word and idea and form of beauty and it is the power of

the soul through which it finds expression or the level of mind from which it speaks which we must distinguish to get a right idea of the progress of poetry. All else is subsidiary, variations of rhythm, language, structure; they are the form, the vehicle; they derive subtly and get their character and meaning from the psychological power and the fundamental motive.

If poetry is a highly charged power of aesthetic expression of the soul of man, it must follow in its course of evolution the development of that soul. I put it that from this point of view the soul of man like the soul of Nature can be regarded as an unfolding of the spirit in the material world. Our unfolding has its roots in the soil of the physical life; its growth shoots up and out in many directions in the stalk and branches of the vital being; it puts forth the opulence of the buds of mind and there, nestling in the luxuriant leaves of mind and above it, out from the spirit which was concealed in the whole process must blossom the free and infinite soul of man, the hundred-petalled rose of God. Man indeed, unlike other forms of being in terrestrial Nature, though rooted in body, proceeds by the mind and all that is characteristic of him belongs to the wonderful play of mind taking up physicality and life and developing and enriching its gains till it can exceed itself and become a spiritual mind, the divine Mind in man. He turns first his view on the outward physical world and on his own life of outward action and concentrates on that or throws into its mould his life-suggestions, his thought, his religious idea, and, if he arrives at some vision of an inner spiritual truth, he puts even that into forms and figures of the physical life and physical Nature.¹ Poetry at a certain stage or of a certain kind expresses this turn of the human mentality in word and in form of beauty. It can reach great heights in this kind of mental mould, can see the physical forms of the gods, lift to a certain greatness by its vision and disclose a divine quality in even the most obvious, material and outward being and action of man; and in this type we have Homer. Arrived to a greater depth of living, seeing from

¹ As in the hymns of the Vedic Rishis.

a vivid half outward half inward turn of mind his thought and action and self and world and Nature, man begins to feel more sensitively the passion and power of life, its joy and pain, its wonder and terror and beauty and romance, to turn everything into moved thought and sentiment and sensation of the life-soul, the desire soul in him which first forces itself on his introspection when he begins to go inward. Poetry too takes this turn, rises and deepens to a new kind of greatness; and at the summit in this kind we have Shakespeare.

This way of seeing and creating, in which thought is involved in life and the view is that of the life-spirit feeling, thinking, imagining, carried forward in its own surge of self, cannot permanently hold the greater activities of the mental being. He ceases to identify himself entirely with the passion, the emotion, the thought-suggestions of life; for he needs to know from a freer height what it is and what he is, to get a clear detached idea of its workings, to dominate his emotions and vital intuitions and see with the calm eye of his reason, to probe, analyse, get at the law and cause and general and particular rule of himself and Nature. He does this at first on large and comparatively bare lines dwelling only on the salient details for a first strong and provisionally adequate view. Poetry following this movement takes on the lucid, restrained, intellectual and ideal classic form, in which high or strong ideas govern and develop the presentation of life and thought in an atmosphere of clear beauty and the vision of the satisfied intelligence; that is the greatness of the Greek and Latin poets. But afterwards the intelligence sets more comprehensively to work, opens itself to all manner of the possibilities of truth and to a crowding stream and mass of interests, a never satisfied minuteness of detail, an endless succession of pregnant generalisations. This is the type of modern intellectualism.

The poetry which arises from this mentality is full of a teeming many-sided poetic ideation which takes up the external and life motives not for their own sake, but to make them food for the poetic intelligence, blends the classical and romantic motives, adds to them the realistic, aesthetic, impressionist, idealistic

ways of seeing and thinking, makes many experiments and combinations, passes through many phases. The true classic form is then no longer possible; if it is tried, it is not quite genuine, for what informs it is no longer the classic spirit; it is too crowded with subtle thought-matter, too brooding, sensitive, responsive to many things; no new Parthenon can be built whether in the white marble subdued to the hand or in the pure and lucid spacings of the idea and the word: the mind of man has become too full, complex, pregnant with subtle and not easily expressible things to be capable of that earlier type of perfection. The romantic strain is a part of this wider intelligence, but the pure and genuine romanticism of the life-spirit which cares nothing for thought except as it enriches its own being, is also no longer possible. If it tries to get back to that, it falls into an affectation, an intellectual pose and, whatever genius may be expended upon it, this kind cannot remain long alive. That is the secret of the failure of modern romanticism in Germany and France. In Germany, Goethe and Heine alone got away from this falsity and were able to use this strain in its proper way as one enriching chord serving the complex harmonic purpose of the intelligence; the rest of German literary creation of the time is interesting and suggestive in its way, but very little of it is intimately alive and true, and afterwards Germany failed to keep up a sustained poetic impulse; she turned aside to music on the one side and on the other to philosophy and science for her field. The French mind got away very soon from romanticism and, though greatly enriched by its outbreak into that phase, went on to a more genuine intellectual and intellectually aesthetic form of creation. In England with the greater spontaneity of its poetic spirit the mistake never went so far. The poetry of the time of Wordsworth and Shelley is sometimes called romantic poetry, but it was not so in its essence, but only in certain of its moods and motives. It lives really by its greater and more characteristic element, by its half spiritual turn, by Wordsworth's force of ethical thought and communion with Nature, by Shelley's imaginative transcendentalism, Keats' worship of Beauty, Byron's Titanism and force of personality, Coleridge's supernaturalism or, as it should more

properly be called, his eye for other nature, Blake's command of the inner psychic realms. Only in drama was there, owing to the prestige of Shakespeare, an attempt at pure romanticism, and therefore in this domain nothing great and living could be done, but only a record of failures. Realism is a more native turn of this kind of intelligence, and it invades poetry too to a certain extent, but if it dominates, then poetry must decline and cease. The poetry of an age of many-sided intellectualism can live only by its many-sidedness and by making everything as it comes a new material for the aesthetic creations of the observing, thinking, constructing intelligence.

But then comes the now vital question in this cultural evolution,—in what is this intellectualism to culminate? For if it leads to nothing beyond itself, it must end, however brilliant its work, in a poetic decadence, and that must come nearer, the more intellect dominates the other powers of our being. The intellect moves naturally between two limits, the abstractions or solving analyses of the reason and the domain of positive and practical reality; its great achievements are in these two fields or in a mediation between them, and it can do most and go farthest, can achieve its most native and characteristic and therefore its greatest and completest work either in philosophy or in Science. The age of developed intellectualism in Greece killed poetry; it ended in the comedy of Menander, the intellectual artificialities of Alexandrianism, the last flush of beauty in the aesthetic pseudo-naturalism of the Sicilian pastoral poetry; philosophy occupied the field. In the more rich and complex modern mind this result could not so easily come and has not yet come. At the same time the really great, perfect and securely characteristic work of the age has not been in the field of art and poetry, but in critical thought and science. Criticism and science, by a triumphant force of abstraction and analysis turned on the world of positive fact, have in this period been able to become enormously effective for life. They have been able to reign sovereignly, not so much by their contributions to pure knowledge, but by their practical, revolutionary and constructive force. If modern thought with its immense scientific achievement has not enriched life at its

base or given it a higher and purer action,—it has only created a yet unrealised possibility in that direction by its idealistic side,—it has wonderfully equipped it with powerful machinery and an imposing paraphernalia and wrought conspicuous and unprecedented changes in its superstructure. But poetry in this atmosphere has kept itself alive not by any native and spontaneous power born of agreement between its own essential spirit and the spirit of the age, but by a great effort of the imagination and aesthetic intelligence labouring for the most part to make the best of what material it could get in the shape of new thought and new view-points for the poetic criticism or the thoughtful presentation of life. It has been an aesthetic byplay rather than a leading or sometimes even premier force in the cultural life of the race such as it was in the ancient ages and even, with a certain limited action, in more recent times.

That a certain decline, not of the activity of the poetic mind, but of its natural vigour, importance and effective power has been felt, if not quite clearly appreciated in its causes, we can see from various significant indications. Throughout the later nineteenth century one observes a constant apprehension of approaching aesthetic decadence, a tendency to be on the look-out for it and to find the signs of it in innovations and new turns in art and poetry. The attempt to break the whole mould of poetry and make a new thing of it so that it may be easier to handle and may shape itself to all the turns, the high and low, noble and common, fair or unseemly movements of the modern mind and its varied interest in life, is itself due to a sense of some difficulty, limitation and unease, some want of equation between the fine but severely self-limiting character of this kind of creative power and the spirit of the age. At one time indeed it was hardly predicted that since the modern mind is increasingly scientific and less and less poetically and aesthetically imaginative, poetry must necessarily decline and give place to science,—for much the same reason, in fact, for which philosophy replaced poetry in Greece. On the opposite side it was sometimes suggested that the poetic mind might become more positive and make use of the materials of science or might undertake a more intellectual

though always poetic criticism of life and might fill the place of philosophy and religion which were supposed for a time to be dead or dying powers in human nature; but this came to the same thing, for it meant a deviation from the true law of aesthetic creation and only a more protracted decadence.

And behind these uneasy suggestions lay the one fact that for causes already indicated an age of reason dominated by the critical, scientific or philosophic intelligence is ordinarily unfavourable and, even when it is most catholic and ample, cannot be quite favourable to great poetic creation. The pure intellect cannot create poetry. The inspired or the imaginative reason does indeed play an important, sometimes a leading part, but even that can only be a support or an influence; the thinking mind may help to give a final shape, a great and large form, *sam̄ mahemā manīṣayā*, as the Vedic poets said of the Mantra, but the word must start first from a more intimate sense in the heart of the inner being, *ḥṛdā taṣṭam*; it is the spirit within and not the mind without that is the fount of poetry. Poetry too is an interpreter of truth, but in the forms of an innate beauty, and not so much of intellectual truth, the truths offered by the critical mind, as of the intimate truth of being. It deals not so much with things thought as with things seen, not with the authenticities of the analytic mind, but with the authenticities of the synthetic vision and the seeing spirit. The abstractions, generalisations, minute precisions of our ordinary intellectual cerebration are no part of its essence or texture; but it has others, more luminous, more subtle, those which come to us after passing through the medium and getting drenched in the light of the intuitive and revealing mind. And therefore when the general activity of thought runs predominantly into the former kind, the works of the latter are apt to proceed under rather anaemic conditions, they are affected by the pervading atmosphere; poetry either ceases or falls into a minor strain or takes refuge in virtuosities of its outer instruments and aids or, if it still does any considerable work, lacks the supreme spontaneity, the natural perfection, the sense of abundant ease or else of sovereign mastery which the touch of the

spirit manifests even amidst the fullest or austerest labour of its creation.

But this incompatibility is not the last word of the matter. The truth which poetry expresses takes two forms, the truth of life and the truth of that which works in life, the truth of the inner spirit. It may take its stand on the outer life and work in an intimate identity, relation or close dwelling upon it, and then what it does is to bring some light of intuitive things, some power of revelation of the beauty that is truth and the truth that is beauty into the outer things of life, even into those that are most common, obvious, of daily occurrence. But also it may get back into the truth of the inner spirit and work in an intimate identity, relation or close dwelling upon it, and then what it will do is to give a new revelation of our being and life and thought and Nature and the material and the psychical and spiritual worlds. That is the effort to which it seems to be turning now in its most characteristic, effective and beautiful manifestations. But it cannot fully develop in this sense unless the general mind of the age takes that turn. There are signs that this will indeed be the outcome of the new direction taken by the modern mind, not an intellectual petrifaction or a long spinning in the grooves of a critical intellectualism, but a higher and more authentic thinking and living. The human intelligence seems on the verge of an attempt to rise through the intellectual into an intuitive mentality; it is no longer content to regard the intellect and the world of positive fact as all or the intellectual reason as a sufficient mediator between life and the spirit, but is beginning to perceive that there is a spiritual mind which can admit us to a greater and more comprehensive vision. This does not mean any sacrifice of the gains of the past, but a raising and extending of them not only by a seeking of the inner as well as the outer truth of things, but also of all that binds them together and a bringing of them into true relation and oneness. A first opening out to this new way of seeing is the sense of the work of Whitman and Carpenter and some of the recent French poets, of Tagore and Yeats and A. E., of Meredith and some others of the English poets. There are critics who regard this tendency as only another

sign of decadence; they see in it a morbid brilliance, a phosphorescence of decay or the phosphorescence which we observe on the sea when the sun has gone down and night occupies the waters. But this is to suppose that poetry can only repeat what it has done in the past and can accomplish no new and great thing and that a clear, strong or brilliant dealing with the outer mind and world is its last word and the one condition of its healthy creativeness. There is much that is morbid, perverse or unsound in some recent poetry; but this comes from an artificial prolongation of the past or a temporary mixed straining, it does not belong to that element in the new poetry which escapes from it and turns firmly to the things of the future. Decadence arrives when in the decline of a culture there is nothing more to be lived or seen or said, or when the poetic mind settles irretrievably into a clumsy and artificial repetition of past forms and conventions or can only escape from them into scholastic or aesthetic prettinesses or extravagance. But an age which brings in large and new vital and spiritual truths, truths of our being, truths of the self of man and the inner self of Nature and opens vast untrod ranges to sight and imagination, is not likely to be an age of decadence, and a poetry which voices these things,—unless its creative power has been fatally atrophied by long conventionalism, and that is not at present our case,—is not likely to be a poetry of decadence.

The more perfectly intuitive poetry of the future, supposing it to emerge successfully from its present incubation, find itself and develop all its possibilities, will not be a mystic poetry recondite in expression or quite remote from the earthly life of man. Some element of the kind may be there; for always when we open into these fields, mysteries more than the Orphic or the Eleusinian revive and some of them are beyond our means of expression; but mysticism in its unfavourable or lesser sense comes when either we glimpse but do not intimately realise the now secret things of the spirit or, realising, yet cannot find their direct language, their intrinsic way of utterance, and have to use obscurely luminous hints or a thick drapery of symbol, when we have the revelation, but not the inspiration, the sight but

not the word. And remoteness comes when we cannot relate the spirit with life or bring the power of the spirit to transmute the other members of our being. But the new age is one which is climbing from a full intellectuality towards some possibility of an equal fullness of the intuitive mind, and the full intuitive mind, not that of glimpses, but of a luminous totality, opens to the mind of revelation and inspiration. The aesthetic mind, whether it take form in the word of the poet or in the word of the illumined thinker, the prophet or the seer, can be one of the main gateways. And what the age will aim at is neither materialism nor an intuitive vitalism nor a remote detached spirituality, but a harmonious and luminous totality of man's being. Therefore to this poetry the whole field of existence will be open for its subject, God and Nature and man and all the worlds, the field of the finite and the infinite. It is not a close, even a high close and ending in this or any field that the future offers to us, but a new and higher evolution, a second and greater birth of all man's powers and his being and action and creation.

The Future Poetry

Part II

Chapter I

The Ideal Spirit of Poetry

TO ATTEMPT to presage the future turn or development of mind or life in any of its fields must always be a hazardous venture. For life and mind are not like physical Nature; the processes of physical Nature run in precise mechanical grooves, but these are more mobile and freer powers. The gods of life and still more the gods of mind are so incalculably self-creative that even where we can distinguish the main lines on which the working runs or has so far run, we are still unable to foresee with any certainty what turn they will yet take or of what new thing they are in labour. It is therefore impossible to predict what the poetry of the future will actually be like. We can see where we stand today, but we cannot tell where we shall stand a quarter of a century hence. All that one can do is to distinguish for oneself some possibilities that lie before the poetic mind of the race and to figure what it can achieve if it chooses to follow out certain great openings which the genius of recent and contemporary poets has made free to us; but what path it will actually choose to tread or what new heights attempt, waits still for its own yet unformed decision.

What would be the ideal spirit of poetry in an age of the increasingly intuitive mind: that is the question which arises from all that has gone before and to which we may attempt some kind of answer. I have spoken in the beginning of the Mantra as the highest and intensest revealing form of poetic thought and expression. What the Vedic poets meant by the Mantra was an inspired and revealed seeing and visioned thinking, attended by a realisation, to use the ponderous but necessary modern word, of some inmost truth of God and self and man and Nature and cosmos and life and thing and thought and experience and deed. It was a thinking that came on the wings of a great soul rhythm, *chandas*. For the seeing could not be separated from

the hearing; it was one act. Nor could the living of the truth in oneself which we mean by realisation, be separated from either, for the presence of it in the soul and its possession of the mind must precede or accompany in the creator or human channel that expression of the inner sight and hearing which takes the shape of the luminous word. The Mantra is born through the heart and shaped or massed by the thinking mind into a chariot of that godhead of the Eternal of whom the truth seen is a face or a form. And in the mind too of the fit outward hearer who listens to the word of the poet-seer, these three must come together, if our word is a real Mantra; the sight of the inmost truth must accompany the hearing, the possession of the inmost spirit of it by the mind and its coming home to the soul must accompany or follow immediately upon the rhythmic message of the Word and the mind's sight of the Truth. That may sound a rather mystic account of the matter, but substantially there could hardly be a more complete description of the birth and effect of the inspired and revealing word, and it might be applied, though usually on a more lowered scale than was intended by the Vedic Rishis, to all the highest outbursts of a really great poetry. But poetry is the Mantra only when it is the voice of the inmost truth and is couched in the highest power of the very rhythm and speech of that truth. And the ancient poets of the Veda and Upanishads claimed to be uttering the Mantra because always it was this inmost and almost occult truth of things which they strove to see and hear and speak and because they believed themselves to be using or finding its innate soul rhythms and the sacrificial speech of it cast up by the divine Agni, the sacred Fire in the heart of man. The Mantra in other words is a direct and most heightened, an intensest and most divinely burdened rhythmic word which embodies an intuitive and revelatory inspiration and ensouls the mind with the sight and the presence of the very self, the inmost reality of things and with its truth and with the divine soul-forms of it, the Godheads which are born from the living Truth. Or, let us say, it is a supreme rhythmic language which seizes hold upon all that is finite and brings into each the light and voice of its own infinite.

This is a theory of poetry, a view of the rhythmic and creative self-expression to which we give that name, which is very different from any that we now hold, a sacred or hieratic *ars poetica* only possible in days when man believed himself to be near to the gods and felt their presence in his bosom and could think he heard some accents of their divine and eternal wisdom take form on the heights of his mind. And perhaps no thinking age has been so far removed from any such view of our life as the one through which we have recently passed and even now are not well out of its shadow, the age of materialism, the age of positive outward matter of fact and of scientific and utilitarian reason. And yet curiously enough—or naturally, since in the economy of Nature opposite creates itself out of opposite and not only like from like,—it is to some far-off light at least of the view of ourselves at our greatest of which such ideas were a concretised expression that we seem to be returning. For we can mark that although in very different circumstances, in broader forms, with a more complex mind and an enormously enlarged basis of culture and civilisation, the gain and inheritance of many intermediate ages, it is still to something very like the effort which was the soul of the Vedic or at least the Vedantic mind that we almost appear to be on the point of turning back in the circle of our course. Now that we have seen minutely what is the material reality of the world in which we live and have some knowledge of the vital reality of the Force from which we spring, we are at last beginning to seek again for the spiritual reality of that which we and all things secretly are. Our minds are once more trying to envisage the self, the spirit of Man and the spirit of the universe, intellectually, no doubt, at first, but from that to the old effort at sight, at realisation within ourselves and in all is not a very far step. And with this effort there must rise too on the human mind the conception of the godheads in whom this Spirit, this marvellous Self and Reality which broods over the world, takes shape in the liberated soul and life of the human being, his godheads of Truth and Freedom and Unity, his godheads of a greater more highly visioned Will and Power, his godheads of Love and universal Delight, his godheads of universal and

eternal Beauty, his godheads of a supreme Light and Harmony and Good. The new ideals of the race seem already to be affected by some first bright shadow of these things, and even though it be only a tinge, a flush colouring the duller atmosphere of our recent mentality, there is every sign that this tinge will deepen and grow, in the heavens to which we look up if not at once in the earth of our actual life.

But this new vision will not be as in the old times something hieratically remote, mystic, inward, shielded from the profane, but rather a sight which will endeavour to draw these godheads again to close and familiar intimacy with our earth and embody them not only in the heart of religion and philosophy, nor only in the higher flights of thought and art, but also, as far as may be, in the common life and action of man. For in the old days these things were Mysteries, which men left to the few, to the initiates and by so leaving them lost sight of them in the end, but the endeavour of this new mind is to reveal, to divulge and to bring near to our comprehension all mysteries,—at present indeed making them too common and outward in the process and depriving them of much of their beauty and inner light and depth, but that defect will pass,—and this turn towards an open realisation may well lead to an age in which man as a race will try to live in a greater Truth than has as yet governed our kind. For all that we know, we now tend to make some attempt to form clearly and live. His creation too will then be moved by another spirit and cast on other lines.

And if this takes place or even if there is some strong mental movement towards it, poetry may recover something of an old sacred prestige. There will no doubt still be plenty of poetical writing which will follow the old lines and minister to the old commoner aesthetic motives, and it is as well that it should be so, for the business of poetry is to express the soul of man to himself and to embody in the word whatever power of beauty he sees; but also there may now emerge too and take the first place souls no longer niggardly of the highest flame, the poet-seer and seer-creator, the poet who is also a Rishi, master singers of Truth, hierophants and magicians of a diviner and more

universal beauty. There has no doubt always been something of that in the greatest masters of poetry in the great ages, but to fulfil such a role has not often been the one fountain idea of their function; the mind of the age has made other demands on them, needed at that time, and the highest things in this direction have been rare self-exceedings and still coloured by and toned to the half light in which they sang. But if an age comes which is in common possession of a deeper and greater and more inspiring Truth, then its masters of the rhythmic word will at least sing on a higher common level and may rise more often into a fuller intenser light and capture more constantly the greater tones of which this harp of God, to use the Upanishad's description of man's created being, is secretly capable.

A greater era of man's living seems to be in promise, whatever nearer and earthier powers may be striving to lead him on a side path away to a less exalted ideal, and with that advent there must come a new great age of his creation different from the past epochs which he counts as his glories and superior to them in its vision and motive. But first there must intervene a poetry which will lead him towards it from the present faint beginnings. It will be aided by new views in philosophy, a changed and extended spirit in science and new revelations in the other arts, in music, painting, architecture, sculpture, as well as high new ideals in life and new powers of a reviving but no longer limited or obscurantist religious mind. A glint of this change is already visible. And in poetry there is already the commencement of such a greater leading; the conscious effort of Whitman, the tone of Carpenter, the significance of the poetry of A. E., the rapid immediate fame of Tagore are its first signs. The idea of the poet who is also the Rishi has made again its appearance. Only a wider spreading of the thought and mentality in which that idea can live and the growth of an accomplished art of poetry in which it can take body, are still needed to give the force of permanence to what is now only an incipient and just emerging power. Mankind satiated with the levels is turning its face once more towards the heights, and the poetic voices that will lead us thither with song will be among the high seer voices. For the great poet interprets

to man his present or reinterprets for him his past, but can also point him to his future and in all three reveal to him the face of the Eternal.

An intuitive revealing poetry of the kind which we have in view would voice a supreme harmony of five eternal powers, Truth, Beauty, Delight, Life and the Spirit. These are indeed the five greater ideal lamps or rather the five suns of poetry. And towards three of them the higher mind of the race is in many directions turning its thought and desire with a new kind and force of insistence. The intellectual side of our recent progress has in fact been for a long time a constant arduous pursuit of Truth in certain of its fields; but now the limited truth of yesterday can no longer satisfy or bind us. Much has been known and discovered of a kind which had not been found or had only been glimpsed before, but the utmost of that much appears now very little compared with the infinitely more which was left aside and ignored and which now invites our search. The description which the old Vedic poet once gave of the seeking of divine Truth, applies vividly to the mind of our age, "As it climbs from height to height, there becomes clear to its view all the much that is yet to be done." But also it is beginning to be seen that only in some great awakening of the self and spiritual being of man is that yet unlied truth to be found and that infinite much to be achieved. It is only then that the fullness of a greater knowledge for man living on earth can unfold itself and get rid of its coverings and again on his deeper mind and soul, in the words of another Vedic poet-seer, "New states come into birth, covering upon covering awaken to knowledge, till in the lap of the Mother one wholly sees." This new-old light is now returning upon our minds. Men no longer so completely believe that the world is a machine and they only so much transient thinking matter, a view of existence in the midst of which however helpful it might be to a victorious concentration on physical science and social economy and material well-being, neither religion nor philosophic wisdom could renew their power in the fountains of the spirit nor art and poetry, which are also things of the soul like religion and wisdom, refresh themselves from their native

sources of strength. Now we are moving back from the physical obsession to the consciousness that there is a soul and greater self within us and the universe which finds expression here in the life and the body.

But the mind of today insists too and rightly insists on life, on humanity, on the dignity of our labour and action. We have no longer any ascetic quarrel with our mother earth, but rather would drink full of her bosom of beauty and power and raise her life to a more perfect greatness. Thought now dwells much on the idea of a vast creative will of life and action as the secret of existence. That way of seeing, though it may give room for a greater power of art and poetry and philosophy and religion, for it brings in real soul-values, has by its limitation its own dangers. A spirit which is all life because it is greater than life, is rather the truth in which we shall most powerfully live. Aditi, the infinite Mother, cries in the ancient Vedic hymn to Indra the divine Power now about to be born in her womb, "This is the path of old discovered again by which all the gods rose up into birth, even by that upward way shouldst thou be born in thy increase; but go not forth by this other to turn thy mother to her fall," but if, refusing the upward way, the new spirit in process of birth replies like the god, "By that way I will not go forth, for it is hard to tread, let me come out straight on the level from thy side; I have many things to do which have not yet been done; with one I must fight and with another I must question after the Truth," then the new age may do great things, as the last also did great things, but it will miss the highest way and end like it in a catastrophe. There is no reason why we should so limit our new birth in time; for the spirit and life are not incompatible, but rather a greater power of the spirit brings a greater power of life. Poetry and art most of all our powers can help to bring this truth home to the mind of man with an illuminating and catholic force, for while philosophy may lose itself in abstractions and religion turn to an intolerant otherworldliness and asceticism, poetry and art are born mediators between the immaterial and the concrete, the spirit and life. This mediation between the truth of the spirit and the truth

of life will be one of the chief functions of the poetry of the future.

The two other sister lamps of God, colour suns of the Ideal, which our age has most dimmed and of whose reviving light it is most sadly in need, but still too strenuously outward and utilitarian to feel sufficiently their absence, Beauty and Delight, are also things spiritual and they bring out the very heart of sweetness and colour and flame of the other three. Truth and Life have not their perfection until they are suffused and filled with the completing power of delight and the fine power of beauty and become one at their heights with this perfecting hue and this secret essence of themselves; the spirit has no full revelation without these two satisfying presences. For the ancient Indian idea is absolutely true that delight, Ananda, is the inmost expressive and creative nature of the free self because it is the very essence of the original being of the Spirit. But beauty and delight are also the very soul and origin of art and poetry. It is the significance and spiritual function of art and poetry to liberate man into pure delight and to bring beauty into his life. Only there are grades and heights here as in everything else and the highest kinds of delight and beauty are those which are one with the highest Truth, the perfection of life and the purest and fullest joy of the self-revealing Spirit. Therefore will poetry most find itself and enter most completely into its heritage when it arrives at the richest harmony of these five things in their most splendid and ample sweetness and light and power; but that can only wholly be when it sings from the highest skies of vision and ranges through the widest widths of our being.

These powers can indeed be possessed in every scale, because on whatever grade of our ascent we stand, the Spirit, the divine Self of man is always there, can break out into a strong flame of manifestation carrying in it all its godheads in whatever form, and poetry and art are among the means by which it thus delivers itself into expression. Therefore the essence of poetry is eternally the same and its essential power and the magnitude of the genius expended may be the same whatever the frame of the sight, whether it be Homer chanting of the heroes in god-moved battle

before Troy and of Odysseus wandering among the wonders of remote and magic isles with his heart always turned to his lost and far-off human hearth, Shakespeare riding in his surge of the manifold colour and music and passion of life, or Dante errant mid his terrible or beatific visions of Hell and Purgatory and Paradise, or Valmiki singing of the ideal man embodying God and egoistic giant Rakshasa embodying only fierce self-will approaching each other from their different centres of life and in their different law of being for the struggle desired by the gods, or some mystic Vamadeva or Vishwamitra voicing in strange vivid now forgotten symbols the action of the gods and the glories of the Truth, the battle and the journey to the Light, the double riches and the sacrificial climbing of the soul to Immortality. For whether it be the inspired imagination fixed on earth or the soul of life or the inspired reason or the high intuitive spiritual vision which gives the form, the genius of the great poet will seize on some truth of being, some breath of life, some power of the spirit and bring it out with a certain supreme force for his and our delight and joy in its beauty. But nevertheless the poetry which can keep the amplitude of its breadth and nearness of its touch and yet see all things from a higher height will, the rest being equal, give more and will more fully satisfy the whole of what we are and therefore the whole of what we demand from this most complete of all the arts and most subtle of all our means of aesthetic self-expression.

The poetry of the future, if it fulfils in amplitude the promise now only there in rich hint, will kindle these five lamps of our being, but raise them up more on high and light with them a broader country, many countries indeed now hidden from our view, will make them not any longer lamps in some limited temple of beauty, but suns in the heavens of our highest mind and illuminative of our widest as well as our inmost life. It will be a poetry of a new largest vision of himself and Nature and God and all things which is offering itself to man and of its possible realisation in a nobler and more divine manhood; and it will not sing of them only with the power of the imaginative intelligence, the exalted and ecstatic sense or the moved joy and

passion of life, but will rise to look at them from an intenser light and embody them in a more revealing force of the word. It will be first and most a poetry of the intuitive reason, the intuitive senses, the intuitive delight-soul in us, getting from this enhanced source of inspiration a more sovereign poetic enthusiasm and ecstasy, and then, it may even be, rise towards a still greater power of revelation nearer to the direct vision and word of the Overmind from which all creative inspiration comes.

A poetry of this kind need not be at all something high and remote or beautifully and delicately intangible, or not that alone, but will make too the highest things near, close and visible, will sing greatly and beautifully of all that has been sung, all that we are from outward body to very God and Self, of the finite and the infinite, the transient and the Eternal, but with a new reconciling and fusing vision that will make them other to us than they have been even when yet the same. If it wings to the heights, it will not leave earth unseen below it, but also will not confine itself to earth, but find too other realities and their powers on man and take all the planes of existence for its empire. It will take up and transform the secrets of the older poets and find new undiscovered secrets, transfigure the old rhythms by the insistence of the voice of its deeper subtler spirit and create new characteristic harmonies, reveal other greater powers and spirits of language, proceeding from the past and present yet will not be limited by them or their rule and forms and canon, but compass its own altered perfected art of poetry. This at least is its possible ideal endeavour, and then the attempt itself would be a rejuvenating elixir and put the poetic spirit once more in the shining front of the powers and guides of the ever-progressing soul of humanity. There it will lead in the journey like the Vedic Agni, the fiery giver of the word, *yuvā kavīḥ*, *priyo atithir amartyo mandrajihvo*, *rtacid rtāvā*, the Youth, the Seer, the beloved and immortal Guest with his honeyed tongue of ecstasy, the Truth-conscious, the Truth-finder, born as a flame from earth and yet the heavenly messenger of the Immortals.

Chapter II

The Sun of Poetic Truth

WHAT IS the kind of Truth which we can demand from the spirit of poetry, from the lips of the inspired singer, or what do we mean when we speak of Truth as one of the high powers and godheads of his work and of its light as a diviner sunlight in which he must see and shape from its burning rays within and around him the flame-stuff of his creation? We have all our own notions of the Truth and that gives an ambiguous character to the word and brings in often a narrow and limited sense of it into our idea of poetry. But first there is the primary objection, plausible enough if we look only at the glowing robe and not at the soul of creative expression, that the poet has nothing at all to do with any other kind of truth or with Truth at all for her own sake, but is a lover only of Beauty, she his only worshipped goddess, and not truth but imagination her winged servant and the radiant messenger of the Muse. If it cannot absolutely be said that most poetry is most feigning and the whole art amounts to a power of beautiful fiction, yet it is apparent that the poet most succeeds when he takes outward or actual truth only as a first hint and steeps most subtly whatever crude matter it gives to his mind in the delightful hues of imagination and transmutes it into the unfettered beauty of her shapes. That might seem at first sight to mean or so might be interpreted that truth and art are two unconnected or little connected things, and if truth is to be made at all the subject-matter of art, it yet does not become art unless it has come out transfigured and, it may be, unrecognisable in the imagination's characteristic process. But in fact it does not mean that, but only that art is not an imitation or reproduction of outward Nature, but rather missioned to give by the aid of a transmuting faculty something more inwardly true than the external life and appearance.

And next, there is the quite opposite idea, which one finds sometimes rampant and self-confident in an age of realism and the cult of vital power, that the truth which is the material of poetry and has to be set out and rhythmed in her process, is the reality of life in its most strenuous vital sense, the reality of what we see and hear and touch and vitally feel and energetically think with the most positive impact of the mind, the raw rough concrete and dynamic fact of experience to be transferred without any real change into rhythmic form, relieved with image and dressed in its just idea and word. And we are even told that poetry to be faithful to life must manage not only her seeing and expression, but her rhythmic movement so as to create some subjective correspondence with life, creep and trip and walk and run and bound along with it, reproduce every bang and stumble and shuffle and thump of the vital steps, and then we shall get a quite new large and vigorous music and in comparison with its sincere and direct power the old melodies will fade into false and flimsy sweetesses of insipid artifice. Here what is demanded is not beauty but power or rather force. If beauty can get in, if she can dress herself in these new and strong colours, we shall gratefully accept her, provided she is not too beautiful to be true and does not bring in again with her the unreal, the romantic or remotely ideal or some novel kind of perverse¹ imagination. But if ugly, brutal and sordid things are shown powerfully in their full ugliness, brutality and sordidness without any work of transmutation, so much the better since truth of life, force of vital reality of whatever kind set and made vivid in a strong outlining illumination is what we shall henceforth demand of the artist in verse. And it cannot be denied that the crudity of actual life so treated and heightened in art — for art cannot merely reproduce, it cannot help heightening — gives us a new sensation, becomes a crude and heady wine setting up an agreeable disturbance in the midriff and bowels and a violent satisfaction in the brain

¹ In the sense in which a critic of some note, I am told, applies the epithet to Yeats' poetry. I have not read the criticism, but the expression itself is a sufficient condemnation not of the poet, but of the mind — and of its poetic theory — which can use such a word in such a connection.

and can be given by a powerful writer a wide appeal demanding no effort of taste or understanding from the average man who makes the multitude. A robust muscular and masculine poetry suitable to the Anglo-Saxon genius can no doubt be the result of this kind of aesthetics.

Then again there is the old academic conception, truth of the cultivated intelligence, truth of reason, philosophic and scientific truth, or, more pertinent to the matter, truth of a certain selective imagination and taste consonant with reason and strong to give a tempered beauty to just presentation and idea, the classical or in its more formal shape the pseudo-classical aesthetic rule. And in this connection we have many familiar notions chasing each other across the field, such as on one side the compatibility or incompatibility of philosophy and poetry or on the other the definition of poetry as substantially a criticism of life though set in an artistic form and a high and serious tone. And associated with this view also we find very commonly a dislike of free imagination and rich colour and the audacities of the fancy and the far-off and shrouded voices and things visionary, subtle and remote. The aesthetic mind varies, follows its own bent, fashions its idea of poetic truth according to its own standard of satisfaction and sets up as a canon and law its own manner of response; there is a multitude of counsels, and each has this common characteristic that it overstresses one side of the norm of poetic creation. For the spirit of poetry is many-sided and flexible in its processes, but firm and invariable in the central law of its nature.

The poetic Truth of which I am speaking has nothing to do with any of these limitations. Truth, as she is seen by us in the end, is an infinite goddess, the very front and face of Infinity and Aditi herself, the illimitable mother of all the gods. This infinite, eternal and eternally creative Truth is no enemy of imagination or even of free fancy, for they too are godheads and can wear one of her faces or one of her expressive masks, while imagination is perhaps the very colour of her creative process, her births and movements are innumerable, her walk supple and many-pathed, and through all divine powers and universal

means she can find her way to her own riches, and even error is her illegitimate child and serves, though wantonly, rebelliously and through many a giddy turn, her mother's many-formed self-adaptive world-wide aim. Now it is something of this infinite Truth which poetry succeeds in giving us with a high power, in its own way of beauty, by its own opulent appointed means. The channel is different from those of her other activities because the power is of another kind. Infinite Truth has her many distinct ways of expressing and finding herself and each way must be kept distinct and the law of one must not be applied to the law of another form of her self-expression; and yet that does not mean that the material of one cannot be used as the material of another, though it must be cast by a different power into a different mould, or that all do not meet on their tops. Truth of poetry is not truth of philosophy or truth of science or truth of religion only, because it is another way of self-expression of infinite Truth so distinct that it appears to give quite another face of things and reveal quite another side of experience. A poet may have a religious creed or subscribe to a system of philosophy or take rank himself like Lucretius or certain Indian poets as a considerable philosophical thinker or succeed like Goethe as a scientist as well as a poetic creator, but the moment he begins to argue out his system intellectually in verse or puts a dressed-up science straight into metre or else inflicts like Wordsworth or Dryden rhymed sermons or theological disputations on us, he is breaking the law. And even if he does not move so far astray, yet the farther he goes in that direction even within the bounds of his art, he is, though it has often been done with a tolerable, sometimes a considerable or total success, treading on unfirm or at any rate on lower ground. It is difficult for him there to maintain the authentic poetic spirit and pure inspiration.

For this is another cult and worship and the moment he stands before the altar of the Muse, he has to change his robes of mind and serve the rites of a different consecration. He has to bring out into the front that other personality in him who looks with a more richly irised seeing eye and speaks with a more rapturous voice. The others have not normally the same

joy of the word because they do not go to its fountain-head, even though each has its own intense delight, as philosophy has its joy of deep and comprehensive understanding and religion its hardly expressible rapture. Still it remains true that the poet may express precisely the same thing in essence as the philosopher or the man of religion or the man of science, may even give us truth of philosophy, truth of religion, truth of science, provided he transmutes it, abstracts from it something on which the others insist in their own special form and gives us the something more which poetic sight and expression bring. He has to convert it into truth of poetry, and it will be still better for his art if he saw it originally with the poetic insight, the creative, intuitive, directly perceiving and interpreting eye; for then his utterance of truth is likely to be more poetic, authentic, inspired and compelling. This distinction between poetic and other truth, well enough felt but not always well observed, and their fusion and meeting-place are worth dwelling upon; for if poetry is to do all it can for us in the new age, it will include increasingly in its scope much that will be common to it with philosophy, religion and even in a broader sense with science, and yet it will at the same time develop more intensely the special beauty and peculiar power of its own insight and its own manner. The poetry of Tagore is already a new striking instance of what differently seen and followed out might have been a specifically philosophic and religious truth, but here turned into beauty and given a new significance by the transforming power of poetic vision.

The difference which separates these great things of the mind is a difference of the principal, the indispensable instrument we must use and of the appeal to the mind and the whole manner. There is a whole gulf of difference. The philosopher sees in the dry light of the reason, proceeds dispassionately by a severe analysis and abstraction of the intellectual content of the truth, a logical slow close stepping from idea to pure idea, a method difficult and nebulous to the ordinary, hard, arid, impossible to the poetic mind. For the poetic mind sees at once in a flood of coloured light, in a moved experience, in an ecstasy of the coming of the word, in splendours of form, in a spontaneous

leaping out of inspired idea upon idea, sparks of the hoof-beats of the white flame horse Dadhikravan galloping up the mountain of the gods or breath and hue of wing striking into wing of the irised broods of Thought flying over earth or up towards heaven. The scientist proceeds also by the intellectual reason but with a microscopic scrutiny which brings it to bear on an analysis of sensible fact and process and on the correct measure and relation of force and energy as it is seen working on the phenomenal stuff of existence, and joins continually link of fact with fact and coil of process with process till he has under his hand at least in skeleton and tissue the whole connected chain of apparent things. But to the poetic mind this is a dead mechanical thing; for the eye of the poet loves to look on breathing acting life in its perfected synthesis and rhythm, not on the constituent measures, still less on the dissected parts, and his look seizes the soul of wonder of things, not the mechanical miracle. The method of these other powers moves by the rigorously based and patiently self-assured steps of the systematising intelligence and the aspect of Truth which they uncover is a norm measured and cut out from the world of ideas and the world of sense by the eye of the intellectual reason. The brooding philosopher or the discovering scientist cannot indeed do without the aid of a greater power, intuition, but ordinarily he has to bring what that nearer more swiftly luminous faculty gives him into a more deliberate air under the critical light of the intelligence and establish it in the dialectical or analytical way of philosophy and science before the intellect as judge. The mind of the poet sees by intuition and direct perception and brings out what they give him by a formative stress on the total image, and the aspect to which he thrills is the living truth of the form, of the life that inspires it, of the creative thought behind and the supporting movement of the soul and a rhythmic harmony of these things revealed to his delight in their beauty. These fields and paths lie very wide apart, and if any voices from the others reach and claim the ear of the poetic creator, they must change greatly in their form and suit themselves to the warmth and colour of his atmosphere before they can find right of entry into his kingdom.

The meeting is not here at the base, but on the tops. The philosopher's reasoning intelligence discovers only a system of thought symbols and the reality they figure cannot be seized by the intelligence, but needs direct intuition, a living contact, a close experience by identity in our self of knowledge. That is work not for a dialectical, but a bright revelatory thinking, a luminous body of intuitive thought and spiritual experience which carries us straight into sight, into vision of knowledge. The first effort of philosophy is to know for the sake of pure understanding, but her greater height is to take Truth alive in the spirit and clasp and grow one with her and be consciously within ourselves all the reality we have learned to know. But that is precisely what the poet strives to do in his own way by intuition and imagination, when he labours to bring himself close to and be one by delight with the thing of beauty which awakes his joy. He does not always seize the very self of the thing, but to do so lies within his power. The language of intuitive thinking moves always therefore to an affinity with poetic speech and in the ancient Upanishads it used that commonly as its natural vehicle. "The Spirit went abroad, a thing pure, bright, unwounded by sin, without body or sinew or scar; the Seer, the Thinker, the Self-born who breaks into being all around us, decreed of old all things in their nature from long eternal years." "There sun shines not nor moon nor star nor these lightnings blaze nor this fire; all this world is luminous only with his light." Are we listening, one might ask, to the voice of poetry or philosophy or religion? It is all three voices cast in one, indistinguishable in the eternal choir. And there is too and similarly a pure intuitive science which comes into the field when we enter the ranges of the psychical and spiritual being and can from there work for the discovery of greater secrets of the physical or at least of the psycho-physical world. Indian Yoga finds itself on that greater process, and there, though as in all true science the object is an assured method of personal discovery or living repetition and possession of past discovery and a working out of all the thing found, there is too a high final intention to hold the truth, the light found in our inner power of being and turn it to a power of

our psychical self, our spirit, our self of knowledge and will, our self of love and joy, our self of life and action. This too, though not the same thing in form, is akin to the higher work of poetry when it acts, as the ancients would have had it consciously act, as a purifier and builder of the soul.

The initial function of religion again is to make clear the approaches of the soul to the Highest, to God. And it does that at first by laying on the mind a scheme of religious knowledge or guiding creed and dogma, a taming yoke of moral instruction or purifying law of religious conduct and an awakening call of religious emotion, worship, cult, and so far it is a thing apart in its own field, but in its truly revealing side of intuitive being and experience we find that the essence of religion is an aspiration and adoration of the soul towards the Divine, the Self, the Supreme, the Eternal, the Infinite, and an effort to get close to and live with or in that or to enjoy in love and be like or one with that which we adore. But poetry also on its heights turns to the same things in ourselves and the world, not indeed with religious adoration, but by a regarding closeness and moved oneness in beauty and delight. The characteristic method and first field of all these things is indeed wide apart, but at their end when they come into their deepest spirit, they begin to approach each other and touch; and because of this greater affinity philosophy, psychic and spiritual science and religion are found in the ancient Indian culture woven into one unity, and when they turn to the expression of their most intimate experience, it is always the poetic word which they use.

The steps of Poetry rise to these heights on her own side of the mountain of the gods. Poetry comes into being at the direct call of three powers, inspiration, beauty and delight, and brings them to us and us to them by the magic charm of the inspired rhythmic word. If it can do that at all perfectly, its essential work has been done. It is in its beginning concerned with close and simple natural things and, when it grows more subtle, still it has only to create a power of beauty, move the soul with aesthetic delight and make it feel and see, and its function seems at an end. The kind does not seem to matter, and it has nothing to do

primarily or directly, nor at any time in a set formal will taking that as its function and aim, with the presentation of intellectual concepts to the reason or with truth of science or with moral betterment or the working out of religious aspiration, not often even with so near a thing to it as religious emotion and love. But yet because of that greater affinity we see it actually doing what is an equivalent to these things by its own power, in a strange and beautiful mould, with an indirect and yet subtly direct touch. The poet too brings out sometimes as if by accident, sometimes with a conscious intention the same essential truths as the philosopher or the man of religion. An instance or two will be sufficient to show the approximation and the difference. Religion brings us a command to love our neighbour as ourselves and even our enemies, a thing impossible to our normal nature, a law honoured with the consent of the lips and universally ignored in the observance. A few only seeking perfection in spiritual experience discover in it the natural rule of our real and our highest being, quite possible if we can only get some abiding realisation of that secret oneness which is the foundation of the law of universal love. Then, not seeking this at all but only poetic delight or, if you are so inclined, the criticism of life, we listen to Creon's fierce reproach to Antigone that in her refusal to hate the national enemy she stands unnaturally apart from the mind and heart of all her people and hear suddenly start out the high and proud reply of one lonely and doomed but inflexibly true to her nature, her soul's will under the shadow of a cruel death, "Not to join in hate, but to join in love was I born!" The Athenian poet intended no moral instruction, calls up no religious emotion into his line, is concerned only with a crucial situation in life, the revolt of natural affection against the rigid claim of the law, nation, State. It is a simple cry of the voice of nature and life, yet there breathes behind it a greater thought which is not so far from the truth underlying religious teaching and spiritual experience. The poet, his eyes fixed on life, shows us as if by accident the seed in our normal nature which can grow into the prodigious spiritual truth of universal love. He has to do it in his own way in the mould of poetic

beauty and delight, and if we judge by such instances, we shall say that so only he has to do it, to cast as if casually the seed of the beauty and delight of some high mood of life and nature into the mind and pass on leaving it to its work on the soul's reflecting emotional experience, perhaps hardly himself knowing what he has done since he is absorbed in sight and satisfied with the joy of beautiful creation.

And yet actually we find that we cannot quite set these limits or they are not regarded by poets of a high order. The poet of the Gita has the conscious intention of laying the form of unity on the soul of the hearer and moving him to seek the full experience. "He is the greatest Yogi who, come happiness by that or come grief, sees wherever he turns his eyes all equally in the image of his self." That is something high, grave, couched in the language of the inspired reason, uplifted in the original by a sweet and noble diction and rhythm, religious and philosophical in its strain and yet poetical, because it adds to the fundamental idea the visualising and bringing home of the spiritual experience, the sustaining emotion of the thing felt and a touch of its life. And in the much older Yajur Veda we find breaking out with a different, a more moved and less reflective voice the same truth of experience, the same touch on the soul, "Where I am wounded, make me firm and whole. May all creatures gaze on me with the eye of the Friend, may I gaze on all creatures, may we all gaze on all with the eye of the Friend." There poetry and religious emotion become powerfully fused and one in the aspiration to the heart's perfection and the loving unity of all life. The same uniting alchemy and fusion can take place between truth of philosophy and poetic truth and it is continually found in Indian literature. And so too all the old Rig Veda, all the Vaishnava poetry of North and South had behind it an elaborate Yoga or practised psychical and spiritual science, without which it could not have come into birth in that form. Today much of the poetry of Tagore is the sign of such a Sadhana, a long inheritance of assured spiritual discovery and experience. But what is given whether directly or in symbol or in poetic image is not the formal steps of the Sadhana, but

the strongly felt movement and the living outcome, the vision and life and inner experience, the spirit and power and body of sweetness and beauty and delight. The tracing of close and too meticulous bounds round the steps of poetic truth or turning of its wide continental spheres into some limiting magic circle seems therefore to have no real foundation. One may almost though not quite say that there is nothing in infinite Truth that the poet cannot make his material, even if it seems to belong to other provinces of the mind, because all forms of human experience approach each other on their sides of intuition and inner life and vision and all meet in the spirit. The condition, the limitation is only in the way and manner,—but that means enormously much,—the necessity of the purely poetic way of seeing and the subjection of the thing seen to the law of poetic harmony and moved delight and beauty.

The real distinction therefore is in the primary or essential aim of poetry and in the imperative condition which that aim lays upon the art. Its function is not to teach truth of any particular kind, nor indeed to teach at all, nor to pursue knowledge nor to serve any religious or ethical aim, but to embody beauty in the word and give delight. But at the same time it is at any rate part of its highest function to serve the spirit and to illumine and lead through beauty and build by a high informing and revealing delight the soul of man. And its field is all soul experience, its appeal is to the aesthetic response of the soul to all that touches it in self or world; it is one of the high and beautiful powers of our inner and may be a power of our inmost life. All of the infinite Truth of being that can be made part of that life, all that can be made true and beautiful and living to that experience, is poetic truth and a fit subject matter of poetry. But there are always three things which we find present in the utterance and which may be taken as the tests of its measure of power. First there is a force of inspired seeing which gives us the appeal of some reality of self or mind or world, whether in this material field or the other planes of universal existence or of our own being to which imagination is one of the gates, a seeing which brings to us the power of its truth and the beauty of its image

and gives it body in the mind by the word. Then there must be the touch, presence, breath of the very life, not the outward only, but the inward life, not an imitation by force of speech or the holding up of a mirror to some external movement or form of Nature, but a creative interpretation which brings home to us as much as may be of what she is or things or we are. And again that must carry in it and arouse in us an emotion of its touch on the soul, not the raw emotion of the vital parts,—though that comes in in certain kinds of poetry,—but a spiritual essence of feeling to which our inner strands can vibrate. The intellectual, vital, sensible truths are subordinate things; the breath of poetry should give us along with them, or it may even be apart from them, some more essential truth of the being of things, their very power which springs in the last resort from something eternal in their heart and secrecy, *hrdaye guhāyām*, expressive even in the moments and transiences of life. The soul of the poet, and the soul too of the hearer by a response to his word, enters into some direct contact through vision and straight touch and emotion, possesses and feels at its strongest by a union in our own stuff of being, a moved identity. A direct spiritual perception and vision called by us intuition, however helped or prepared by other powers, can alone avail to give us these things. Imagination is only the poet's most powerful aid for this discovery and interpretative creation, fancy a brilliant opener of hidden or out-of-the-way doors. The finding of a new image is itself a joy to the poet and the hearer because it reveals some new significant correspondence or sheds a stronger disclosing light on the thing seen and makes it stand out and live more opulently, luminously, with a greater delight of itself in the mind. The poet having to bring home something, even in things common, which is not obvious to surface experience, avails himself of image, symbol, whatever is just, beautiful, meaningful, suggestive. His fictions are not charming airy nothings, but as with every true artist significant figures and creations which serve to bring very real realities close to the spirit, and their immortality is the immortality of truth.

It is in this sense that we can speak of the sun of poetic truth

in whose universal light the poet creates. But all depends on how he sees or uses the light. He can catch this or that sight in an isolated ray, or sometimes lights with it his own personality and kindles a lamp in the house of his own being, or looks through its radiance over the material earth and the forms and first movements of her children or searches with the lustre the surge of the life-soul and its passion and power or discovers the lesser or the greater secrets of the mind and heart of man, or looks upwards through a loftier flood of beams and sees the mid-worlds and heavens and the actions of the gods and the scenes and moments of an immortal life. And sometimes the dark sun of the Vedic image lodging in the blind cave gives him a negative light; a darkness visible revealing darkness immeasurable shows him the gloomy secrets of some city of dreadful Night, shadow of Hades or lowest Tartarean clot of Hell. The sun of Truth may be still for him below the verge with its light already on the tops and flushing the chill of the snows, ride regal in heaven or gravely sunken or splendid in some setting light. He may stand on the earth or wander winged like the symbolic birds of the Veda still in the terrestrial atmosphere or rise into worlds beyond nearer to the sun and see in a changed light all that is below. And one or two may perhaps be strong to look with unblinded eyes into the source of all light, see that splendour which is its happiest form of all, to which approaching or entering one can say "He am I", discover the identity of his spirit with all things and find in that oneness the word of light which can most powerfully illumine our human utterance.

And where then is the highest range of sight into which the mind of the poet can rise and according to the power of his genius find a deeper and deeper and larger and larger truth of already spoken things and of new things to be spoken and as yet unattempted in prose or rhyme? If some kind of intuitive seeing is at the back of his imaginative vision and the real power that calls down the inspired word, it will be when he can rise to its source and live in the fullness of a highest intuitive mind which is greater than the awakened sense, intuitive life-vision or inspired reason, though it will see all that they can see, that

he will get his fullest power, deepest sight, broadest scope. To throw light on the self of things in some power and beauty of it is after all the native aim of poetry, and that can be done entirely by this greatest intuitive mind, for it can bring near or going beyond itself actually reach the vision of identity, that seeing of our whole self and the self of the world which is the last object and the highest spirit of all our mental powers and seekings. The poetry which will accomplish that will be able to see, though in another way than that of philosophy and religion, the self of the Eternal, to know God and his godheads, to know the freedom and immortality which is our divinest aim, to see in the delight of a union in beauty the self of the Infinite, the self of Nature and the whole self of man. But so to see the self is to meet the spirit in everything and the spirit reveals to us the inner and the inmost truth of all that comes from it, life and thought and form and every image and every power. Much has been done by the art of rhythmic self-expression; much remains to be done. To express these greatest things and to gather up all that man has come and is yet coming to see and know and feel in a new and greater light and give to him the universal spirit and power of beauty and delight behind all this existence is a work that will open to poetry a larger territory and the perfect greatness of its function. A beginning of such an endeavour we have seen to be the noblest strain in recent work; the possibility of a refreshed and long continued vitality and a hardly exhaustible fount of inspiration lies in that direction. The Veda speaks in one of its symbolic hints of the fountain of eternal Truth round which stand the illumined powers of thought and life. There under the eyes of delight and the face of imperishable beauty of the Mother of creation and bride of the eternal Spirit they lead their immortal dance. The poet visits that marvellous source in his superconscious mind and brings to us some strain or some vision of her face and works. To find the way into that circle with the waking self is to be the seer-poet and discover the highest power of the inspired word, the Mantra.

Chapter III

The Breath of Greater Life

THE TURN of poetry in the age which we have now left behind, was, as was inevitable in a reign of dominant intellectuality, a preoccupation with reflective thought and therefore with truth, but it was not at its core and in its essence a poetic thought and truth and its expression, however artistically dressed with image and turn or enforced by strong or dexterous phrase, however frequently searching, apt or picturesque, had not often, except in one or two exceptional voices, the most moving and intimate tones of poetry. The poets of the middle nineteenth century in England and America philosophised, moralised or criticised life in energetic and telling or beautiful and attractive or competent and cultured verse; but they did not represent life with success or interpret it with high poetic power or inspired insight and were not stirred and uplifted by any deeply great vision of truth. The reasoning and observing intellect is a most necessary and serviceable instrument, but an excess of reason and intellectuality does not create an atmosphere favourable to moved vision and the uplifting breath of life, and for all its great stir of progress and discovery that age, the carnival of industry and science, gives us who are in search of more living, inner and potent things the impression of a brazen flavour, a heavy air, an inhibition of the greater creative movements, a level spirit of utility and prose. The few poets who strained towards a nearer hold upon life, had to struggle against this atmosphere which weighed upon their mind and clogged their breath. Whitman, striving by stress of thought towards a greater truth of the soul and life, found refuge in a revolutionary breaking out into new anarchic forms, a vindication of freedom of movement which unfortunately at its ordinary levels brings us nearer to the earth and not higher up towards a more illumined air; Swinburne, excited by the lyric fire within him, had too

often to lash himself into a strained violence of passion in order to make a way through the clogging thickness for its rush of sound; Meredith's strains, hymning life in a word burdened and packed with thought, are strong and intimate, but difficult and few. And therefore in this epoch of a bursting into new fields and seeking for new finer and bolder impulses of creation, one of the most insistent demands and needs of the human mind, not only in poetry, but in thought itself and in spirit, has been to lessen the tyranny of the reasoning and critical intellect, to return to the power and sincerity of life and come by a greater deepness of the intuition of its soul of meaning. That is the most striking turn of all recent writing of any importance.

This turn is in itself perfectly sound and its direction is to a certain extent on the right line, even if it does not yet altogether see its own end. But the firm grasp on a greater life has not quite come and there are many mistaken directions of this urge. The enlightening power of the poet's creation is vision of truth, its moving power is a passion of beauty and delight, but its sustaining power and that which makes it great and vital is the breath of life. A poetry which is all thought and no life or a thought which does not constantly keep in touch with and refresh itself from the fountains of life, even if it is something more than a strong, elegant or cultured philosophising or moralising in skilled verse, even if it has vision and intellectual beauty, suffers always by lack of fire and body, wants perfection of grasp and does not take full hold on the inner being to seize and uplift as well as sweeten and illumine, as poetry should do and all great poetic writing does. The function of the poet even when he is most absorbed in thinking, is still to bring out not merely the truth and interest, but the beauty and power of the thought, its life and emotion, and not only to do that, not only to make the thought a beautiful and living thing, but to make it one thing with life. But words are ambiguous things and we must see what is the full extent of our meaning when we say, as we may say, that the poet's first concern and his concern always is with living beauty and reality, with life.

As we can say that the truth with which poetry is touched,

is an infinite truth, all the truth that lives in the eternal and universal and fills, informs, vivifies, holds and shapes the spirit and form of creation, so we may say too that the life, something of which the poet has to reembodiment in the beauty of the word, is all life, the infinite life of the spirit thrown out in its many creations. The poet's business most really, most intimately is not with the outward physical life as it is or the life of the passions and emotions only for its own sake or even with some ideal life imaged by the mind or some combining and new shaping of these things into a form of beauty, but with the life of the soul and with these other things only as its expressive forms. Poetry is the rhythmic voice of life, but it is one of the inner and not one of the surface voices. And the more of this inner truth of his function the poet brings out in his work, the greater is his creation, while it does not seem to matter essentially or not at the first whether his method is professedly subjective or objective, his ostensible power that of a more outward or a more inward spirit or whether it is the individual or the group soul or the soul of Nature or mankind or the eternal and universal spirit in them whose beauty and living reality find expression in his word. This universal truth of poetry is apt to be a little hidden from us by the form and stress of preoccupation with this or that medium of outward soul-expression in the poet's work. Mankind in its development seems to begin with the most outward things and go always more and more inward in order that the race may mount to greater heights of the spirit's life. An early poetry therefore is much occupied with a simple, natural, straightforward, external presentation of life. A primitive epic bard like Homer thinks only by the way and seems to be carried constantly forward in the stream of his strenuous action and to cast out as he goes only so much of surface thought and character and feeling as obviously emerges in a strong and single and natural speech and action. And yet it is the adventures and trials and strength and courage of the soul of man in Odysseus which makes the greatness of the *Odyssey* and not merely the vivid incident and picturesque surrounding circumstance, and it is the clash of great and strong spirits with the gods leaning

down to participate in their struggle which makes the greatness of the Iliad and not merely the action and stir of battle. The outward form of Shakespeare's work is a surge of emotion and passion and thought and act and event arising out of character at ferment in the yeast of feeling and passion, but it is its living interpretation of the truth and powers of the life-soul of man that are the core of greatness of his work and the rest without it would be a vain brute turmoil. The absence or defect of this greater element makes indeed the immense inferiority of the rest of Elizabethan dramatic work. And whatever the outward character or form of the poetry, the same law holds that poetry is a self-expressive power of the spirit and where the soul of things is most revealed in its very life by the rhythmic word, there is the fullest achievement of the poet's function.

And so long as the poet's medium is the outward life of things or the surface inward life of the passions and emotions, he is moving in a strong and fresh natural element and in an undivided wholeness of the inner and outer man, and his work, given the native power in him, has all the vitality of a thing fully felt and lived. But when intellectual thought has begun its reign in the mind of a more cultured race, the poet's difficulty also begins and increases as that reign becomes more sovereign and imperative. For intellectual thought makes a sort of scission in our being and on one side of the line is the vital urge carrying on life and on the other side the deliberate detached reason trying to observe it, take an intelligent view and extract from it all its thought values. The poet, as a child of the age and one of its voices, is moved to follow this turn. He too observes life, extracts the thought values of his theme, criticises while attempting to create, or even lingers to analyse his living subject, as Browning is constantly doing with the thinking and feeling mind of his characters. But this can only be done without detriment to the vital power of the poetic spirit and the all-seizing effect of its word, when there is a balance maintained between thought and life, the life passing into self-observing thought and the thought returning on the life to shape it in its own vital image. It has been remarked that the just balance between thought and the living

word was found by the Greeks and not again. That is perhaps an excessive affirmation, but certainly a just balance between observing thought and life is the distinctive effort of classical poetry and that endeavour gave it its stamp whether in Athens or Rome or in much of the epic or classical literature of ancient India. But this balance is easily lost, a difficult thing, and, once it has gone, thought begins to overweight life which loses its power and élan and joy, its vigorous natural body and its sincere and satisfied passion and force. We get more of studies of life than of creation, thought about the meaning of character and emotion and event and elaborate description rather than the living presence of these things. Passion, direct feeling, ardent emotion, sincerity of sensuous joy are chilled by the observing eye of the reason and give place to a play of sentiment,—sentiment which is an indulgence of the intelligent observing mind in the aesthesis, the *rasa* of feeling, passion, emotion, sense thinning them away into a subtle, at the end almost unreal fineness. There is then an attempt to get back to the natural fullness of the vital and physical life, but the endeavour fails in sincerity and success because it is impossible; the mind of man having got so far cannot return upon its course, undo what it has made of itself and recover the glad childhood of its early vigorous nature. There is instead of the simplicity of spontaneous life a search after things striking, exaggerated, abnormal, violent, new, in the end a morbid fastening on perversities, on all that is ugly, glaring and coarse on the plea of their greater reality, on exaggerations of vital instinct and sensation, on physical wrynesses and crudities and things unhealthily strange. The thought-mind, losing the natural full-blooded power of the vital being, pores on these things, stimulates the failing blood with them and gives itself an illusion of some forceful sensation of living. This is not the real issue, but the way to exhaustion and decadence.

The demand for life, for action, the tendency to a pragmatic and vitalistic view of things, a certain strenuous and even strident note has been loud enough in recent years. Life, action, vital power are great indispensable things, but to get back to them by thinking less is a way not open to us in this age of time, even if

it were a desirable remedy for our disease of over-intellectuality and a mechanised existence. In fact we do not think less than the men of the past generation but much more insistently, with a more packed and teeming thought, with a more eager more absorbed hunting of the mind along all the royal high-roads and alluring byways of life. And it could not be otherwise. The very school of poetry which insists on actual life as the subject matter of the poet carries into it with or without conscious intention the straining of the thought mind after something quite other than the obvious sense of the things it tries to force into relief, some significance deeper than what either the observing reason or the normal life-sense gives to our first or our second view of existence. The way out lies not in cessation of thinking and the turn to a strenuous description of life, nor even in a more vitally forceful thinking, but in another kind of thought mind. The filled activity of the thinking mind is as much part of life as that of the body and vital and emotional being, and its growth and predominance are a necessary stage of human progress and man's self-evolution. To go back from it is impossible or, if possible, would be undesirable, a lapse and not a betterment of our spirit. But the full thought-life does not come by the activity of the intellectual reason and its predominance. That is only a step by which we get above the first immersion in the activity and excitement and vigour of the life and the body and give ourselves a first freedom to turn to a greater and higher reach of the fullness of existence. And that higher reach we gain when we get above the limited crude physical mind, above the vital power and its forceful thought and self-vision, above the intellect and its pondering and measuring reason, and tread the illumined realm of an intuitive and spiritual thinking, an intuitive feeling, sense and vision. This is not that vital intuition which is sometimes confused with a much broader, loftier, vaster and more seeing power, but the high original power itself, a supra-intellectual and spiritual intuition. The all-informing spirit, when found in all its fullness, heals the scission between thought and life, the need of a just balance between them disappears, instead there begins a new and luminous and joyful fusion and oneness. The

spirit gives us not only a greater light of truth and vision, but the breath of a greater living; for the spirit is not only the self of our consciousness and knowledge, but the great self of life. To find our self and the self of things is not to go through a rarefied ether of thought into Nirvana, but to discover the whole greatest integral power of our complete existence.

This need is the sufficient reason for attaching the greatest importance to those poets in whom there is the double seeking of this twofold power, the truth and reality of the eternal self and spirit in man and things and the insistence on life. All the most significant and vital work in recent poetry has borne this stamp; the rest is of the hour, but this is of the future. It is the highest note of Whitman; in him, as in one who seeks and sees much but has not fully found, it widens the sweep of a great pioneer poetry, but is an opening of a new view rather than a living in its accomplished fullness; it is constantly repeated from the earth side in Meredith, comes down from the spiritual side in all A. E.'s work, moves between earth and the life of the worlds behind in Yeats' subtle rhythmic voices of vision and beauty, echoes with a large fullness in Carpenter. The poetry of Tagore owes its sudden and universal success to this advantage that he gives us more of this discovery and fusion for which the mind of our age is in quest than any other creative writer of the time. His work is a constant music of the overpassing of the borders, a chant-filled realm in which the subtle sounds and lights of the truth of the spirit give new meanings to the finer subtleties of life. The objection has been made that this poetry is too subtle, too remote, goes too far away from the broad, near, present and vital actualities of terrestrial existence. Yeats is considered by some a poet of Celtic romance and nothing more, Tagore accused in his own country of an unsubstantial poetic philosophising, a lack of actuality, of reality of touch and force of vital insistence. But this is to mistake the work of this poetry and to mistake too in a great measure the sense of life as it must reveal itself to the greatening mind of humanity now that that mind is growing in world-knowledge and towards self-knowledge. These poets have not indeed done all that has to be done or given the complete

poetic synthesis and fusion. Their work has been to create a new and deeper manner of seeing life, to build bridges of visioned light and rhythm between the infinite and eternal and the limited mind and soul and embodied life of man. The future poetry has not to stay in their achievement; it has yet to step from these first fields into new and yet greater ranges, to fathom all the depths yet unplumbed, to complete what has been left half done or not yet done, to bring all it can of the power of man's greater self and the universal spirit into a broader and even the broadest possible all of life. That cannot and will not be achieved in its fullness at once, but to make a foundation of this new infinite range of poetic vision and creation is work enough to give greatness to a whole age.

The demand for activity and realism or for a direct, exact and forceful presentation of life in poetry proceeds upon a false sense of what poetry gives or can give us. All the highest activities of the mind of man deal with things other than the crude actuality or the direct appearance or the first rough appeal of existence. A critical or a scientific thought may attempt to give an account of the actuality as it really is, though even to do that they have to go far behind its frontage and make a mental reconstruction and surprising change in its appearance. But the creative powers cannot stop there, but have to make new things for us as well as to make existing things new to the mind and eye. It is no real portion of the function of art to cut out palpitating pieces from life and present them raw and smoking or well-cooked for the aesthetic digestion. For in the first place all art has to give us beauty and the crude actuality of life is not often beautiful, and in the second place poetry has to give us a deeper reality of things and the outsides and surface faces of life are only a part of its reality and do not take us either very deep or very far. Moreover, the poet's greatest work is to open to us new realms of vision, new realms of being, our own and the world's, and he does this even when he is dealing with actual things. Homer with all his epic vigour of outward presentation does not show us the heroes and deeds before Troy in their actuality as they really were to the normal vision of men, but much rather as they were or might

have been to the vision of the gods. Shakespeare's greatness lies not in his reproduction of actual human events or men as they appear to us buttoned and cloaked in life,— others of his time could have done that as well, if with less radiant force of genius, yet with more of the realistic crude colour or humdrum drab of daily truth,— but in his bringing out in his characters and themes of things essential, intimate, eternal, universal in man and Nature and Fate on which the outward features are borne as fringe and robe and which belong to all times, but are least obvious to the moment's experience: when we do see them, life presents to us another face and becomes something deeper than its actual present mask. That is why the poet oftenest instinctively prefers to go away from the obsession of a petty actuality, from the realism of the prose of life to his inner creative self or an imaginative background of the past or the lucent air of myth or dream or on into a greater outlook on the future. Poetry may indeed deal with the present living scene, at some peril, or even with the social or other questions and problems of the day,— a task which is now often laid on the creative mind, as if that were its proper work; but it does that successfully only when it makes as little as possible of what belongs to the moment and time and the surface and brings out their roots of universal or eternal interest or their suggestion of great and deep things. What the poet borrows from the moment, is the most perishable part of his work and lives at all only by being subordinated and put into intimate relation with less transient realities. And this is so because it is the eternal increasing soul of man and the intimate self of things and their more abiding and significant forms which are the real object of his vision.

The poetry of the future can least afford to chain itself to the outward actualities which we too often mistake for the whole of life, because it will be the voice of a human mind which is pressing more and more towards the very self of the self of things, the very spirit of which the soul of man is a living power and to a vision of unity and totality which is bound to take note of all that lies behind our apparent material life. What man sees and experiences of God and himself and his race and Nature

and the spiritual, mental, psychic and material worlds in which he moves, his backlook upon the past, his sweep of vision over the present, his eye of aspiration and prophecy cast towards the future, his passion of self-finding and self-exceeding, his reach beyond the three times to the eternal and immutable, this is his real life. Poetry in the past wrote much of the godheads and powers behind existence, but in the mask of legends and myths, sometimes of God, but not often with a living experience, oftener in the set forms taught by religions and churches and without true beauty and knowledge. But now the mind of man is opening more largely to the deepest truth of the Divine, the Self, the Spirit, the eternal Presence not separate and distant, but near us, around us and in us, the Spirit in the world, the greater Self in man and his kind, the Spirit in all that is and lives, the Godhead, the Existence, the Power, the Beauty, the eternal Delight that broods over all, supports all and manifests itself in every turn of creation. A poetry which lives in this vision must give us quite a new presentation and interpretation of life; for of itself and at the first touch this seeing reconstructs and reimages the world for us and gives us a greater sense and a vaster, subtler and profounder form of our existence. The real faces of the gods are growing more apparent to the eye of the mind, though not yet again intimate with our life, and the forms of legend and symbol and myth must open to other and deeper meanings, as already they have begun to do, and come in changed and vital again into poetry to interpret the realities behind the veil. Nature wears already to our eye a greater and more transparent robe of her divine and her animal and her terrestrial and cosmic life and a deeper poetry of Nature than has yet been written is one of the certain potentialities of the future. The material realm too cannot for very much longer be our sole or separate world of experience, for the partitions which divide it from psychic and other kingdoms behind it are wearing thin and voices and presences are beginning to break through and reveal their impact on our world. This too must widen our conception of life and make a new world and atmosphere for poetry which may justify as perhaps never before the poet's refusal to regard as unreal

what to the normal mind was only romance, illusion or dream. A larger field of being made more real to man's experience will be the realm of the future poetry.

These things are often given an appearance of remoteness, of withdrawal from the actuality of life, because to discover them the mind had at first to draw away from the insistent outward preoccupation and live as if in a separate world. The seeker of the Self and Spirit, the God-lover, tended to become the cloistered monk, the ascetic, the mystic, the eremite and to set the spiritual apart from and against the material life. The lover of Nature went away from the noise of man and daily things to commune with her largeness and peace. The gods were found more in the lights of solitude than in the thoughts and actions of men. The seer of other worlds lived surrounded by the voices and faces of supernature. And this was a legitimate seclusion, for these are provinces and realms and presences and one has often to wander apart in them or live secluded with them to know their nearest intimacies. The spirit is real in itself even apart from the world, the gods have their own home beyond our sky and air, Nature her own self-absorbed life and supernature its brilliant curtains and its dim mysterious fences. None of these things are unreal, and if the supernatural as handled by older poets seemed often mere legend, fancy and romance, it was because it was seen from a distance by the imagination, not lived in by the soul and in its spirit, as is done by the true seer and poet of this supernature or other-nature. And all these things, because they have their own reality, have their life and a poetry which makes them its subject can be as vital, as powerful, as true as the song which makes beautiful the physical life and normal passions and emotions of men and the objects of our bodily sense-experience.

But still all life is one and a new human mind moves towards the realisation of its totality and oneness. The poetry which voices the oneness and totality of our being and Nature and the worlds and God, will not make the actuality of our earthly life less but more real and rich and full and wide and living to men. To know other countries is not to belittle but enlarge our own country and help it to a greater power of its own

being, and to know the other countries of the soul is to widen our bounds and make more opulent and beautiful the earth on which we live. To bring the gods into our life is to raise it to its own diviner powers. To live in close and abiding intimacy with Nature and the spirit in her is to free our daily living from its prison of narrow preoccupation with the immediate moment and act and to give the moment the inspiration of all Time and the background of eternity and the daily act the foundation of an eternal peace and the large momentum of the universal Power. To bring God into life, the sense of the self in us into all our personality and becoming, the powers and vistas of the Infinite into our mental and material existence, the oneness of the self in all into our experience and feelings and relations of heart and mind with all that is around us is to help to divinise our actual being and life, to force down its fences of division and blindness and unveil the human godhead that individual man and his race can become if they will and lead us to our most vital perfection. This is what a future poetry may do for us in the way and measure in which poetry can do these things, by vision, by the power of the word, by the attraction of the beauty and delight of what it shows us. What philosophy or other mental brooding makes precise or full to our thought, poetry can by its creative power, imaging force and appeal to the emotions make living to the soul and heart. This poetry will present to us indeed in forms of power and beauty all the actual life of man, his wonderful and fruitful past, his living and striving present, his yet more living aspiration and hope of the future, but will present it more seemly as the life of the vast self and spirit within the race and the veiled divinity in the individual, as an act of the power and delight of universal being, in the greatness of an eternal manifestation, in the presence and intimacy of Nature, in harmony with the beauty and wonder of the realms that stretch out beyond earth and its life, in the march to godhead and the significances of immortality, in the ever clearer letters and symbols of the self-revealing mystery and not only in its first crude and incomplete actualities; these actualities will themselves be treated with a firmer and finer

vision, find their own greater meaning and become to our sight thread of the fine tissue and web of the cosmic work of the Spirit. This poetry will be the voice and rhythmic utterance of our greater, our total, our infinite existence, and will give us the strong and infinite sense, the spiritual and vital joy, the exalting power of a greater breath of life.

Chapter IV

The Soul of Poetic Delight and Beauty

THE LIGHT of truth, the breath of life, great and potent things though they are, are insufficient to give poetry the touch of immortality and perfection, even a little of which is enough to carry it safe through the ages, unless the soul and form of delight and beauty take possession of the seeing of truth and give immortality to the breath and body of the life. Delight is the soul of existence, beauty the intense impression, the concentrated form of delight; and these two fundamental things tend to be one for the mind of the artist and the poet, though they are often enough separated in our cruder vital and mental experience. These twin powers meet, make a consonance of the perfect harmony of his work and are the first deities he serves, all the others only group themselves about them, strive to be admitted to the soul of delight and the privilege of beauty and have to make themselves acceptable to them before they can mix with them in a compelling and attracting oneness. For the poet the moon of beauty and delight is a greater godhead even than the sun of truth or the breath of life, as in the symbolic image of the Vedic moon-god Soma, whose plant of intoxication has to be gathered on lonely mountain heights in the moonlight and whose purified juice and essence is the sacred wine and nectar of sweetness, *rasa, madhu, amṛta*, without which the gods themselves could not be immortal. A lightest trifle, if it manages to get itself saturated with this sweetness of poetic delight and beauty, will be preserved for its sake, while the highest strenuous labour of the thinking mind and the most forceful assertion of the life-power, if deprived of or deficient in this subtlest immortalising essence, may carry on for a time, but soon drops, grows old, sinks into the gulf of oblivion or has at most a lifeless survival

and belongs to the dead history of literature, not to its eternal present. But beauty and delight, whatever form it takes,—for we may speak here of the two as one,—has an unaging youth, an eternal moment, an immortal presence.

The imperative instinct for beauty and the aesthetic demand which set that among the first needs and was not satisfied with anything else if this were neglected or put second in importance, are now things that are almost lost, nowhere general to the human mind, but once they were the sign of the poetic and artistic peoples and the great ages of art and poetry and supreme creation. The ancient communities who created those fine many-sided cultures which still remain the fountain-head of all our evolving civilisation, had the instinct for beauty, the aesthetic turn of the temperament and formation of the mind almost, it would seem, from the beginning, planted in their spirit and their blood, colouring their outlook so that even before they got the developed intellectual consciousness of it, they created instinctively in the spirit and form of beauty and that is quite half the secret of the compelling and attractive power of the antique cultures. The earliest surviving poetry of ancient India was philosophical and religious, the Veda, the Upanishads, and our modern notions tend to divorce these things from the instinct of delight and beauty, to separate the religious and the philosophic from the aesthetic sense; but the miracle of these antique writings is their perfect union of beauty and power and truth, the word of truth coming out spontaneously as a word of beauty, the revealed utterance of that universal spirit who is described in the Upanishads as the eater of the honey of sweetness, *madhvadam puruṣam*; and this high achievement was not surprising in these ancient deep-thinking men who discovered the profound truth that all existence derives from and lives by the bliss of the eternal spirit, in the power of a universal delight, Ananda. The idea of beauty, the spontaneous satisfaction in it, the worship of it as in itself something divine, became more intellectually conscious afterwards, was a dominant strain of the later Indian mind and got to its richest outward colour and sensuous passion in the work of the classical writers, while the expression of the spiritual

through the aesthetic sense is the constant sense of Indian art, as it is also the inspiring motive of a great part of the later religion and poetry. Japan and China, more especially perhaps southern China, for the north has been weighted by a tendency to a more external and formal idea of measure and harmony, had in a different way this fusion of the spiritual and aesthetic mind and it is a distinguishing stamp of their art and culture. The Persian had a sort of sensuous magic of the transforming aesthetics born of psychic delight and vision. Ancient Greece did all its work of founding European civilisation by a union of a subtle and active intelligence with a fine aesthetic spirit and worship of beauty. The Celtic nations again seem always to have had by nature a psychic delicacy and subtlety united with an instinctive turn for imaginative beauty to which we surely owe much of the finer strain in English literature. But there these spontaneous miracles of fusion end and in the mind of later peoples who come in and take possession with a less innate, a more derivative culture, the sense of beauty works with a certain effort and is clogged by many heavier elements which are in conflict with and prevent the sureness of the aesthetic perception. There is in their cruder temperament and intelligence a barbaric strain which worships rudely the power and energy of life and is not at home with the delight of beauty, an ethical and puritanic strain which looks askance at art and beauty and pleasure, a heavy scholastic or a dry scientific intellectual strain which follows after truth with a conscientious and industrious diligence but without vision and fine aesthetics. And the modern mind, inheritor of all this past, is a divided and complex mind which strives at its best to get back at the old thing on a larger scale and realise some oneness of its many strands of experience, but has not yet found the right meeting-place; and it is besides still labouring under the disadvantage of its aberration into a mechanical, economical, materialistic, utilitarian civilisation from which it cannot get free, though it is struggling to shake off that dullest side of it for which a naked and unashamed riot of ugliness could be indulged in without any prickings of the spiritual conscience but rather with a smug self-righteousness in the hideous, the vulgar and the

ignoble. The day when we get back to the ancient worship of delight and beauty, will be our day of salvation; for without these things there can be neither an assured nobility and sweetness in poetry and art, nor a satisfied dignity and fullness of life nor a harmonious perfection of the spirit.

An insufficiently profound and intimate perception of the real deep soul of poetic delight and beauty is the first obstacle to a recovery of the old strong soundness of the aesthetic sense and spontaneity of the aesthetic impulse. This comes from the peculiar character of the modern intelligence and its want of harmony between our internal selves and our external experience; there is little spontaneous joy of their meeting, an active labour to assimilate, but no happy, deep or satisfied possession either of self or life, a continual seeking but no repose in the thing found, a feverish restlessness without home and abiding-place. The spirit of man can make its home in either one of two things, the depths of our self arrived at through vision of self-knowledge, through power of self-mastery or through ecstasy, or a profound, a glad and satisfied acceptance of the truth, the delight and beauty of the world and life, of existence and experience. And either of these things can help too to bring in the other,—possess the inner self and life can become happy and illumined by a full sense of its hidden significance, or get hold of the complete delight and beauty of life and the world and you have then only a thin layer of shining mist to break through to get also at the self and spirit behind it, the eater of the honey of sweetness who is seated in the soul of man and extends himself through the universe. The ancient peoples had in a very large measure this foundation of satisfaction and harmony, took the greatest interest in the reality of the inner self, as once in India and China, the Atman, the Tao, and life and the world as its field of expression and self-experience or, like the Greeks, felt at once the naturalness and profundity of human existence and gave to it an immediate and subtle aesthetic response. The modern mind on the contrary looks little into our deepest self, takes little interest in sounding that depth and has hardly any confidence in its reality, and concentrates not on the truth and delight and

beauty of life, but upon the stress of its results and circumstances, which in themselves have only an incidental and no satisfying and harmonious meaning, and on the agitating or attractive turmoil of the mind excited by their contact or their siege.¹ This difference results in a fundamental difference of aesthetics. The pure aesthetic spirit ought to be left free, trusted in, made master of its own action and creation and it will then create with greatness and beauty, in a calm and satisfied ecstasy, and yet safely harmonise its action with the other spiritual powers of our existence, the need of the life-soul, the insistent seeking of the thought-mind, the demand of the active will and the senses. But we now make the aesthetic sense and intelligence a servant of these other powers; it is condemned to serve first and foremost our external interest in life or our interest in thought or in troubled personality or the demand of the senses or passions and bidden to make them beautiful or vivid to us by an active aesthetic cerebration and artistic manufacture of the word or a supply of carefully apt or beautiful forms and measures. The secondary things are put in the first rank, the primary, the one thing needful has to get in as best it can to give some firm base to the creation. This aesthetics aided by the vast curiosity of the modern intelligence has done some great and much interesting work, but it arrives with difficulty at the readily fused harmonies and assured stamp of the perfect way of spiritual creation.

There is a profound intrinsic delight and beauty in all things and behind all experience whatever face it wears to the surface mind, which makes it to a spirit housed within us other than its first appearance, makes it, that is to say, no longer a thing exciting mental interest, pain, pleasure, but rather a revelation of the truth and power and delight of being and our feeling of it a form of the universal Ananda of the old philosophical thinkers, the calm yet moved ecstasy with which the spirit of existence

¹ This is the result perhaps of an ill-assimilated Christian influence intervening on the external vitalism of the Teutonic temperament and on Latin intellectualism, and bringing in new needs and experiences which disturbed the mind and emotions without possessing the soul with peace or arriving at a harmony of spiritual emotion and spiritual self-knowledge.

regards itself and its creations. This deeper spiritual feeling, this Ananda is the fountain of poetic delight and beauty. It springs from a supreme essence of experience, a supreme aesthesis which is in its own nature spiritual, impersonal, independent of the personal reactions and passions of the mind, and that is why the poet is able to transmute pain and sorrow and the most tragic and terrible and ugly things into forms of poetic beauty, because of this impersonal joy of the spirit in all experience, whatever its nature. And as, therefore, the subject of the poet is all that he can feel of the infinite life of the spirit that creates in existence and all that he can seize of the infinite truth of God and Nature and our own and the world's being, so too what he brings out from his subject is all that he can pour into speech of his vision of eternal and universal beauty, all that he can express of the soul's universal delight in existence. That is what he has to reveal, and to make others share in, to render more expressive and firmly present to them what experience they have of it and help the race towards its greater fullness in the soul of man and embodiment in our mind and life. This Ananda is not the pleasure of a mood or a sentiment or the fine aesthetic indulgence of the sense in the attraction of a form, superficial results and incidents which are often mistaken for that much deeper and greater thing by the minor poetic faculty, the lesser artistic mind, but the enduring delight which, as the ancient idea justly perceived, is the essence of spirit and being and the beauty which all things assume when the spirit lives in the pure joy of creation and experience.

The universality of this delight and beauty does not mean that we can take whatever we will straight from life and experience, just as it is, and by making it precise and vivid through word and image or dressing it in imaginative colour achieve poetic effect and beauty. That is the theory by which a great deal of our modern endeavour at poetry seems to be guided, as it is the ruling method of inferior poets and the mark too of the lesser or unsuccessful or only partially successful work of greater writers. The error made is to confuse the sources of poetic delight and beauty with the more superficial interest, pain and pleasure which the normal mind takes in the first untransmuted appeal

of thought and life and feeling. That in its first crude form or a little deepened by sensitiveness of emotion and a reflective intelligence is the response to existence of the natural mind, the only instrument of the majority, and what it is apt to expect from the poet is that this is what he too shall give to the world and only think it more profoundly, feel it more sensitively, live it with a greater excitement and find for it beauty of word and attraction of rhythm. The poet has in him a double personality, a double instrument of his response to life and existence. There is in him the normal man absorbed in mere living who thinks and feels and acts like others, and there is the seer of things, the supernormal man, the super-soul or delight-soul in touch with the impersonal and eternal fountains of joy and beauty who creates from that source and transmutes by its alchemy all experience into a form of the spirit's Ananda. It is easy for him, if the demand of his genius is not constant or if he is not held back by a natural fineness of the poetic conscience, to subject this deeper and greater power to the lower and general demand and put it at the service of his superficial mental experience. He has then to rely on the charm and beauty of word and form to save the externality of his substance. But the genius in him when he is faithful to it, knows that this is not his high way of perfection nor the thing his spirit gave him to do; it is a spiritual transmutation of the substance got by sinking the mental and vital interests in a deeper soul experience which brings the inevitable word and the supreme form and the unanalysable rhythm. The poet is then something more than a maker of beautiful word and phrase, a favoured child of the fancy and imagination, a careful fashioner of idea and utterance or an effective poetic thinker, moralist, dramatist or storyteller; he becomes a spokesman of the eternal spirit of beauty and delight and shares that highest creative and self-expressive rapture which is close to the original ecstasy that made existence, the divine Ananda.

This rapture, the Platonic divine possession and enthusiasm, is born not of mental, but of soul experience, and the more the surface mind gets into the way, the more this divine passion is weakened and diluted by a less potent spirit. The surface mind

is powerfully attracted by the stir of the outward passion and excitement, the stress of immediate thought, life and action, hastens to embody it in speech or in deed and has no leisure to transmute life into those greater abiding values of which the soul in its depths is alone capable. But the higher faculties are given us as keys to a deeper experience; the seer, the poet, the artist, the children of the spirit's light and intuition are only true to themselves when they live in the depths of the soul, refuse to be hurried away by the surface call of mind and life and wait rather for their own greater voices. The poetry which insists on an external effectiveness, on immediate thought and life and experience, may seize very powerfully the ear of the moment, but is singularly frail in its affectation of power and even if it has strength of body, is hollow and null inside; it fails because it is concerned with immediately vital things perhaps, but not with that which is immortal. That is just why patriotic poetry, war poetry or poetry of the occasion and the moment are so difficult to write greatly and, although it would seem that these things are among the most dynamic and should move most easily to powerful utterance, are oftenest poor in poetic substance and inferior in value. For life they may be dynamic, but they are not so readily dynamic for art and poetry, and precisely because the vital interest, the life attraction is so strong that it is difficult to draw back from the external to the spiritual delight and the spiritual significance. A great poet may do it sometimes, because the constant instinct of his genius is to look beyond the surface and the moment to that which is universal and eternal behind the personal experience and the occasion is only for him an excuse for its utterance. The drama of action and mere passion is for the same reason short-lived in its gusto of vitality, fades in a century or less into a lifeless mask, while the drama of the soul abides, because it gets near to the subtler eternal element, the soul's essential aesthetics, the spirit's delight in self-creation and experience. Philosophical and religious poetry too fails so often by a neglect of the same fine distinction, because the interest of the thought pursued by the intellectual activity, the interest of the mind in its surface religious ideas and feelings get the upper hand

and do not consent to sink themselves in the spiritual emotion of the seeing of truth and the abiding spiritual experience. The mental and vital interest, pleasure, pain of thought, life, action is not the source of poetic delight and beauty and can be turned into that deeper thing only when they have sunk into the soul and been transmuted in the soul's radiant memory into spiritual experience,—that perhaps was what the Greeks meant when they made Mnemosyne the eternal mother of the muses; the passions can only change into poetic matter when they have been spiritualised in the same bright sources and have undergone the purification, the *katharsis*, spoken of by the Greek critic; the life values are only poetic when they have come out heightened and changed into soul values. The poetic delight and beauty are born of a deeper rapture and not of the surface mind's excited interest and enjoyment of life and existence.

The ancient Indian critics defined the essence of poetry as *rasa* and by that word they meant a concentrated taste, a spiritual essence of emotion, an essential aesthetics, the soul's pleasure in the pure and perfect sources of feeling. The memory of the soul that takes in, broods over and transmutes the mind's thought, feeling and experience, is a large part of the process which comes by this aesthetics, but it is not quite the whole thing; it is rather only a common way by which we get at something that stands behind, the spiritual being in us which has the secret of the universal delight and the eternal beauty of existence. That which we call genius works or comes out from something deep within which calls down the word, the vision, the light and power from a level above the normal mind and it is the sense of the inrush from above which makes the rapture and the enthusiasm of illumination and inspiration. That source, when we know better the secrets of our being, turns out to be the spiritual self with its diviner consciousness and knowledge, happier fountains of power, inalienable delight of existence. The cultures that were able directly or indirectly to feel the joy of this self and spirit, got into the very strain of their aesthetics the touch of its delight, its Ananda, and this touch was the secret of the generalised instinct for beauty which has been denied to a later mind limited by

intellectual activity, practical utility and the externals of life: we have to go for it to exceptional individuals gifted with a finer strain, but the wide-spread aesthetic instinct has been lost and has yet to be recovered for the common mind and recognised once more as a part of human perfection as indispensable as intellectual knowledge and at least as necessary to happiness as vital well-being. But this Ananda, this delight, this aesthesis which is the soul of poetic beauty works like other things, like poetic truth or the poetic breath of life, on different levels, in different provinces of its action, with the same law that we have observed in the rest, of the emergence of a richer and profounder face of itself the more it gets inward and upward from the less to the more occult powers of its revelation. This finer soul of delight throws itself out on the physical mind and being, takes up its experiences and turns them by its own innate and peculiar power into things of beauty, fuses into itself the experiences of the life soul and transmutes to beauty their power and passion in the surge of its poetic ecstasy, takes up all life and form into the reflective thought-mind and changes them in the beauty and rapture of thought discovering and embodying new values of soul and Nature and existence. And in all its working there is felt its own essence of an intuitive delight which acts in these moulds and gets into them whatever it can of its own intimate and eternal delight values. But when that intuitive mind self-finding, self-seeing, self-creating in a higher power of light and vision than is possible on the intellectual or other levels gets out into full play, and now there is some sign of this emergence, then we come nearer to the most potent sources of universal and eternal delight and beauty, nearer to its full and wide seeing, and its all-embracing rapture. This inner mind is the first native power of the self and spirit dropping its lower veils and the very life and aesthesis of the spirit in its creation is a life of self-experiencing spiritual delight and a luminous Ananda.

The beauty and delight of such a greater intuitive inspiration, a poetry of this spiritual Ananda making all existence luminous and wonderful and beautiful to us may be one of the gifts of the future. It is that of which we stand in need and

of which there is some promise in the highest strains that we have now begun to hear. This change will mean that poetry may resume on a larger scale, with a wider and more shining vision the greater effect it once had on the life of the race in the noble antique cultures. At one time poetry was a revelation to the race of the life of the gods and man and the meaning of the world and the beauty and power of existence and through its vision and joy and the height and clarity of its purpose it became creative of the life of the people. Ananda, the joy of the spirit in itself carrying in it a revelation of the powers of its conscious being, was to the ancient Indian idea the creative principle, and ancient poetry did thus creatively reveal to the people its soul and its possibilities by forms of beauty and suggestions of power in a way we have to a great extent lost by our later pettier use of this always great art and medium. One might almost say that ancient India was created by the Veda and Upanishads and that the visions of inspired seers made a people. That sublime poetry with its revelation of godhead and the joy and power of life and truth and immortality or its revelation of the secrets of the self and the powers of its manifestation in man and the universe and of man's return to self-knowledge got into the very blood and mind and life of the race and made itself the fountain-head of all that incessant urge to spirituality which has been its distinguishing gift and cultural motive. The Mahabharata and the Ramayana revealing to it in forms of noble beauty and grandiose or beautiful or telling types of character the joy of its forms of life, the significance of its spiritual, ethical and aesthetic ideals, the powers and dangers of the human soul, its godheads and its titanisms have played a great and well-recognised formative part second only to religion and the stress of religio-social training in the life of the Indian peoples. And even later the religious poetry of the Vaishnavas, Shaivas, Shaktas has entered powerfully into the life of the nation and helped to shape its temperament and soul-type. The effect of the Homeric poems in Greece, the intimate connection of poetry and art with the public life of Athens sprang from a similar but less steep height of poetic and artistic motive. The epic poems revealed the Hellenic people to itself

in the lucid and clear nobility and beauty of an uplifting of life and an aesthetic sense of the humanity and divinity of man; the later art and poetry interpreted to Athens her religious ideas, her thought, her aesthetic instincts, the soul of grandeur and beauty of her culture.

And in all these instances, as in others like the art and poetry of Japan and of China, a more or less profoundly intuitive creation from the depths and expression through poetic delight of the soul of a people has been the secret of this effect and this power of creation or influence. But in other times and places poetry has been more a servant of aesthetic pleasure than a creative master of life and great spiritual agent; when it is at all great, it cannot fail to be that to a certain extent, but it has not so acted as a whole, centrally, in the same large and effective way or with the same high conscience of its function. It has leaned too much on the surface or external interests of life for the pleasure of the intellect and imagination and failed too much to create life from within by a deeper delight in the power of vision of the soul and spirit. The high energy of English poetry has done great and interesting things; it has portrayed life with charm and poetic interest in Chaucer, made thought and character and action and passion wonderful to the life soul in us in Shakespeare, seen and spoken with nobility and grandeur of vision and voice in Milton, intellectualised vigorous or pointed commonplace in Pope and Dryden, played with elegance and beauty on the lesser strings with the Victorians or cast out here and there a profounder strain of thought or more passionate and aspiring voice, and if the most spiritual strains have been few, yet it has dreamed in light in Shelley or drawn close in Wordsworth to the soul in Nature. And it may seem hard to say in the face of all this splendour and vigour and glow and beauty and of the undeniable cultural influence, that something was too often lacking which would have made the power of this poetry more central and intimate and a greater direct force on the life of the people, and yet this is, I think, true in spite of exceptions, not only here, but of almost all the later European literature. To get back to a profounder centre, to create from

within in a more universal power of the spirit and its vision and delight of existence will supply the missing element and make poetry once again young and mighty and creative and its word deeply effective on life by the power of a greater Ananda.

The mind of man, a little weary now of the superficial pleasure of the life and intellect, demands, obscurely still, not yet perceiving what will satisfy it, a poetry of the joy of self, of the deeper beauty and delight of existence. A merely cultured poetry fair in form and word and playing on the surface strings of mind and emotion will not serve its purpose. The human mind is opening to an unprecedented largeness of vision of the greatness of the worlds, the wonder of life, the self of man, the mystery of the spirit in him and the universe. The future poetry must seek in that vision its inspiration, and the greater its universality of joy in existence, the more it seeks through intuitive sight and aesthesis the deepest fountains of poetic delight and beauty, the more it will become powerfully creative of a greater life for the race. The modern poet is perfectly right in a way in breaking down in whatever direction the bounds erected by the singers of the past around their magic palace and its grounds; he must claim all things in heaven or earth or beyond for his portion: but that care for a fine poetic beauty and delight which they safeguarded by excluding all or most that did not readily obey its law or turn to fair material of poetic shaping, he must preserve as jealously and satisfy by steeping all that he finds in his wider field in that profoundest vision which delivers out of each thing its spiritual Ananda, the secret of truth and beauty in it for which it was created; it is in the sense of that spiritual joy of vision, and not in any lower sensuous, intellectual or imaginative seeing, that Keats' phrase becomes true for the poet, beauty that is truth, truth that is beauty, and this all that we need to know as the law of our aesthetic knowledge. He is right too in wishing to make poetry more intimately one with life, but again in this sense only, in going back to those creative fountains of the spirit's Ananda from which life is seen and reshaped by the vision that springs from a moved identity,— the inmost source of the authentic poet vision. The beauty and delight of all physical things

illumined by the wonder of the secret spiritual self that is the inhabitant and self-sculptor of form, the beauty and delight of the thousand-coloured, many-crested, million-waved miracle of life made a hundred times more profoundly meaningful by the greatness and the sweetness and attracting poignancy of the self-creating inmost soul which makes of life its epic and its drama and its lyric, the beauty and delight of the spirit in thought, the seer, the thinker, the interpreter of his own creation and being who broods over all he is and does in man and the world and constantly resees and shapes it new by the stress and power of his thinking, this will be the substance of the greater poetry that has yet to be written. And that can be discovered only if and so far as the soul of man looks or feels beyond even these things and sees and voices the eternal and knows its godheads and gets to some close inward touch of the infinite ecstasy which is the source of the universal delight and beauty. For the nearer we get to the absolute Ananda, the greater becomes our joy in man and the universe and the receptive and creative spiritual emotion which needs for its voice the moved tones of poetic speech.

Chapter V

The Power of the Spirit

A POETRY born direct from and full of the power of the spirit and therefore a largest and a deepest self-expression of the soul and mind of the race is that for which we are seeking and of which the more profound tendencies of the creative mind seem to be in travail. This poetry will be a voice of eternal things raising to a new significance and to a great satisfied joy in experience the events and emotions and transiences of life which will then be seen and sung as the succession of signs, the changing of the steps of an eternal manifestation; it will be an expression of the very self of man and the self of things and the self of nature; it will be a creative and interpretative revelation of the infinite truth of existence and of the universal delight and beauty and of a greater spiritualised vision and power of life. This can only come if the mind of the race takes actually the step over which it is now hesitating and passes from the satisfaction of the liberated intellect which has been its preoccupation for the last two centuries to the pursuit of the realisation of the larger self, from the scrutiny of the things that explain to the experience of the things that reveal, the truths of the spirit. The progress of the mind of humanity takes place by a constant enlarging attended with a constant transmutation of its experience which is reflected in its ways of self-expression, and the tendency of this progression is always more and more inward, a movement that cannot cease till we get to the inmost, and even then there can be no real cessation because the inmost is the infinite. The progress of poetry, as it has been viewed in these pages, has been an index of an advance of the cultural mind of humanity which has enlarged its scope by a constant raising of the scale of the soul's experience and has now risen to a great height and breadth of intellectual vision and activity, and the question is at present of the next step in the scale of ascension, and whether

it can now be firmly taken or will be missed once more with a fall back to another retracing of the psychological circuit. That will determine the character of the coming era of the mind and life of man and consequently the character of all his methods of aesthetic self-expression.

The one thing that man sees above the intellect is the spirit, and therefore the developed intellect of the race, if it is at all to go forward, must open now to an understanding and seeing spirituality, other than the rather obscure religionism of the past which belonged to the lower levels of the life and the emotion and which has had its bounds broken and its narrowesses condemned by the free light of intellectual thought: this will be rather an illumined self-knowledge and God-knowledge and a world-knowledge too which transmuted in that greater light will spiritualise the whole view and motive of our existence. That is the one development to which an accomplished intellectualism can open and by exceeding itself find its own right consummation. The alternative is a continual ringing of changes in the spinnings of the intellectual circle which leads nowhere or else a collapse to the lower levels which may bring human civilisation down with a run to a new corrupted and intellectualised barbarism. This is a catastrophe which has happened before in the world's history, and it was brought about ostensibly by outward events and causes, but arose essentially from an inability of the intellect of man to find its way out of itself and out of the vital formula in which its strainings and questionings can only exhaust itself and life into a full illumination of the spirit and an enlightened application of the saving spiritual principle to mind and life and action. The possibility of such a catastrophe is by no means absent from the present human situation. On the one hand the straining of the intellect to its limits of elasticity has brought in a recoil to a straining for unbridled vital, emotional and sensational experience and a morbid disorder in the economy of the nature and on the other there have come in, perhaps as a result, perturbations of the earth system that threaten to break up the mould of civilisation, and the problem of the race is whether a new and greater mould can be created

or instead a collapse and decadence intervene and a recommenc-ing of the circle. The hope of the race in this crisis lies in the fidelity of its intellect to the larger perceptions it now has of the greater self of humanity, the turning of its will to the inception of delivering forms of thought, art and social endeavour which arise from those perceptions and the raising of the intellectual mind to the intuitive supra-intellectual spiritual consciousness which can alone give the basis for a spiritualised life of the race and the realisation of its diviner potentialities. The meaning of spirituality is a new and greater inner life of man founded in the consciousness of his true, his inmost, highest and largest self and spirit by which he receives the whole of existence as a progressive manifestation of the self in the universe and his own life as a field of a possible transformation in which its divine sense will be found, its potentialities highly evolved, the now imperfect forms changed into an image of the divine perfection, and an effort not only to see but to live out these greater possibilities of his being. And this consciousness of his true self and spirit must bring with it a consciousness too of the oneness of the individual and the race and a harmonious unity of the life of man with the spirit in Nature and the spirit of the universe.

The voice of a new deeper intuitive poetry can be a powerful aid to this necessary change of seeing and aspiration, because what the thought comprehends with a certain abstraction, it can make living to the imagination by the word and a thing of beauty and delight and inspiration for the soul's acceptance. This poetry will speak of new things and of old things in a new way and with a new voice, not by any exclusion or diminution of its province, but by a great heightening above, a great intimacy within, a great enlargement and wideness around, a vision of inmost things and therefore a changed vision of the world and life and the untold potentialities of the soul's experience. It will restore to us the sense of the Eternal, the presence of the Divine which has been taken from us for a time by an intellect too narrowly and curiously fixed on the external and physical world, but it will not speak of these things in the feeble and conventional tones of traditional religion, but as a voice of intuitive experience and

the rhythm and chant of the revelation of an eternal presence. The voice of the poet will reveal to us by the inspired rhythmic word the God who is the Self of all things and beings, the Life of the universe, the Divinity in man, and he will express all the emotion and delight of the endeavour of the human soul to discover the touch and joy of that Divinity within him in whom he feels the mighty founts of his own being and life and effort and his fullness and unity with all cosmic experience and with Nature and with all creatures. The note which has already begun and found many of its tones in Whitman and Carpenter and A. E. and Tagore will grow into a more full and near and intimate poetic knowledge and vision and feeling which will continue to embrace more and more, no longer only the more exceptional inner states and touches which are the domain of mystic poetry, but everything in our inner and outer existence until all life and experience has been brought within the mould of the spiritual sense and the spiritual interpretation. A poetry of this kind will be in a supreme way what all art should be, a thing of harmony and joy and illumination, a solution and release of the soul from its vital unrest and questioning and struggle, not by any ignoring of these things but by an uplifting into the strength of the self within and the light and air of its greater view where there is found not only the point of escape but the supporting calmness and power of a seated knowledge, mastery and deliverance. In the greatest art and poetry there should be something of the calm of the impersonal basing and elevating the effort and struggle of the personality, something of the largeness of the universal releasing and harmonising the troubled concentrations of the individual existence, something of the sense of the transcendent raising the inferior, ignorant and uncertain powers of life towards a greater strength and light and Ananda. And when art and poetry can utter the fullest sense of these things, it is then that they will become the greatest fortifiers and builders of the soul of man and assure it in the grandeur of its own largest self and spirit. The poetry of Europe has been a voice intensely eager and moved but restless, troubled and without a sure base of happiness and repose, vibrating with the

passion of life and avid of its joy and pleasure and beauty, but afflicted also by its unrest, grief, tragedy, discord, insufficiency, incertitude, capable only of its lesser harmonies, not of any great release and satisfaction. The art and poetry of the East have been the creation of a larger and quieter spirit, intensely responsive as in the far East to deeper psychic significances and finding there fine and subtle harmonies of the soul's experience or, as in India, expressing in spite of the ascetic creed of vanity and illusion much rather the greatness and power and satisfied activity of human thought and life and action and behind it the communion of the soul with the Eternal. The poetry of the future reconciling all these strains, taking the highest as its keynote and interpreting the rest in its intensity and its largeness, will offer to the human mind a more complex aesthetic and spiritual satisfaction, express a more richly filled content of self-experience raised to a more persistent sight of things absolute and infinite and a more potent and all-comprehending release into the calm and delight of the spirit.

And this poetry must bring with it too a new depth of the intimacies of the soul with Nature. The early poetry of Nature gave us merely the delight of the forms of objects and the beauty of the setting of the natural world around man's life, but not any inner communion between him and the universal Mother. A later tone brought in more of the subtleties of the vital soul of the natural world and a response of the moved sensation and emotion of the life-spirit in us and out of this arose an intellectual and aesthetic sense of hidden finer and subtler things and, more profound, in the poetry of Wordsworth, Byron and Keats and Shelley an attempt at communion with a universal presence in Nature and a living principle of peace or light and love or universal power or conscious delight and beauty. A more deeply seeing and intimate poetry will take up these things into a yet greater Nature sense and vision and make us aware of the very self and soul and conscious being of Nature, her profoundest psychic suggestion and significance, the spirit in her and the intuition of all that she keeps hidden in her forms and veils and reveals more and more to the soul that has entered into

unity with that spirit. The more intuitive human mind of the future, delivered from its present limitation of sympathy by the touch of the one self in all being, will feel as has not been felt before a unity with other consciousness in Nature and hear the voice of self-revelation of all that is mute to us, the soul and life of things that now seem inert and lifeless, the soul and life of the animal world, the soul and life of the things that grow in silence and are enclosed in the absorbed dream of their own half-conscious existence. And it will open to and interpret not only man and terrestrial Nature, for a poetry concerned with that alone excludes large ranges of self-experience, but other domains also of our spirit. It will give the key of the worlds of supernature, and allow us to move among the beings and scenes, images and influences and presences of the psychic kingdoms which are near to us behind their dark or luminous curtain and will not be afraid to enter into vaster realms of the self and other universal states and the powers that stand behind our life and the soul's eternal spaces. It will do this not merely in a symbol of greatness human magnitudes, as the old poets represented the gods, or in hues of romantic glamour or in the far-off light of a mystic remoteness, but with the close directness and reality that comes from intimate vision and feeling, and make these things a part of our living experience.

A poetry of large spiritual inspiration must necessarily be, when it is not dealing directly with eternal things and turns its eye on the movement of time and the actual life and destiny of man, largely present and futurist in its insistence. The poet will continue though in a new way and with a new eye to transfigure the past for us, but will not feel that need to live in an imaginative preoccupation with the past which withdraws compelled from the unmanageable and transformable actuality of the present: for to live in the spirit is to be able to distinguish the eternal in the transient forms of the moment and to see too in these forms a revelation of the spirit's greater significances. His vision will search all the ways of the present and interpret deeply to man the sense of that which is making him and which he is making: it will reveal the divinity in all its disguises, face all even that is ugly and

terrible and baffling in the enigma of our actual human life, find its deeper aesthetics, disengage what is struggling untransformed in its outsides and make out of it by poetic sympathy material of spiritual truth and beauty. This is a strain that has been growing in recent poetic creation and it suffers as yet too often from an insufficient fineness of insight and a too crude handling, but, that immaturity once overcome, must hold a large and assured place among the great poetic motives. But especially a clearer and more inspiring vision of the destiny of the spirit in man will be a large part of the poetry of the future. For the spiritual eye is not only able to see the divinity in man as he is, the divinity in his struggle and victory and failure and even in his sin and offence and littleness, but the spirit is master of the future, its past and present in time not only the half-formed stuff of its coming ages, but in a profound sense it is the call and attraction of the future that makes the past and present, and that future will be more and more seen to be the growth of the godhead in the human being which is the high fate of this race that thinks and wills and labours towards its own perfection. This is a strain that we shall hear more and more, the song of the growing godhead of the kind, of human unity, of spiritual freedom, of the coming supermanhood of man, of the divine ideal seeking to actualise itself in the life of the earth, of the call to the individual to rise to his godlike possibility and to the race to live in the greatness of that which humanity feels within itself as a power of the spirit which it has to deliver into some yet ungrasped perfect form of clearness. To embellish life with beauty is only the most outward function of art and poetry, to make life more intimately beautiful and noble and great and full of meaning is its higher office, but its highest comes when the poet becomes the seer and reveals to man his eternal self and the godheads of its manifestation.

These new voices must needs be the result of the growth of the power of the spirit on the mind of man which is the promise of a coming era. It is always indeed the spirit in him that shapes his poetic utterance; but when that spirit is preoccupied with the outward life, the great poets are those who make his common life and action and its surroundings splendid and beautiful and

noble to him by the power of their vision; when it is the intellect through which it labours, the great poets are those who give a profound enlightening idea and creative interpretation of the world and nature and all that man is and does and thinks and dreams, but when the spirit turns to its own large intuitive will and vision, then it is yet profounder things to which the great poet must give utterance, the inmost sense of things, the inmost consciousness of Nature, the movement of the deepest soul of man, the truth that reveals the meaning of existence and the universal delight and beauty and the power of a greater life and the infinite potentialities of our experience and self-creation. These may not be the only strains, but they will be the greatest and those which the highest human mind will demand from the poet and they will colour all the rest by their opening of new vistas to the general intelligence and life sense of the race. And whatever poetry may make its substance or its subject, this growth of the power of the spirit must necessarily bring into it a more intense and revealing speech, a more inward and subtle and penetrating rhythm, a greater stress of sight, a more vibrant and responsive sense, the eye that looks at all smallest and greatest things for the significances that have not yet been discovered and the secrets that are not on the surface. That will be the type of the new utterance and the boundless field of poetic discovery left for the inspiration of the humanity of the future.

Chapter VI

The Form and the Spirit

ACHANGE in the spirit of poetry must necessarily bring with it a change of its forms, and this departure may be less or greater to the eye, more inward or more outward, but always there must be at least some subtle and profound alteration which, whatever the apparent fidelity to old moulds, is certain to amount in fact to a transmutation, since even the outward character and effect become other than they were and the soul of substance and movement a new thing. The opening of the creative mind into an intuitive and revelatory poetry need not of itself compel a revolution and total breaking up of the old forms and a creation of altogether new moulds: it may, especially where a preparatory labour in that sense has been doing a work of modification and adaptation, be effected for the most part by an opening up of new potentialities in old instruments and a subtle inner change of their character. Actually, however, while the previous revolutions in the domain of poetry have moved within the limits of the normal and received action of the poetic intelligence, the upward and inward movement and great widening of which the human mind is now in labour is an effort of such rapidity and magnitude that it appears like an irresistible breaking out of all familiar bounds and it is natural that the mentality in its effort at a completely new creation should wish to break too the old moulds as a restriction and a fettering narrowness and be desirous of discovering novel and unprecedented forms, fitting tenements and temples of the freer, subtler, vaster spirit that is preparing to enter into occupation. To remould seems to be an insufficient change, the creation of a new body for a quite new spirit the commanded discovery and labour. There must certainly take place in order to satisfy the changed vision a considerable departure in all the main provinces of poetic creation, the lyric, the drama, the narrative

or epic, and the question for solution is how far and in what way the technique of each kind will necessarily be affected or should with advantage be transformed so as to allow free room for the steps and the constructive figures of a finer and ampler poetic idea and a changed soul movement and a just correspondence to it in the art of the poet.

The lyrical impulse is the original and spontaneous creator of the poetic form, song the first discovery of the possibility of a higher because a rhythmic intensity of self-expression. It wells out from the intensity of touch and the spiritualised emotion of a more delicate or a deeper and more penetrating sight and feeling in the experience, captures and sustains the inevitable cadences of its joy or its attraction, sets the subtle measure of its feeling and keeps it by the magic of its steps in sound vibrating on the inner strings and psychic fibres. The lyric is a moment of heightened soul experience, sometimes brief in a lightness of aerial rapture, in a poignant ecstasy of pain, of joy or of mingled emotion or in a swift graver exaltation, sometimes prolonged and repeating or varying the same note, sometimes linking itself in a sustained succession to other moments that start from it or are suggested by its central motive. It is at first a music of simple melodies coming out of itself to which the spirit listens with pleasure and makes eternal by it the charm of self-discovery or of reminiscence. And the lyrical spirit may rest satisfied with these clear spontaneities of song or else it may prefer to weight its steps with thought and turn to a meditative movement or, great-winged, assume an epic elevation, or lyricise the successive moments of an action, or utter the responses of heart to heart, mind to mind, soul to soul, move between suggestions and counter-suggestions of mood and idea and feeling and devise a lyrical seed or concentration of drama. The widest in range as it is the most flexible in form and motive of all the poetic kinds, the others have grown out of it by the assumption of a more settled and deliberate and extended speech and a more ample structure. It is therefore in the lyric nearest to the freshness of an original impulse that a new spirit in poetry is likely to become aware of itself and feel out for its right ways of expression and to discover

with the most adaptable freedom and variety its own essential motives and cadences, first forms and simpler structures before it works out victoriously its greater motions or ampler figures in narrative and drama.

The freshest and most spontaneous liquidities of song utterance abounded in past literature at times when the direct movement of the life-spirit, whether confined to simple primary emotion and experience or deepening to the more vivid probings of its own richer but still natural self-aesthesia, has been the fountain-head of a stirred poetic utterance. It is then that there come the pure lyric outbursts and the poet is content to sing and let the feeling create its own native moulds of music. The thought satisfied with its own emotion is not too insistent to elaborate the lyrical form for its more intricate purposes or to give it certainly a weightier but almost inevitably a less simply rapturous movement. The intellectual ages sing less easily. It is their care to cut and carve the lyrical form with a self-conscious and considering art and their practice arrives at measures and movements of a consummate literary perfection, much power of modulation, a moved thinking and sentiment deliberately making the most of its own possibilities; but except in the voices of the one or two who are born with the capacity and need of the pure lyrical impulse, the too developed intellect cannot often keep or recover life's first fine careless rapture or call the memory of it into its own more loaded tones and measures. The lyric poetry of the ancient classical tongues is largely of this character and we find it there confined to a certain number of highly developed forms managed with a perfect and careful technique, and the movement of poetic feeling, sometimes grave, sometimes permitted a lighter and more rapid impulsion, is chastened and subdued to the service of the reflective poetic intelligence. The absolute simplicities and spontaneities of the soul's emotion which were the root of the original lyric impulse get only an occasional opportunity of coming back to the surface, and in their place there is the movement of a more thoughtful and often complex sentiment and feeling, not freshets of song, but the larger wave of the chant and elegy and ode: the flowers

of the field and mountain self-sown on the banks or near the sources are replaced by the blossoms of a careful culture. Still however reined in or penetrated and rendered grave by thought, the life of feeling is still there and the power and sincerity of the lyrical impulse abide as the base of the workings of the moved intelligence. But in the literary ages that are classical by imitation, there is ordinarily a great poverty, an absence or thinness of the lyrical element, the sincerity and confident self-pleasure of the feeling indispensable to the lyrical movement wither under the coldly observant and too scrutinising eye of the reflective reason, and the revival of song has to await the romantic movement of interest of a more eager and a wider intelligence which will endeavour to get back to some joy of the intimate powers of life and the vivid lyricism of the heart and the imagination. There is then a return by an imaginative effort to old cultivated forms of lyrical expression and to early simple movements like the ballad motive and in the end a great variety of experiments in new metrical moulds and subtle modifications of old structures, an attempt of the idea to turn back the thought mind to grave or happy sincerities of emotion or impose on it a more absolute assent to bare simplicities of thought and feeling and finally a living curiosity of the intelligence in the expression of all kinds and shades of sensation and emotion. The work of this developed poetic intellectuality differs from the early work whose spirit and manner it often tries hard to recover because it is the thought that is primarily at work and the form less a spontaneous creation of the soul than a deliberately intelligent structure, and while the movement of the pure lyrical impulse is entirely shaped by the feeling and the thought only accompanies it in its steps, here the thought actively intervenes and determines and cannot but sophisticate the emotional movement. This distinction has many consequences and most this pregnant result that even the simplicities of a developed poetical thought are willed simplicities and the end is a curiosity of work that has many triumphs of aesthetic satisfaction but not often any longer the native tones of the soul when the pure lyrical feeling was still possible.

The turn to a more direct self-expression of the spirit must find out its way first by the emergence of a new kind of lyrical sincerity which is neither the directness of the surface life emotions nor the moved truth of the thought mind seizing or observing the emotion and bringing out its thought significances. There are in fact only two pure and absolute sincerities here, the power of the native intuition of itself by life which has for its result a direct and obvious identity of the thing felt and its expression, and the power of identity of the spirit when it takes up thought and feeling and life and makes them one with some inmost absolute truth of their and our existence. There is a power too of the sincerities of thought, but that is an intermediary between life and the spirit and only poetic when it fills itself with the sense of one of the others or links them together or aids to bring them to oneness. It is therefore a transition from the lyricism of life weighted by the stresses of thought to the lyricism of the inmost spirit which uses but is beyond thought that has to be made. And here we notice a significant tendency, an endeavour to present life in an utmost clarity of its intention and form and outline stripped and discharged of the thought's abundant additions, made naked of the haze of the reflective intelligence, the idea being that we shall thus get at its bare truth and feeling, its pure vital intuition where that starts out of the subconscious suggestion and meets the seeing mind and a conscious identity can be created with its sense in our souls by the revealing fidelity of the expression. There is often added to this endeavour the injunction that the rhythmic movement should follow the fluctuations of life with a subtle adaptation of the verbal music, and this notion is used to justify the now common free or else irregular and often broken-backed verse which is supposed to be the medium of a subtler correspondence than is at all possible to the formal rigidity of fixed metres. But in actual fact this kind of verse, whatever its power of lyric intention, sensibly fails to give us the satisfaction of a true lyrical form, because it ignores the truth that what sustains the lyrical spirit is the discovery and consistent following of some central cadence revealing the very spirit of the feeling and not at all the sole pursuit of its more

outward movements and changes: these can only rightly come in as a modulation of the constant essential music. This double need may possibly be met by a very skilful free movement, but not so easily, straightforwardly and simply as in a fidelity, much more really natural than these overdone niceties, to the once discovered fixed cadence. And besides the bare truth of the vital intuition is not that inmost truth of things our minds are striving to see; that is something much greater, profounder, more infinite in its content and unending in its suggestion; not our identity in sight and spiritual emotion with the limited subconscious intention of life, but rather a oneness with something in it at once superconscious, immanent and comprehensive of which that is only a blind index will be the moving power of a greater utterance. And until we have found, whether by spiritual experience or poetic insight, this identity and its revelations in ourselves and in things, we shall not have laid a sound and durable basis for the future creation.

The essential and decisive step of the future art of poetry will perhaps be to discover that it is not the form which either fixes or reveals the spirit but the spirit which makes out of itself the form and the word and this with so sure a discovery, once we can live in it and create out of it without too much interference from the difficult and devising intellect, that their movement becomes as spontaneously inevitable as the movements and their mould as structurally perfect as the magical formations of inconscient Nature. Nature creates perfectly because she creates directly out of life and is not intellectually self-conscious, the spirit will create perfectly because it creates directly out of self and is spontaneously supra-intellectually all-conscious. It is no doubt this truth of a spiritually just and natural creation that some of the present ideas and tendencies are trying to adumbrate, but not as yet as understandingly as one could desire. The decisive revealing lyrical outburst must come when the poet has learnt to live creatively only in the inmost spiritual sight and identity of his own self with the self of his objects and images and to sing only from the deepest spiritual emotion which is the ecstasy of feeling of that identity or at least of some extreme nearness to

its sheer directness of touch and vision. And then we may find that this Ananda, this spiritual delight, for it is something more intimate and rapturous than emotion, has brought with it an unprecedented freedom of manifold and many-suggested and yet perfectly sufficient and definite formation and utterance. The poetry born from the inmost spirit will not bind the poet in any limiting circle or narrow theory of an intellectual art principle, but create at will according to the truth of the spirit's absolute moments. According to the innate rightnesses of the motive and its needed cadence the spirit will move him to discover infinite possibilities of new spiritual measure and intonation in time-old lyrical rhythms or to find a new principle of rhythm and structure or to make visible developments which will keep past treasures of sound and yet more magically innovate than can be done by any breaking up of forms in order to build a new order out of chaos. The intimate and intuitive poetry of the future will have on the one side all the inexhaustible range and profound complexities of the cosmic imagination of which it will be the interpreter and to that it must suit a hundred single and separate and combined and harmonic lyrical tones of poignantly or richly moved utterance, and on the other it will reach those bare and absolute simplicities of utter and essential sight in which thought sublimates into a translucidity of light and vision, feeling passes beyond itself into sheer spiritual ecstasy and the word rarefies into a pure voice out of the silence. The sight will determine the lyrical form and discover the identities of an inevitable rhythm and no lesser standard prevail against the purity of this spiritual principle.

A spiritual change must equally come over the intention and form of the drama when once the age has determined its tendencies, and this change is already foreshadowed in an evolution which is still only at its commencement and first tentatives. Hitherto there have been two forms consecrated by great achievements, the drama of life, whether presenting only vivid outsides and significant incidents and morals and manners or expressive of the life-soul and its workings in event and character and passion, and the drama of the idea or, more vitally,

of the idea-power that is made to work itself out in the life movement, lay its hold on the soul's motions, create the type, use the character and the passion for its instruments and at its highest tension appear as an agent of the conflict of ideal forces that produce the more lofty tragedies of human action. The paucity of great creation in the modern drama after one very considerable moment of power and vision has been due largely to an inability to decide between these two motives or to discover a great poetic form for the drama of the idea or effect in the poetic imagination some fusion of the intellectual and the life motive which would be an effective dramatic rendering of the modern way of seeing man and his life. The only recent vital and effective dramatic writing has been in prose and that has taken the questionable shape of the problem play which is peculiarly congenial to the dominating interests of the highly intellectualised but always practical mind of humanity today. The poetic form has long been for the most part a reproduction of past moulds and motives without any roots of vitality in the living mind of the age; but recently there has been a more inward and profounder movement which promises some chance of replacing this sort of unsatisfying imitation by a novel and a sincerer kind of dramatic poetry. An attempt has been initiated to create an inner drama of the soul with the soul itself for the real stage. There is in the spirit and the forms of this endeavour a predominance as yet of the lyrical rather than the dramatic motive, an insufficient power of making the characters living beings rather than unsubstantial types or shadows of soul movements or even the figures of a veiled allegory and parable; and there is needed perhaps for a greater vitality a freer and more nobly aesthetic stage which would not be limited by the external realism that now stands in the way of a living revival of the poetic and artistic theatre. Nevertheless this attempt is a true though not a complete index of the direction the creative mind must take in the future.

The soul of man, a many-motioned representative of the world-spirit, subsisting and seeking for itself and its own meanings amid the laws and powers and moving forces of the universe

and discovering and realising its spiritual relations with others will be the vision and intention of a dramatic poetry fully reflective of the now growing intuitive mind of the future. All drama must be a movement of life and of action because its mode of presentation is through the speech of living beings and the interaction of their natures, but equally the real interest except in the least poetic kinds is an internal movement and an action of the soul because dramatic speech is poetically interesting only when it is an instrument of human self-expression and not merely a support for a series of stirring incidents. The drama of the future will differ from the romantic play or tragedy because the thing which dramatic speech will represent will be something more internal than the life soul and its brilliant pageant of passion and character. The external web of events and action, whether sparing or abundant, strongly marked or slight in incidence, will only be outward threads and indices and the movement that will throughout occupy the mind will be the procession of the soul phases or the turns of the soul action: the character, whether profusely filled in in detail in the modern fashion or simply and strongly outlined in the purer ancient method, will not be mistaken for the person, but accepted as only an inner life notation of the spirit: the passions, which have hitherto been prominently brought forward as the central stuff of the drama, will be reduced to their proper place as indicative colour and waves on the stream of spiritual self-revelation. And this greater kind will differ too from the classical tragedy of which the method was some significant and governing idea working out its life issues, because the idea will only be to a larger human mind better instructed in the secret of existence the self-view by the soul of its own greater and more intimate issues and of the conscient turns of its existence. The personage of the play will be the spirit in man diversified or multitudinous in many human beings whose inner spiritual much more intimately than their external life relations will determine the development, and the culminations will be steps of solution of those spiritual problems of our existence which after all are at the root of and include and inform all the others. The drama will be no longer an

interpretation of Fate or self-acting Karma or of the simple or complex natural entanglements of the human life-movement, but a revelation of the Soul as its own fate and determiner of its life and its karma and behind it of the powers and the movements of the spirit in the universe. It will not be limited by any lesser idealisms or realisms, but representing at will this and other worlds, the purpose of the gods and the actions of men, man's dreams and man's actualities each as real as the other, the struggles and the sufferings and the victories of the spirit, the fixities of Nature and her mutabilities and significant perversions and fruitful conversions, interpret in dramatic form the inmost truth of the action of man the infinite. It will not be limited either by any old or new formal convention, but transmute old moulds and invent others and arrange according to the truth of its vision its acts and the evolution of its dramatic process or the refrain of its lyrical or the march of its epic motive. This clue at least is the largest and the most suggestive for a new and living future creation in the forms of the drama.

The spirit and intention of the narrative and epic forms of poetry must undergo the same transmuting change. Hitherto the poetical narrative has been a simple relation or a vivid picturing or transcript of life and action varied by description of surrounding circumstance and indication of mood and feeling and character or else that with the development of an idea or a mental and moral significance at the basis with the story as its occasion or form of its presentation. The change to a profounder motive will substitute a soul significance as the real substance, the action will not be there for its external surface interest but as a vital indication of the significance, the surrounding circumstance will be only such as helps to point and frame it and bring out its accessory suggestions and mood and feeling and character its internal powers and phases. An intensive narrative, intensive in simplicity or in richness of significant shades, tones and colours, will be the more profound and subtle art of this kind in the future and its appropriate structures determined by the needs of this inner art motive. A first form of the intensive and spiritually significant poetic narrative has already been created and

attempts to replace the more superficially intellectual motives, where the idea rather supervened upon the story or read into it the sense of its turns or its total movement, but here the story tends more to be the living expression of the idea and the idea itself vibrant in the speech and description and action the index of a profounder soul motive. The future poetry will follow this direction with a more and more subtle and variable inwardness and a greater fusion and living identity of soul motive, indicative idea, suggestive description and intensely significant speech and action. The same governing vision will be there as in lyric and drama; the method of development will alone be different according to the necessities of the more diffused, circumstanced and outwardly processive form which is proper to narrative.

The epic is only the narrative presentation on its largest canvas and at its highest elevation, greatness and amplitude of spirit and speech and movement. It is sometimes asserted that the epic is solely proper to primitive ages when the freshness of life made a story of large and simple action of supreme interest to the youthful mind of humanity, the literary epic an artificial prolongation by an intellectual age and a genuine epic poetry no longer possible now or in the future. This is to mistake form and circumstance for the central reality. The epic, a great poetic story of man or world or the gods, need not necessarily be a vigorous presentation of external action: the divinely appointed creation of Rome, the struggle of the principles of good and evil as presented in the great Indian poems, the pageant of the centuries or the journey of the seer through the three worlds beyond us are as fit themes as primitive war and adventure for the imagination of the epic creator. The epics of the soul most inwardly seen as they will be by an intuitive poetry, are his greatest possible subject, and it is this supreme kind that we shall expect from some profound and mighty voice of the future. His indeed may be the song of greatest flight that will reveal from the highest pinnacle and with the largest field of vision the destiny of the human spirit and the presence and ways and purpose of the Divinity in man and the universe.

Chapter VII

The Word and the Spirit

A DEVELOPMENT of the kind of which we are speaking must affect not only the frames of poetry, but initiate also a subtle change of its word and rhythmic movement. The poetic word is a vehicle of the spirit, the chosen medium of the soul's self-expression, and any profound modification of the inner habit of the soul, its thought atmosphere, its way of seeing, its type of feeling, any change of the light in which it lives and the power of the breath which it breathes, greatening of its elevations or entry into deeper chambers of its self must reflect itself in a corresponding modification, changed intensity of light or power, inner greatening and deepening of the word which it has to use, and if there is no such change or if it is not sufficient for the new intention of the spirit, then there can be no living or no perfect self-expression. The old habits of speech cannot contain the new spirit and must either enlarge and deepen themselves and undergo a transformation or else be broken up and make way for another figure. The conservatism of the human mind stands in the way of the transforming force and insists for a time on the authority of traditional or already current standards of literary and poetic perfection, but the eternally self-renewing spirit must have eventually its way or else there will come a petrifaction, a decay by too much stability, which is a much worse danger than the decadence predicted by the purist when faced by what seems to him a morbid strangeness and distortion of the poetic moulds of speech or a perilous departure from safe and enduring rules of perfection. A change of this kind very considerable in its magnitude and force of renovation has been for some time at work in most living literatures.

I have already suggested that the governing spirit and intention of this change, not always very clearly envisaged even by those who are most active in bringing it about, is a turn

to a more intimate and directly or fully intuitive speech and rhythm. The thing is in itself so subtle that it can better be indicated than analysed, adequately described or made precise to the intelligence. And moreover all poetry except that of the most outward kind,—a verse movement which is separable rather by distinction of form than power of the soul from prose,—is in its inmost inspiration and character intuitive, more a creation of the vision and feeling than of the intelligence, and the change made is one of the level or the depth of the self from which the poetic intuition, usually modified in transmission, immediately acts, and of its intervening psychological instrument rather than its primary initiating movement. The initiating inspiration must always be intuitive in a greater or lesser degree and it is the form or expression that differs. The intellect in its use of speech is apt to regard it as an intellectual device, a means for the precise connotation of object and idea or at most an elegant and pleasing or an effective and forceful presentation. The poetic view and use of speech is of a very different kind and enters more into the vital reality of the word and the more mystic connection between the movement of the spirit and the significances of the mental utterance. The poet has to do much more than to offer a precise, a harmonious or a forcefully presented idea to the intelligence: he has to give a breath of life to the word and for that must find out and make full use of its potential power of living suggestion; he has to make it carry in it not only the intellectual notion but the emotion and the psychical sensation of the thing he would make present to us; he has to erect an image of its presence and appeal with which we can inwardly live as we live with the presence and appeal of the objects of the actual universe. As in the Vedic theory the Spirit was supposed to create the worlds by the Word, so the poet brings into being in himself and us by his creative word fragmentarily or largely, in isolated pieces or massed spaces an inner world of beings, objects and experiences. But all creation is a mystery in its secret of inmost process and it is only at best the most outward or mechanical part of it which admits analysis; the creative faculty of the poetic mind is no exception. The poet is a magician who hardly knows the secret

of his own spell; even the part taken by the consciously critical or constructive mind is less intellectual than intuitive; he creates by an afflatus of spiritual power of which his mind is the channel and instrument and the appreciation of it in himself and others comes not by an intellectual judgment but by a spiritual feeling. It is that which must tell him whether the word that comes is the true body of his vision or whether he has to seek or to wait for another that shall be felt as its adequate, its effective, its illuminative, its inspired or its inevitable utterance. The distinction that I am trying to draw here between the various powers of the always intuitive speech of poetry can therefore better be felt than critically stated, but at the same time certain indications may serve to make it more clearly sensed in its spirit with the sympathetic aid of the critical intelligence.

The words which we use in our speech seem to be, if we look only at their external formation, mere physical sounds which a device of the mind has made to represent certain objects and ideas and perceptions,—a machinery nervous perhaps in origin, but developed for a constantly finer and more intricate use by the growing intelligence; but if we look at them in their inmost psychological and not solely at their more external aspect, we shall see that what constitutes speech and gives it its life and appeal and significance is a subtle conscious force which informs and is the soul of the body of sound: it is a superconscious Nature-Force raising its material out of our subconscience but growingly conscious in its operations in the human mind that develops itself in one fundamental way and yet variously in language. It is this Force, this Shakti to which the old Vedic thinkers gave the name of Vak, the goddess of creative Speech, and the Tantric psychists supposed that this Power acts in us through different subtle nervous centres on higher and higher levels of its force and that thus the word has a graduation of its expressive powers of truth and vision. One may accept as a clue of great utility this idea of different degrees of the force of speech, each separately characteristic and distinguishable, and recognise one of the grades of the Tantric classification, Pashyanti the seeing word, as the description of that degree of power to which the

poetic mind is called to elevate itself and which is original and native to its manner of expression. The degree of word-force characteristic of prose speech avails ordinarily to distinguish and state things to the conceptual intelligence; the word of the poet sees and presents in its body and image to a subtle visual perception in the mind awakened by an inner rhythmic audition truth of soul and thought experience and truth of sense and life, the spiritual and living actuality of idea and object. The prosaist may bring to his aid more or less of the seeing power, the poet dilute his vision with intellectual observation and statement, but the fundamental difference remains that ordinary speech proceeds from and appeals to the conceiving intelligence while it is the seeing mind that is the master of poetic utterance.

This seeing speech has itself, however, different grades of its power of vision and expression of vision. The first and simplest power is limited to a clear poetic adequacy and at its lowest difficult to distinguish from prose statement except by its more compact and vivid force of presentation and the subtle difference made by the rhythm which brings in a living appeal and adds something of an emotional and sensational nearness to what would otherwise be little more than an intellectual expression; but in a higher and much finer clarity this manner has the power to make us not only conceive adequately, but see the object or idea in a certain temperate lucidity of vision. The difference can best be illustrated by an example of each kind taken at random, one from Dryden,

Whate'er he did was done with so much ease,
In him alone 'twas natural to please:—

and the other from Wordsworth,

The waves beside them danced, but they
Outdid the sparkling waves in glee:
A poet could not but be gay
In such a jocund company.

The first is in the manner of terse prose statement, but made just poetical by a certain life and vividness and a rhythmic suggestion touching though not deeply some emotional centre of response just sufficient to make it a thought felt and not merely presented to the conception: the other though not going beyond a luminously clear and strong poetical adequacy in its manner of speech is far away from this doubtful borderland and from the beginning a thing seen and lived within us and awakening a satisfied soul response. It has the native action of the seeing word and bears the stamp of a spiritual sincerity greater, profounder, more beautiful than that of the intelligence.

The second power tries to go beyond this fine and perfect adequacy in its intensities, attempts a more rich or a more powerful expression, not merely sound and adequate to poetic vision, but dynamic and strongly effective. In prose also there is this difference and on its lower levels its attempt at effect takes the shape of rhetoric and appeals to a kind of nervous energy of the intelligence but, when its mood is more intellectually deep and sincere, it prefers to arrive rather by subtler means, suggestive turn, aptness and vividness and richness and beauty of phrase. Poetic speech follows the same methods but in another and higher manner and with a different atmosphere. There is indeed a poetic rhetoric which differs from prose rhetoric only in the same way as the lower kind of poetic adequacy differs from prose adequacy by just managing to bring in some element of rhythmic emotion and vision, and of this kind we may take an effective example from Pope,—

Atoms and systems into ruins hurled
And now a bubble burst and now a world.

A greater spirit and a less intellectual and more imaginative sincerity and elevation of thought, feeling and vision will give us a sublimer poetic rhetoric, as in certain lines of Milton belonging to his more external manner,—

Hurled headlong flaming from the ethereal sky
With hideous ruin and combustion down

To bottomless perdition.

At a more temperate pitch and more capable of a certain subtlety of suggestion we can see the adequate changing into the more rhetorical poetic manner, as in many passages of Wordsworth,—

And oft when in my heart was heard
Thy timely mandate, I deferred
The task in smoother walks to stray.

A richer, subtler and usually a truer poetic effectivity is attained not by this rhetorical manner, but through a language succeeding by apt and vivid metaphor and simile, richness and beauty of phrase or the forceful word that makes the mind see the body of the thought with a singularly living distinctness or energy of suggestion and nearness,— Wordsworth's

Her eyes as stars of twilight fair,
Like twilight's too her dusky hair,
But all things else about her drawn
From Maytime and the cheerful dawn:

Shelley's

When hearts have once mingled,
Love first leaves the well-built nest,
The weak one is singled
To endure what it once possessed;

or

Its passions will rock thee,
As the storms rock the ravens on high;
Bright reason will mock thee
Like the sun from a wintry sky.

In this manner English poetry is especially opulent and gets from it much of its energy and power; but yet we feel that this is not the highest degree of which poetic speech is capable. There is a more intimate vision, a more penetrating spiritual emotion,

a more intense and revealing speech, to which the soul can be more vibrantly sensible.

This comes to its first self-discovery when either the adequate or the dynamically effective style is raised into a greater illumination in which the inner mind sees and feels object, emotion, idea not only clearly or richly or distinctly and powerfully, but in a flash or outbreak of transforming light which kindles the thought or image into a disclosure of new significances of a much more inner character, a more profoundly revealing vision, emotion, spiritual response. This illuminating poetic speech comes suddenly and rarely, as in Dryden's

And Paradise was opened in his face,
breaking out of a surrounding merely effective poetical eloquence, or intervening at times as in Shelley's

The heart's echoes render
No song when the spirit is mute,
No song but sad dirges
Like the wind through a ruined cell,

where the effective force of image and feeling that makes us see and respond by a strong suggestion, at work throughout the rest of the lyric, passes now beyond itself into an illuminative closeness and then we feel, we bear, we ourselves live at the moment through the power of the poetic word the authentic identity of the experience. It comes in luminous phrases emerging from a fine and lucid adequacy and the justice or the delicacy makes place for a lustrous profundity of suggestion, as in Shelley's

And now, alas! the poor sprite is
Imprisoned for some fault of his
In a body like a grave,

or it strikes across a movement of strong and effective poetical thinking, as in Wordsworth's *Ode to Duty*,

Me this unchartered freedom tires,
or leaps up at once to set the tone of a poem,

She was a phantom of delight
When first she gleamed upon my sight,
A lovely apparition sent
To be a moment's ornament.

And supreme examples within the limits of this power which will bring out all their difference from the more common texture of poetry, may be taken from the same poets,—Shelley's

The silent moon
In her interlunar swoon,

and Wordsworth's

They flash upon the inner eye
Which is the bliss of solitude.

Here we get the pure illuminative speech of poetry not mixed with or arising out of the lucid adequate or the richly or forcefully effective or dynamic manner, but changed into an altogether supra-intellectual light of intuitive substance and vision and utterance.

The difference here we find to be an increasing intensity and finally a concentrated purity and fullness of the substance and language of intuitive expression. In the less intense styles the thing conveyed is indeed something suggested to and by the intuitive mind,—only the least inspired poetry is purely intellectual in substance,—but it is expressed with a certain indirectness or else with a dilution of the body of the intuitive light, and this is due to an intellectualised language or to the speech of an imagination which tries to bridge the gulf between the intuitive mind and the normal intelligence. The two powers seem to lean on and support each other, at a certain point are brought very close and even up to the point of fusion, and then suddenly the border is crossed, the difficulty of getting out through the doors of the mind the pure untranslated language of intuitive vision overcome and we have a word of intense light in which the intellect and its imagination count for nothing and the mind's language, even while remaining in material the same,

undergoes an unanalysable alchemy and spiritual change. And beyond this first language of intuitive illumination we arrive at a more uplifted range of an inspired poetic speech which brings to us not only pure light and beauty and inexhaustible depth, but a greater moved ecstasy of highest or largest thought and sight and speech and at its highest culminates in the inevitable, absolute and revealing word. This too is sometimes a magical transformation of the adequate manner, as in Wordsworth's

A voice so thrilling ne'er was heard
In springtime from the cuckoo bird
Breaking the silence of the seas
Among the farthest Hebrides —

sometimes of the richer or more dynamic imaged style,

Flowers laugh before thee in their beds
And fragrance in thy footing treads;
Thou dost preserve the stars from wrong;
And the most ancient heavens through thee are fresh and strong

— and sometimes it is the illuminative speech powerfully inspired and rising suddenly into the highest revealing word,

The cataracts blow their trumpets from the steep,
No more shall grief of mine the season wrong,
I hear the echoes through the mountains throng,
The winds come to me from the fields of sleep.

There the inspiration takes up the effort of the poetic intelligence and imagination into a stirred concentration of the speech of sight and in its last movement seems to leap even beyond itself and beyond any pursuit or touch of the intellect into a pure revelatory spiritual vision.

The genius of the poet can do work of a high beauty or of a considerable greatness in any of these degrees of poetic speech, but it is the more purely intuitive, inspired or revelatory utterance that is the most rare and difficult for the human mind to command, and it is these kinds that we peculiarly value. Their power not only moves and seizes us the most, but it

admits the soul to a most spiritually profound light of seeing and ecstasy of feeling even of ordinary ideas and objects and in its highest force to thoughts and things that surpass the manner and range and limits of depth of the normal intelligence. The greatest poets have been those in whom these moments of a highest intensity of intuitive and inspired speech have been of a frequent occurrence and in one or two, as in Shakespeare, of a miraculous abundance. There is however this subtle farther variation that this kind of utterance, though essentially the same always, takes a different colour according to the kind of object vision and subjective vision which is peculiar to the mind of the poet in its normal action. The citations I have made have been all taken from writers in whom the poetic intelligence and its type of imagination have been the leading forces. The same power in poets who speak more with the direct voice of the life-soul assumes quite another hue and seems even of a very different texture of language. The characteristic distinction of its note from that of the more intellectualised intuition can best be illustrated from Shakespeare and by such a passage as the speech of Claudio,

Ay, but to die and go we know not where;
To lie in cold obstruction and to rot;
This sensible warm motion to become
A kneaded clod: and the delighted spirit
To bathe in fiery floods, or to reside
In thrilling region of thick-ribbed ice;
To be imprisoned in the viewless winds
And blown with restless violence round about
The pendant world:

and the rest. There is an illumination, an intuitive intensity of the life spirit and its feeling in that thought and its speech which we can no longer command in the same direct and essential manner. And even the ideas that seem to belong to the region of the thinking intelligence have subtly in these poets the same inspiration. It is sufficient to compare Shakespeare's

Life's but a walking shadow . . .
it is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing —

and Shelley's voicing of a kindred idea of transience,

Heaven's light forever shines, earth's shadows fly;
Life like a dome of many-coloured glass
Stains the white radiance of eternity,
Until death tramples it to fragments.

The one has the colour of an intuition of the life-soul in one of its intense moods and we not only think the thought but seem to feel it even in our nerves of mental sensation, the other is the thought mind itself uttering in a moved, inspired and illuminative language an idea of the pure intelligence. It would be difficult for the present human mind to recover the same spirit as moved Shakespeare's speech; it is nearer to that of the later poets and their voice of the brooding or the moved poetic intelligence or of the intuitive mind rising out of the intellect and still preserving something of its tones. Still the manner of the coming poetry is likely to recover and hold as its central secret something akin to the older poet, a greater straight impact and natural body of intuitive intensity, because it too will take up the thought and feeling into a concentrated expression of an equal though a different directness. It will be the language of a higher intuitive mind swallowing up the intellectual tones into the closenesses and identities of a supra-intellectual light and Ananda.

The future poetry, assuming it to be of the kind I have suggested, its object to express some inmost truth of the things which it makes its subject, must to be perfectly adequate to its task express them in the inmost way, and that can only be done if, transcending the more intellectualised or externally vital and sensational expression, it speaks wholly in the language of an intuitive mind and vision and imagination, intuitive sense, intuitive emotion, intuitive vital feeling, which can seize in a

peculiarly intimate light of knowledge by a spiritual identity the inmost thought, sight, image, sense, life, feeling of that which it is missioned to utter. The voice of poetry comes from a region above us, a plane of our being above and beyond our personal intelligence, a supermind which sees things in their innermost and largest truth by a spiritual identity and with a lustrous effulgency and rapture and its native language is a revelatory, inspired, intuitive word limpid or subtly vibrant or densely packed with the glory of this ecstasy and lustre. It is the possession of the mind by the supramental touch and the communicated impulse to seize this sight and word that creates the psychological phenomenon of poetic inspiration and it is the invasion of it by a superior power to that which it is normally able to harbour that produces the temporary excitement of brain and heart and nerve which accompanies the inrush of the influence. The inspired word comes, as said of old the Vedic seers, from the home of Truth, *sadañād ṛtasya*, the high and native level of a superior self which holds the light of a reality that is hidden by the lesser truth of the normal sense and intelligence. It is rarely however that it comes direct and unaltered, ready embodied and perfect and absolute: ordinarily there is an influx and a suggestion of its light and speech hidden in a cloud of formless lustre and we have to receive as best we can, to find and disengage or to reshape word and substance with the aid of our mental powers while they are still possessed and excited and enlightened by the influence. The word comes secretly from above the mind, but it is plunged first into our intuitive depths and emerges imperfectly to be shaped by the poetic feeling and intelligence, *ḥṛḍā taṣṭam maniṣā*. An intuitive self in the depth of each of our parts of being, hid in sense, life, heart, mind, is the transmitting agent, a subliminal power concealed in some secret cavern within of which the curtained and crystal doors disclose only occasional and partial transparencies or are sometimes half open or ajar,—*nīhitam guhāyām, guhāhitam gahvareṣṭham*. The less we are near and awake to this agent, the more externally intellectualised and vitalised becomes the tone and substance of the poetic speech; the more we can bring in

of its direct power and vision, the more intuitive and illumined becomes the word of our utterance. And the more we can light up the veil and have the direct transmission, the greater the force of inspiration and revelation and the nearer we shall get to an absolute and inevitable word straight from the supramental sight and language.

The most characteristic trend of recent poetry has been an attempt, sometimes lucid, sometimes half understanding or obscure, to break open the doors of the luminous cavern and to get the seeing and phrase which would be that of this intuitive self of our intelligence and imagination and sensation and life and feeling. In a certain kind of continental poetry it is a search for the sheer intuitivities of sensation and of the more vital emotions and states and experiences and relations with objects and persons, the spirit's sense of itself, as it were, externalised and made vital and physical and some illumination of the inner meaning of this externality, that motivates a new kind of utterance. Much of present-day English poetry drives in the same direction but with less subtlety and a more forceful outwardness of sight and tone. The Irish poets and in a different way the few Indians, Tagore and Chattpadhyay and Mrs. Naidu, who have written in English or transferred their poetical thought into that medium, aim at pure intuitivities of a more psychic feeling, sensation and life-vision or a subtle and psychic or spiritualised imagination and intelligence. All however are secretly moved to their very different and often contradictory tendencies by the same fundamental endeavour of the Time-spirit. The difficulty has been to find the intuitive language which will be the true medium and the condition of perfect success of this endeavour. The old habits of poetic speech still cling around and encrust or dilute the subtler subtlety, the more luminous light, the intenser intensities, the deeper depths sought for by the intuitive utterance. These things however are already there and are shaping a new manner of speech, a basis for the more inner and illumined poetic language of the future. At its best, and oftenest in the greater poets, it emerges from the admixture of older methods and manifests the whole and pure characteristic note of the intuitive manner. It is

the greatening, deepening and making normal of this kind that is likely to bring the perfect voice of the poetry of the future.

The character of this change is a raising of what I have called the adequate and the dynamic degrees of poetic speech to the third intuitive and illuminative power or a touching and penetrating of them with its peculiar lustre. The more potent inspired or revelatory inevitable word occasionally intervenes as in the older poets, but it is the greater generalising of the intermediate, the first more purely intuitive degree that is the common feature, the level of the endeavour, the distinctive stamp where it succeeds of this new utterance. It takes the clear and strong or the lucid and delicate poetical adequacy of speech from which the older poets started and takes too the dynamic poetical eloquence or the richer suggestive and imaginatively effective power of language and tries to effect commonly what they were content to do only in moments of greater elevation, — to put into its mould or even surcharge it with a stronger or subtler content of illumination and this also to discharge of the intellectual tone and colour which so usually holds or else makes its way into all but their rarest utterances and to arrive at a pure intuitive expression of sensation and feeling and thought or of an inwardly intuitive vital vision or of a strong or a subtle psychic or spiritualised intelligence. This is a language which aims at bare or strange or subtle or pregnant identities between the mind's intuitive thought and perception and emotion and a rarer than the surface truth and meaning of the object or experience. And very often the work is done not so much by the language as the subtle sense suggestion of the rhythm and word music, the sound doing the alchemic labour of transfiguration which the expression is not yet strong and adult enough to lead and compass.

These are beginnings and beyond lies much that has to be done to effectuate the complete change; an uncertain transition has yet to pass into a great transformation. The moulds or at least the spirit and manner of poetic expression have to be recast, very much as Shakespeare and his contemporaries recast the poetic speech of the English tongue so as to give shape and room to

the surge of self-seeing and self-feeling and self-thinking of the life soul of man: but this time it has to be done in many languages by the minds of many nation entities at once and to make shape and room for the multitudinous vastitudes, the finer and finer subtleties, the absolute transparencies of the seeing, feeling, and thinking of the inmost self and spirit in man in intimate touch with the opening truths of all the levels of his existence and all his surroundings in Nature and in supernature. The voices we already have, the as yet strange and not yet universally accepted subtleties of some, the immature strainings and violences of others, the work of those who have something of the new substance but not a mastery of its native expression and those who have the new speech and rhythm but a poverty of the substance that should have made it rich and ample, the perfections attained even, are to be regarded only as incipient efforts and successes and stimulations to a more complete disclosure of the unfolding spirit. The speech that opens more constantly the doors of the intuitive self in the caverns of light of our nature has not done all that is to be done. The speech also has to be found that shall come by the rending or removal of the golden lid between our intelligence and the effulgent supra-intelligence and effect a direct and sovereign descent and pouring of some absolute sight and word of the spirit into the moulds of human language.

Chapter VIII

Conclusion

THE POETRY of the future has to solve, if the suggestions I have made are sound, a problem new to the art of poetic speech, an utterance of the deepest soul of man and of the universal spirit in things, not only with another and a more complete vision, but in the very inmost language of the self-experience of the soul and the sight of the spiritual mind. The attempt to speak in poetry the inmost things of the spirit or to use a psychical and spiritual seeing other than that of the more outward imagination and intelligence has indeed been made before, but for the most part and except in rare moments of an unusually inspired speech it has used some kind of figure or symbol more than a direct language of inmost experience; or else, where it has used such a language, it has been within the limited province of a purely inward experience as in the lofty philosophic and spiritual poetry of the Upanishads, the expression of a peculiar psychic feeling of Nature common in far eastern poets or the poetic setting of mystic states or of an especial religious emotion and experience of which we have a few examples in Europe and many in the literature of western Asia and India. It is a different and much larger creative and interpretative movement that we now see in its first stages, an expansion of the inner way of vision to outer no less than to inner things, to all that is subjective to us and all that is objective, a seeing by a closer identity in the self of man with the self of things and life and Nature and of all that meets him in the universe. The poet has to find the language of these identities, and even symbol and figure, when brought in to assist the more direct utterance, must be used in a different fashion, less as a veil, more as a real correspondence.

The first condition of the complete emergence of this new poetic inspiration and this vaster and deeper significance of

poetic speech must be the completion of an as yet only initial spiritualised turn of our general human feeling and intelligence. At present the human mind is occupied in passing the borders of two kingdoms. It is emerging out of a period of active and mostly materialistic intellectualism towards a primary intuitive seeking to which the straining of the intellect after truth has been brought in the very drive of its own impulse by a sort of slipping over unexpected borders. There is therefore an uncertain groping in many directions some of which are only valuable as a transitional effort and, if they could be the end and final movement, might land us only in a brilliant corruption and decadence. There is a vitalistic intuitivism sometimes taking a more subjective, sometimes a more objective form, that lingers amid dubious lights on the border and cannot get through its own rather thick and often violent lustres and colours to a finer and truer spiritual vision. There is an emotional and sensational psychical intuitivism half emerging from and half entangled in the vitalistic motive that has often a strange beauty and brilliance, sometimes stained with morbid hues, sometimes floating in a vague mist, sometimes — and this is a common tendency — strained to an exaggeration of half vital, half psychic motive. There is a purer and more delicate psychic intuition with a spiritual issue, that which has been brought by the Irish poets into English literature. The poetry of Whitman and his successors has been that of life, but of life broadened, raised and illumined by a strong intellectual intuition of the self of man and the large soul of humanity. And at the subtlest elevation of all that has yet been reached stands or rather wings and floats in a high intermediate region the poetry of Tagore, not in the complete spiritual light, but amid an air shot with its seekings and glimpses, a sight and cadence found in a psycho-spiritual heaven of subtle and delicate soul experience transmuting the earth tones by the touch of its radiance. The wide success and appeal of his poetry is indeed one of the most significant signs of the tendency of the mind of the age. At the same time one feels that none of these things are at all the whole of what we are seeking or the definite outcome and issue. That can only be assured when

a supreme light of the spirit, a perfect joy and satisfaction of the subtlety and complexity of a finer psychic experience and a wide strength and amplitude of the life soul sure of the earth and open to the heavens have met, found each other and fused together in the sovereign unity of some great poetic discovery and utterance.

It is possible that it may be rather in Eastern languages and by the genius of Eastern poets that there will come the first discovery of this perfection: the East has always had in its temperament a greater constant nearness to the spiritual and psychic sight and experience and it is only a more perfect turning of this sight on the whole life of man to accept and illuminate that is needed for the realisation of that for which we are still waiting. On the other hand the West has this advantage that though it is only now emerging not so much into the spiritual light as into an outer half-lit circle and though it is hampered by an excessive outward, intellectual and vital pressure, it has at present a more widely ranging thought and a more questing and active eye, and if these once take the right direction, the expression is not so much encircled by past spiritual forms and traditions. It is in any case the shock upon each other of the oriental and occidental mentalities, on the one side the large spiritual mind and inward eye turned upon self and eternal realities, on the other the free inquiry of thought and the courage of the life energy assailing the earth and its problems that is creating the future and must be the parent of the poetry of the future. The whole of life and of the world and Nature seen, fathomed, accepted, but seen in the light of man's deepest spirit, fathomed by the fathoming of the self of man and the large self of the universe, accepted in the sense of its inmost and not only its more outward truth, the discovery of the divine reality within it and of man's own divine possibilities,—this is the delivering vision for which our minds are seeking and it is this vision of which the future poetry must find the inspiring aesthetic form and the revealing language.

The world is making itself anew under a great spiritual pressure, the old things are passing away and the new things ready to come into being, and it may be that some of the old nations

that have been the leaders of the past and the old literatures that have been hitherto the chosen vehicles of strong poetic creation may prove incapable of holding the greater breath of the new spirit and be condemned to fall into decadence. It may be that we shall have to look for the future creation to new poetical literatures that are not yet born or are yet in their youth and first making or, though they have done something in the past, have still to reach their greatest voice and compass. A language passes through its cycle and grows aged and decays by many maladies: it stagnates perhaps by the attachment of its life to a past tradition and mould of excellence from which it cannot get away without danger to its principle of existence or a straining and breaking of its possibilities and a highly coloured decadence; or, exhausted in its creative vigour, it passes into that attractive but dangerous phase of art for art's sake which makes of poetry no longer a high and fine outpouring of the soul and the life but a hedonistic indulgence and dilettantism of the intelligence. These and other signs of age are not absent from the greater European literary tongues, and at such a stage it becomes a difficult and a critical experiment to attempt at once a transformation of spirit and of the inner cast of poetic language. There is yet in the present ferment and travail a compelling force of new potentiality, a saving element in the power that is at the root of the call to change, the power of the spirit ever strong to transmute life and mind and make all young again, and once this magical force can be accepted in its completeness and provided there is no long-continued floundering among perverted inspirations or half motives, the old literatures may enter rejuvenated into a new creative cycle.

The poetry of the English language in direct relation to which I have made these suggestions, has certain disadvantages for the task that has to be attempted but also certain signal advantages. It is a literature that has long done great things but has neither exhausted its great natural vigour nor fixed itself in any dominant tradition, but rather has constantly shown a free spirit of poetical adventure and a perfect readiness to depart from old moorings and set its sail to undiscovered countries. It

has an unsurpassed power of imaginative and intuitive language and has shown it to a very high degree in the intuitive expression of the life soul and to some degree in that of the inspired intelligence. It seems therefore a predestined instrument for the new poetic language of the intuitive spirit. The chief danger of failure arises from the external direction of the Anglo-Saxon mind. That has been a source of strength in combination with the finer Celtic imagination and has given English poetry a strong hold on life, but the hold has been also something of a chain continually drawing it back from the height and fullness of some great spiritual attempt to inferior levels. Today however the language is no longer the tongue only of the English people: the Irish mind with its Celtic originality and psychic delicacy of vision and purpose has entered into this poetic field. It is receiving too for a time an element or at least an embassy and message from the higher spiritual mind and imagination of India. The countries beyond the seas, still absorbed in their material making, have yet to achieve spiritual independence, but once that comes, the poetry of Whitman shows what large and new elements they can bring to the increase of the spiritual potentialities of the now wide-spreading language. On the whole therefore it is here among European tongues that there is the largest present chance of the revolution of the human spirit finding most easily its poetic utterance. It is also here by the union of a great vital energy and a considerable possibility of the spiritual vision that there may be most naturally a strong utterance of that which most has to be expressed, the seen and realised unity of life and the spirit.

The pouring of a new and greater self-vision of man and Nature and existence into the idea and the life is the condition of the completeness of the coming poetry. It is a large setting and movement of life opening a considerable expansion to the human soul and mind that has been in the great ages of literature the supreme creative stimulus. The discovery of a fresh intellectual or aesthetic motive of the kind that was common in the last century initiates only an ephemeral ripple on the surface and seldom creates work of the very first order. The real inspiration enters with a more complete movement, an enlarged horizon of

life, a widening of the fields of the idea, a heightening of the flight of the spirit. The change that is at present coming over the mind of the race began with a wider cosmic vision, a sense of the greatness and destiny and possibilities of the individual and the race, the idea of humanity and of the unity of man with man and a closer relation too and unity of his mind with the life of Nature. It is the endeavour to make the expression of these things one with the expression of life that imparts to the poetry of Whitman so much more large and vital an air than the comparatively feeble refinement and careful art of most of the contemporary poetry of Europe—not that the art has to be omitted, but that it must be united with a more puissant sincerity of spirit and greatness of impulse and a sense of new birth and youth and the potencies of the future. The intellectual idea was yet not enough, for it had to find its own greater truth in the spiritual idea and its finer cultural field in a more delicate and complex and subtle psychic sight and experience. It is this that has been prepared by recent and contemporary poets. The expression of this profounder idea and experience is again not enough until the spiritual idea has passed into a complete spiritual realisation and not only affected individual intellect and psychic mind and imagination, but entered into the general sense and feeling of the race and taken hold upon all thought and life to reinterpret and remould them in their image. It is this spiritual realisation that the future poetry has to help forward by giving to it its eye of sight, its shape of aesthetic beauty, its revealing tongue and it is this greatening of life that it has to make its substance.

It is in effect a larger cosmic vision, a realising of the godhead in the world and in man, of his divine possibilities as well as of the greatness of the power that manifests in what he is, a spiritualised uplifting of his thought and feeling and sense and action, a more developed psychic mind and heart, a truer and a deeper insight into his nature and the meaning of the world, a calling of diviner potentialities and more spiritual values into the intention and structure of his life that is the call upon humanity, the prospect offered to it by the slowly unfolding and

now more clearly disclosed Self of the universe. The nations that most include and make real these things in their life and culture are the nations of the coming dawn and the poets of whatever tongue and race who most completely see with this vision and speak with the inspiration of its utterance are those who shall be the creators of the poetry of the future.

Appendices to *The Future Poetry*

The three fragmentary pieces that follow, all written at different times, are each connected in some way with the text of *The Future Poetry*. Appendix I is an incomplete review of James Cousins' book *New Ways in English Literature*. Written in November 1917, the review was abandoned when Sri Aurobindo decided to make his consideration of Cousins' book the starting-point for a presentation of his own ideas on poetry. The two paragraphs of the review were rewritten as the first two paragraphs of the first chapter of *The Future Poetry*.

Appendix II consists of a fragment found in a notebook used by Sri Aurobindo in 1920. Evidently intended for *The Future Poetry*, it is closely linked to the book's last chapter, which was published in the *Arya* in July 1920. One might suppose that the fragment was intended to be part of the last chapter, or that it is the beginning of a new chapter that was never completed. The subject at which it hints does not seem to have been given full treatment anywhere in *The Future Poetry*.

The paragraph printed as Appendix III was dictated by Sri Aurobindo in the later stage of his revision of the book, probably in 1950. It is all that was written of a new chapter meant to replace the first chapter of *The Future Poetry*.

APPENDIX I

New Ways in English Literature

(Review)

Amid the commonplace, vapid and undiscriminating stuff which mostly does duty for literary criticism in India, here is at last a work of the first order, something in which the soul can take pleasure for the beauty of its style, its perfect measure, its insight, its subtle observation and just appreciation. Such a book would be a miracle in its environment, but the miracle disappears when we know the name of the author; Mr. James Cousins is one of the leading spirits of the Irish movement which has given contemporary English literature its two greatest poets. This book therefore comes to us from Ireland, although it is published in India. One would like to see a significant link in this circumstance of Mr. Cousins' presence and activities among us. For Ireland is a predestined home of the new spiritual illumination rising in Europe from the ashes of the age of rationalism and she has already, in literature at least, found the path of her salvation: India, that ancient home of an imperishable spirituality, has still, Rabindranath and the Bengal school of painting notwithstanding, to find hers, has yet to create the favourable imaginative, intellectual and aesthetic conditions for her voice to be heard again with the old power, but a renewed message. The atmosphere is at present raw and chill, thick with the crude mists of a false education and a meagre and imitative culture. Mr. Cousins' work is avowedly part of a movement intended to make a salutary change and bring in the large air and light of a living culture and education.

Mr. Cousins deals here with the contemporary and recent English poets, a subject for the most part quite unfamiliar to the Indian mind. He treats it with an admirable sympathy, an illuminating power of phrase and a fine certainty of touch; but

for the purpose for which these essays were put together, his criticism has one great fault,—there is too little of it. The first part deals with four contemporary poets, three of them of the first importance, and a group; the second deals with five recent poets and a dramatist and of these writers three again are of the first importance; but this slender volume of 135 pages is a small pedestal for so many figures. To catch the eye of the Indian reader [he tries] to give the greater of these something like life size, while putting the rest in smaller proportions—after a convention familiar to Indian art. Each essay is indeed excellent in itself; that on Emerson is a masterpiece of fullness in brevity, for it says perfectly in a few pages all that need be said about Emerson the poet and nothing that need not be said; others are quite full and conclusive enough for their purpose, for instance the admirable “defence” of Alfred Austin; and in all the essential things are said and said finely and tellingly. There is quite enough for the experienced reader of English poetry who can seize on implications and follow out suggestions; but the Indian reader is inexperienced and has not ordinarily a well-cultivated critical faculty or receptiveness; he needs an ampler treatment to familiarise him with the subject and secure his permanent interest. The essays do act admirably as finger-posts; but finger-posts are not enough for him, he needs to be carried some miles along the road before he will consent to follow it.

APPENDIX II

The poetry of the future will be unlike that of the past in one very important circumstance that in whatever languages it may be written, it will be more and more moved by the common mind and motives of all the human peoples. Mankind is now being drawn to a fundamental unity of thought and culture among all its racial and national differences to which there has been no parallel

APPENDIX III

Part I Chapter I

The Mantra

A supreme, an absolute of itself, a reaching to an infinite and utmost, a last point of perfection of its own possibilities is that to which all action of Nature intuitively tends in its unconscious formations and when it has arrived to that point it has justified its existence to the spirit which has created it and fulfilled the secret creative will within it. Speech, the expressive Word, has such a summit or absolute, a perfection which is the touch of the infinite upon its finite possibilities and the seal upon it of its Creator. This absolute of the expressive Word can be given the name which was found for it by the inspired singers of the Veda, the Mantra. Poetry especially claimed for its perfected expression in the hymns of the Veda this name. It is not confined however to this sense, for it is extended to all speech that has a supreme or an absolute power; the Mantra is the word that carries the godhead in it or the power of the godhead, can bring it into the consciousness and fix there it and its workings, awaken there the thrill of the infinite, the force of something absolute, perpetuate the miracle of the supreme utterance. This highest power of speech and especially of poetic speech is what we have to make here the object of our scrutiny, discover, if we can, its secret, regard the stream of poetry as a long course of the endeavour of human speech to find it and the greater generalisation of its presence and its power as the future sign of an ultimate climbing towards an ultimate evolution as a poetic consciousness towards the conquest of its ultimate summits.

(9) Descent

All my cells are swept ^{thru} ~~with~~ a surge of splendor,
~~Soul~~ Sense and body stir with a mighty rapture;
Light and still rose light ^{like} an ocean billow
Ose me, round me.

Rigid, stonelike, fixed like a hill or statue
With my body ~~glows~~ ^{and} bears the world's weight.
At the descent of the Godhead comes
Laws that are not laws that are mortal.

~~Yonder~~ ^{longed,}
Swell all infinity crowds upon me,
Pressing down ^{on} the glory of power eternal; wideness
Mind and heart groan with the cosmic ⁱⁿ ~~other~~ ^{nunans}
Stilled the earth's voice.

Swiftly, swiftly, crowning the golden species
Knowledge leaps a torrent of ^{meteors} lightning;
Thoughts ~~the~~ ^{are} from the ineffable flaming monad;
Blaze in my spirit.

Slow the hasty beats of thy like a giant hammer;
Resound voices down ^{one} from God's doorway
Winds that break not save ~~from~~ ^{up} Nature's summit;
Restless chariots.

All the world is changed to a boundless oneness;
Gods undying, omnipotent forces meeting
Join in god-dance veiling a great Nature,
Rhythm of the Deekha.

And a burst ^{only} calling a half offering,
Cry the ~~utter~~ ^{utter}, find the notes eternal;
Love and neighbor ^{neither} and immortal done
Lived forever
Close

A draft of the poem on pages 377-78

On Quantitative Metre

On Quantitative Metre

The Reason of Past Failures

A DEFINITIVE verdict seems to have been pronounced by the critical mind on the long-continued attempt to introduce quantitative metres into English poetry. It is evident that the attempt has failed, and it can even be affirmed that it was predestined to failure; quantitative metre is something alien to the rhythm of the language. Pure quantity, dependent primarily on the length or brevity of the vowel of the syllable, but partly also on the consonants on which the vowel sustains itself, quantity as it was understood in the ancient classical languages, is in the English tongue small in its incidence, compared with stress and accent, and uncertain in its rules; at any rate, even in the most capable hands it has failed to form a practicable basis of metre. Accentual metre is normal in English poetry, stress metres are possible, but quantitative metres can only be constructed by a *tour de force*; artificial and incapable of normality or of naturalisation, they cannot get a certified right of citizenship. If quantity has to be understood in that and no other sense, this verdict must stand; all attempts made hitherto have been a failure, and not usually a brilliant failure. And yet this does not dispose of the question: an appeal is possible against the sentence of illegitimacy and banishment on the ground that from the very first the problem has been misunderstood and misstated, the methods used either a deviation from the true line or, even when close to it, a misfit; a better statement may lead to a solution that could well be viable.

At the very beginning of these attempts a double thesis was raised; two separate problems were closely associated together which are in their nature distinct, although they can be brought

into close relation. There was, first, the problem of the naturalisation of classical metres in English poetry, and there was, mixed up with it, the problem of the free creation of quantitative English verse in its own right, on its own basis, with its own natural laws, not necessarily identical with those laid down in the ancient tongues. The main attempt then made was not to discover a true English principle of quantitative metre,—what was done was to bring in classical metres built according to the laws of quantity proper to a classical tongue but of doubtful validity in a modern language. Chaucer, influenced by mediaeval French and Italian poetry, had naturalised their metrical inventions by making accentual pitch and inflexion the basis of English metre. This revolution succeeded because he had called to his aid one of the most important elements in the natural rhythm of the language and it was easy for him by that happy choice to establish a perfect harmony between this rhythm and his new art of metrical building. The metrical movement he perfected—for others before him had attempted it—passed easily into the language, because he caught and lifted its native rhythm into a perfect beauty of sound captivating to the ear and moving to the inner witness and listener silent within us—the soul, to whom all art and all life should appeal and minister. This great victory was essential for the free flowering of poetry in the English tongue; the absence of any such *coup d'œil* of genius was one chief reason of its failure to flower as freely in so many human languages,—no creative genius found for them the route which leads to the discovery of a perfect plasticity of word and sound, a perfect expressiveness, a perfect beauty of rhythm. But with the Renaissance came a new impulse, a new influence; an enthusiasm was vividly felt by many for the greatness of structure and achievement of the Greek and Latin tongues—an achievement far surpassing anything done in the mediaeval Romance languages—and a desire arose to bring this greatness of structure and achievement into English poetry. As Chaucer by the success of the accentual structure in verse and his discovery of its true and natural rhythm was able to bring in the grace and fluidity of the Romance tongues, so they too

conceived that the best way to achieve their aim was to bring in the greatness of classical harmony and the nobility and beauty of Greek and Latin utterance by naturalising the quantitative metres of Virgil, Ovid, Horace. It was also natural that some of these innovators should conceive that this could be best done by imposing the classical laws of quantity wholesale on the English language.

At the first attempt a difference of view on this very point arose; there was a bifurcation of paths, but neither of these branchings led anywhere near the goal. One led nowhere at all, there was a laborious trudging round in a futile circle; the other turned straight back towards accentual metre and ended in the entire abandonment of the quantitative principle. Spenser in his experiments used all his sovereign capacity to force English verse into an unnatural classical mould, Sidney followed his example. Harvey thought, rightly enough, that an adaptation to the natural rhythm of English was indispensable, but he failed to take more than a first step towards the right path; after him, those who followed his line could not get any farther,—in the end, in place of the attempt at quantitative verse, there was an adaptation of classical metres to the accentual system. Some who still experimented with quantity, feeling the necessity of making their verse normally readable, did this by taking care that their long quantities and stress or accentual pitch, wherever these came in, coincided as far as possible. But the result was not encouraging; it made the verse readable indeed, but stiff beyond measure. Even Tennyson in his lines on Milton, where he attempts this combination, seems to be walking on stilts,—very skilfully and nobly, but still on stilts and not on his own free God-given feet. As for other attempts which followed the Spenserian line of approach, they can best be described in Tennyson's own language—

Barbarous hexameters, barbarous pentameters

— and the alcaics, sapphics and galliambics were no better. A metre which cannot be read as normal English is read, in which light syllables are forced to carry a voice-weight which they

have no strength to bear and strong stresses are compelled to efface themselves while small insignificant sounds take up their burden, is not a real and natural verse movement; it is an artificial structure which will never find an agreed place in the language.

No make-believe can reconcile us to such rhythms as Sidney's

In wind | or wa|ter's || stream do re|quire to be | writ. |

Here two intractably iambic feet followed by a resolutely short syllable are compelled to dance a jig garbed as two spondees followed by a solitary long syllable; so disguised, they pretend to be the first half of a pentameter,—the second half with its faultless and natural metre and rhythm is of itself a condemnation of its predecessor. Neither can one accept Bridges'

Flowery do|main the flush|ing soft | crowding | loveliness | of Spring |

where length is forced on an inexorable short like the "ing" of "flushing" and "crowding" and a pretence is made that an accentual iamb, "of Spring", can be transformed into a quantitative spondee. Still worse, still more impossible to digest or even to swallow, is his forced hexameter ending,

the se|renely so|lemn spells. |

There two successive accentual trochees and a terminal long syllable are turned by force or by farce into a closing dactyl and spondee. Such are the ungainly antics into which the natural movements of verse have to be compelled in this game of thrusting the laws of quantity of an ancient language upon a modern tongue which has quite another spirit and body. What is possible and natural in a clear-cut ancient language where there is a more even distribution of the voice and both the short and long syllables can get their full sound-value, is impossible or unnatural in the English tongue; for there the alternation of stresses with unstressed short and light sounds is a constant and inescapable feature. That makes all the difference; it turns this kind of verse into a frolic of false quantities. In any case,

the method has invariably resulted in failure from Spenser to Bridges; the greatness of some of the poets who have made this too daring and unnatural effort, has not been great enough to bring success to an impossible adventure.

There remains the alternative way, the adaptation of classical metres to the accentual mould, of which the accentual hexameter is the not too successful consequence; but this is not a solution of the problem of English quantitative verse. Even if successful, in every field and not only in the treatment of the hexameter, it would have only solved the other quite distinct problem of naturalising Greek and Latin metres in English. But even in this direction success has been either nil or partial and defective. The experiments have always remained experiments; there has been no opening of new paths, no new rhythmic discoveries or triumphant original creations. The writers carry with them very evidently the feeling of being experimenters in an abnormal kind; they achieve an artificial rhythm, their very language has an artificial ring: there is always a stamp of manufacture, not a free outflow of significant sound and harmonious word from the depths of the spirit. A poet trying to naturalise in English the power of the ancient hexameter or to achieve a new form of its greatness or beauty natural to the English tongue must have absorbed its rhythm into his very blood, made it a part of himself, then only could he bring it out from within him as a self-expression of his own being, realised and authentic. If he relies, not on this inner inspiration, but solely on his technical ability for the purpose, there will be a failure; yet this is all that has been done. There have been a few exceptions like Swinburne's magnificent sapphics; but these are isolated triumphs, there has been no considerable body of such poems that could stand out in English literature as a new form perfectly accomplished and accepted. This may be perhaps because the attempt was always made as a sort of leisure exercise and no writer of great genius like Spenser, Tennyson or Swinburne has made it a main part of his work; but, more probably, there is a deeper cause inherent in the very principle and method of the endeavour.

Two poets, Clough and Longfellow, have ventured on a

considerable attempt in this kind and have succeeded in creating something like an English hexameter; but this was only a half accomplishment. The rhythm that was so great, so beautiful or, at the lowest, so strong or so happy in the ancient tongues, the hexameter of Homer and Virgil, the hexameter of Theocritus, the hexameter of Horace and Juvenal becomes in their hands something poor, uncertain of itself and defective. There is here the waddle and squawk of a big water-fowl, not the flight and challenge of the eagle. Longfellow was an admirable literary craftsman in his own limits, the limits of ordinary metre perfectly executed in the ordinary way, but his technique like his poetic inspiration had no subtlety and no power. Yet both subtlety and power, or at the very least one of these greater qualities, are imperatively called for in the creation of a true and efficient English hexameter; it is only a great care and refinement or a great poetic force that can overcome the obstacles. Longfellow had his gift of a certain kind of small perfection on his own level; Clough had energy, some drive of language, often a vigorous if flawed and hasty force of self-expression. It cannot be said that their work in this line was a total failure; "The Bothie of Tober-na-Vuolich", "Evangeline" and "The Courtship of Miles Standish" have their place, though not a high place, in English poetry. But the little they achieved was not enough to acclimatise the hexameter permanently in English soil; nor did their work encourage others to do better, on the contrary the imperfection of its success has been a deterrent, not an incentive.

It is probable indeed that the real reason of the failure went much deeper; it lay in the very character of the mould they invented. The accentual hexameter was a makeshift and could not be the true thing; its false plausibility could not be an equivalent for the great authentic rhythms of old, its mechanically regular beat, common, uninspiring, sometimes stumbling or broken, is something quite different from the powerful sweep, the divine rush or the assured truth of tread of that greater word-music. The hexameter is a quantitative verse or nothing; losing the element of quantity, it loses also its quality. Admitting that quantity as it is ordinarily understood cannot be the sole basic element in

any English metre, yet for the hexameter, perhaps for any classical rhythm, the discovery and management of true quantity is an intimate part of its technique; to neglect or to omit it is to neglect or omit something essential, indispensable. Accentual pitch gives beat, but its beat does not depend on quantity except in so far as the stress ictus creates a genuine length valid for any rhythm which is native to the language. To find out what does constitute true quantity is the first need, only then can there be any solution of the difficulty. Tennyson, like Harvey, missed this necessity; he was content to fuse long syllable and stress and manage carefully his short quantities conceived according to the classical law; this he did admirably, but two or three efforts in this kind of tight-rope acrobatics were as much as he cared to manage. But true quantity in English must be something else; it must be something inherent in the tongue, recognisable everywhere in its rhythm, — not an artifice or convention governing its verse forms alone, but a technique of Nature flowing spontaneously through the very texture of the language as a whole.

Metre and the Three Elements of English Rhythm

There are three elements which constitute the general exterior forms of rhythm in the English language, — accent, stress, quantity. Each of them can be made in theory the one essential basis of metre, relegating the other indispensable elements to the position of subordinate factors which help out the rhythm but are not counted in the constitution of the metrical basis. But in practice accent and stress combining with it and aiding it have alone successfully dominated English verse-form; intrinsic quantity has been left to do what it can for itself under their rule. The basis commonly adopted in most English poetry since Chaucer is the accentual rhythm, the flow of accentual pitch and inflexion which is so all-important an element in the intonation of English speech. In any common form of English poetry we find all based on pitch and inflexion; the feet are accentual feet, the metrical “length” or “shortness” of syllables — not their inherent quantity — is determined by natural or willed location

of a pitch of accent or some helping inflexion falling on the main supporting syllable of the foot and by the absence of any such pitch or accentual inflexion on those that are subordinate and supported: the main accented syllables are supposed to be metrically long, the subordinate unaccented short, there is no other test or standard. To take a familiar example:

The way / was long, / the wind / was cold,
The min|strel was | infirm | and old. |¹

Here there is a regular iambic beat determined by the persistent accentual high pitch or low pitch falling on the second syllable of the foot. In a stress scansion the second foot of the second line would rank not as an iamb but as a pyrrhic, for it is composed of two short unstressed syllables; but there is the minor accentual inflexion which commonly occurs as a sort of stepping-stone helping the voice across a number of unstressed syllables; that, slight as it is, is sufficient to justify in accentual theory the description of this foot as an iamb. Stress usually coincides with the high accentual pitch and is indispensable as the backbone of the rhythm, but it was not treated until recently either as an independent or as the main factor. Inherent quantity is not at all regarded; long-syllable quantity sometimes coincides with both high pitch and stress, sometimes it stands by itself as a rhythmic element, but that makes no difference to the metre.

The instance given is an example of the iambic verse with an extreme, an almost mechanical regularity of beat; so, for completeness, we may turn to poetry of a freer and larger type.

Full man|y a glo|rious mor|ning have | I seen
Flattering | the moun|tain-tops | with sove|reign eye.

Here there are two glide-anapaests in the first line, an initial dactyl in the second,—three departures from the regular iambic

¹ The sign / indicates the accentual high pitch, the sign \ the transitional inflexion, unobtrusive and without stress or with only a half-stress.

beat. Such liberty of variation can always be indulged in English verse and it is sometimes pushed to much greater lengths — as in the line

Cover | her face; | my eyes daz|zle; she | died young |

where there is only one iamb in the five feet of the line; the other four feet are respectively a trochee, a bacchius, a pyrrhic and a closing spondee. Nevertheless the basic system of the metre or at least some form of its spirit asserts itself even here by a predominant beat on the final syllable of most of the feet: all the variations are different from each other, none predominates so as to oust and supplant the iamb in its possession of the metric base. In Webster's line this forceful irregularity is used with a remarkable skill and freedom; the two first feet are combined in a choriamb to bring out a vehemence of swift and abrupt unexpressed emotion; in the rest intrinsic quantitative longs combine with short-vowel stress lengths to embody a surcharged feeling — still unexpressed — in a strong and burdened movement: all is divided into three brief and packed word-groups to bring out by the subtly potent force of the rhythm the overpowering yet suppressed reactions of the speaker. The language used, however vivid in itself, could not have done as much as it does, if it were deprived of this sound-effect; it would have given the idea by its external indices, but it is the rhythm that brings out the concealed feeling. Each word-group has a separate rhythm, an independent life, yet it is by following each other rapidly in a single whole that the three together achieve a complete force and beauty. If the three clauses of this line were cut up into successive lines in modern free-verse fashion, they would lose most of their beauty; it is the total rhythmic power of these three hammer-strokes that brings to the surface all that underlies the words. But without the aid of the unusual arrangements of stress and quantity it could not have been done.

This shows up the true nature of the accentual system as distinguished from its formal theory. It becomes clear that the supposed longs and shorts constituting its feet are not real quantities, they are not composed of long and short syllables, — on

the contrary, a very short sound can be made to bear the weight of the whole foot while longer ones trail after it in dependence on their diminutive leader. What we really have is a system of recurrent strokes or beats intervening at a fixed place in each foot, while the syllables which are not hammered into prominent place by this kind of stroke or beat fill the interspaces. A regular metrical base is thus supplied, but the rhythm can be varied or modulated by departures from the base—from it but always upon it; for these departures, variations or modulations, relieve its regularity which might otherwise become monotonous, but do not replace or frustrate the essential rhythm. If the modulations overlay too much the basic sound-system so as to obliterate it or if they are so ill-managed as to substitute another rhythm for it, then we have a rhythmic mixture; or else there is a break of the metrical movement which can be legitimate only if it is done with set purpose and justified by the success of that purpose.

In all these instances it will be seen that inherent quantity combined with distribution of stress—which is also as we shall see a true quantity-builder—plays always the same role; it is used as an accessory or important element of the rhythm, to give variety, subtlety, deeper significance. A longer quotation may illustrate this position and function of stress distribution and distribution of quantity in accentual metre with more amplitude—

The lun⁺|atic, | the lov|er and | the poet
 Are of | imag|ina|tion all | compact:
 One sees | more de|vils than | vast hell | can hold;
 That is, | the mad|man; the lov|er, all | as fran|tic,
 Sees Hel|en's beau|ty in | a brow | of Egypt:
 The po|et's eye, | in a | fine fren|zy roll|ing,
 Doth glance | from heav|en to earth, | from earth | to heaven;
 And as | imag|ina|tion bo|dies forth

The forms | of things | unknown, | the po|et's pen
 Turns them | to shapes | and gives | to air|y no|thing
 A lo|cal ha|bita|tion and | a name.²

The first six lines of this passage owe much of their beauty to the unusual placing of the stresses and the long-vowelled syllables; in each line the distribution differs and creates a special significant rhythm which deepens and reinforces the outward sense and adds to it that atmosphere of the unexpressed reality of the thing in itself which it is in the power of rhythm, of word-music as of all music, to create. In the first line two pyrrhics separate the two long-vowelled sounds which give emphasis and power to the first and last feet from the narrower short-vowel stressed foot in the middle: this gives a peculiar rhythmic effect which makes the line no longer a mere enumerative statement, it evokes three different rhythmic significances isolating and locating each of the three pure Imaginatives in his own kind. In the second line a swift short movement in its first half slows down to a heavy prolonged movement in its second, a swift run with a long and tangled consequence; here too the expressiveness of the rhythm is evident. In the third line there are no fewer than four long vowels and a single pyrrhic separates two rhythmic movements of an unusual power and amplitude expressive of the enormity of the lunatic's vision and imagination; here too, short-vowel stress and intrinsic-quantity longs are combined no less than three times and it is this accumulation that brings about the effect. In the fifth and sixth lines the separative pyrrhic in the middle serves again a similar purpose. In the fifth it helps to isolate in contrast two opposites each emphasised by its own significant rhythm. In the sixth line there are again four long vowels and a very expressive combination of short-vowel stressed length with intrinsic long syllables, a spacious amphibrach like a long plunge of a wave at the end; no more

² Here only the stresses are marked, by the sign ^l, and the long-vowel syllables, by the sign ⁻; the quantitative shorts are left unmarked: the accents need no indication.

expressive rhythm could have been contrived to convey potently the power, the excitement and the amplitude of the poet's vision.³ Afterwards there follow five lines of a normal iambic movement, but still with a great subtlety of variation of rhythm and distribution of quantity creating another kind of rhythmic beauty, a beauty of pure harmonious word-music, but this too is the native utterance of the thing seen and conveys by significant sound its natural atmosphere. This passage shows us how much the metrically unrecognised element of intrinsic quantity can tell in poetic rhythm bringing real significations into what would be otherwise only sheer beauty of sound; quantity is one among its most important elements, even though it is not reckoned in the constitution of the metre. It combines with stress distribution to give power and expressive richness to the beat or, as it has been called, the strokes and flicks of accentual verse.

It has been seen that accentual high pitch and stress most frequently coincide;—indeed, many refuse to make any distinction between stress of accent and stress proper. The identity is so close that all the passages cited— and accentual verse generally —can, if we so choose, be scanned by stress instead of accentual inflexion. But that at once brings in a difference: for the lesser accentual inflexions have then to be ignored because they do not carry in them anything that can be called a stress; as a result, syllables which are treated as long in the conventional scansion because of this slight accentual help have now, since they are unstressed, to be regarded as short. Iambs, so reputed, cease, in this reckoning, to be iambs and become pyrrhics; an iambic pentameter has often to be read in the stress scansion as an imperfectly iambic stress verse because of the frequent modulations, trochee or pyrrhic, anapaest, amphibrach or spondee. But apart from this, there can be a more independent stress principle of metre; for, properly speaking, stress means not accentual high

³ A combination of powerful intrinsic longs and equally powerful short-vowel stresses help to create two of the most famous "mighty lines" of Marlowe,—

Was this the face that launched a thousand ships
 And burnt the topless towers of Ilium?

pitch, but weight of voice emphasis; it is a brief hammer-stroke of the voice from above which comes down on a long-vowel or a short-vowel syllable and gives even to the latter a metrical length and power which, when without stress, it does not naturally have. This stroke can thus confer metrical length even on a very short vowel or slightest short syllable, because it drives it firmly in like a nail into the wall, so that other unstressed sounds can hang loosely upon it. This provides a distinctive sound-frame which can be generalised and so made into a metrical base.

There can then be a pure stress scansion and pure stress metres in their own right without any justification by accent. For in stress metre proper the high accentual pitches are swallowed up into stress; any other rise or fall of accentual inflexion is ignored, — it is allowed to influence the rhythm but it does not determine or affect the basic metrical structure. Accent can in this way disappear altogether as a metrical base; stress replaces it. Here, for example, are lines composed entirely of stress paeons —

It is evident that here there are accentual inflexions other than those taken up into stress, on one syllable even a low pitch, but because they are not reckoned as stresses, they do not count in the metrical structure of the lines. Or there may be a still freer stress metrification which rejects any scheme of regular feet and refuses to recognise the necessity of a fixed number of syllables either to the foot or the line; it regards only the fall of the stress and is faithful to that measure alone.

A far sail | on the unchangeable monotone | of a slow slumbering sea. |

The line is divided into three word-groups; the first contains two stresses, the others carry each three stresses, but the beats are distributed at pleasure: sometimes they are close together, sometimes they stand separated by far intervals amid a crowd of short unstressed syllables. Sometimes there is a closely packed movement loosening itself at the end, —

Over its head | like a gold ball the sun | tossed by the gods in their
play. |

Sometimes a loose run gathers itself up in its close into a compact movement:

Or any other movement can be chosen which is best suited to the idea or the feeling of the individual line. Quantity as such is here immaterial for metre building; it is of value only in so far as it coincides with stress and gives it an ampler fullness of metrical length so as to build and sustain more strongly the rhythmic totality of the line and the stanza.

But what then of this third element, quantity? Its importance is evident, but it does not form by itself the backbone of the natural rhythm of the language; quantity in English seems to intervene only as a free element taking its chance part in the general movement or its place assigned at will in the architecture. And yet quantity of some kind, shorts, longs, intermediate sounds, is ubiquitous and there seems to be no reason why it should not regulate metre. Indeed, every system affirms some kind of quantity as its constituent material. Stress metre arranges its rhythms by taking all stressed syllables as long, all unstressed syllables as metrically short; accent affirms similarly its own principle of quantity, though here the word seems to be a misnomer. Can then quantity properly speaking, pure quantity, stand by itself as the whole basis of a metrical system, as accent and stress have done? Can it similarly leave the other two

elements, stress and accent, to influence and vary the rhythm but not allow them to interfere in the building of the metre? Can there be in English poetry a quantitative as well as an accentual or a stress building of verse, natural to the turn of the language, recognised and successful? and must stress or accentual lengths in such a metrical system be excluded from the idea of length? For everything here depends upon what we understand by quantity; if stress lengths are admitted, the problem of quantitative metre loses its difficulty, otherwise it seems insoluble.

The experimenters in pure quantitative verse have excluded stress from their theory of metrical lengths; they have admitted only intrinsic lengths determined by the vowel of the syllable and positional lengths determined by the number of succeeding consonants. That there is a fundamental falsity in this theory is shown by the fact that their lines cannot be read; or else in order to make them readable, an unnatural weight has to be thrown on sounds that are too slender to bear it; a weird sound-system full of false values is artificially created. But stress is a main, if not the main, feature of English rhythm; a metrical method ignoring it is impracticable. A pure quantitative verse of this manufacture has therefore to be ruled out, both because of its intrinsic artificiality and its unsuccessful result; it has to be abandoned as impossible or as inherently false. Those experimenters who avoid these false values and try to get rid of the difficulty by allowing only those stresses which coincide with intrinsic and positional longs, are on firmer ground and have some chance of arriving at something practicable. But their efforts too are hampered by the classical theory that the support of more than one consonant after a short vowel is sufficient to make short syllables metrically long, a statement which is true of the classical languages but not true of English. This either leads them into the introduction of false quantities which cannot stand the test of natural reading or drives them to oblige their longs and shorts to coincide with accentual or stress longs and shorts. Thus we

see quantitative feet come to coincide exactly or predominantly with stress or accentual feet in Harvey's hexameter verse,—

— ī ī ī | ī ī ī | ī ī ī | ī ī ī | ī ī ī |
Fame with a|bundance | maketh a | man thrice | blessed and⁴ | happy. |

In Sidney's line

These be her words, but a woman's words to a love that is eager

there happens to be a similar predominant identification of quantity with accent or stress and it is this that makes the line readable. In reality these are stress hexameters, for in each there are syllables, as in *woman's*, *love*, *happy*, which are long by stress only and not by either inherent or positional quantity. But, on the other hand, feet which would be trochees in accentual or stress verse are reckoned here quite artificially as spondees, *abundance*, *woman's*, because of the two-or-more-consonants theory; but the closing syllables of these two words, if listened to by the ear and not measured by the eye, are very clearly short, even though not among the shortest possible, and it is only by a violence of the mind or a convention that they can be reckoned as long and this kind of very slightly loaded trochee promoted to the full dignity of a spondee. Evidently, we must seek elsewhere for a true theory of English quantity and a sound basis for quantitative verse.

A Theory of True Quantity

If we are to get a true theory of quantity, the ear must find it; it cannot be determined by mental fictions or by reading with the eye: the ear too in listening must exercise its own uninfluenced pure hearing if it is not to go astray. So listening, we shall find that intrinsic or inherent quantity and the positional sound-values are not the only factors in metrical length, there is also

⁴ The word *and* here ought by the classicist theory to be long because of its two consonants after the vowel and still longer because it is further supported by the initial *b* of *happy*.

another factor, the weight-length; it may even be said that all quantity in English is determined by weight, all syllables that bear the weight of the voice are long, all over which the voice passes lightly are short. But the voice-weight on a vowel is determined in three different ways. There is a dwelling of the voice, a horizontal weight-bar laid across the syllable, or there is its rapid passing, an absence of the weight-bar: that difference decides its natural length, it creates the inherent or intrinsic long or short, *lazily, sweetness*. There is, again, a vertical ictus weight of the voice, the hammer-stroke of stress on the syllable; that of itself makes even a short-vowel syllable metrically long, as in *heavily, aridity, channel*,⁵ *cānāl*; the short-vowel syllables that have not the lengthening ictus or vertical weight and have not, either, the horizontal weight of the voice upon them remain light and therefore short. It is evident that these words are respectively a natural dactyl, second paeon, trochee, iamb, yet all their syllables are short, apart from the stress; but what true rhythm or metre could treat as other than long these stressed short-vowel syllables? In the words, *narrative, māneāter, brūtality, cōtemplātive, incārnāte*, we see this triple power of length at work within one word,—weight-bar long syllables stressed or unstressed, hammer-stroke-weighted short-vowel longs, natural unweighted short syllables. It is clear that there can be no true reduction of stressed or unstressed or of intrinsic long or short to a sole one-kind principle; both stress and vowel length work together to make a complex but harmonious system of quantity. But, yet again, there is a third factor of length-determination; there is consonantal weight, a lingering or retardation of the voice compelled by a load of consonants, or there is a free unencumbered light movement. This distinction creates the positionally long syllable, short by its vowel but lengthened by its consonants, *strength, swift, abstract*; where there is no such weight or no sufficient weight

⁵ The double consonant here, as in other words like *happy, tell*, can make no difference even in the classicist theory, because it is a mere matter of spelling and represents a single, not a double sound,—the sound is the same as in *pānel*.

of consonants buttressing up the short syllable, it remains short, unless lengthened by stress. We must consider separately how far this third or consonantal element is operative, whether its effect is invariable and absolute as the classicists would have it or only produces its result according to circumstance.

It is evident to the natural ear that stress confers in its own right metrical length on the syllable in which it occurs; even an extreme shortness of the vowel does not take away the lengthening force given. To the ear it stands out that the feet in Webster's line, "my eyes daz|zle" and "she | died young," are, quantitatively, bacchius⁶ and spondee; the one is not and cannot be a true anapaest, as it would or can be accounted by convention in accentual scansion, the other is not and cannot be either iamb or trochee. The stress long naturally combines here with the intrinsic long to make bacchius or spondee, because it has itself a true metrical length which is equivalent to that of the long-vowel syllable, though not identical in nature. This stress length, in any valid theory of quantity, cannot be ignored; its ictus weight and the conveyed force of length which the weight carries with it cannot be whittled down to shortness by any mental decree. In accentual verse its power is usually absorbed by coincidence with accentual high pitch and so it is satisfied and does not need to put in a separate claim; but in quantitative verse too it insists on its right and, if denied, fatally disturbs by its presence the rhythm that tries to disown or ignore it. In true quantitative verse, stress lengths and intrinsic lengths can and must be equally accepted because they both carry weight enough to burden the syllable with an enhanced sound-value. The admission or generalisation of the idea of weight lengths clears up many cobwebs and, because it corresponds with the facts, provides us with a rational system of quantitative verse.

What difficulty remains arises from the theory drawn from

⁶ Unless we consider *my* as long, which is a disputable point; the sound is inherently a long-vowel one, but depressed by the absence of stress or accentual high pitch. In quantitative verse this should not matter; it can retain in spite of the depression its native dignity as a long-vowel syllable.

the classical languages that a sequence of more than one consonant after a short vowel — whether in the word itself or with the help of an initial consonant or consonants in the word that follows — compensates for the shortness and gives the syllable, inexorably, a value of metrical length. This is palpably untrue, as has already been shown by the stumbles of Sidney and Bridges and every other classicist operator in quantitative verse. Let us again consult the ear, not the theorising mind; what is its judgment on this point if we listen, for instance, to these four hexameter lines based on natural and true quantity?

According to the classical theory words and syllables like "and", "of", "in", "the", "he", "ing" should be treated as long since or when two or three consonants come immediately after the vowel within the line. But this is quite false; the "dr" of "driver" does not as a matter of fact make the "the" before it long; the natural shortness of "with" is not abolished by the "h" of the following word "his", or the shortness of "his" by the "d" of "decades". All these small light words are so intrinsically short, so light in their very nature, that nothing, or nothing short of an unavoidable stress, can force quantitative length or weight of sound upon them. Even the short "i"s and short "a" of "insignificant" and the short "e" of "feeblest" retain their insignificance and feebleness in spite of the help of the two consonants occurring after them,—the voice passes too swiftly away for any length to accrue before it has left them; there is no weight, no dwelling or lingering upon them sufficient to give them a greater sound-value. It would be a strange and extravagant prosody that could

scan the first line —

though it might still scan as a hexameter with *antibacchius* and *molossus* twice repeated as modulations in place of the dactyl; but it could not be read aloud in that way,—the ear would immediately contradict the arbitrary dictates of the eye and the inapplicable rigidity of the mental theory.

This is not to deny that an additional consonant or consonants within the word after and before the vowel do give greater length to the syllable as a whole; but this does not necessarily transfer it from the category of shorts to the category of longs. At most, when the weight of consonants is not heavy and decisive, it makes it easier for these midway sounds to figure as lengthened shorts; it helps a trochee to serve as a substitute modulation for a spondee but it does not transform it into a spondee. To take an instance from a hexameter movement —

Wind in the forests, bees in the grove,—spring's ardent cymbal
Thrilling, the cry of the cuckoo.

Here the word “ardent” easily replaces a dactyl or spondee as a modulation, but it remains trochaic. There is more possibility of treating “forests” here with its three heavy consonants as a spondee,— a possibility, not a necessity invariable in all places, for one could very well write “in the forests of autumn”, in spite of the three consonants, as the orthodox dactylic close of a hexameter. Let us try again with yet another example, this time of wholly or fundamentally dactylic hexameters,—

Onward from continent sailing to continent, ever from harbour
Hasting to harbour, a wanderer joining⁷ ocean to ocean.

⁷ This word is a trochaic modulation; it is not intended to figure as a spondee.

Here the word “continent” clearly does not become a cretic, even when a third consonant follows like the “s” of “sailing”, still less when a vowel follows; a slight weight is there, but it is altogether insufficient to hamper the pure dactylic flow of the line.

It is only a sufficient consonant weight that can change the category; but even then the result depends less on the number than on the power and heaviness of the consonants composing the word; the theory that it is the number of consonants that determines metrical length cannot stand always. Thus the word *strength* or the word *stripped* is long wherever it may occur, but *string* with its five consonant sounds is long mainly by the voice ictus falling on it; where that lacks it may remain short by the inherent value of its vowel: *heart-string*, *hamstring* sound more natural as trochees than as spondees; *hamstringing* carries weight as a dactyl, it is too weak to be a good antibacchius. In these matters it is always the ear that must judge, there can be no rule of thumb or fixed mathematical measure determinable by the eye of the reader; it is the weight or lightness of the syllable, the slowed down or unencumbered rapid passage of the voice, the pressure or slightness of its step in passing that makes the difference, and of that the ear alone can be the true judge or arbiter.

In any case it is only the internal consonants that matter; for it is doubtful whether initial consonants in a word that follows can, even when they are many, radically influence the quantity of a preceding syllable. This rule of backward influence could prevail in the classical tongues because there the voice was more evenly distributed over the words; this evenness gave a chance to the short syllables to have their full sound-value and a slight addition of consonantal sound might overweight them and give them, either internally or in position, a decisive length value. Intrinsic quantity also was not crushed under the weight of stress as in English and turned into a secondary factor,—it was and remained a prime factor in the rhythm. There is accentual pitch and inflexion, but it does not take the first place. Thus the first lines of the Aeneid,—

+ ∨ ∨ - ∨ ∨ - + - - + ∨ ∨ + -
 Arma vir|umque ca|no, Tro|jae qui | primus ab | oris
 - ∨ - + - ∨ ∨ - - + ∨ ∨ + ∨
 Itali|am, fa|to profu|gus, La|vinaque | venit
 + ∨ ∨ -
 Litora.| —

if they were read like an English line, would become some kind of irregular and formless accentual hexameter,—

/ / / / / /
 Arma | virumque | cano, | Trojae qui | primus ab | oris
 / / / / / /
 Itali|am, fato | profugus, La|vinaque | venit
 /
 Litora.| —

stress would preside and quantity fall into a subordinate second place. If this did not and could not happen, it was evidently because the accent was an inflexion or pitch of the voice and not stress, not an emphatic pressure.⁸ In English stress or voice emphasis predominates and there is a very uneven distribution of sound-values in which quantity is partly determined and, where not determined, considerably influenced by stress; it has some difficulty in asserting its full independent value. Moreover the words do not cohere or run into each other as in a Sanskrit line, (this cohesion was the *raison d'être* of the complicated law of Sandhi by which the closing letter of one word so frequently unites with the initial letter of its successor in a conjunct sound); each word in English is independent and has its own metrical value unaffected by the word that follows. In Sanskrit, as in Latin and Greek, the short syllable having already its full natural sound-value is affected by the additional consonant and passes

⁸ In the Latin metre accent and quantity coincide in the last two feet but not in the earlier four feet; the Harvey type of hexameter has been criticised for not following this rule, but the writers had no choice,—to do otherwise would have brought in the conflict between stress and quantity which for the reason here stated could not occur in Latin. In the English hexameter accent, stress and quantity have inevitably to fuse together in the main long syllable of the foot; relief from a too insistent beat has to be sought by other natural means or technical devices, modulation, the greater value given to long unstressed syllables, variation of foot-grouping, pause, caesura.

into the category of longs by the force of the consonant weightage, but these conditions are not naturally present in English verse.

There is therefore no good reason, or at least no essential reason, for the admission of a rule allowing or obliging a throw-back of influence from a following word upon its predecessor. In accentual or stress metre no such rule prevails,—one never thinks of this element in arranging one's line; there is nothing that compels its adoption in quantitative verse. If these initial consonants created an obstacle to the pace of the voice sufficient to make it linger or pause, then such an effect would be justified, —the closing short syllable of the preceding word would or might be lengthened: but, normally, the obstacle is so slight that it is not felt and the voice takes it in its stride and passes on without any slackening or with only a slight slackening of its pace. The distinctness of each word from another does not, indeed, create any gap or pause, but it is strong enough to preserve for it its independence, its separate self-value in the total rhythm of the line, the word-group or the clause. This does not destroy the value of consonant weight in the sound system; it is evident that a crowding or sparseness of consonants will make a great difference to the total rhythm, it will produce a greater or less heaviness or lightness; but that is a rhythmic effect quite distinct from any imperative influence on the metre. A trochee does not become a spondee, a dactyl does not become a cretic because its final syllable is followed by a consonant or even by a group of consonants. There is, then, no sense in dragging in the classical rule where its admission is quite contrary to the natural instinct and practice of the language.

If these considerations are accepted as valid, the way lies open for the construction of true quantitative metre; a sound and realistic theory of it becomes possible. Four rules or sets of rules can be formulated which will sum up the whole base of the theory:—

(1) All stressed syllables are metrically long, as are also all long-vowel syllables even without stress.

All short-vowel syllables are metrically short, unless they

are lengthened by stress — or else by a sufficient weight of consonants or some other lengthening sound-element; but the mere fact of more than one consonant coming after a short vowel, whether within the word or after it, or both in combination, is not sufficient to confer length upon the syllable. Heaviness caused by a crowding of consonants affects the rhythm of a line or part of a line but does not alter its metrical values.

Each word has its own metrical value which cannot be radically influenced or altered by the word that follows.

(2) The English language has many sounds which are doubtful or variable in quantity; these may be sometimes used as short and sometimes as long according to circumstance. Here the ear must be the judge.

(3) Quantity within the syllable itself is not so rigidly fixed as in the ancient languages; often position or other circumstances may alter the metrical value of a syllable. A certain latitude has to be conceded in such cases, and there again the ear must be the judge.

(4) Quantity metres cannot be as rigid and unalterable in English as in the old classical tongues; for the movement of the language is pliant and flexible and averse to rigidity and monotone. English poetry has always a fundamental metrical basis, a fixed normality of the feet constituting a line; but it relieves the fixity by the use of modulations substituting, with sometimes a less, sometimes a greater freedom, other feet for the normal. This rule of variation, very occasionally admitted in the classical tongues but natural in English poetry, must be applied or at least permitted in quantitative metres also; otherwise, in poems of some length, their rhythms may become stereotyped in a too rigid sameness and fatigue the ear.

No other rules than these four need be laid down, for the rest must be left to individual choice and skill in technique.

In the basic structure of quantitative verse so arranged the three elements of English rhythm, accent, stress and intrinsic quantity are none of them excluded; all are united or even fused together. Accentual high pitch is taken up into stress; low pitch, not amounting to stress, as also slighter accentual inflexions

have their place in the rhythm and the intonation but not in the metre; they are not allowed to determine the metrical quantity of the syllable on which they fall. For, in fact, unless they amount to stress, these voice inflexions do not confer length of true quantity; the quantity conferred by them in accentual verse is conventional and need not be admitted where the accentual basis is abandoned and the convention is not needed. Stress itself is admitted as a quantitative element because it constitutes, by the weight of the voice which it lays on the syllable, a true metrical length, a strong sound-value. Intrinsic quantity, which is not recognised as a metrical constituent in the traditional verse system, recovers here its legitimate place. As a result quantitative metres can be constructed which, like accentual and stress metres but unlike the abortive constructions of the classicists, can flow naturally in a free movement, a movement native to the language; for they will combine in themselves without disfiguration or forcing all the natural elements of the rhythm or sound-movement proper to the English tongue.

It may even be said that all English speech, colloquial, prose or verse, has this as its natural rhythm, preserves these normal sound-values. This universality will be at once evident if we take at will or even take at random any snatch of conversation or any prose passage caught from anywhere or everywhere and test by it this rule of quantity; it will be found that the rule is in all cases applicable.

I [˘] have de[˘]cided to | start to[˘]|morrow. | It is no use | putting off | my
[˘][˘] going | any longer. |

These sentences set out with a dactylo-trochaic movement and change to less simple feet, ionic a minore, cretic, antibacchius, double trochee. Or if you hear an irate voice shouting

Get out of that | or I'll kick you, |

and have sufficient leisure and equanimity of mind to analyse the rhythm of this exhortation, you will find yourself in the presence of an excited double iamb followed by a vehement antispast,

and can then conscientiously determine the rhythm of your own answer. Or if one takes, as a resting-house between colloquial speech and literary prose, the first advertisement that meets the eye in any daily newspaper, the result will still infallibly illustrate our rule. For example,

This column | is intended | to give | publicity | to the a|m|enities | and
commercial | interests | of Bangalore. |—

where amphibrach, paeons, iamb, tribrach, dactyl, cretic, double iamb are harmoniously blended together by an unconscious master of quantitative rhythm. It can be at once and easily established, by multiplying instances, that the daily talk and writing of English-speaking peoples, though not by any means always poetry, is still, in spite of itself and by an unfelt compulsion, always rhythmic and always quantitative in its rhythm.

If we take similarly passages from literary prose, we shall find the same law of rhythm lifted to a higher level. Shakespeare and the Bible will give us the best and most concentrated examples of this rhythm in prose. Our first quotation, from the New Testament, can indeed be arranged, omitting the superfluous word “even” before “Solomon”, as a very perfect and harmonious stanza of free quantitative verse.

Consider | the lilies | of the field | how they grow, |
They toil not | neither do | they spin, |
Yet I | say unto you | that Solomon | in all his | glory |
Was not arrayed | like unto | one of these. |

Or again, let us take the opening verses of the Sermon on the Mount,

Blessed are | the poor | in spirit; | for theirs is | the kingdom | of
heaven. |
Blessed are | they that mourn; | for they shall be | comforted. |

Blessed are | the meek; | for they shall | inherit | the earth. |

Blessed are | the merciful; | for they shall | obtain mercy. |

Blessed are | the pure in heart; | for they shall see | God. |

Or from St. Paul,—

Though I speak | with the tongues | of men | and of angels | and have
not | charity, |

I am become | as sounding brass | or a tinkling | cymbal. |

And though I have | the gift | of prophecy |

and understand | all mysteries | and all knowledge, |

and though I have | all faith | so that I could | remove mountains, |

and have | not charity, | I am nothing. |

If we take Shakespeare's prose in a well-known passage, we shall find the same law of quantitative rhythm automatically arranging his word-movement —

This goodly frame, | the earth, seems to | me a sterile | promontory; |
this most excell|ent canopy, | the air, look you, | this brave o'erhang-
ing firmament, | this majesti|cal roof fretted | with golden fire, |—
why, it appears | to me no oth|er thing than a | foul and pestil|ent
congrega|tion of vapours. | What a piece of | work is a man! | How
noble in | reason, | how infinite | in faculty! | in form, | in moving |
how express and | admirable! | in action how | like an angel! | in
apprehension | how like a god! | the beauty of | the world! | the
paragon | of animals! | And yet, to me, | what is this quint|essence of
dust? |

The measures of this prose rhythm find their units of order in word-groups and not as in poetry in metrical lines; the syllabic combinations which we call feet do not follow here any fixed sequence. In colloquial speech the sequence is arranged by impulse of Nature or by the automatic play of the subconscious mind, in prose either by the instinctive or by the conscious action of an inner ear, by a secret and subtle hearing in our subliminal parts. There is not an arrangement of feet previously set by the mind and fixedly recurrent as in metre. But still the measures of speech are the same and in all these prose passages there is a dominant rhythm,—even sometimes a free recurrence or dominance of certain measures, not laid down or fixed, but easy and natural,—which gives an underlying unity to the whole passage. In the instance taken from Shakespeare a remarkable persistence of four-foot measures, with occasional shorter ones intervening, builds up a grave and massive rhythmic feeling and imparts even a poetic motion to the unified whole.

In free verse the difference of prose movement and poetic rhythm tends to disappear; poetry steps down to or towards the level of rhythmic, sometimes a very poorly rhythmic prose; but it is too often a rhythm which misses its aim at the ear and is not evident, still less convincing, though it may exist incomunicably somewhere in the mind of the writer. That indeed is the general modernistic tendency—to step back to the level of prose, sometimes to the colloquial level, both in language and in sound movement; the tendency, the aim even, is to throw away the intensities of poetic rhythm and poetic language and approximate to a prose intonation and to a prose diction; one intensity only is kept in view and that too not always, the intensity of the thought substance. It is the thought substance that is expected to determine its own sound harmonies—as in prose: the thought must not subject itself to a preconceived or set rhythm, it must be free from the metrical strait-waistcoat; or else the metrical mould must be sufficiently irregular, capricious, easily modifiable to give a new freedom and ease of movement to the thought substance.

Our immediate concern, however, is with quantitative metre

constructed on this principle of quantity,—though free verse also on that basis has to be taken into consideration as a subordinate possibility. After all, the swing against metre has not justified itself; it goes contrary to a very profound law of speech, contradicts a very strong need of the ear, and the metreless verse it prefers disappoints, by the frequent flatness and inequality which seems natural to it at its ordinary level, the listening consciousness. All creation proceeds on a basis of oneness and sameness with a superstructure of diversity, and there is the highest creation where is the intensest power of basic unity and sameness and on that supporting basis the intensest power of appropriate and governed diversity. In poetic speech metre gives us this intensest power of basic unity and sameness—rhythmic variation gives us this intensest power of expressive diversity. Metre was in the thought of the Vedic poets the reproduction in speech of great creative world-rhythms; it is not a mere formal construction, though it may be made by the mind into even such a lifeless form: but even that lifeless form or convention, when genius and inspiration breathe the force of life into it, becomes again what it was meant to be, it becomes itself and serves its own true and great purpose. There is an intonation of poetry which is different from the flatter and looser intonation of prose, and with it a heightened or gathered intensity of language, a deepened vibrating intensity of rhythm, an intense inspiration in the thought substance. One leaps up with this rhythmic spring or flies upon these wings of rhythmic exaltation to a higher scale of consciousness which expresses things common with an uncommon power both of vision and of utterance and things uncommon with their own native and revealing accent; it expresses them, as no mere prose speech can do, with a certain kind of deep appealing intimacy of truth which poetic rhythm alone gives to expressive form and power of language: the greater this element, the greater is the poetry. The essence of this power can be there without metre, but metre is its spontaneous form, raises it to its acme. The tradition of metre is not a vain and foolish convention followed by the great poets of the past in a primitive ignorance unconscious of their

own bondage; it is in spite of its appearance of human convention a law of Nature, an innermost mind-nature, a highest speech-nature.

But it does not immediately follow that the metrical application to poetry of the normal rhythm of the language, discoverable even in its colloquial speech and prose, is imperatively called for or that the construction of quantitative metres in that mould will be a needed or a right procedure. It might be reasoned, on the contrary, that precisely because this is a normal movement for colloquial speech and prose, it must be ill-fitted for poetry; poetic speech is supernormal, above the ordinary level, and its principle of rhythm should be other than that of common language. Moreover, it may be said, the admission of intrinsic rhythmic quantities to a share in determining the metrical basis would in practice only give us an accentual or stress metre with a slight difference, and the difference would be for the worse. For the function which quantity now serves in accentual verse as a powerful free element in the variation of the rhythm, would be sacrificed; quantitative verse would be bound to a rigid beat which would impose on it the character of a monotonous drone or would fix it in a shackled stiffness like the drumming of the early "decasyllabon" or that treadmill movement which has been charged, as an incurable defect, against the English hexameter.

But let us note, first, that there can be no idea of replacing altogether the normal accentual mould of English verse by a quantitative structure; the object can only be to introduce new rhythms which would extend and vary the established achievement of English poetry, to create new moulds, to add a rich and possibly a very spacious modern wing to an old edifice. Even if the new forms are only an improvement on stress metre, a rhythm starting from the same swing of the language, that is no objection; it may still be worth doing if it brings in new tunes, other cadences, fresh subtleties of word-music. As for the objection of a tied-up monotony caused by the disappearance of the free placing and variation of the pure quantitative elements in metrical rhythm, that need not be the

consequence: there are other means of variation which are sufficient to dispel that peril. A free use of modulation, an avoidance of metrical rigidity by other devices natural to the flexibility of the English tongue, a skilful employment of overlapping (*en-jambement*), of caesura, of word-grouping are presupposed in any reasonable quantitative system. Even where a very regular movement is necessitated or desirable, the resources of the play of sound, a subtle play of vowelisation and of consonant harmonies, rhythmic undertones and overtones ought to cure the alleged deficiency. It is not the nature of the material but the unskilful hand that creates the flaw; for each kind of material has its own limitations and its own possibilities, and the hand of the craftsman is needed to restrict or overcome the limitations, even to take advantage of the natural bounds and bring out the full force of the latent creativeness concealed in the obstructing matter.

The application of the quantitative principle and the discovery of the forms that are possible are the task of the creator, not of the theoretical critic. It is, first and foremost, English quantitative forms that we have to create; the reproduction or new-creation of classical metres in English speech is only a side issue. Here the possibilities are endless, but they fall into two or three categories. First, there can be fixed quantitative metres repeated from line to line without variation except for such modulations as are, in the form chosen, possible or desirable. Secondly, stanza forms can be found, either analogous to those used in accentual verse or else analogous to the Greek arrangement in strophe and antistrophe. Thirdly, one can use a freer quantitative verse in which each line has its own appropriate movement, the feet being variable, but with a predominant single rhythm unifying the whole. Lastly, there can be entirely free quantitative verse, true verse with a poetic rhythm, but not bound by any law of metre. The stanza form is the most suitable to quantitative verse, for here there can be much variety and the danger of rigidity or monotony is non-existent. The use of set stanza metres simple or composite is less obligatory than it was in classical verse; even, each poem can discover

its own metrical stanza form most in consonance with its own thought and feeling. The fixed metre unchanging from line to line needs greater skill; modulation is here of great importance. A semi-free quantitative verse also gives considerable scope; it can be planned in a form resembling that of the Greek chorus but without the fixed balance of strophe and antistrophe, or a still looser use can be made of it escaping towards the freedom of modernistic verse. There are in this collection of poems examples of the first two methods, the fixed metre and the set stanza or the strophe and antistrophe arrangement;⁹ a few more, illustrative of these and other forms, are added at the end of this appendix. There is one illustration of semi-free and one of free quantitative verse.

An unconsciously quantitative free verse may be said to exist already in the writings of Whitman and contemporary modernist poets. In modern free verse the underlying impulse is to get away from the fixed limitations of accentual metre, its set forms and its traditional "poetic" language, and to create forms and a diction more kin to the natural rhythm and turns of language which we find in common speech and in prose. To throw away the bonds of metre altogether, to approximate not only in the language but in the rhythmic movement to normal speech and to prose tone and prose expression was the method first preferred; a great deal of free verse is nothing but prose cut up into lines to make it look like verse. But in the more skilful treatment by the greater writers there is a labour to arrive at a certain power of rhythm and a sufficient unity of movement. Free verse cannot justify itself unless it makes a thing of beauty of every line and achieves at the same time an underlying rhythmic oneness; this is imperative when the power for form and the uplifting intensity of metrical verse is absent, if this kind of writing is not to be, as it too often is, a failure. In the best poetry of the kind the attempt to achieve this end arrives precisely at a form of free

⁹ "On Quantitative Metre" first appeared as an appendix to Sri Aurobindo's Collected Poems and Plays (1942). The examples mentioned as occurring "in this collection of poems" are now published in Collected Poems. They include "Ahana" and some of the poems in "Six Poems" and "Poems [1941]". — Ed.

quantitative verse based on the natural rhythm of the language liberated from all metrical convention of regularity, and there is sometimes an approximation to its highest possibilities. But the approximation is not so near as it might have been in the work of one who had the theory before him; for it was not the conscious mind, but the creative ear that was active and compelled this result, helped no doubt by the will to outdo the beauty of accentual metrical rhythm in a freer poetry.

In Whitman the attempt at perfection of rhythm is often present and, when he does his best as a rhythmist, it rises to a high-strung acuteness which gives a great beauty of movement to his finest lines; but what he arrives at is a true quantitative free verse.

Come, | lovely and | soothing | death, |
Undulate | round the world, | serenely | arriving, | arriving, |
In the day, | in the night, | to all, | to each |
Sooner or | later, | delicate | death. |
Approach, | strong de|liveress, |
When it is so, | when thou hast | taken them | I joyously | sing the
dead, |
Lost in the | loving | floating | ocean of thee, |
Laved in the | flood of thy | bliss, O death. |
And the sights | of the open | landscape | and the high-spread | sky are
fitting |
And life | and the fields | and the huge and | thoughtful night. |

That is comparatively rare in its high beauty; but everywhere the rhythmic trend is the same wherever we look at it,—as in the rhymed freedom of this opening,—

- u - u - u -
Weapon | shapely, | naked, | wan,

Even when he loosens into a laxity nearer to prose, the compact quantitative movement, though much less high-strung, is still there,—

I see | male and | female | everywhere, |
I see | the serene | brotherhood | of philosophs, |
I see the | constructiveness | of my race. |

It is only when he lies back or lolls indolently content with spreading himself out in a democratic averageness of rhythm that the intensity of poetic movement fades out; but the free quantitative movement is there even then, though near now to the manner and quality of prose.

The later practitioners of free verse have not often the heightened rhythmic movement of Whitman at his best, but still they are striving towards the same kind of thing, and their work apparently and deliberately amorphous receives something like a shape, a balance, a reasoned meaning when scanned as quantitative free verse. We find this in passages of *The Waste Land* and *The Hollow Men*, e.g.,

We are the | hollow men |
We are the | stuffed men |
Leaning to|gether |
Headpiece | filled with straw. | Alas!

Our dried | voices, when |
 We whisper | together, |
 Are quiet | and meaningless |
 As wind | in dry grass |
 Or rats' feet | over | broken glass |
 In our dry | cellar, |

 Shape without form, | shade without | colour, |
 Paralysed force, | gesture with|out motion. |

Or let us take a passage from Stephen Spender,—

Oh — comrades, | let not those | who follow | after |
 — The beautiful | generation | that shall spring from | our sides — |
 Let not them | wonder | how after | the failure of | banks |
 The failure | of cathedrals | and the declared | insanity | of our rulers, |
 We lacked | the spring-like | resources | of the tiger |
 Or of plants | who strike out | new roots to | gushing waters. |
 But through | the torn down | portions of | old fabric | let their eyes |
 Watch the ad|miring dawn | explode | like a shell |
 Around us, | dazing us | with its light | like snow. |

There is a rhythm there, but it is not sufficiently gathered up or vivid and it is much more subdued than Eliot's towards the atony and flatness of ordinary prose rhythm. The last lines of the quotation from *The Hollow Men* could be used to describe with a painful accuracy most of this ametric poetry. Some kind of poetic shape is there but no realised and convincing form; shade there is plenty, but colour — except perhaps blacks,

browns, greys and silver-greys — is mostly absent; force is there but paralysed or only half-carrying out its intention, gestures with much effort and straining, but no successful motion. In less excellent passages of the free verse writers this atony comes out very evidently; all intensity of poetic rhythm disappears and we plod through arid waste-lands. There is an insistence on formlessness as the basis and each writer tries to shape his own rhythm out of this arrhythmic amorphousness, sometimes with a half success, but not always or very often. This is clearly the reason of the failure of free verse and the reason too of several besetting general deficiencies of modernist verse; for even where there is form or metre, it seems ashamed of itself and tries to look as if there were none. It is the reason also of the discouraging inequality of modernist poetry, its failure to achieve any supreme beauty or greatness, any outstanding work which could compare with the masterpieces of other epochs. Inspiration is the source of poetic intensity and, while inspiration comes when it will and not at command, yet it is more tempted to come and can be more sustained when there is a conscious and constant form to receive it, — not necessarily metre in the received sense, — and although the highest breath of inspiration cannot, even so, be continuous, for the human mind is too frail to sustain the supernormal luminous inrush, yet the form sustains quality, keeps it at a higher level than can any licence of caprice or freedom of shapelessness. When the form is not there the inspiration, the intensity that gives perfect poetic expression to idea, feeling or vision, keeps more at a distance and has to be dragged in with an effort; even if it comes in lines, phrases, passages, afterwards its impulse ceases or flags and toils and through long weary pages one feels its persistent absence or unwilling half-presence and the mass of the work remains unsatisfying. What is done may be strong or interesting in substance, but it lacks the immortal shape. Mind is there, a fertile and forceful, sometimes too acute and forceful intelligence, but not life, not a firm lasting body. It is possible that one day the impulse which created free verse may be justified; but, if so, it can only be done when a free form is achieved, a free rhythmic unity. For that end the best

work of Whitman would seem to point to a free but finely built quantitative rhythm as the most promising base. But, even at its highest, free verse is not likely to replace metre.

The Problem of the Hexameter

It is now possible to transfer our attention to the minor problem of the naturalisation of classical quantitative metres in English poetry; for in the light of this more natural theory of quantity we can hope to find an easier solution. Among these metres the hexameter stands as the central knot of the problem; if that is loosened, the rest follows. But first let us return on past attempts and their failure and find by that study a basis of comparison between the true and the false hexameter. There are here two elements to be considered, the metrical form and the characteristic rhythm; both Clough and Longfellow have failed for the most part to get into their form the true metrical movement and missed too by that failure to get the true inner rhythm, the something more that is the soul of the hexameter. Of the two, Longfellow achieved the smoother half-success — or rather the more plausible failure. He realised that the metre must be predominantly dactylic and maintained a smooth dactylic flow, broken only by the false, because mechanical, use of trochees to vary the continuous dactylic beat. Other modulations could not be used with effect because the accentual system only admits in the hexameter the dactyl, the spondee and the trochee. For all three-syllabled feet are in the accentual hexameter reduced to dactyls. The tribrah gets right of entry by imposing an accentual low pitch on its inherently unaccented and unstressed first syllable, e.g.,

And with the | others in haste went hurrying down to the sea-shore.

The anapaest is cooked up into a pseudo-dactyl by a similar device of false accentuation and by the belittling of its long vowel, the antibacchius and cretic by a depression or half-suppression of the value of the unstressed long syllable, the second long bar that gives them their musical value; the molossus is shorn

of its strength by a similar treatment of all its syllables except the opening long sound. All are disabled from coming out in relief on the dactylic background and so cannot do their work as modulating variants; for that they should enter in their own right as themselves and not as false dactyls and with their full metrical value. Even among the three available feet the trochee gives poor service; for it rarely fits in,—its effect, when it is used mechanically as a device and with no meaningful appropriateness or rhythmic beauty, disturbs the dactylic flow without giving any relief to the dactylic monotone. Dactyl and spondee by themselves, pure and unmodulated, or the dactyl by itself cannot, unhelped and unrelieved, bear successfully the burden of a long poem in accentual metre.

Longfellow treats us to a non-stop flow of even hexameters with few overlappings and insufficient use of pauses; such overlappings as there are are hardly noticeable, so mechanical is their intervention, so entirely uncalled by rhythmic necessity and unburdened with meaning; the pauses are sometimes well-done but the whole tone of the rhythm is so mechanical that even then they lose their effect and seem almost artificial. The result on the rhythmic whole is disastrous; a smooth even sing-song is the constant note, a movement without nobility or beauty or power or swiftness. Sometimes we come across passages that are adequate and achieve a quiet and subdued beauty —

Filled was the air with a dreamy and magical light, and the landscape
Lay as if new-created in all the freshness of childhood.
Peace seemed to reign upon earth and the restless heart of the ocean
Was for a moment consoled. All sounds were in harmony blended.

In such passages, the metre, though accentual, satisfies the quantitative demand and so escapes from its deficiencies, but the rhythm is too flatly smooth and still indistinctive; it fails to support and achieve fully by the something more behind the metrical movement the beauty that the words intended. Some charm of delicacy is achieved, but it lacks power, height and depth; here certainly is not the tread of the great Olympian measure. Ordinarily, the note sinks lower and even descends to

a very low pitch; we hear, not the roll of the hexameter, but some six-foot dactylic rhythm resembling a sort of measured prose recitative —

Then he arose from his bed and heard what the people were saying,
Joined in the talk at the door with Stephen and Richard and Gilbert,
Joined in the morning prayer and in the reading of Scripture.¹⁰

And yet even the accentual (or perhaps one should say the stress) hexameter is capable of better things. Clough, aiming at this stronger efficiency, tries to escape from the treadmill motion, the sing-song, the monotone; but he does not altogether get away from it and arrives only at a familiar vigour or a capable but undistinguished movement, or falls into a trotting and stumbling rhythm which is sometimes hardly even a rhythm. In attempting to shun the monotony of the unuplifted dactylic beat, he often totally overlays or half overlays the metrical basis of the hexameter rhythm which must be always a sustained dactylic movement. He perpetrates frequently lines that are wholly trochaic and have only this in common with the hexameter that they walk on six feet; a host of other lines are, if not wholly, yet predominantly trochaic. This, which can sometimes be done in a true hexameter rhythm with a special intonation and a special purpose, is fatal if constantly used as an ordinary action of a machine. Very often the trochees break a line that would otherwise have been adequate; sometimes there is what seems to be a cross between hexameter and pentameter; often he indulges in an anapaestic line, sometimes three at a time, disguised as hexameters by turning an initial pyrrhic into a false trochee. The result tends to be tedious, trivial and disappointing; let us take a sample —

So they bathed, they read, they roamed in glen and forest
Far amid blackest pines to the waterfalls they shadow,
Far up the long long glens to the loch and the loch behind it
Deep under huge red cliffs, a secret, and oft by the starlight

¹⁰ Note the detestable combination of two flat trochees with a falsified tribrach in the middle of this line. These false movements abound in the accentual hexameter.

Or they bathed and read and roamed in heathery Highland.
So they bathed and read and roamed in heathery Highland.

This indistinctive paddling has even less of the sound and rhythm of the true hexameter than Longfellow's verses which are at least hexametric in form and surface appearance.

But still there are passages, not numerous enough, in which he loses his fear of the pure dactylic movement and does not replace it or break it with the disturbing intrusion of unmanaged or unassimilated trochees; he arrives then at “accentual” lines, — if they must be so called, but they are really stress lines, — with a firm beat that makes the metrical structure adequate; or he achieves a movement in which the trochees come in with a distinct rhythmic meaning and significant effect or, at the least, make themselves at home in the dactylic rhythm, or he brings in other modulations in a way proper to the quantitative hexameter.

Found amid granite dust on the frosty scalp of the Cairngorm. . . .
Eying one moment the beauty, the life, ere he flung himself in it,
Drinking in, deep in his soul, the beautiful hue and the clearness. . . .
Often I find myself saying and know not myself as I say it,
Perish the poor and the weary! what can they better than perish,
Perish in labour for her who is worth the destruction of empires? . . .
Dig in thy deep dark prison, O miner! and finding be thankful,
While thou art | eating black | bread in the | poisonous | air of thy |
cavern, |
Far away glitters the gem on the peerless neck of a princess. . . .
Into a granite basin the amber torrent descended.

These lines are metrically and rhythmically adequate; the treatment of the metre is unexceptionable: there is a true form, a good basis and beginning of a genuine hexameter movement; and yet something is lacking, something which ought to be there

¹¹ Note that this, the sole truly dactylic line, with quantitative modulations, is in spite of its deliberate prosaism less unsatisfactory in sound than the rest of the passage.

and is not, and its absence prevents them from being quite effective. It is the rhythm that in spite of its soundness is not altogether alive, does not keep sufficiently alert, has not found the true movement that would give it the full power and speed of the true hexameter. A second fault is that while individual lines are good and may sound even excellent when read by themselves or even two or three at a time, there is no rhythmic harmony of the long passage or paragraph; one has, in the mass, the sense of listening to the same indifferent and undistinguished movement repeated without sufficient meaningful variation and without any harmonious total significance. Above all the large hexameter rhythm, such as we have it in Greek or Latin, has not been found, nor anything that would equal it as a native English harmony fitted for great poetic speech, for great thoughts and feelings, for great action and movement. There is a tameness of sound, a flatness of level, or, even when beauty or energy is there, it is a tenuous beauty, a strength that is content to be low-toned and moderate.

One reason of this deficiency must be that in all this work the hexameter is compelled to express subjects whose triviality brings it down far below its natural pitch of greatness, force or beauty. A pathetically sentimental love story, a rather dull-hued tale of courtship among New England Puritans, the trifling doings and amours and chaff and chat of holiday-making undergraduates, these are not subjects in which either language or rhythm can rise to any great heights or reach out into revealing largenesses; they are obliged to key themselves to commonness and flatness; the language is as often as not confidentially familiar or prosaic, a manner good enough for some other kinds of verse but not entitled to call in the power of the great classical metre. There can be in such an atmosphere no room and no courage to dare to rise into any uplifting grandeur or break out into any extreme of beauty. Both Clough and Longfellow tell their stories well and it is more for the interest of the contents than for the beauty of the poetry that we read them. But the hexameter was made for nobler purposes; it has been the medium of epic or pastoral or it tuned itself to a

powerful or forcefully pointed expression of thought and observation; power and beauty are its native character and, even when it turns to satire or to familiar speech, it keeps always one or other or both of these characteristics. There is no sound reason why it should be otherwise in English, why this great metre should be condemned to an inferior level and inferior purpose; if that is done, it fails its user and dissatisfies the reader.

In fact, Clough does once or twice rise above these limitations. Here, following immediately three lines that have been already quoted as good in their limits, come three others that suddenly realise the true hexameter rhythm; there is the life and energy natural to that rhythm, there is the characteristic swiftness, rush, force, which is one of its notes, there is an exact clothing of the thought, feeling or action in its own native movement —

What! for a mite, or a mote, an impalpable odour of honour
 Armies shall bleed, cities burn, and the soldier red from the storming
 Carry hot rancour and lust into chambers of mothers and daughters!

At another place he rises still higher and suddenly discovers, though only once in a way and apparently without being conscious of his find, the rhythm of the true quantitative hexameter —

He like a | god came | leaving his | ample O|lympian | chamber

where the opening antibacchius and spondee followed by bounding and undulating dactyls give a sound-value recognisable as akin to the ancient movement. It would be an epic line if it were not in the mock-heroic style; but, even so, if we met it apart from its context, it would remind us at once of the Homeric rhythms —

Bē de kat' Oulumpio karēnōn chōōmenos kēr . . .

If all the poem had been written in that manner or in accordant rhythms, the problem of the English hexameter would have been solved; there would have been no failure or half failure.¹²

We begin to glimpse the conditions of success and may now summarily state them. The hexameter is a dactylic metre and it must remain unequivocally and patently dactylic; there can be no escape from its difficulties by diminishing the dactylic beat: rather its full quantitative force has to be brought out,—the more that is done, the more the true rhythm will appear. But this need not bring in any sing-song, treadmill walk or monotone. In Longfellow, in Clough at their ordinary level, it is the low even tone without relief, the repetition of a semi-trochaic jog-trot or a smooth unvarying canter, the beat of tame dactyls, that gives this impression. In Harvey or similar writers it is the constrained artificial treatment of the metre that enforces a treadmill labour. But this is not the true hexameter movement; the true movement is a swift stream or a large flow, an undulating run, the impetuous bounding of a torrent, an ocean surge or a divine gallop of the horses of the sungod. There must be one underlying sameness as in all metre, but there can and should be at the same time a considerable diversity on the surface. That can be secured by several means, each of which gives plenty of room for rhythmic subtlety and for many turns of sound significance. There is the pause in various places of the line, near the beginning, at the middle or just after it or close to the end; all admit of a considerable variety in the exact placing, modulation, combination of the pause or pauses. There is also the line caesura and the foot caesura. The hexameter line in English may be cut into two or else three equal dactylic parts, or it may be cut anywhere in the middle of a foot and this admits of a number of very effective

¹² Kingsley's "Andromeda" deserves a mention, for it is the most readable of English hexameter poems; the verse is well-constructed, much better than Clough's; it has not the sing-song tameness of Longfellow, there is rhythm, there is resonance. But though the frame is correct and very presentable, there is nothing or little inside it. Kingsley has the trick of romantic language, romantic imagination and thinking, but he is not an original poet; the poetic value of his work is far inferior to Clough's or Longfellow's, it is not sound and good stuff but romantic tinsel.

variations which obviate monotony altogether. For example —

In the dawn-ray lofty and voiceless
 Ida climbed with her god-haunted peaks | into diamond lustres,
 Ida first of the hills | with the ranges silent beyond her
 Watching the dawn in their giant companies, | as since the ages
 First began | they had watched her, | upbearing Time on their
 summits. . . .

“Hero Aeneas, swift be thy stride to the Ilian hill-top.
 Dardanid, haste! for the gods are at work; they have risen with the
 morning,
 Each from his starry couch, and they labour. Doom, we can see it,
 Glows on their anvils of destiny, clang we can hear of their hammers.
 Something they forge there sitting unknown in the silence eternal,
 Whether of evil or good it is they who shall choose who are masters
 Calm, unopposed; they are gods and they work out their iron caprices.
 Troy is their stage and Argos their background; we are their puppets.
 Always our voices are prompted to speech for an end that we know not,
 Always we think that we drive, but are driven. Action and impulse,
 Yearning and thought are their engines, our will is their shadow and
 helper.”

There are many other devices for variation: there is overlapping,—but it must be skilfully managed so as to coincide with perceptible movements of the thought, not used merely as a customary technical device; there is the constant attention to the right vowelisation and consonant harmonies which can give an individual character to each line and are also intimately connected with the rhythmic rendering of significance. Even though the free rhythmic placing of intrinsic long syllables is taken away, since they are now bound down to a metrical use, still much can be done with the distribution of stressed long vowels and stressed short vowels among the six beats; for the predominance of either in a line or passage or their more or less equal distribution in various ways creates different psychologies of sound and dictates large or wide or narrow or subtle motions of both rhythm and feeling. In this opening of a poem —

Dawn in her journey eternal compelling the labour of mortals,
Dawn the beginner of things with the night for their rest or their ending,
Pallid and bright-lipped arrived from the mists and the chill of the
Euxine —

in the first line the stressed long vowels predominate, in the second the stressed short vowels, in the third there is an equal distribution; in each case there is a suiting of the choices of sound to a different shade of movement-sense. In another passage —

Doffing his mantle
Started to run at the bidding a swift-footed youth of the Trojans
First in the race and the battle, Thrasymachus son of Aretes,

we can see that the predominance of short stresses amounting to an almost unbroken succession of natural short-vowel syllables creates a long running swiftness of the rhythm which fits in exactly with the action. All these minutiae are part of the technique and the possibilities of the hexameter and, if they are neglected or ineffectively used, the fault does not lie with the metre. The natural resources of the true quantitative hexameter are so great that even a long series of end-stopped lines would not necessarily create a monotone.

Finally, there is the resource of modulation, and in the quantitative hexameter this can be used with great effect, either sparingly or in abundance, best sparing perhaps in epic or high narrative, abundant in poems of complex thinking and emotion. There is only one possible modulation in place of the spondee and that is the trochee. In the quantitative hexameter the trochee, unless unskilfully used, does not break or hurt the flow; it modifies the total rhythm so as to give it an expressive turn and it can easily make itself a part of the general dactylic streaming. For example —

High over all that a nation had built and its love and its laughter,
Lighting the last time highway and homestead, market and temple,
Looking on men who must | die ānd | wōmēn | destined to sorrow,
Looking on | beauty | fire mūst lāy | low and the sickle of slaughter.

Here the two trochees together — a combination almost always awkward or crippling in the accentual hexameter — and the trochee followed by a cretic fit easily into the movement and create by their unusual and appropriate turn of sound a modulation of the rhythmic feeling. If the third line were written

Looking on men who must die and on women predestined to sorrow,

the common indistinguishable metrical run would not at all serve the intended meaning,—it would be a statement and would inform the mind but, robbed of the special turn of sound, it would not move. For the dactyl there is a great number of possible modulations; the antibacchius can be used freely, the lighter cretic less freely but still frequently, the first paeon often but not too often; even the lighter molossus can come in to our aid; the tribrah or the anapaest can introduce the first foot of a line or step in after a pause in the middle, but elsewhere they can seldom intervene or only if it is done very carefully. Even the choriamb or the double trochee can be employed in place of the paeon, if the second long syllable of the foot is unstressed and therefore not burdensome. Heavy trisyllables can be allowed only now and then, if the movement demands them. But in fact all modulations must be employed only when there is the rhythmic necessity or for rhythmic significance; if they are used mechanically without reason or at random, it does not help the harmony and often destroys it. Rhythmic necessity intervenes when the special movement needed by the thought, feeling or action must so be brought about, by modulation of the fixed rhythm or a departure from it;¹³ rhythmic significance occurs when the deeper unexpressed soul sense behind the words is brought out, not by word but by sound, to the surface.

The efficacy of this technique depends on the power of the

¹³ Thus even an almost wholly trochaic or a wholly spondaic line can be admitted when it is demanded by the action, e.g.,

He from the carven couch upreared his giant stature
or,
Fate-weighed up Troy's slope strode musing strong Aeneas.

writer to discover and sustain the true movement of the hexameter, its spirit and character, such as we find it in the ancient epics, pastorals, epistles, satires in which it was used with a supreme greatness or a consummate mastery. That movement can be of many kinds; it admits a considerable variation of pace, sometimes swift, sometimes slow, short in its rapidity or long-drawn-out with many rhythmic turns, and there are several possibilities in each kind. Only a considerable poetic genius could bring out the full power and subtleties of its rhythms; but it is essential for even a tolerable success to find and keep up a true length and pitch in the delivery of the lines; the dactylic flow is especially exacting in this respect on the care of the rhythmist. An undulant run is the easiest to maintain, the most simple and natural pace, but it has to be varied by other movements, a long or a brief bounding swiftness, the light rapid run or a slower deliberate running; a large even stream is a second possibility as a basic rhythm, but this needs a Virgilian genius or talent; the surge is the greatest of all, but only the born epic poet could sustain it for a long time,—it suits indeed only the epic or high-pitched narrative, but it can come in from time to time as an occasional high rise from a lower level of rhythmic plenitude. Finally, rhyme can be used for poems of reflective thought or lyrical feeling; but it must not be made the excuse for a melodic monotone. That kind of melodic fixity is permissible in very short dactylic pieces, but the hexameter does not move at ease in a short range: it has fluted in the pastoral grove and walked on the Appian way, but it loves better the free sky and the winds of the ocean; it finds its natural self in the wide plain, on high mountains or in the surge and roll of a long venturous voyage.

If the difficulty of the hexameter can be successfully overcome, no insuperable impossibility need be met in the naturalisation of other classical metres, for the harmonic principle will be the same. All that is necessary is that artificial quantity and the atmosphere of a pastime or an experiment must be abandoned; there must not be the sense of an importation or a construction, the metre must read as if it were a born English rhythm, not a naturalised alien. It would be a mistake to cling to rigid scholarly

correctness in the process; these metres must submit to the natural law of English poetry, to movements and liberties which the classical rhythms do not admit, to modulation, to slight facilitating changes of form, to the creation of different models of itself, as there are different models of the sonnet. The Alcaic is the most attractive and manageable of the ancient lyrical metres, but in English even the Alcaic cannot easily be the same in all respects as the original verse form of its creator. The original model can indeed be reproduced; but modulations have to be brought in to help the difficulties experienced by English speech in taking a foreign metre into itself; trochees have very usually to be substituted for the not easily found spondee, an occasional anapaest, a paeon lengthening out the orthodox dactyl should not be excluded; the omission of the first syllable in the opening line of the stanza can be admitted as an occasional licence. Otherwise the full harmonic possibilities of this rhythmic measure in its new tongue cannot be richly exploited. The Horatian form in which the two opening lines very commonly end in a cretic doing duty for the theoretic dactyl, is more manageable in English, in which a constant dactylic close to the line is not easily handled: this change gives a less melodious, a graver and more sculptural turn to the outlines of the stanza. Finally, to this Horatian form it is possible to give a greater amplitude by admitting a feminine ending in these two lines, the cretic turning into a double trochee. That does not break or destroy the spirit and character of the Alcaic verse; it gives it more largeness and resonance.

Other lyrical forms may be less amenable to change; there is sometimes too close an identity between the body and the spirit. It is so with the Sapphic, an alluring metre but, as experimenters have found, difficult to change and anglicise: here only slight modulations are admissible, the trochee for the spondee, the antibacchius or light cretic for the dactyl. Still others would need the minute and scrupulous art of a goldsmith or the force of a giant to make anything of them; yet they are worth trying, for one never knows whether the difficulty may not be the way to a triumph or a *trouvaille*. In any case, the hexameter, half a dozen of the greater or more beautiful lyrical forms and the

freedom of the use of quantitative verse for the creation of new original rhythms would be enough to add a wide field to the large and opulent estate of English poetry.

Poems
in Quantitative Metres

Ocean Oneness¹

Silence is round me, wideness ineffable;
White birds on the ocean diving and wandering;
A soundless sea on a voiceless heaven,
Azure on azure, is mutely gazing.

Identified with silence and boundlessness
My spirit widens clasping the universe
Till all that seemed becomes the Real,
One in a mighty and single vastness.

Someone broods there nameless and bodiless,
Conscious and lonely, deathless and infinite,
And, sole in a still eternal rapture,
Gathers all things to his heart for ever.

¹ Alcaics. Modulations are allowed, trochee or iamb in the first foot or a long mono-syllable; an occasional anapaest in place of an iamb is permitted; an antibacchius can replace a dactyl.

Trance of Waiting²

² Elegiacs, with rhyme in the pentameter. A syllable or two introducing the last hemistich of the pentameter is allowed, but this must not be made the rule. This licence, impossible in the strict cut of classical metre, comes in naturally in English and is therefore permissible.

Flame-Wind³

A flame-wind ran from the gold of the east,
Leaped on my soul with the breath of a sevenfold noon.
Wings of the angel, gallop of the beast!
Mind and body on fire, but the heart in swoon.

O flame, thou bringest the strength of the noon,
But where are the voices of morn and the stillness of eve?
Where the pale-blue wine of the moon?
Mind and life are in flower, but the heart must grieve.

Gold in the mind and the life-flame's red
Make of the heavens a splendour, the earth a blaze,
But the white and rose of the heart are dead.
Flame-wind, pass! I will wait for Love in the silent ways.

³ Dactylic tetrameter and pentameter catalectic; an additional foot in the last line; trochee or spondee freely admitted anywhere; first paeon, antibacchius, cretic can replace a dactyl. One or two extra syllables are allowed sometimes at the beginning of the line.

The River⁴

Vast now in a wide press and a dense hurry and mass
movement of thronged waters
Loud-thundering, fast-galloping, might, speed is the stern
message of thy spirit,
Proud violence, stark claim and the dire cry of the heart's
hunger on God's barriers
Self-hurled, and a void lust of unknown distance, and pace
reckless and free grandeur.

Calm yet shall release thee; an immense peace and a large
streaming of white silence,
Broad plains shall be thine, greenness surround thee, and
wharved cities and life's labour
Long thou wilt befriend, human delight help with the waves'
coolness, with ships' furrows
Thrill,—last become, self losing, a sea-motion and joy
boundless and blue laughter.

⁴ Ionic a majore pentameter catalectic. In one place an epitrite replaces the ionic.

Journey's End⁵

The day ends lost in a stretch of even,
A long road trod — and the little farther.
Now the waste-land, now the silence;
A blank dark wall, and behind it heaven.

⁵ Lines 1, 2, 4, epitrite, third paeon, trochee,
 $\sim\text{—}\text{—}|\sim\text{—}\text{—}| \sim$.
In line 3, two double trochees,
 $\sim\text{—}\sim| \sim\text{—}\sim$.

The Dream Boat⁶

Who was it that came to me in a boat made of dream-fire,
 With his flame brow and his sun-gold body?
 Melted was the silence into a sweet secret murmur,
 “Do you come now? is the heart’s fire ready?”

Hidden in the recesses of the heart something shuddered.
 It recalled all that the life’s joy cherished,
 Imaged the felicity it must leave lost for ever,
 And the boat passed and the gold god vanished.

Now within the hollowness of the world’s breast inhabits —
 For the love died and the old joy ended —
 Void of a felicity that has fled, gone for ever,
 And the gold god and the dream boat come not.

⁶ Lines 1, 3, dactyl, second paeon, ionic a minore, amphibrach (or bacchius),
 —˘˘|˘—˘˘|˘˘— —|˘—˘.

Lines 2, 4, two ionics a minore with a closing trochee,
 ˘˘— —|˘˘— —|—˘.

Soul in the Ignorance⁷

Soul in the Ignorance, wake from its stupor.
Flake of the world-fire, spark of Divinity,
Lift up thy mind and thy heart into glory.
Sun in the darkness, recover thy lustre.

One, universal, ensphering creation,
Wheeling no more with inconscient Nature,
Feel thyself God-born, know thyself deathless.
Timeless return to thy immortal existence.

⁷ Dactylic tetrameter, usually catalectic, with the ordinary modulations.

The Witness and the Wheel⁸

Who art thou in the heart comrade of man who sits
August, watching his works, watching his joys and griefs,
Unmoved, careless of pain, careless of death and fate?
Witness, what hast thou seen watching this great blind world
Moving helpless in Time, whirled on the Wheel in Space,
That yet thou with thy vast Will biddest toil our hearts,
Mystic,—for without thee nothing can last in Time?
We too, when from the urge ceaseless of Nature turn
Our souls, far from the breast casting her tool, desire,
Grow like thee. In the front Nature still drives in vain
The blind trail of our acts, passions and thoughts and hopes;
Unmoved, calm, we look on, careless of death and fate,
Of grief careless and joy,—signs of a surface script
Without value or sense, steps of an aimless world.
Something watches behind, Spirit or Self or Soul,
Viewing Space and its toil, waiting the end of Time.
Witness, who then art thou, one with thee who am I,
Nameless, watching the Wheel whirl across Time and Space?

⁸ The metre is the little Asclepiad used by Horace in his Ode addressed to Maecenas, two choriamb between an initial spondee and a final iamb. Here modulations are admitted, trochee or iamb for the spondee, occasionally a spondee for the concluding iamb; an epitrite or ionic a minore can replace the choriamb.

Descent⁹

All my cells thrill swept by a surge of splendour,
Soul and body stir with a mighty rapture,
Light and still more light like an ocean billows
Over me, round me.

Rigid, stonelike, fixed like a hill or statue,
Vast my body feels and upbears the world's weight;
Dire the large descent of the Godhead enters
Limbs that are mortal.

Voiceless, thronged, Infinity crowds upon me;
Presses down a glory of power eternal;
Mind and heart grow one with the cosmic wideness;
Stilled are earth's murmurs.

Swiftly, swiftly crossing the golden spaces
Knowledge leaps, a torrent of rapid lightnings;
Thoughts that left the Ineffable's flaming mansions,
Blaze in my spirit.

Slow the heart-beats' rhythm like a giant hammer's;
Missioned voices drive to me from God's doorway
Words that live not save upon Nature's summits,
Ecstasy's chariots.

All the world is changed to a single oneness;
Souls undying, infinite forces, meeting,
Join in God-dance weaving a seamless Nature,
Rhythm of the Deathless.

⁹ Sapphics. But the second-foot spondee is very usually replaced by a trochee, the final trochee sometimes by a spondee; an antbacchius, cretic or molossus can replace the dactyl. In the fifteenth line elision is used; in a sapphic line there can be only one dactyl.

Mind and heart and body, one harp of being,
Cry that anthem, finding the notes eternal,—
Light and might and bliss and immortal wisdom
 Clasping for ever.

The Lost Boat¹⁰

Is it Chance smites? is it Fate's irony? dead workings or blind
purpose of brute Nature?
Or man's own deeds that return back on his doomed head with
a stark justice, a fixed vengeance?
Or a dread Will from behind Life that regards pain and salutes
death with a hard laughter?
Is it God's might or a Force rules in this dense jungle of events,
deeds and our thought's strivings?

¹⁰ Ionic a minore pentameter with an overflow of one short syllable,

In a chance happening, fate's whims and the blind workings or
dead drive of a brute Nature,
In her dire Titan caprice, strength that to death drifts and to
doom, hidden a Will labours.
Not with one moment of sharp close or the slow fall of a dim
curtain the play ceases:
Yet is there Time to be crossed, lives to be lived out, the
unplayed acts of the soul's drama.

Renewal¹¹

When the heart tires and the throb stills recalling
Things that were once and again can be never,
When the bow falls and the drawn string is broken,
Hands that were clasped, yet for ever are parted,

When the soul passes to new births and bodies,
Lands never seen and meetings with new faces,
Is the bow raised and the fall'n arrow fitted,
Acts that were vain rewedded to the Fate-curve?

To the lives sundered can Time bring rejoicing,
Love that was slain be reborn with the body?
In the mind null, from the heart's chords rejected,
Lost to the sense, but the spirit remembers!

¹¹ Lines 1, 3, two ionics a minore with a final amphibrach,

—○— | ○— | ○— .

Lines 2, 4, choriamb, paeon, antibacchius (or sometimes bacchius or amphibrach),

—○— | ○—○— | —○—
|○—○— |○— |○—

Soul's Scene¹²

The clouds lain on forlorn spaces of sky, weary and lolling,
Watch grey waves of a lost sea wander sad, reckless and rolling,
A bare anguish of bleak beaches made mournful with the
breath of the Northwind
And a huddle of melancholy hills in the distance.

The blank hour in some vast mood of a Soul lonely in Nature
On earth's face puts a mask pregnantly carved, cut to
misfeature,
And man's heart and his stilled mind react hushed in a
spiritual passion
Imitating the contours of her desolate waiting.

¹² Lines 1, 2, three antisasts (or in the first foot a second paeon), amphibrach,

— — — | — — — | — — — | — — .

Line 3, two antispasts, ionic a majore, second paeon, trochee,


Line 4, three paeons, trochee, but the middle paeon can be replaced by an antispast or an ionic a majore; a double iamb once replaces the third paeon.

Ascent¹³

(1) *The Silence*

Into the Silence, into the Silence,
Arise, O Spirit immortal,
Away from the turning Wheel, breaking the magical Circle.
Ascend, single and deathless:
Care no more for the whispers and the shoutings in the
darkness,

Pass from the sphere of the grey and the little,
Leaving the cry and the struggle,
Into the Silence for ever.

Vast and immobile, formless and marvellous,
Higher than Heaven, wider than the universe,
In a pure glory of being,
In a bright stillness of self-seeing,
Communing with a boundlessness voiceless and intimate,
Make thy knowledge too high for thought, thy joy too deep for
emotion;
At rest in the unchanging Light, mute with the wordless
self-vision,
Spirit, pass out of thyself; Soul, escape from the clutch of
Nature.

All thou hast seen cast from thee, O Witness.

Turn to the Alone and the Absolute, turn to the Eternal:

Be only eternity, peace and silence

O world-transcending nameless Oneness,

Spirit immortal.

¹³ Free quantitative verse with a predominant dactylic movement.

(2) Beyond the Silence

Out from the Silence, out from the Silence,
Carrying with thee the ineffable Substance,
Carrying with thee the splendour and wideness,
Ascend, O Spirit immortal.
Assigning to Time its endless meaning,
Blissful enter into the clasp of the Timeless.
Awake in the living Eternal, taken to the bosom of love of the
Infinite,
Live self-found in his endless completeness,
Drowned in his joy and his sweetness,
Thy heart close to the heart of the Godhead for ever.

Vast, God-possessing, embraced by the Wonderful,
Lifted by the All-Beautiful into his infinite beauty,
Love shall envelop thee endless and fathomless,
Joy unimaginable, ecstasy illimitable,
Knowledge omnipotent, Might omniscient,
Light without darkness, Truth that is dateless.
One with the Transcendent, calm, universal,
Single and free, yet innumerably living,
All in thyself and thyself in all dwelling,
Act in the world with thy being beyond it.
Soul, exceed life's boundaries; Spirit, surpass the universe.
Outclimbing the summits of Nature,
Transcending and uplifting the soul of the finite,
Rise with the world in thy bosom,
O Word gathered into the heart of the Ineffable.
One with the Eternal, live in his infinity,
Drowned in the Absolute, found in the Godhead,
Swan of the supreme and spaceless ether wandering winged
through the universe,
Spirit immortal.

The Tiger and the Deer¹⁴

Brilliant, crouching, slouching, what crept through the green
heart of the forest,
Gleaming eyes and mighty chest and soft soundless paws of
grandeur and murder?
The wind slipped through the leaves as if afraid lest its voice
and the noise of its steps perturb the pitiless Splendour,
Hardly daring to breathe. But the great beast crouched and
crept, and crept and crouched a last time, noiseless, fatal,
Till suddenly death leaped on the beautiful wild deer as it
drank
Unsuspecting at the great pool in the forest's coolness and
shadow,
And it fell and, torn, died remembering its mate left sole in the
deep woodland,—
Destroyed, the mild harmless beauty by the strong cruel beauty
in Nature.
But a day may yet come when the tiger crouches and leaps no
more in the dangerous heart of the forest,
As the mammoth shakes no more the plains of Asia;
Still then shall the beautiful wild deer drink from the coolness
of great pools in the leaves' shadow.
The mighty perish in their might;
The slain survive the slayer.

¹⁴ Free quantitative verse, left to find out its own line by line rhythm and unity.

Ilion¹⁵*Dawn over Ilion*

Dawn in her journey eternal compelling the labour of mortals,
 Dawn the beginner of things with the night for their rest or their ending,
 Pallid and bright-lipped arrived from the mists and the chill of the Euxine.
 Earth in the dawn-fire delivered from starry and shadowy vastness
 Woke to the wonder of life and its passion and sorrow and beauty,
 All on her bosom sustaining, the patient compassionate Mother.
 Out of the formless vision of Night with its look on things hidden
 Given to the gaze of the azure she lay in her garment of greenness,
 Wearing light on her brow. In the dawn-ray lofty and voiceless
 Ida climbed with her god-haunted peaks into diamond lustres,
 Ida first of the hills with the ranges silent beyond her
 Watching the dawn in their giant companies, as since the ages
 First began they had watched her, upbearing Time on their summits.
 Troas cold on her plain awaited the boon of the sunshine.
 There, like a hope through an emerald dream sole-pacing for ever,
 Stealing to wideness beyond, crept Simois lame in his currents,
 Guiding his argent thread mid the green of the reeds and the grasses.
 Headlong, impatient of Space and its boundaries, Time and its slowness,
 Xanthus clamoured aloud as he ran to the far-surging waters,
 Joining his call to the many-voiced roar of the mighty Aegean,
 Answering Ocean's limitless cry like a whelp to its parent.
 Forests looked up through their rifts, the ravines grew aware of their
 shadows.
 Closer now gliding glimmered the golden feet of the goddess.
 Over the hills and the headlands spreading her garment of splendour,
 Fateful she came with her eyes impartial looking on all things,
 Bringer to man of the day of his fortune and day of his downfall.

¹⁵ Hexameters. Some opening passages of a poem left unfinished have been recast and added here to illustrate to some extent the theory of the hexameter put forward in the preceding pages.

Full of her luminous errand, careless of eve and its weeping,
Fateful she paused unconcerned above Ilion's mysteried greatness,
Domes like shimmering tongues of the crystal flames of the morning,
Opalesque rhythm-line of tower-tops, notes of the lyre of the sungod.
High over all that a nation had built and its love and its laughter,
Lighting the last time highway and homestead, market and temple,
Looking on men who must die and women destined to sorrow,
Looking on beauty fire must lay low and the sickle of slaughter,
Fateful she lifted the doom-scroll red with the script of the Immortals,
Deep in the invisible air that folds in the race and its morrows
Fixed it, and passed on smiling the smile of the griefless and deathless,—
Dealers of death though death they know not, who in the morning
Scatter the seed of the event for the reaping ready at nightfall.
Over the brooding of plains and the agelong trance of the summits
Out of the sun and its spaces she came, pausing tranquil and fatal,
And, at a distance followed by the golden herds of the sungod,
Carried the burden of Light and its riddle and danger to Hellas.

The Coming of the Herald

Even as fleets on a chariot divine through the gold streets of ether,
Swiftly when Life fleets, invisibly changing the arc of the soul-drift,
And, with the choice that has chanced or the fate man has called and
now suffers
Weighted, the moment travels driving the past towards the future,
Only its face and its feet are seen, not the burden it carries.
Weight of the event and its surface we bear, but the meaning is hidden.
Earth sees not; life's clamour deafens the ear of the spirit:
Man knows not; least knows the messenger chosen for the summons.
Only he listens to the voice of his thoughts, his heart's ignorant whisper,
Whistle of winds in the tree-tops of Time and the rustle of Nature.
Now too the messenger hastened driving the car of the errand:
Even while dawn was a gleam in the east, he had cried to his coursers.
Half yet awake in light's turrets started the scouts of the morning
Hearing the jar of the wheels and the throb of the hooves' exultation,
Hooves of the horses of Greece as they galloped to Phrygian Troya.
Proudly they trampled through Xanthus thwarting the foam of his anger,

Whinnying high as in scorn crossed Simois' tangled currents,
 Xanthus' reed-girdled twin, the gentle and slaggard river.
 One and unarmed in the car was the driver; grey was he, shrunken,
 Worn with his decades. To Pergama cinctured with strength Cyclopean
 Old and alone he arrived, insignificant, feeblest of mortals,
 Carrying Fate in his helpless hands and the doom of an empire.
 Ilion, couchant, saw him arrive from the sea and the darkness.
 Heard mid the faint slow stirrings of life in the sleep of the city,
 Rapid there neared a running of feet, and the cry of the summons
 Beat round the doors that guarded the domes of the splendour of Priam.
 "Wardens charged with the night, ye who stand in Laomedon's gateway,
 Waken the Ilian kings. Talthybius, herald of Argos,
 Parleying stands at the portals of Troy in the grey of the dawning."
 High and insistent the call. In the dimness and hush of his chamber
 Charioted far in his dreams amid visions of glory and terror,
 Scenes of a vider world,— though blurred and deformed in the
 brain-cells,
 Vague and inconsequent, there full of colour and beauty and greatness,—
 Suddenly drawn by the pull of the conscious thread of the earth-bond
 And of the needs of Time and the travail assigned in the transience
 Warned by his body, Deiphobus, reached in that splendid remoteness,
 Touched through the nerve-ways of life that branch to the brain of the
 dreamer,
 Heard the terrestrial call and slumber startled receded
 Sliding like dew from the mane of a lion. Reluctant he travelled
 Back from the light of the fields beyond death, from the wonderful
 kingdoms
 Where he had wandered a soul among souls in the countries beyond us,
 Free from the toil and incertitude, free from the struggle and danger:
 Now, compelled, he returned from the respite given to the time-born,
 Called to the strife and the wounds of the earth and the burden of
 daylight.
 He from the carven couch upreared his giant stature.
 Haste-spurred he laved his eyes and regained earth's memories,
 haste-spurred
 Donning apparel and armour strode through the town of his fathers,
 Watched by her gods on his way to his fate, towards Pergama's portals.

The Siege

Nine long years had passed and the tenth now was wearily ending,
Years of the wrath of the gods, and the leaguer still threatened the
ramparts

Since through a tranquil morn the ships came past Tenedos sailing
And the first Argive fell slain as he leaped on the Phrygian beaches;
Still the assailants attacked, still fought back the stubborn defenders.
When the reward is withheld and endlessly lengthens the labour,
Weary of fruitless toil grows the transient heart of the mortal.
Weary of battle the invaders warring heartless and homeless
Prayed to the gods for release and return to the land of their fathers:
Weary of battle the Phrygians beset in their beautiful city
Prayed to the gods for an end of the danger and mortal encounter.
Long had the high-beached ships forgotten their measureless ocean.
Greece seemed old and strange to her children camped on the beaches,
Old like a life long past one remembers hardly believing
But as a dream that has happened, but as the tale of another.
Time with his tardy touch and Nature changing our substance
Slowly had dimmed the faces loved and the scenes once cherished:
Yet was the dream still dear to them longing for wife and for children,
Longing for hearth and glebe in the far-off valleys of Hellas.
Always like waves that swallow the shingles, lapsing, returning,
Tide of the battle, race of the onset relentlessly thundered
Over the Phrygian corn-fields. Trojan wrestled with Argive,
Caria, Lycia, Thrace and the war-lord mighty Achaia
Joined in the clasp of the fight. Death, panic and wounds and disaster,
Glory of conquest and glory of fall, and the empty hearth-side,
Weeping and fortitude, terror and hope and the pang of remembrance,
Anguish of hearts, the lives of the warriors, the strength of the nations
Thrown were like weights into Destiny's scales, but the balance wavered
Pressed by invisible hands. For not only the mortal fighters,
Heroes half divine whose names are like stars in remoteness,
Triumphed and failed and were winds or were weeds on the dance of the
surges,
But from the peaks of Olympus and shimmering summits of Ida

Gleaming and clanging the gods of the antique ages descended.
 Hidden from human knowledge the brilliant shapes of Immortals
 Mingled unseen in the mellay, or sometimes, marvellous, maskless,
 Forms of undying beauty and power that made tremble the heart-strings
 Parting their deathless secrecy crossed through the borders of vision,
 Plain as of old to the demigods out of their glory emerging,
 Heard by mortal ears and seen by the eyeballs that perish.
 Mighty they came from their spaces of freedom and sorrowless splendour.
 Sea-vast, trailing the azure hem of his clamorous waters,
 Blue-lidded, maned with the Night, Poseidon smote for the future,
 Earth-shaker who with his trident releases the coils of the Dragon,
 Freeing the forces unborn that are locked in the caverns of Nature.
 Calm and unmoved, upholding the Word that is Fate and the order
 Fixed in the sight of a Will foreknowing and silent and changeless,
 Hera sent by Zeus and Athene lifting his aegis
 Guarded the hidden decree. But for Ilion, loud as the surges,
 Ares impetuous called to the fire in men's hearts, and his passion
 Woke in the shadowy depths the forms of the Titan and demon;
 Dumb and coerced by the grip of the gods in the abyss of the being,
 Formidable, veiled they sit in the grey subconscious darkness
 Watching the sleep of the snake-haired Erinnys. Miracled, haloed,
 Seer and magician and prophet who beholds what the thought cannot
 witness,
 Lifting the godhead within us to more than a human endeavour,
 Slayer and saviour, thinker and mystic, leaped from his sun-peaks
 Guarding in Ilion the wall of his mysteries Delphic Apollo.
 Heaven's strengths divided swayed in the whirl of the Earth-force.
 All that is born and destroyed is reborn in the sweep of the ages;
 Life like a decimal ever recurring repeats the old figure;
 Goal seems there none for the ball that is chased throughout Time by the
 Fate-teams;
 Evil once ended renews and no issue comes out of living:
 Only an Eye unseen can distinguish the thread of its workings.
 Such seemed the rule of the pastime of Fate on the plains of the Troad;
 All went backwards and forwards tossed in the swing of the death-game.
 Vain was the toil of the heroes, the blood of the mighty was squandered,
 Spray as of surf on the cliffs when it moans unappeased, unrequited

Age after fruitless age. Day hunted the steps of the nightfall;
Joy succeeded to grief; defeat only greatened the vanquished,
Victory offered an empty delight without guerdon or profit.
End there was none of the effort and end there was none of the failure.
Triumph and agony changing hands in a desperate measure
Faced and turned as a man and a maiden trampling the grasses
Face and turn and they laugh in their joy of the dance and each other.
These were gods and they trampled lives. But though Time is immortal,
Mortal his works are and ways and the anguish ends like the rapture.
Artists of Nature content with their work in the plan of the transience,
Beautiful, deathless, august, the Olympians turned from the carnage,
Leaving the battle already decided, leaving the heroes
Slain in their minds, Troy burned, Greece left to her glory and downfall.
Into their heavens they rose up mighty like eagles ascending
Fanning the world with their wings. As the great to their luminous

mansions

Turn from the cry and the strife, forgetting the wounded and fallen,
Calm they repose from their toil and incline to the joy of the banquet,
Watching the feet of the wine-bearers rosily placed on the marble,
Filling their hearts with ease, so they to their sorrowless ether
Passed from the wounded earth and its air that is ploughed with men's
anguish;
Calm they reposed and their hearts inclined to the joy and the silence.
Lifted was the burden laid on our wills by their starry presence:
Man was restored to his smallness, the world to its inconscient labour.
Life felt a respite from height, the winds breathed freer delivered;
Light was released from their blaze and the earth was released from their
greatness.

But their immortal content from the struggle titanic departed.
Vacant the noise of the battle roared like the sea on the shingles;
Wearily hunted the spears their quarry; strength was disheartened;
Silence increased with the march of the months on the tents of the leaguer.
But not alone on the Achaians the steps of the moments fell heavy;
Slowly the shadow deepened on Ilion mighty and scornful:
Dragging her days went by; in the rear of the hearts of her people
Something that knew what they dared not know and the mind would
not utter,

Something that smote at her soul of defiance and beauty and laughter,
Darkened the hours. For Doom in her sombre and giant uprising
Neared, assailing the skies: the sense of her lived in all pastimes;
Time was pursued by unease and a terror woke in the midnight:
Even the ramparts felt her, stones that the gods had erected.
Now no longer she dallied and played, but bounded and hastened,
Seeing before her the end and, imagining massacre calmly,
Laughed and admired the flames and rejoiced in the cry of the captives.
Under her, dead to the watching immortals, Deiphobus hastened
Clanging in arms through the streets of the beautiful insolent city,
Brilliant, a gleaming husk but empty and left by the daemon.
Even as a star long extinguished whose light still travels the spaces,
Seen in its form by men, but itself goes phantom-like fleeting
Void and null and dark through the uncaring infinite vastness,
So now he seemed to the sight that sees all things from the Real.
Timeless its vision of Time creates the hour by things coming.
Borne on a force from the past and no more by a power for the future
Mighty and bright was his body, but shadowy the shape of his spirit
Only an eidolon seemed of the being that had lived in him, fleeting
Vague like a phantom seen by the dim Acherontian waters.

The Herald

But to the guardian towers that watched over Pergama's gateway
Out of the waking city Deiphobus swiftly arriving
Called, and swinging back the huge gates slowly, reluctant,
Flung Troy wide to the entering Argive. Ilion's portals
Parted admitting her destiny, then with a sullen and iron
Cry they closed. Mute, staring, grey like a wolf descended
Old Talthybius, propping his steps on the staff of his errand;
Feeble his body, but fierce still his glance with the fire within him;
Speechless and brooding he gazed on the hated and coveted city.
Suddenly, seeking heaven with her buildings hewn as for Titans,
Marvellous, rhythmic, a child of the gods with marble for raiment,
Smiting the vision with harmony, splendid and mighty and golden,
Ilion stood up around him entrenched in her giant defences.
Strength was uplifted on strength and grandeur supported by grandeur;

Secrecy whispers, there I will speak among Ilion's princes."

"Envoy," answered the Laomedontian, "voice of Achilles,
Vain is the offer of peace that sets out with a threat for its prelude.
Yet will we hear thee. Arise who are fleetest of foot in the gateway,—
Thou, Thrasymachus, haste. Let the domes of the mansion of Ilus
Wake to the bruit of the Hellene challenge. Summon Aeneas."

Even as the word sank back into stillness, doffing his mantle
Started to run at the bidding a swift-footed youth of the Trojans
First in the race and the battle, Thrasymachus son of Aretes.
He in the dawn disappeared into swiftness. Deiphobus slowly,
Measuring Fate with his thoughts in the troubled vasts of his spirit,
Back through the stir of the city returned to the house of his fathers,
Taming his mighty stride to the pace infirm of the Argive.

Aeneas

But with the god in his feet Thrasymachus rapidly running
Came to the halls in the youth of the wonderful city by Ilus
Built for the joy of the eye; for he rested from war and, triumphant,
Reigned adored by the prostrate nations. Now when all ended,
Last of its mortal possessors to walk in its flowering gardens,
Great Anchises lay in that luminous house of the ancients
Soothing his restful age, the far-warring victor Anchises,
High Bucoleon's son and the father of Rome by a goddess;
Lonely and vagrant once in his boyhood divine upon Ida
White Aphrodite ensnared him and she loosed her ambrosial girdle
Seeking a mortal's love. On the threshold Thrasymachus halted
Looking for servant or guard, but felt only a loneliness of slumber
Drawing the soul's sight within away from its life and things human;
Soundless, unheeding, the vacant corridors fled into darkness.
He to the shades of the house and the dreams of the echoing rafters
Trusted his high-voiced call, and from chambers still dim in their twilight
Strong Aeneas armoured and mantled, leonine striding,
Came, Anchises' son; for the dawn had not found him reposing,
But in the night he had left his couch and the clasp of Creüsa,
Rising from sleep at the call of his spirit that turned to the waters
Prompted by Fate and his mother who guided him, white Aphrodite.

Still with the impulse of speed Thrasymachus greeted Aeneas:
“Hero Aeneas, swift be thy stride to the Ilian hill-top.
Dardanid, haste! for the gods are at work; they have risen with the
morning,
Each from his starry couch, and they labour. Doom, we can see it,
Glow on their anvils of destiny, clang we can hear of their hammers.
Something they forge there sitting unknown in the silence eternal,
Whether of evil or good it is they who shall choose who are masters
Calm, unopposed; they are gods and they work out their iron caprices.
Troy is their stage and Argos their background; we are their puppets.
Always our voices are prompted to speech for an end that we know not,
Always we think that we drive, but are driven. Action and impulse,
Yearning and thought are their engines, our will is their shadow and
helper.

Now too, deeming he comes with a purpose framed by a mortal,
Shaft of their will they have shot from the bow of the Grecian leaguer,
Lashing themselves at his steeds, Talthybius sent by Achilles.”
“Busy the gods are always, Thrasymachus son of Arete,
Weaving Fate on their looms, and yesterday, now and tomorrow
Are but the stands they have made with Space and Time for their timber,
Frame but the dance of their shuttle. What eye unmazed by their
workings
Ever can pierce where they dwell and uncover their far-stretching purpose?
Silent they toil, they are hid in the clouds, they are wrapped with the
midnight.

Yet to Apollo I pray, the Archer friendly to mortals,
Yet to the rider on Fate I abase myself, wielder of thunder,
Evil and doom to avert from my fatherland. All night Morpheus,
He who with shadowy hands heaps error and truth upon mortals,
Stood at my pillow with images. Dreaming I erred like a phantom
Helpless in Ilion’s streets with the fire and the foeman around me.
Red was the smoke as it mounted triumphant the house-top of Priam,
Clang of the arms of the Greeks was in Troya, and thwarting the clangour
Voices were crying and calling me over the violent Ocean
Borne by the winds of the West from a land where Hesperus harbours.”
Brooding they ceased, for their thoughts grew heavy upon them and
voiceless.

Then, in a farewell brief and unthought and unconscious of meaning,
Parting they turned to their tasks and their lives now close but soon
severed:

Destined to perish even before his perishing nation,
Back to his watch at the gate sped Thrasymachus rapidly running;
Large of pace and swift, but with eyes absorbed and unseeing,
Driven like a car of the gods by the whip of his thoughts through the
highways,

Turned to his mighty future the hero born of a goddess.
One was he chosen to ascend into greatness through fall and disaster,
Loser of his world by the will of a heaven that seemed ruthless and
adverse,

Founder of a newer and greater world by daring adventure.
Now, from the citadel's rise with the townships crowding below it
High towards a pondering of domes and the mystic Palladium climbing,
Fronted with the morning ray and joined by the winds of the ocean,
Fate-weighed up Troy's slope strode musing strong Aeneas.

Under him silent the slumbering roofs of the city of Ilus
Dreamed in the light of the dawn; above watched the citadel, sleepless
Lonely and strong like a goddess white-limbed and bright on a hill-top,
Looking far out at the sea and the foe and the prowling of danger.
Over the brow he mounted and saw the palace of Priam,
Home of the gods of the earth, Laomedon's marvellous vision
Held in the thought that accustomed his will to unearthly achievement
And in the blaze of his spirit compelling heaven with its greatness,
Dreamed by the harp of Apollo, a melody caught into marble.

Out of his mind it arose like an epic canto by canto;
Each of its halls was a strophe, its chambers lines of an epode,
Victor chant of Ilion's destiny. Absent he entered,
Voiceless with thought, the brilliant megaron crowded with paintings,
Paved with a splendour of marble, and saw Deiphobus seated,
Son of the ancient house by the opulent hearth of his fathers,
And at his side like a shadow the grey and ominous Argive.
Happy of light like a lustrous star when it welcomes the morning,
Brilliant, beautiful, glamoured with gold and a fillet of gem-fire,
Paris, plucked from the song and the lyre by the Grecian challenge,
Came with the joy in his face and his eyes that Fate could not alter.

Ever a child of the dawn at play near a turn of the sun-roads,
Facing destiny's look with the careless laugh of a comrade,
He with his vision of delight and beauty brightening the earth-field
Passed through its peril and grief on his way to the ambiguous Shadow.
Last from her chamber of sleep where she lay in the Ilian mansion
Far in the heart of the house with the deep-bosomed daughters of Priam,
Noble and tall and erect in a nimbus of youth and of glory,
Claiming the world and life as a fief of her strength and her courage,
Dawned through a doorway that opened to distant murmurs and laughter,
Capturing the eye like a smile or a sunbeam, Penthesilea.

Note on the Texts

THE FUTURE POETRY was first published serially in the monthly review *Arya* between December 1917 and July 1920 in thirty-two instalments. The starting-point for these chapters was a book by James H. Cousins, *New Ways in English Literature* (Ganesh & Co., Madras, preface dated November 1917). A copy of this book was sent to Sri Aurobindo shortly after its publication for review in the *Arya*. He began a review (see Appendix I) but soon abandoned it in favour of a larger work drawn, as he wrote later, from his “own ideas and his already conceived view of art and life”.

Revision of *The Future Poetry*. *The Future Poetry* was not published as a book during Sri Aurobindo’s lifetime. He wished to revise the *Arya* chapters before republishing them and twice undertook this task, first in the late 1920s or early 1930s, and then in the last years of his life, apparently in 1950. During the first period he revised seventeen chapters: 2–14, 16, 25, 27 and 32. The work done ranges from very light retouching to the rewriting of entire chapters. During the second period he dictated to his amanuensis changes and additions to twenty chapters, thirteen of which had been revised during the earlier period. This later revision is mostly light—in some chapters only a word or two was added or changed—but it does include two considerable additions to Chapter 19 and an incomplete opening for a planned new first chapter (see Appendix III). Sri Aurobindo had plans for much more extensive additions. In particular he wished to write a chapter or chapters on contemporary poetry, and was considering a treatment of the metaphysical poets of the seventeenth century.

All told twenty-four of the book’s thirty-two chapters received some revision at one time or another. A table outlining the nature and extent of the revision of each chapter appears in the reference volume (volume 35).

When asked in 1949 about the possibility of publishing *The Future Poetry*, Sri Aurobindo replied that it

cannot be published as it is, for there must be a considerable rearrangement of its matter since publication from month to month left its plan straggling and ill-arranged and also one or two chapters will have to be omitted or replaced by other new ones. I do not wish it to be published in its present imperfect form.

Editions of *The Future Poetry*. In 1953, three years after Sri Aurobindo's passing, *The Future Poetry* was published as a book by the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry. The publishers were at that time unaware of the existence of the bulk of Sri Aurobindo's revision. The edition therefore was practically a reprint of the *Arya* chapters. The only parts of the revision used were the two long passages added to Chapter 19 in 1950. In 1971, the 1953 text was reproduced along with "Letters on Poetry, Literature and Art" as volume 9 of the de luxe edition of the Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary Library. The next year the popular edition of this volume was issued, as well as a separate, photographically reduced edition. In 1985 a new edition of *The Future Poetry*, incorporating for the first time all the author's revision, was published by the Sri Aurobindo Ashram. This edition was reprinted in 1991 and 1994. It omitted the letters; in THE COMPLETE WORKS OF SRI AUROBINDO these are included in volume 27, *Letters on Poetry and Art*.

The present edition differs very little from the edition of 1985. The text has been checked against Sri Aurobindo's manuscripts, which consist of (1) pages torn from the *Arya*, many of which have his handwritten or dictated changes and additions, and (2) a few loose sheets containing longer additions. Only fragments remain of the manuscript used for printing the *Arya*.

Sri Aurobindo quoted almost a hundred lines or passages of English poetry as illustrations. The sources of these quotations are given in a table in the reference volume. He seems to have quoted from the works of older poets largely from memory; for contemporary writers he relied mostly on Cousins' *New Ways in English Literature*. The editors have reproduced the quotations as they appear in the *Arya* except when a misprint obviously occurred.

On Quantitative Metre. Sri Aurobindo wrote this essay for inclusion in his *Collected Poems and Plays*, which was brought out in 1942 by the Sri Aurobindo Ashram and printed at the Government Central Press, Hyderabad. A separate booklet was also printed at that time from the same setting of type. *On Quantitative Metre* included as examples fifteen poems written in quantitative metres. The fifteenth consisted of the first 371 lines of *Ilion* divided into five sections with headings. These poems are reproduced here with the notes on metre Sri Aurobindo provided for them. In *Collected Poems*, volume 2 of THE COMPLETE WORKS OF SRI AUROBINDO, they appear without notes. *Ilion* is printed there in its entirety.

In the present volume *On Quantitative Metre* is published along with *The Future Poetry* for the first time. The text of the essay has been carefully checked against Sri Aurobindo's manuscripts and the text printed in 1942.

Letters on Poetry and Art



Sri Aurobindo

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Letters on Poetry and Art

Publisher's Note

Letters on Poetry and Art comprises letters written by Sri Aurobindo on poetry and other forms of literature, painting and the other arts, beauty, aesthetics and the relation of these to the practice of yoga. He wrote most of these letters to members of his ashram during the 1930s and 1940s, primarily between 1931 and 1937. Only around a sixth of the letters were published during his lifetime. The rest have been transcribed from his manuscripts.

The present volume is the first collection of Sri Aurobindo's letters on poetry, literature, art and aesthetics to bear the title *Letters on Poetry and Art*. It incorporates material from three previous books: (1) *Letters on Poetry, Literature and Art*; (2) *Letters on "Savitri"*, and (3) *On Himself* (section entitled "The Poet and the Critic"). It also contains around five hundred letters that have not appeared in any previous collection published under his name. The arrangement is that of the editors. The texts of the letters have been checked against all available manuscripts and printed versions.

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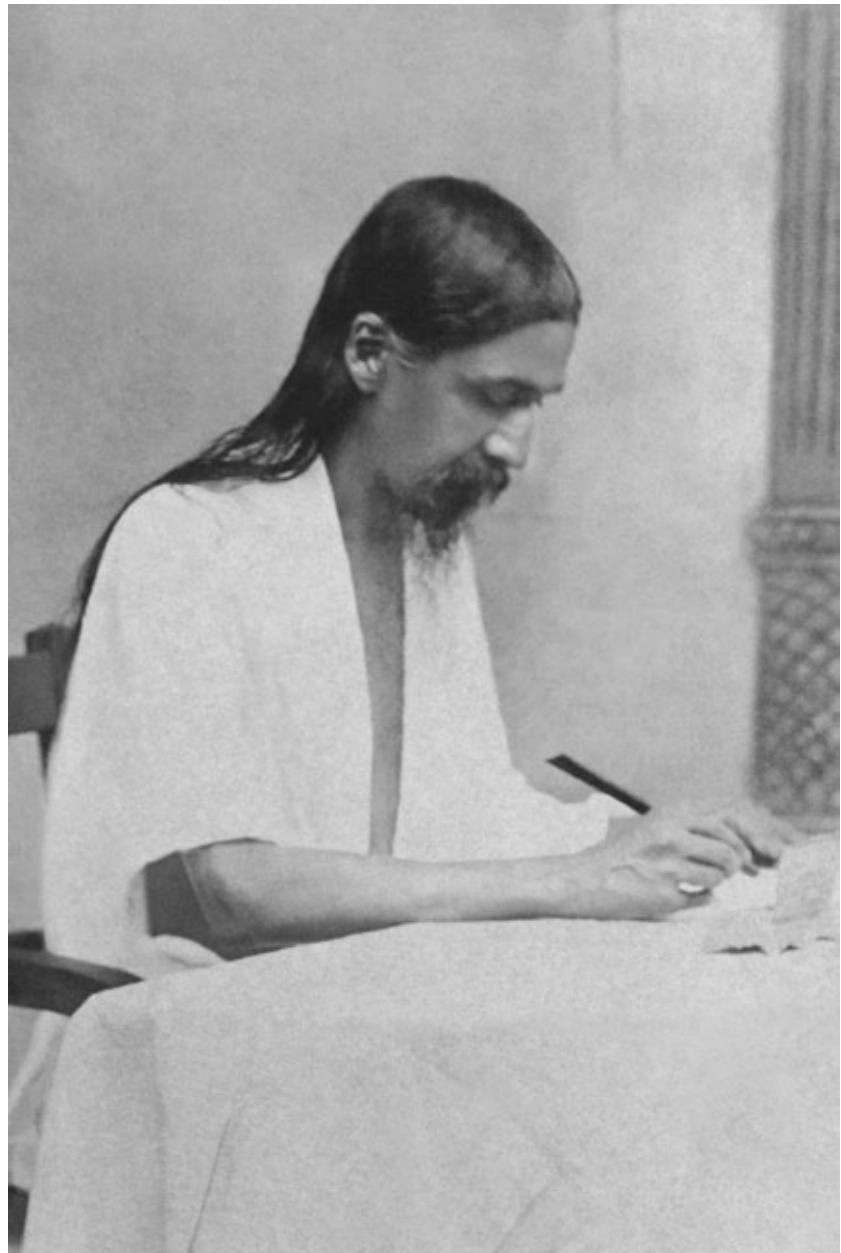
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Sri Aurobindo in Pondicherry

Part One

Poetry and Its Creation

Section One

The Sources of Poetry

Poetic Creation

Three Elements of Poetic Creation

Poetry, or at any rate a truly poetic poetry, comes always from some subtle plane through the creative vital and uses the outer mind and other external instruments for transmission only. There are three elements in the production of poetry; there is the original source of inspiration, there is the vital force of creative beauty which contributes its own substance and impetus and often determines the form, except when that also comes ready made from the original sources; there is, finally, the transmitting outer consciousness of the poet. The most genuine and perfect poetry is written when the original source is able to throw its inspiration pure and undiminished into the vital and there takes its true native form and power of speech exactly reproducing the inspiration, while the outer consciousness is entirely passive and transmits without alteration what it receives from the godheads of the inner or the superior spaces. When the vital mind and emotion are too active and give too much of their own initiation or a translation into more or less turbid vital stuff, the poetry remains powerful but is inferior in quality and less authentic. Finally, if the outer consciousness is too lethargic and blocks the transmission or too active and makes its own version, then you have the poetry that fails or is at best a creditable mental manufacture. It is the interference of these two parts either by obstruction or by too great an activity of their own or by both together that causes the difficulty and labour of writing. There would be no difficulty if the inspiration came through without obstruction or interference in a pure transcript—that is what happens in a poet's highest or freest moments when he writes not at all out of his own external human mind, but by inspiration, as the mouthpiece of the Gods.

The originating source may be anywhere; the poetry may arise or descend from the subtle physical plane, from the higher or lower vital itself, from the dynamic or creative intelligence, from the plane of dynamic vision, from the psychic, from the illumined mind or Intuition,—even, though this is the rarest, from the Overmind widenesses. To get the Overmind inspiration is so rare that there are only a few lines or short passages in all poetic literature that give at least some appearance or reflection of it. When the source of inspiration is in the heart or the psychic there is more easily a good will in the vital channel, the flow is spontaneous; the inspiration takes at once its true form and speech and is transmitted without any interference or only a minimum of interference by the brain-mind, that great spoiler of the higher or deeper splendours. It is the character of the lyrical inspiration, to flow in a jet out of the being—whether it comes from the vital or the psychic, it is usually spontaneous, for these are the two most powerfully impelling and compelling parts of the nature. When on the contrary the source of inspiration is in the creative poetic intelligence or even the higher mind or the illumined mind, the poetry which comes from this quarter is always apt to be arrested by the outer intellect, our habitual thought-production engine. This intellect is an absurdly overactive part of the nature; it always thinks that nothing can be well done unless it puts its finger into the pie and therefore it instinctively interferes with the inspiration, blocks half or more than half of it and labours to substitute its own inferior and toilsome productions for the true speech and rhythm that ought to have come. The poet labours in anguish to get the one true word, the authentic rhythm, the real divine substance of what he has to say, while all the time it is waiting complete and ready behind; but it is denied free transmission by some part of the transmitting agency which prefers to translate and is not willing merely to receive and transcribe. When one gets something through from the illumined mind, then there is likely to come to birth work that is really fine and great. When there comes with labour or without it something reasonably like what the poetic intelligence wanted to say, then there is

something fine or adequate, though it may not be great unless there is an intervention from the higher levels. But when the outer brain is at work trying to fashion out of itself or to give its own version of what the higher sources are trying to pour down, then there results a manufacture or something quite inadequate or faulty or, at the best, "good on the whole", but not *the* thing that ought to have come.

2 June 1931

Creation by the Word

The word is a sound expressive of the idea. In the supra-physical plane when an idea has to be realised, one can by repeating the word-expression of it, produce vibrations which prepare the mind for the realisation of the idea. That is the principle of the Mantra and of japa. One repeats the name of the Divine and the vibrations created in the consciousness prepare the realisation of the Divine. It is the same idea that is expressed in the Bible, "God said, Let there be Light, and there was Light." It is creation by the Word.

6 May 1933

Creative Power and the Human Instrument

A poem may pre-exist in the timeless as all creation pre-exists there or else in some plane where the past, present and future exist together. But it is not necessary to presuppose anything of the kind to explain the phenomena of inspiration. All is here a matter of formation or creation. By the contact with the source of inspiration the creative Power at one level or another and the human instrument, receptacle or channel get into contact. That is the essential point, all the rest depends upon the individual case. If the substance, rhythm, form, words come down all together ready-formed from the plane of poetic creation, that is the perfect type of inspiration; it may give its own spontaneous gift or it may give something which corresponds to the idea or the aspiration of the poet, but in either case the human being is only a channel or receptacle, although he feels the joy of the creation and the joy of the *āvesá, enthousiasmos*, elation of the

inrush and the passage. On the other hand it may be that the creative source sends down the substance or stuff, the force and the idea, but the language, rhythm etc. are formed somewhere in the instrument; he has to find the human transcription of something that is there in diviner essence above; then there is an illumination or excitement, a conscious labour of creation swift or slow, hampered or facile. Something of the language may be supplied by the mind or vital, something may break through from somewhere behind the veil, from whatever source gets into touch with the transcribing mind in the liberating or stimulating excitement or uplifting of the consciousness. Or a line or lines may come through from some plane and the poet excited to creation may build around them constructing his material or getting it from any source he can tap. There are many possibilities of this nature. There is also the possibility of an inspiration not from above, but from somewhere within on the ordinary levels, some inner mind, emotional vital etc. which the mind practised in poetical technique works out according to its habitual faculty. Here again in a different way similar phenomena, similar variations may arise.

As for the language, the tongue in which the poem comes or the whole lines from above, that offers no real difficulty. It all depends on the contact between the creative Power and the instrument or channel, the Power will naturally choose the language of the instrument or channel, that to which it is accustomed and can therefore readily hear and receive. The Power itself is not limited and can use any language, but although it is possible for things to come through in a language unknown or ill-known—I have seen several instances of the former—it is not a usual case, since the *saṅskāra* of the mind, its habits of action and conception would normally obstruct any such unprepared receptiveness; only a strong mediumistic faculty might be unaffected by this difficulty. These things however are obviously exceptional, abnormal or supernormal phenomena.

If the parts of a poem come from different planes, it is because one starts from some high plane but the connecting consciousness cannot receive uninterruptedly from there and as

soon as it flickers or wavers it comes down to a lower, perhaps without noticing it, or the lower comes in to supply the continuation of the flow or on the contrary the consciousness starts from a lower plane and is lifted in the *āveśa*, perhaps occasionally, perhaps more continuously higher for a time or else the higher force attracted by the creative will breaks through or touches or catches up the less exalted inspiration towards or into itself. I am speaking here especially of the overhead planes where this is quite natural; for the Overmind for instance is the ultimate source of intuition, illumination or heightened power of the planes immediately below it. It can lift them up into its own greater intensity or give out of its intensity to them or touch or combine their powers together with something of its own greater power—or they can receive or draw something from it or from each other. On the lower planes beginning from the mental downwards there can also be such variations or combinations, but the working is not the same, for the different powers here stand more on a footing of equality whether they stand apart from each other, each working in its own right, or cooperate.

29 April 1937

*

Human creation comes from the vital planes into the physical—but there is often enough something more behind it than is expressed—it gets altered or diminished in the human physical transcription.

9 March 1933

Joy of Poetic Creation

Poetry takes its start from any plane of the consciousness, but, like all art, one might even say all creation, it must be passed *through* the vital, the life-soul, gather from it a certain force for manifestation if it is to be itself alive. And as there is always a joy in creation, that joy along with a certain *enthousiasmos*—not enthusiasm, if you please, but an invasion and exultation of creative force and creative ecstasy, *ānandamaya āveśa*—must always be there, whatever the source. But where the inspiration

comes from the linking of the vital creative instrument to a deeper psychic experience, that imparts another kind of intensive originality and peculiar individual power, a subtle and delicate perfection, a linking on to something that is at once fine to etheriality and potent, intense as fire yet full of sweetness. But this is exceedingly rare in its absolute quality,—poetry as an expression of mind and life is common, poetry of the mind and life touched by the soul and given a spiritual fineness is to be found but more rare; the pure psychic note in poetry breaks through only once in a way, in a brief lyric, a sudden line, a luminous passage. It was indeed because this linking-on took place that the true poetic faculty suddenly awoke in you,—for it was not there before, at least on the surface. The joy you feel, therefore, was no doubt partly the simple joy of creation, but there comes also into it the joy of expression of the psychic being which was seeking for an outlet since your boyhood. It is this inner expression that makes the writing of poetry a part of sadhana.

29 May 1931

Essence of Inspiration

There can be inspiration also without words—a certain intensity in the light and force and substance of the knowledge is the essence of inspiration.

18 June 1933

Inspiration and Effort

Inspiration is always a very uncertain thing; it comes when it chooses, stops suddenly before it has finished its work, refuses to descend when it is called. This is a well-known affliction, perhaps of all artists, but certainly of poets. There are some who can command it at will; those who, I think, are more full of an abundant poetic energy than careful for perfection; others who oblige it to come whenever they put pen to paper but with these the inspiration is either not of a high order or quite unequal in its level. Again there are some who try to give it a habit of coming by always writing at the same time; Virgil with his nine

lines first written, then perfected every morning, Milton with his fifty epic lines a day, are said to have succeeded in regularising their inspiration. It is, I suppose, the same principle which makes gurus in India prescribe for their disciples a meditation at the same fixed hour every day. It succeeds partially of course, for some entirely, but not for everybody. For myself, when the inspiration did not come with a rush or in a stream,—for then there is no difficulty,—I had only one way, to allow a certain kind of incubation in which a large form of the thing to be done threw itself on the mind and then wait for the white heat in which the entire transcription could rapidly take place. But I think each poet has his own way of working and finds his own issue out of inspiration's incertitudes.

26 January 1932

*

Merciful heavens, what a splashing and floundering! When you miss a verse or a poem, it is better to wait in an entire quietude about it (with only a silent expectation) until the true inspiration comes, and not to thrash the inner air vainly for possible variants — like that the true form is much more likely to come, as people go to sleep on a problem and find it solved when they awake. Otherwise, you are likely to have only a series of misses, the half-gods of the semi-poetic mind continually intervening with their false enthusiasms and misleading voices.

11 July 1931

*

Few poets can keep for a very long time a sustained level of the highest inspiration. The best poetry does not usually come by streams except in poets of a supreme greatness though there may be in others than the greatest long-continued wingings at a considerable height. The very best comes by intermittent drops, though sometimes three or four gleaming drops at a time. Even in the greatest poets, even in those with the most opulent flow of riches like Shakespeare, the very best is comparatively rare.

13 February 1936

Aspiration, Opening, Recognition

Impatience does not help — intensity of aspiration does. The use of keeping the consciousness uplifted is that it then remains ready for the inflow from above when that comes. To get as early as possible to the highest range one must keep the consciousness steadily turned towards it and maintain the call. First one has to establish the permanent opening — or get it to establish itself, then the ascension and frequent, afterwards constant descent. It is only afterwards that one can have the ease. 21 April 1937

*

Perhaps one reason why your mind is so variable is because it has learned too much and has too many influences stamped upon it; it does not allow the real poet in you who is a little at the back to be himself — it wants to supply him with a form instead of allowing him to breathe into the instrument his own notes. It is besides too ingenious. . . . What you have to learn is the art of allowing things to come through and recognising among them the one right thing — which is very much what you have to do in Yoga also. It is really this recognition that is the one important need — once you have that, things become much easier.

3 July 1932

Self-criticism

It is no use being disgusted because there is a best you have not reached yet; every poet should have that feeling of “a miraculous poetic creation existing on a plane” he has not reached, but he should not despair of reaching it, but rather he has to regard present achievement not as something final but as steps towards what he hopes one day to write. That is the true artistic temper.

1 May 1934

*

It is precisely the people who are careful, self-critical, anxious for perfection who have interrupted visits from the Muse. Those

who don't mind what they write, trusting to their genius, vigour or fluency to carry it off are usually the abundant writers. There are exceptions, of course. "The poetic part caught in the mere mind" is an admirable explanation of the phenomenon of interruption. Fluent poets are those who either do not mind if they do not always write their very best or whose minds are sufficiently poetic to make even their "not best" verse pass muster or make a reasonably good show. Sometimes you write things that are good enough, but not your best, but both your insistence and mine — for I think it essential for you to write your best always, at least your "level best" — may have curbed the fluency a good deal.

The check and diminution forced on your prose was compensated by the much higher and maturer quality to which it attained afterwards. It would be so, I suppose, with the poetry; a new level of consciousness once attained, there might well be a new fluency. So there is not much justification for the fear.

6 October 1936

*

You seem to suffer from a mania of self-deprecatory criticism. Many artists and poets have that; as soon as they look at their work they find it awfully poor and bad. (I had that myself often varied with the opposite feeling, Arjava also has it); but to have it while writing is its most excruciating degree of intensity. Better get rid of it if you want to write freely. 14 December 1936

Correction by Second Inspiration

It is a second inspiration which has come in improving on the first. When the improving is done by the mind and not by a pure inspiration, then the retouches spoil more often than they perfect.

8 August 1936

Sources of Inspiration

Sources of Inspiration and Variety

If there were not different sources of inspiration, every poet would write the same thing and in the same way as every other, which would be deplorable. Each draws from a different realm and therefore a different kind and manner of inspiration — except of course those who make a school and all write on the same lines.

18 July 1936

*

Different sources of inspiration may express differently the same thing. I can't say what plane is imaged in the poem [*submitted by the correspondent*]. Planes are big regions of being with all sorts of things in them.

17 October 1936

Poetry of the Material or Physical Consciousness

The Vedic times were an age in which men lived in the material consciousness as did the heroes of Homer. The Rishis were the mystics of the time and took the frame of their symbolic imagery from the material life around them.

20 October 1936

*

Homer and Chaucer are poets of the physical consciousness — I have pointed that out in *The Future Poetry*.

31 May 1937

*

You can't drive a sharp line between the subtle physical and the physical like that in these matters. If a poet writes from the outward physical only his work is likely to be more photographic than poetic.

1937

Poetry of the Vital World

I had begun something about visions of this kind and A.E.'s and other theories but that was a long affair — too long, as it turned out, to finish or even do more than begin. I can only now answer your questions rather briefly.

There is an earth-memory from which one gets or can get things of the past more or less accurately according to the quality of the mind that receives them. But this experience is not explicable on that basis — for the Gopis here are evidently not earthly beings and the place Raihana saw was not a terrestrial locality. If she had got it from the earth-mind at all, it could only be from the world of images created by Vaishnava tradition with perhaps a personal transcription of her own. But this also does not agree with all the details.

It is quite usual for poets and musicians and artists to receive things — they can even be received complete and direct, though oftenest with some working of the individual mind and consequent alteration — from a plane above the physical mind, a vital world of creative art and beauty in which these things are prepared and come down through the fit channel. The musician, poet or artist, if he is conscious, may be quite aware and sensitive of the transmission, even feel or see something of the plane from which it comes. Usually, however, this is in the waking state and the contact is not so vivid as that felt by Raihana.

There are such things as dream inspirations — it is rare however that these are of any value. For the dreams of most people are recorded by the subconscious. Either the whole thing is a creation of the subconscious and turns out, if recorded, to be incoherent and lacking in any sense or, if there is a real communication from a higher plane, marked by a feeling of elevation and wonder, it gets transcribed by the subconscious and what that forms is either flat or ludicrous. Moreover, this was seen between sleep and waking — and things so seen are not dreams, but experiences from other planes — either mental or vital or subtle physical or more rarely psychic or higher plane experiences.

In this case it is very possible that she got into some kind of connection with the actual world of Krishna and the Gopis — through the vital. This seems to be indicated first by the sense of extreme rapture and light and beauty and secondly by the contact with the “Blue Radiance” that was Krishna — that phrase and the expressions she uses have a strong touch of something that was authentic. I say through the vital, because of course it was presented to her in forms and words that her human mind could seize and understand; the original forms of that world would be something that could hardly be seizable by the human sense. The Hindi words of course belong to the transcribing agency. That would not mean that it was a creation of her personal mind, but only a transcription given to her just within the bounds of what it could seize, even though unfamiliar to her waking consciousness. Once the receptivity of the mind awakened, the rest came to her freely through the channel created by the vision. That her mind did not create the song is confirmed by the fact that it came in Hindi with so much perfection of language and technique.

To anyone familiar with occult phenomena and their analysis, these things will seem perfectly normal and intelligible. The vision-mind in us is part of the inner being, and the inner mind, vital, physical are not bound by the dull and narrow limitations of our outer physical personality and the small scope of the world it lives in. Its scope is vast, extraordinary, full of inexhaustible interest and, as one goes higher, of glory and sweetness and beauty. The difficulty is to get it through the outer human instruments which are so narrow and crippled and unwilling to receive them.

9 June 1935

*

I may say that purely vital poetry can be very remarkable. Many nowadays in Europe seem even to think that poetry should be written only from the vital (I mean from poetic sensations, not from ideas) and that that is the only pure *poetry*. The poets of the vital plane seize with a great vividness and extraordinary force of rhythm and phrase the life-power and the very sensation of the

things they describe and express them to the poetic sense. What is often lacking in them is a perfect balance between this power and the other powers of poetry: intellectual, psychic, emotional etc. There is something in them which gives an impression of excess — when they are great in genius, splendid excess, but still not the perfect perfection.

*

In purely or mainly vital poetry the appeal to sense or sensation, to the vital thrill, is so dominant that the mental content of the poetry takes quite a secondary place. Indeed in the lower kinds of vital poetry the force of word and sound and the force of the stirred sensation tend to predominate over the mental sense or else the nerves and blood are thrilled (as in war-poetry) but the mind and soul do not find an equal satisfaction. But this does not mean that there should be no vital element in poetry — without the vital nothing living can be done. But for a deeper or greater appeal the vital element must be surcharged with something more forward or else something from above, an element of superior inspiration or influence.

Poetry essentially psychic can have a strong vital element, but the psychic being is always behind it; it intervenes and throws its self-expression into what is written. There comes an utterance with an inner life in it, a touch perhaps even of the spiritual, easily felt by those who have themselves an inner life, but others may miss it.

The World of Word-Music

Nishikanta seems to have put himself into contact with an inexhaustible source of flowing word and rhythm — with the world of word-music, which is one province of the World of Beauty. It is part of the vital World no doubt and the joy that comes of contact with that beauty is vital — but it is a subtle vital which is not merely sensuous. It is one of the powers by which the substance of the consciousness can be refined and prepared for sensibility to a still higher beauty and Ananda. Also it can be

made a vehicle for the expression of the highest things. The Veda, the Upanishad, the Mantra, everywhere owe half their power to the rhythmic sound that embodies their inner meanings.

6 December 1936

Mental and Vital Poetry

All poetry is mental or vital or both, sometimes with a psychic tinge; the power from above mind comes in only in rare lines and passages lifting up the mental and vital inspiration towards its own light or power. To work freely from that higher inspiration is a thing that has not yet been done, though certain tendencies of modern poetry seem to be an unconscious attempt to prepare for that. But in the mind and vital there are many provinces and kingdoms and what you have been writing recently is by no means from the ordinary mind or vital; its inspiration comes from a higher or deeper occult or inner source. 17 May 1937

Poetic Intelligence and Dynamic Sight

On the plane of poetic intelligence the creation is by thought, the Idea force is the inspiring Muse and the images are constructed by the idea, they are mind-images; on the plane of dynamic vision one creates by sight, by direct grasp either of the thing in itself or of some living significant symbol or expressive body of it. This dynamic sight is not the vision that comes by an intense reconstruction of physical seeing or through a strong vital experience; it is a kind of inner occult sight which sees the things behind the veil, the forms that are more intimate and expressive than any outward appearance. It is a very vivid sight and the expression that comes with it is also extremely vivid and living but with a sort of inner super-life. To be able to write at will from this plane is sufficiently rare,— but a poet habitually writing from some other level may stumble into it from time to time or it may come to him strongly and lift him up out of his ordinary sight or intelligence. Coleridge had it with great vividness at certain moments. Blake's poems are full of it, but it

is not confined to the poetry of the occult or of the supernormal; this vision can take up outward and physical things, the substance of normal experience, and recreate them in the light of something deep behind which makes their outward figure look like mere symbols of some more intense reality within them. In contemporary poetry there is an attempt at a more frequent or habitual use of the dynamic vision, but the success is not always commensurate with the energy of the endeavour. 9 July 1931

Poetic Eloquence

It [*poetic eloquence*] belongs usually to the poetic intelligence, but, as in much of Milton, it can be lifted up by the touch of the Higher Mind rhythm and largeness. 29 November 1936

Overhead Poetry

Higher Mind and Poetic Intelligence

I mean by the Higher Mind a first plane of spiritual [consciousness] where one becomes constantly and closely aware of the Self, the One everywhere and knows and sees things habitually with that awareness; but it is still very much on the mind-level although highly spiritual in its essential substance; and its instrumentation is through an elevated thought-power and comprehensive mental sight—not illumined by any of the intenser upper lights but as if in a large strong and clear daylight. It acts as an intermediate state between the Truth-Light above and the human mind; communicating the higher knowledge in a form that the Mind intensified, broadened, made spiritually supple, can receive without being blinded or dazzled by a Truth beyond it. The poetic intelligence is not at all part of that clarified spiritual seeing and thinking—it is only a high activity of the mind and its vision moving on the wings of imagination, but still akin to the intellect proper, though exalted above it. The Higher Mind is a spiritual plane,—this does not answer to that description. But the larger poetic intelligence like the larger philosophic, though in a different cast of thinking, is nearer to the Higher Mind than the ordinary intellect and can more easily receive its influence. When Milton starts his poem

Of Man's first disobedience and the fruit
Of that forbidden tree —

he is evidently writing from the poetic intelligence. There is nothing of the Higher Mind knowledge or vision either in the style or the substance. But there is often a largeness of rhythm and sweep of language in Milton which has a certain distant kinship to the manner natural to a higher supra-intellectual vision,

and something from the substance of the planes of spiritual seeing can come into this poetry whose medium is the poetic intelligence and uplift it.

Milton is a classical poet and most classical poetry is fundamentally a poetry of the pure poetic intelligence. But there are other influences which can suffuse and modify the pure poetic intelligence, making it perhaps less clear by limitation but more vivid, colourful, vivid with various lights and hues; it becomes less intellectual, more made of vision and a flame of insight. Very often this comes by an infiltration of the veiled inner Mind which is within us and has its own wider and deeper fields and subtler movements,—and can bring also the tinge of a higher afflatus to the poetic intelligence, sometimes a direct uplifting towards what is beyond it. It must be understood however that the greatness of poetry as poetry does not necessarily or always depend on the level from which it is written. Shelley has more access to the inner Mind and through it to greater things than Milton, but he is not the greater poet.

19 October 1936

Higher Mind and Inner Mind

When I say that the inner Mind can get the tinge or reflection of the higher experience I am not speaking here of the “descent” in Yoga by which the higher realisation can come down into the inferior planes and enlighten or transform them. I mean that the Higher Mind is itself a spiritual plane and one who lives in it has naturally and normally the realisation of the Self, the unity and harmony everywhere, and a vision and activity of knowledge that proceeds from this consciousness but the inner Mind has not that naturally and in its own right, yet can open to its influence more easily than the outer intelligence. All the same between the reflected realisation in the mind and the automatic and authentic realisation in the spiritual mental planes there is a wide difference.

. . . There is also a plane of dynamic Vision which is a part of the inner Mind and perhaps should be called not a plane but a province. There are many kinds of vision in the inner Mind and

not this dynamic vision alone. So to fix invariable characteristics for the poetry of the inner Mind is not easy or even possible; it is a thing to be felt rather than mentally definable. A certain spontaneous intensity of vision is usually there, but that large or rich sweep or power which belongs to the illumined Mind is not part of its character. Moreover it is subtle and fine and has not the wideness which is the characteristic of the planes that rise towards the vast universality of the Overmind level.

. . . That is why the lower planes cannot express the Spirit with its full and native voice as the higher planes do — unless something comes down into them from the higher and overrides their limitations for the moment.

October 1936

Poetic Intelligence and Illumined Mind

Certainly, if you want to achieve a greater poetry, more unique, you will yourself have to change, to alter the poise of your consciousness. At present you write, as you do other things, too much with the brain, the mere human intelligence. To get back from the surface vital into the psychic and psychic vital, to raise the level of your mental from the intellect to the illumined mind is your need both in poetry and in Yoga. I have told you already that your best poetry comes from the illumined mind, but as a rule it either comes from there with too much of the transcription diminished in its passage through the intellect or else is generated only in the creative poetic intelligence. But so many poets have written from that intelligence. On the other hand if you could always write direct from the illumined mind — finding not only the substance, as you often do, but the rhythm and language, that indeed would be a poetry exquisite, original and unique. The intellect produces the idea, even the poetic idea, too much for the sake of the idea alone; coming from the illumined mind the idea in a form of light and music is itself but the shining body of the Light Divine.

On the other hand to cease writing altogether might be a doubtful remedy. By your writing here you have at least got rid of most of your former defects, and reached a stage of preparation

in which you may reasonably hope for a greater development hereafter. I myself have more than once abstained for some time from writing because I did not wish to produce anything except as an expression from a higher plane of consciousness, but to do that you must be sure of your poetic gift, that it will not rust by too long a disuse.

4 September 1931

Poetry of the Illumined Mind and of the Intuition

The poetry of the illumined mind is usually full of a play of lights and colours, brilliant and striking in phrase, for illumination makes the Truth vivid — it acts usually by a luminous rush. The poetry of the Intuition may have play of colour and bright lights, but it does not depend on them — it may be quite bare; it tells by a sort of close intimacy with the Truth, an inward expression of it. The illumined mind sometimes gets rid of its trappings, but even then it always keeps a sort of lustrousness of robe which is its characteristic.

1934

Overmind Touch

What super-excellence?¹ As poetry? When I say that a line comes from a higher or overhead plane or has the Overmind touch, I do not mean that it is superior in pure poetic excellence to others from lower planes — that Amal's lines outshine Shakespeare or Homer for instance. I simply mean that it has some vision, light, etc. from up there and the character of its expression and rhythm are from there.

You do not appreciate probably because you catch only the surface mental meaning. The [first] line is very fine from the technical point of view, the distribution of consonantal and

¹ Sri Aurobindo was asked: "You said that these two lines of Amal's poem:
*Flickering no longer with the cry of clay,
The distance-haunted fire of mystic mind*
have an Overmind touch. . . . Can you show me where their super-excellence lies?"

vowel sounds being perfect. That however is possible on any level of inspiration.

These [*assonance, etc.*] are technical elements, the Overmind touch does not consist in that, but in the undertones or overtones of the rhythmic cry and a language which carries in it a great depth or height or width of spiritual truth or spiritual vision, feeling or experience. But all that has to be felt, it is not analysable. If I say that the second line is a magnificent expression of an inner reality most intimate and powerful and the first line, with its conception of the fire once “flickering” with the “cry” of clay, but now no longer, is admirably revelatory — you would probably reply that it does not convey anything of the kind to you. That is why I do not usually speak of these things in themselves or in their relation to poetry — only with Amal who is trying to get his inspiration into touch with these planes. Either one must have the experience — e.g., here one must have lived in or glimpsed the mystic mind, felt its fire, been aware of the distances that haunt it, heard the cry of clay mixing with it and the consequent unsteady flickering of its flames and the release into the straight upward burning and so known that this is not mere romantic rhetoric, not mere images or metaphors expressing something imaginative but unreal (that is how many would take it perhaps) but facts and realities of the self, actual and concrete, or else there must be a conspiracy between the “solar plexus” and the thousand-petalled lotus which makes one feel, if not know, the suggestion of these things through the words and rhythm. As for technique, there is a technique of this higher poetry but it is not analysable and teachable. If for instance Amal had written “No longer flickering with the cry of clay”, it would no longer have been the same thing though the words and mental meaning would be just as before — for the overtone, the rhythm would have been lost in the ordinary staccato clipped movement and with the overtone the rhythmic significance. It would not have given the suggestion of space and wideness full with the cry and the flicker, the intense impact of that cry and the agitation of the fire which is heard through the line as it is. But to realise that one must have the inner sight and inner ear for these things;

one must be able to hear the sound-meaning, feel the sound-spaces with their vibrations. Again if he had written "Quivering no longer with the touch on clay", it would have been a good line, but meant much less and something quite different to the inner experience, though to the mind it would have been only the same thing expressed in a different image—not so to the solar plexus and the thousand-petalled lotus. In this technique it must be the right word and no other, in the right place, and in no other, the right sounds and no others, in a design of sound that cannot be changed even a little. You may say that it must be so in all poetry; but in ordinary poetry the mind can play about, chop and change, use one image or another, put this word here or that word there—if the sense is much the same and has a poetical value, the mind does not feel that all is lost unless it is very sensitive and much influenced by the solar plexus. In the overhead poetry these things are quite imperative, it is all or nothing—or at least all or a fall.

8 May 1937

*

Rhythms may come from the same source and yet be entirely dissimilar. It would be a very bad job if the overmind touch made all rhythms similar.

14 February 1934

Overmind Rhythm and Inspiration

In the lines you quote from Wordsworth² the overmind movement is not there in the first three lines; in the last line there is something of the touch, not direct but through some high intuitive consciousness and, because it is not direct, the fully characteristic rhythm is absent or defective. The poetic value or perfection of a line, passage or poem does not depend on the plane from which it comes; it depends on the purity and authenticity and power with which it transcribes an intense

² *The cataracts blow their trumpets from the steep;
No more shall grief of mine the season wrong;
I hear the Echoes through the mountains throng,
The Winds come to me from the fields of sleep,*

vision and inspiration from whatever source. Shakespeare is a poet of the vital inspiration, Homer of the subtle physical, but there are no greater poets in any literature. No doubt, if one could get a continuous inspiration from the overmind, that would mean a greater, sustained height of perfection and spiritual quality in poetry than has yet been achieved; but it is only in short passages and lines that even a touch of it is attainable. One gets nearer the overmind rhythm and inspiration in another line of Wordsworth —

a mind . . .

Voyaging through strange seas of Thought, alone
or in a line like Milton's

Those thoughts that wander through eternity.

One has the sense here of a rhythm which does not begin or end with the line, but has for ever been sounding in the eternal planes and began even in Time ages ago and which returns into the infinite to go sounding on for ages after. In fact, the word-rhythm is only part of what we hear; it is a support for the rhythm we listen to behind in "the Ear of the ear", *śrotrasya śrotram*. To a certain extent, that is what all great poetry at its highest tries to have, but it is only the overmind rhythm to which it is altogether native and in which it is not only behind the word-rhythm but gets into the word-movement itself and finds a kind of fully supporting body there.

P.S. Lines from the highest intuitive mind-consciousness, as well as those from the overmind, can have a mantric character — the rhythm too may have a certain kinship with mantric rhythm, but it may not be the thing itself, only the nearest step towards it.

10 July 1931

The Mantra

The *mantra* as I have tried to describe it in *The Future Poetry* is a word of power and light that comes from the Overmind

inspiration or from some very high plane of Intuition. Its characteristics are a language that conveys infinitely more than the mere surface sense of the words seems to indicate, a rhythm that means even more than the language and is born out of the Infinite and disappears into it, and the power to convey not merely the mental, vital or physical contents or indications or values of the thing uttered, but its significance and figure in some fundamental and original consciousness which is behind all these and greater. The passages you mention from the Upanishad and the Gita have certainly the Overmind accent. But ordinarily the Overmind inspiration does not come out pure in human poetry — it has to come down to an inferior consciousness and touch it or else to lift it by a seizure and surprise from above into some infinite largeness. There is always a mixture of the two elements, not an absolute transformation though the higher may sometimes dominate. You must remember that the Overmind is a superhuman consciousness and to be able to write always or purely from an overmind inspiration would mean the elevation of at least a part of the nature beyond the human level.

But how then do you expect a supramental inspiration to come down here when the Overmind itself is so rarely in human reach? That is always the error of the impatient aspirant, to think he can get the Supermind without going through the intervening stages or to imagine that he has got it when in fact he has only got something from the illumined or intuitive or at the highest *some kind* of mixed overmind consciousness. 22 June 1931

The Overmind and Aesthetics

Obviously, the Overmind and aesthetics cannot be equated together. Aesthetics is concerned mainly with beauty, but more generally with *rasa*, the response of the mind, the vital feeling and the sense to a certain “taste” in things which often may be but is not necessarily a spiritual feeling. Aesthetics belongs to the mental range and all that depends upon it; it may degenerate into aestheticism or may exaggerate or narrow itself into some version of the theory of “Art for Art’s sake”. The Overmind is

essentially a spiritual power. Mind in it surpasses its ordinary self and rises and takes its stand on a spiritual foundation. It embraces beauty and sublimates it; it has an essential aesthetics which is not limited by rules and canons; it sees a universal and an eternal beauty while it takes up and transforms all that is limited and particular. It is besides concerned with things other than beauty or aesthetics. It is concerned especially with truth and knowledge or rather with a wisdom that exceeds what we call knowledge; its truth goes beyond truth of fact and truth of thought, even the higher thought which is the first spiritual range of the thinker. It has the truth of spiritual thought, spiritual feeling, spiritual sense and at its highest the truth that comes by the most intimate spiritual touch or by identity. Ultimately, truth and beauty come together and coincide, but in between there is a difference. Overmind in all its dealings puts truth first; it brings out the essential truth (and truths) in things and also its infinite possibilities; it brings out even the truth that lies behind falsehood and error; it brings out the truth of the Inconscient and the truth of the Superconscious and all that lies in between. When it speaks through poetry, this remains its first essential quality; a limited aesthetical artistic aim is not its purpose. It can take up and uplift any or every style or at least put some stamp of itself upon it. More or less all that we have called overhead poetry has something of this character whether it be from the Overmind or simply intuitive, illumined or strong with the strength of the higher revealing Thought; even when it is not intrinsically overhead poetry, still some touch can come in. Even overhead poetry itself does not always deal in what is new or striking or strange; it can take up the obvious, the common, the bare and even the bald, the old, even that which without it would seem stale and hackneyed and raise it to greatness. Take the lines:

I spoke as one who ne'er would speak again
And as a dying man to dying men.

The writer is not a poet, not even a conspicuously talented versifier. The statement of the thought is bare and direct and the rhetorical device used is of the simplest, but the overhead touch

somehow got in through a passionate emotion and sincerity and is unmistakable. In all poetry a poetical aesthetics of some kind there must be in the writer and the recipient; but aesthetics is of many kinds and the ordinary kind is not sufficient for appreciating the overhead element in poetry. A fundamental and universal aesthetics is needed, something also more intense that listens, sees and feels from deep within and answers to what is far behind the surface. A greater, wider and deeper aesthetics then which can answer even to the transcendent and feel too whatever of the transcendent or spiritual enters into the things of life, mind and sense.

The business of the critical intellect is to appreciate and judge and here too it must judge; but it can judge and appreciate rightly here only if it first learns to see and sense inwardly and interpret. But it is dangerous for it to lay down its own laws or even laws and rules which it thinks it can deduce from some observed practice of the overhead inspiration and use that to wall in the inspiration; for it runs the risk of seeing the overhead inspiration step across its wall and pass on leaving it bewildered and at a loss. The mere critical intellect not touched by a rarer sight can do little here. We can take an extreme case, for in extreme cases certain incompatibilities come out more clearly. What might be called the Johnsonian critical method has obviously little or no place in this field,—the method which expects a precise logical order in thoughts and language and pecks at all that departs from a matter-of-fact or a strict and rational ideative coherence or a sober and restrained classical taste. Johnson himself is plainly out of his element when he deals crudely with one of Gray's delicate trifles and tramples and flounders about in the poet's basin of goldfish breaking it with his heavy and vicious kicks. But also this method is useless in dealing with any kind of romantic poetry. What would the Johnsonian critic say to Shakespeare's famous lines

Or take up arms against a sea of troubles
And by opposing end them?

He would say, "What a mixture of metaphors and jumble of

ideas! Only a lunatic could take up arms against a sea! A sea of troubles is a too fanciful metaphor and, in any case, one can't end the sea by opposing it, it is more likely to end you." Shakespeare knew very well what he was doing; he saw the mixture as well as any critic could and he accepted it because it brought home, with an inspired force which a neater language could not have had, the exact feeling and idea that he wanted to bring out. Still more scared would the Johnsonian be by any occult or mystic poetry. The Veda, for instance, uses with what seems like a deliberate recklessness the mixture, at least the association of disparate images, of things not associated together in the material world which in Shakespeare is only an occasional departure. What would the Johnsonian make of this *ṛ̥k* in the Veda: "That splendour of thee, O Fire, which is in heaven and in the earth and in the plants and in the waters and by which thou hast spread out the wide mid-air, is a vivid ocean of light which sees with a divine seeing"? He would say, "What is this nonsense? How can there be a splendour of light in plants and in water and how can an ocean of light see divinely or otherwise? Anyhow, what meaning can there be in all this, it is a senseless mystical jargon." But, apart from these extremes, the mere critical intellect is likely to feel a distaste or an incomprehension with regard to mystical poetry even if that poetry is quite coherent in its ideas and well-appointed in its language. It is bound to stumble over all sorts of things that are contrary to its reason and offensive to its taste: association of contraries, excess or abruptness or crowding of images, disregard of intellectual limitations in the thought, concretisation of abstractions, the treating of things and forces as if there were a consciousness and a personality in them and a hundred other aberrations from the straight intellectual line. It is not likely either to tolerate departures in technique which disregard the canons of an established order. Fortunately here the modernists with all their errors have broken old bounds and the mystic poet may be more free to invent his own technique.

Here is an instance in point. You refer to certain things I wrote and concessions I made when you were typing an earlier draft of the first books of *Savitri*. You instance my readiness

to correct or do away with repetitions of words or clashes of sound such as “magnificent” in one line and “lucent” in the next. True, but I may observe that at that time I was passing through a transition from the habits of an old inspiration and technique to which I often deferred and the new inspiration that had begun to come. I would still alter this clash because it was a clash, but I would not as in the old days make a fixed rule of this avoidance. If lines like the following were to come to me now,

His forehead was a dome magnificent,
And there gazed forth two orbs of lucent truth
That made the human air a world of light,

I would not reject them but accept “magnificent” and “lucent” as entirely in their place. But this would not be an undiscriminating acceptance; for if it had run

His forehead was a wide magnificent dome
And there gazed forth two orbs of lucent truth

I would not be so ready to accept it, for the repetition of sound here occurring in the same place in the line would lack the just rhythmical balance. I have accepted in the present version of *Savitri* several of the freedoms established by the modernists including internal rhyme, exact assonance of syllable, irregularities introduced into the iambic run of the metre and others which would have been equally painful to an earlier taste. But I have not taken this as a mechanical method or a mannerism, but only where I thought it rhythmically justified; for all freedom must have a truth in it and an order, either a rational or an instinctive and intuitive order.

26 April 1946

The Overmind Aesthesia

Something more might need to be said in regard to the overhead note in poetry and the overmind aesthesis; but these are exactly the subjects on which it is difficult to write with any precision or satisfy the intellect’s demand for clear and positive statement.

I do not know that it is possible for me to say why I regard one line or passage as having the overhead touch or the overhead note while another misses it. When I said that in the lines about the dying man the touch came in through some intense passion and sincerity in the writer, I was simply mentioning the psychological door through which the thing came. I did not mean to suggest that such passion and sincerity could of itself bring in the touch or that they constituted the overhead note in the lines. I am afraid I have to say what Arnold said about the grand style; it has to be felt and cannot be explained or accounted for. One has an intuitive feeling, a recognition of something familiar to one's experience or one's deeper perception in the substance and the rhythm or in one or the other which rings out and cannot be gainsaid. One might put forward a theory or a description of what the overhead character of the line consists in, but it is doubtful whether any such mentally constructed definition could be always applicable. You speak, for instance, of the sense of the Infinite and the One which is pervasive in the overhead planes; that need not be explicitly there in the overhead poetic expression or in the substance of any given line: it can be expressed indeed by overhead poetry as no other can express it, but this poetry can deal with quite other things. I would certainly say that Shakespeare's lines

Absent thee from felicity awhile,
And in this harsh world draw thy breath in pain

have the overhead touch in the substance, the rhythm and the feeling; but Shakespeare is not giving us here the sense of the One and the Infinite. He is, as in the other lines of his which have this note, dealing as he always does with life, with vital emotions and reactions or the thoughts that spring out in the life-mind under the pressure of life. It is not any strict adhesion to a transcendental view of things that constitutes this kind of poetry, but something behind not belonging to the mind or the vital and physical consciousness and with that a certain quality or power in the language and the rhythm which helps to bring out that deeper something. If I had to select the line in European

poetry which most suggests an almost direct descent from the overmind consciousness there might come first Virgil's line about "the touch of tears in mortal things":

sunt lacrimae rerum et mentem mortalia tangunt.

Another might be Shakespeare's

In the dark backward and abyss of time

or again Milton's

Those thoughts that wander through eternity.

We might also add Wordsworth's line

The Winds come to me from the fields of sleep.

There are others less ideative and more emotional or simply descriptive which might be added, such as Marlowe's

Was this the face that launched a thousand ships,
And burnt the topless towers of Ilium?

If we could extract and describe the quality and the subtle something that mark the language and rhythm and feeling of these lines and underlie their substance we might attain hazardously to some mental understanding of the nature of overhead poetry.

The Overmind is not strictly a transcendental consciousness — that epithet would more accurately apply to the supramental and to the Sachchidananda consciousness — though it looks up to the transcendental and may receive something from it and though it does transcend the ordinary human mind and in its full and native self-power, when it does not lean down and become part of mind, is superconscious to us. It is more properly a cosmic consciousness, even the very base of the cosmic as we perceive, understand or feel it. It stands behind every particular in the cosmos and is the source of all our mental, vital or physical actualities and possibilities which are diminished and degraded derivations and variations from it and have not, except in certain formations and activities of genius and some intense self-exceeding, anything of the native overmind quality and

power. Nevertheless, because it stands behind as if covered by a veil, something of it can break through or shine through or even only dimly glimmer through and that brings the overmind touch or note. We cannot get this touch frequently unless we have torn the veil, made a gap in it or rent it largely away and seen the very face of what is beyond, lived in the light of it or established some kind of constant intercourse. Or we can draw upon it from time to time without ever ascending into it if we have established a line of communication between the higher and the ordinary consciousness. What comes down may be very much diminished but it has something of that. The ordinary reader of poetry who has not that experience will usually not be able to distinguish but would at the most feel that here is something extraordinarily fine, profound, sublime or unusual,—or he might turn away from it as something too high-pitched and excessive; he might even speak depreciatingly of “purple passages”, rhetoric, exaggeration or excess. One who had the line of communication open, could on the other hand feel what is there and distinguish even if he could not adequately characterise or describe it. The essential character is perhaps that there is something behind of which I have already spoken and which comes not primarily from the mind or the vital emotion or the physical seeing but from the cosmic self and its consciousness standing behind them all and things then tend to be seen not as the mind or heart or body sees them but as this greater consciousness feels or sees or answers to them. In the direct overmind transmission this something behind is usually forced to the front or close to the front by a combination of words which carries the suggestion of a deeper meaning or by the force of an image or, most of all, by an intonation and a rhythm which carry up the depths in their wide wash or long march or mounting surge. Sometimes it is left lurking behind and only suggested so that a subtle feeling of what is not actually expressed is needed if the reader is not to miss it. This is oftenest the case when there is just a touch or note pressed upon something that would be otherwise only of a mental, vital or physical poetic value and nothing of the body of the overhead power shows itself through the veil, but at

most a tremor and vibration, a gleam or a glimpse. In the lines I have chosen there is always an unusual quality in the rhythm, as prominently in Virgil's line, often in the very building and constantly in the intonation and the association of the sounds which meet in the line and find themselves linked together by a sort of inevitable felicity. There is also an inspired selection or an unusual bringing together of words which has the power to force a deeper sense on the mind as in Virgil's

sunt lacrimae rerum.

One can note that this line if translated straight into English would sound awkward and clumsy as would many of the finest lines in Rig Veda; that is precisely because they are new and felicitous turns in the original language, discoveries of an unexpected and absolute phrase; they defy translation. If you note the combination of words and sounds in Shakespeare's line

And in this harsh world draw thy breath in pain

so arranged as to force on the mind and still more on the subtle nerves and sense the utter absoluteness of the difficulty and pain of living for the soul that has awakened to the misery of the world, you can see how this technique works. Here and elsewhere the very body and soul of the thing seen or felt come out into the open. The same dominant characteristic can be found in other lines which I have not cited,—in Leopardi's

l'insano indegno mistero delle cose
“The insane and ignoble mystery of things”

or in Wordsworth's

Voyaging through strange seas of Thought, alone.

Milton's line lives by its choice of the word “wander” to collocate with “through eternity”; if he had chosen any other word, it would no longer have been an overhead line, even if the surface sense had been exactly the same. On the other hand, take Shelley's stanza —

We look before and after,
 And pine for what is not:
 Our sincerest laughter
 With some pain is fraught;
 Our sweetest songs are those that tell of saddest thought.

This is perfect poetry with the most exquisite melody and beauty of wording and an unsurpassable poignancy of pathos, but there is no touch or note of the overhead inspiration: it is the mind and the heart, the vital emotion, working at their highest pitch under the stress of a psychic inspiration. The rhythm is of the same character, a direct, straightforward, lucid and lucent movement welling out limpidly straight from the psychic source. The same characteristics are found in another short lyric of Shelley's which is perhaps the purest example of the psychic inspiration in English poetry:

I can give not what men call love,
 But wilt thou accept not
 The worship the heart lifts above
 And the Heavens reject not,—
 The desire of the moth for the star,
 Of the night for the morrow,
 The devotion to something afar
 From the sphere of our sorrow?

We have again extreme poetic beauty there, but nothing of the overhead note.

In the other lines I have cited it is really the overmind language and rhythm that have been to some extent transmitted; but of course all overhead poetry is not from the Overmind, more often it comes from the higher thought, the illumined mind or the pure intuition. This last is different from the mental intuition which is frequent enough in poetry that does not transcend the mental level. The language and rhythm from these other overhead levels can be very different from that which is proper to the Overmind; for the Overmind thinks in a mass; its thought, feeling, vision is high or deep or wide or all these things together:

to use the Vedic expression about fire, the divine messenger, it goes vast on its way to bring the divine riches, and it has a corresponding language and rhythm. The higher thought has a strong tread often with bare unsandalled feet and moves in a clear-cut light: a divine power, measure, dignity is its most frequent character. The outflow of the illumined mind comes in a flood brilliant with revealing words or a light of crowding images, sometimes surcharged with its burden of revelations, sometimes with a luminous sweep. The intuition is usually a lightning flash showing up a single spot or plot of ground or scene with an entire and miraculous completeness of vision to the surprised ecstasy of the inner eye; its rhythm has a decisive inevitable sound which leaves nothing essential unheard, but very commonly is embodied in a single stroke. These however are only general or dominant characters; any number of variations is possible. There are besides mingled inspirations, several levels meeting and combining or modifying each other's notes, and an overmind transmission can contain or bring with it all the rest, but how much of this description will be to the ordinary reader of poetry at all intelligible or clearly identifiable?

There are besides in mental poetry derivations or substitutes for all these styles. Milton's "grand style" is such a substitute for the manner of the Higher Thought. Take it anywhere at its ordinary level or in its higher elevation, there is always or almost always that echo there:

Of man's first disobedience, and the fruit
Of that forbidden tree

or

On evil days though fallen, and evil tongues

or

Blind Thamyris, and blind Maeonides,
And Tiresias, and Phineus, prophets old.

Shakespeare's poetry coruscates with a play of the hues of imagination which we may regard as a mental substitute for the

inspiration of the illumined mind and sometimes by aiming at an exalted note he links on to the illumined overhead inspiration itself as in the lines I have more than once quoted:

Wilt thou upon the high and giddy mast
Seal up the ship-boy's eyes and rock his brains
In cradle of the rude imperious surge.

But the rest of that passage falls away in spite of its high-pitched language and resonant rhythm far below the overhead strain. So it is easy for the mind to mistake and take the higher for the lower inspiration or *vice versa*. Thus Milton's lines might at first sight be taken because of a certain depth of emotion in their large lingering rhythm as having the overhead complexion, but this rhythm loses something of its sovereign right because there are no depths of sense behind it. It conveys nothing but the noble and dignified pathos of the blindness and old age of a great personality fallen into evil days. Milton's architecture of thought and verse is high and powerful and massive, but there are usually no subtle echoes there, no deep chambers: the occult things in man's being are foreign to his intelligence,—for it is in the light of the poetic intelligence that he works. He does not stray into "the mystic cavern of the heart", does not follow the inner fire entering like a thief with the Cow of Light into the secrecy of secracies. Shakespeare does sometimes get in as if by a splendid psychic accident in spite of his preoccupation with the colours and shows of life.

I do not know therefore whether I can speak with any certainty about the lines you quote; I would perhaps have to read them in their context first, but it seems to me that there is just a touch, as in the lines about the dying man. The thing that is described there may have happened often enough in times like those of the recent wars and upheavals and in times of violent strife and persecution and catastrophe, but the greatness of the experience does not come out or not wholly, because men feel with the mind and heart and not with the soul; but here there is by some accident of wording and rhythm a suggestion of something behind, of the greatness of the soul's experience and

its courageous acceptance of the tragic, the final, the fatal — and its resistance; it is only just a suggestion, but it is enough: the Overhead has touched and passed back to its heights. There is something very different but of the same essential calibre in the line you quote:

While sad eyes watch for feet that never come.

It is still more difficult to say anything very tangible about the overmind aesthesis. When I wrote about it I was thinking of the static aesthesis that perceives and receives rather than of the dynamic aesthesis which creates; I was not thinking at all of superior or inferior grades of poetic greatness or beauty. If the complete Overmind power or even that of the lower overhead plane could come down into the mind and entirely transform its action, then no doubt there might be greater poetry written than any that man has yet achieved, just as a greater superhuman life might be created if the supermind could come down wholly into life and lift life wholly into itself and transform it. But what happens at present is that something comes down and accepts to work under the law of the mind and with a mixture of the mind and it must be judged by the laws and standards of the mind. It brings in new tones, new colours, new elements, but it does not change radically as yet the stuff of the consciousness with which we labour.

Whether it produces great poetry or not depends on the extent to which it manifests its power and overrides rather than serves the mentality which it is helping. At present it does not do that sufficiently to raise the work to the full greatness of the worker.

And then what do you mean exactly by greatness in poetry? One can say that Virgil is greater than Catullus and that many of Virgil's lines are greater than anything Catullus ever achieved. But poetical perfection is not the same thing as poetical greatness. Virgil is perfect at his best, but Catullus too is perfect at his best: even, each has a certain exquisiteness of perfection, each in his own kind. Virgil's kind is large and deep, that of Catullus sweet and intense. Virgil's art reached or had from its beginning

a greater and more constant ripeness than that of Catullus. We can say then that Virgil was a greater poet and artist of word and rhythm but we cannot say that his poetry, at his best, was more perfect poetry and that of Catullus less perfect. That renders futile many of the attempts at comparison like Arnold's comparison of Wordsworth's *Skylark* with Shelley's. You may say that Milton was a greater poet than Blake, but there can always be people, not aesthetically insensitive, who would prefer Blake's lyrical work to Milton's grander achievement, and there are certainly things in Blake which touch deeper chords than the massive hand of Milton could ever reach. So all poetic superiority is not summed up in the word greatness. Each kind has its own best which escapes from comparison and stands apart in its own value.

Let us then leave for the present the question of poetic greatness or superiority aside and come back to the overmind aesthetics. By aesthetics is meant a reaction of the consciousness, mental and vital and even bodily, which receives a certain element in things, something that can be called their taste, Rasa, which passing through the mind or sense or both, awakes a vital enjoyment of the taste, Bhoga, and this can again awaken us, awaken even the soul in us to something yet deeper and more fundamental than mere pleasure and enjoyment, to some form of the spirit's delight of existence, Ananda. Poetry, like all art, serves the seeking for these things, this aesthetics, this Rasa, Bhoga, Ananda; it brings us a Rasa of word and sound but also of the idea and, through the idea, of the things expressed by the word and sound and thought, a mental or vital or sometimes the spiritual image of their form, quality, impact upon us or even, if the poet is strong enough, of their world-essence, their cosmic reality, the very soul of them, the spirit that resides in them as it resides in all things. Poetry may do more than this, but this at least it must do to however small an extent or it is not poetry. Aesthetics therefore is of the very essence of poetry, as it is of all art. But it is not the sole element and aesthetics too is not confined to a reception of poetry and art; it extends to everything in the world: there is nothing we can sense, think

or in any way experience to which there cannot be an aesthetic reaction of our conscious being. Ordinarily, we suppose that aesthetics is concerned with beauty, and that indeed is its most prominent concern: but it is concerned with many other things also. It is the universal Ananda that is the parent of aesthetics and the universal Ananda takes three major and original forms, beauty, love and delight, the delight of all existence, the delight in things, in all things. Universal Ananda is the artist and creator of the universe witnessing, experiencing and taking joy in its creation. In the lower consciousness it creates its opposites, the sense of ugliness as well as the sense of beauty, hate and repulsion and dislike as well as love and attraction and liking, grief and pain as well as joy and delight; and between these dualities or as a grey tint in the background there is a general tone of neutrality and indifference born from the universal insensibility into which the Ananda sinks in its dark negation in the Inconscient. All this is the sphere of aesthetics, its dullest reaction is indifference, its highest is ecstasy. Ecstasy is a sign of a return towards the original or supreme Ananda: that art or poetry is supreme which can bring us something of the supreme tone of ecstasy. For as the consciousness sinks from the supreme levels through various degrees towards the Inconscience the general sign of this descent is an always diminishing power of its intensity, intensity of being, intensity of consciousness, intensity of force, intensity of the delight in things and the delight of existence. So too as we ascend towards the supreme level these intensities increase. As we climb beyond Mind, higher and wider values replace the values of our limited mind, life and bodily consciousness. Aesthetics shares in this intensification of capacity. The capacity for pleasure and pain, for liking and disliking is comparatively poor on the level of our mind and life; our capacity for ecstasy is brief and limited; these tones arise from a general ground of neutrality which is always dragging them back towards itself. As it enters the overhead planes the ordinary aesthetics turns into a pure delight and becomes capable of a high, a large or a deep abiding ecstasy. The ground is no longer a general neutrality, but a pure spiritual ease and happiness upon which the special

tones of the aesthetic consciousness come out or from which they arise. This is the first fundamental change.

Another change in this transition is a turn towards universality in place of the isolations, the conflicting generalities, the mutually opposing dualities of the lower consciousness. In the Overmind we have a first firm foundation of the experience of a universal beauty, a universal love, a universal delight. These things can come on the mental and vital plane even before those planes are directly touched or influenced by the spiritual consciousness; but they are there a temporary experience and not permanent or they are limited in their field and do not touch the whole being. They are a glimpse and not a change of vision or a change of nature. The artist for instance can look at things only plain or shabby or ugly or even repulsive to the ordinary sense and see in them and bring out of them beauty and the delight that goes with beauty. But this is a sort of special grace for the artistic consciousness and is limited within the field of his art. In the overhead consciousness, especially in the Overmind, these things become more and more the law of the vision and the law of the nature. Wherever the overmind spiritual man turns he sees a universal beauty touching and uplifting all things, expressing itself through them, moulding them into a field or objects of its divine aesthetics; a universal love goes out from him to all beings; he feels the Bliss which has created the worlds and upholds them and all that is expresses to him the universal delight, is made of it, is a manifestation of it and moulded into its image. This universal aesthetics of beauty and delight does not ignore or fail to understand the differences and oppositions, the gradations, the harmony and disharmony obvious to the ordinary consciousness: but, first of all, it draws a Rasa from them and with that comes the enjoyment, Bhoga, and the touch or the mass of the Ananda. It sees that all things have their meaning, their value, their deeper or total significance which the mind does not see, for the mind is only concerned with a surface vision, surface contacts and its own surface reactions. When something expresses perfectly what it was meant to express, the completeness brings with it a sense of harmony, a sense of

artistic perfection; it gives even to what is discordant a place in a system of cosmic concordances and the discords become part of a vast harmony, and wherever there is harmony, there is a sense of beauty. Even in form itself, apart from the significance, the overmind consciousness sees the object with a totality which changes its effect on the percipient even while it remains the same thing. It sees lines and masses and an underlying design which the physical eye does not see and which escapes even the keenest mental vision. Every form becomes beautiful to it in a deeper and larger sense of beauty than that commonly known to us. The Overmind looks also straight at and into the soul of each thing and not only at its form or its significance to the mind or to the life; this brings to it not only the true truth of the thing but the delight of it. It sees also the one spirit in all, the face of the Divine everywhere and there can be no greater Ananda than that; it feels oneness with all, sympathy, love, the bliss of the Brahman. In a highest, a most integral experience it sees all things as if made of existence, consciousness, power, bliss, every atom of them charged with and constituted of Sachchidananda. In all this the overmind aesthesis takes its share and gives its response; for these things come not merely as an idea in the mind or a truth-seeing but as an experience of the whole being and a total response is not only possible but above a certain level imperative.

I have said that aesthesis responds not only to what we call beauty and beautiful things but to all things. We make a distinction between truth and beauty; but there can be an aesthetic response to truth also, a joy in its beauty, a love created by its charm, a rapture in the finding, a passion in the embrace, an aesthetic joy in its expression, a satisfaction of love in the giving of it to others. Truth is not merely a dry statement of facts or ideas to or by the intellect; it can be a splendid discovery, a rapturous revelation, a thing of beauty that is a joy for ever. The poet also can be a seeker and lover of truth as well as a seeker and lover of beauty. He can feel a poetic and aesthetic joy in the expression of the true as well as in the expression of the beautiful. He does not make a mere intellectual or philosophical

statement of the truth; it is his vision of its beauty, its power, his thrilled reception of it, his joy in it that he tries to convey by an utmost perfection in word and rhythm. If he has the passion, then even a philosophical statement of it he can surcharge with this sense of power, force, light, beauty. On certain levels of the Overmind, where the mind element predominates over the element of gnosis, the distinction between truth and beauty is still valid. It is indeed one of the chief functions of the Overmind to separate the main powers of the consciousness and give to each its full separate development and satisfaction, bring out its utmost potency and meaning, its own soul and significant body and take it on its own way as far as it can go. It can take up each power of man and give it its full potentiality, its highest characteristic development. It can give to intellect its austerest intellectuality and to logic its most sheer unsparing logicality. It can give to beauty its most splendid passion of luminous form and the consciousness that receives it a supreme height and depth of ecstasy. It can create a sheer and pure poetry impossible for the intellect to sound to its depths or wholly grasp, much less to mentalise and analyse. It is the function of Overmind to give to every possibility its full potential, its own separate kingdom. But also there is another action of Overmind which sees and thinks and creates in masses, which reunites separated things, which reconciles opposites. On that level truth and beauty not only become constant companions but become one, involved in each other, inseparable: on that level the true is always beautiful and the beautiful is always true. Their highest fusion perhaps only takes place in the Supermind; but Overmind on its summits draws enough of the supramental light to see what the Supermind sees and do what the Supermind does though in a lower key and with a less absolute truth and power. On an inferior level Overmind may use the language of the intellect to convey as far as that language can do it its own greater meaning and message but on its summits Overmind uses its own native language and gives to its truths their own supreme utterance, and no intellectual speech, no mentalised poetry can equal or even come near to that power and beauty. Here your intellectual

dictum that poetry lives by its aesthetic quality alone and has no need of truth or that truth must depend upon aesthetics to become poetic at all, has no longer any meaning. For there truth itself is highest poetry and has only to appear to be utterly beautiful to the vision, the hearing, the sensibility of the soul. There dwells and from there springs the mystery of the inevitable word, the supreme immortal rhythm, the absolute significance and the absolute utterance.

I hope you do not feel crushed under this avalanche of metaphysical psychology; you have called it upon yourself by your questioning about the Overmind's greater, larger and deeper aesthesis. What I have written is indeed very scanty and sketchy, only some of the few essential things that have to be said; but without it I could not try to give you any glimpse of the meaning of my phrase. This greater aesthesis is inseparable from the greater truth, it is deeper because of the depth of that truth, larger by all its immense largeness. I do not expect the reader of poetry to come anywhere near to all that, he could not without being a Yogi or at least a sadhak: but just as the overhead poetry brings some touch of a deeper power of vision and creation into the mind without belonging itself wholly to the higher reaches, so also the full appreciation of all its burden needs at least some touch of a deeper response of the mind and some touch of a deeper aesthesis. Until that becomes general the Overhead or at least the Overmind is not going to do more than to touch here and there as it did in the past, a few lines, a few passages, or perhaps as things advance, a little more, nor is it likely to pour into our utterance its own complete power and absolute value.

I have said that overhead poetry is not necessarily greater or more perfect than any other kind of poetry. But perhaps a subtle qualification may be made to this statement. It is true that each kind of poetical writing can reach a highest or perfect perfection in its own line and in its own quality and what can be more perfect than a perfect perfection or can we say that one kind of absolute perfection is "greater" than another kind? What can be more absolute than the absolute? But then what do we mean by the perfection of poetry? There is the perfection of

the language and there is the perfection of the word-music and the rhythm, beauty of speech and beauty of sound, but there is also the quality of the thing said which counts for something. If we consider only word and sound and what in themselves they evoke, we arrive at the application of the theory of art for art's sake to poetry. On that ground we might say that a lyric of Anacreon is as good poetry and as perfect poetry as anything in Aeschylus or Sophocles or Homer. The question of the elevation or depth or intrinsic beauty of the thing said cannot then enter into our consideration of poetry; and yet it does enter, with most of us at any rate, and is part of the aesthetic reaction even in the most "aesthetic" of critics and readers. From this point of view the elevation from which the inspiration comes may after all matter, provided the one who receives it is a fit and powerful instrument; for a great poet will do more with a lower level of the origin of inspiration than a smaller poet can do even when helped from the highest sources. In a certain sense all genius comes from Overhead; for genius is the entry or inrush of a greater consciousness into the mind or a possession of the mind by a greater power. Every operation of genius has at its back or infused within it an intuition, a revelation, an inspiration, an illumination or at the least a hint or touch or influx from some greater power or level of conscious being than those which men ordinarily possess or use. But this power has two ways of acting: in one it touches the ordinary modes of mind and deepens, heightens, intensifies or exquisitely refines their action but without changing its modes or transforming its normal character; in the other it brings down into these normal modes something of itself, something supernormal, something which one at once feels to be extraordinary and suggestive of a superhuman level. These two ways of action when working in poetry may produce things equally exquisite and beautiful, but the word "greater" may perhaps be applied, with the necessary qualifications, to the second way and its too rare poetic creation.

The great bulk of the highest poetry belongs to the first of these two orders. In the second order there are again two or perhaps three levels; sometimes a felicitous turn or an unusual

force of language or a deeper note of feeling brings in the overhead touch. More often it is the power of the rhythm that lifts up language that is simple and common or a feeling or idea that has often been expressed and awakes something which is not ordinarily there. If one listens with the mind only or from the vital centre only, one may have a wondering admiration for the skill and beauty of woven word and sound or be struck by the happy way or the power with which the feeling or idea is expressed. But there is something more in it than that; it is this that a deeper, more inward strand of the consciousness has seen and is speaking, and if we listen more profoundly we can get something more than the admiration and delight of the mind or Housman's thrill of the solar plexus. We can feel perhaps the Spirit of the universe lending its own depth to our mortal speech or listening from behind to some expression of itself, listening perhaps to its memories of

old, unhappy, far-off things,
And battles long ago

or feeling and hearing, it may be said, the vast oceanic stillness
and the cry of the cuckoo

Breaking the silence of the seas
Among the farthest Hebrides

or it may enter again into Vyasa's

“A void and dreadful forest ringing with the crickets' cry”
Vanam pratibhayam śūnyam jhillikāganānāditam.

or remember its call to the soul of man,

Anityam asukhami lokam imam prāpya bhajasva mām
“Thou who hast come to this transient and unhappy world,
love and worship Me.”

There is a second level on which the poetry draws into itself a fuller language of intuitive inspiration, illumination or the higher thinking and feeling. A very rich or great poetry may then emerge and many of the most powerful passages in Shakespeare,

Virgil or Lucretius or the Mahabharata and Ramayana, not to speak of the Gita, the Upanishads or the Rig Veda, have this inspiration. It is a poetry "thick inlaid with patines of bright gold" or welling up in a stream of passion, beauty and force. But sometimes there comes down a supreme voice, the overmind voice and the overmind music and it is to be observed that the lines and passages where that happens rank among the greatest and most admired in all poetic literature. It would be therefore too much to say that the overhead inspiration cannot bring in a greatness into poetry which could surpass the other levels of inspiration, greater even from the purely aesthetic point of view and certainly greater in the power of its substance.

A conscious attempt to write overhead poetry with a mind aware of the planes from which this inspiration comes and seeking always to ascend to those levels or bring down something from them, would probably result in a partial success; at its lowest it might attain to what I have called the first order, ordinarily it would achieve the two lower levels of the second order and in its supreme moments it might in lines and in sustained passages achieve the supreme level, something of the highest summit of its potency. But its greatest work will be to express adequately and constantly what is now only occasionally and inadequately some kind of utterance of the things above, the things beyond, the things behind the apparent world and its external or superficial happenings and phenomena. It would not only bring in the occult in its larger and deeper ranges but the truths of the spiritual heights, the spiritual depths, the spiritual intimacies and vastnesses as also the truths of the inner mind, the inner life, an inner or subtle physical beauty and reality. It would bring in the concreteness, the authentic image, the inmost soul of identity and the heart of meaning of these things, so that it could never lack in beauty. If this could be achieved by one possessed, if not of a supreme, still of a sufficiently high and wide poetic genius, something new could be added to the domain of poetry and there would be no danger of the power of poetry beginning to fade, to fall into decadence, to fail us. It might even enter into the domain of the infinite and inexhaustible, catch some word of

the Ineffable, show us revealing images which bring us near to the Reality that is secret in us and in all, of which the Upanishad speaks,

*Anejad ekāṁ manaso javīyo nainad devā āpnuvan pūrvam
arṣat. . .
Tad ejati tan naijati tad dūre tad u antike.*

“The One unmoving is swifter than thought, the gods cannot overtake It, for It travels ever in front; It moves and It moves not, It is far away from us and It is very close.”

The gods of the overhead planes can do much to bridge that distance and to bring out that closeness, even if they cannot altogether overtake the Reality that exceeds and transcends them.

29 July 1946

Examples of Overhead Poetry

Examples from Various Poets Evaluations of 1932–1935

Does Wordsworth's ode on immortality contain any trace,
however vague, of the Overmind inspiration?

I don't remember, but I think not.

And what about the rhythm and substance of
solitary thinkings; such as dodge
Conception to the very bourne of heaven.

No. The substance may be overmind, but the rhythm is ordinary
and the expression intellectual and imaginative.

and of

I come, O Sea,
To measure my enormous self with thee.

No; the poem "To the Sea" was produced by a collaboration of
the dynamic poetic intelligence with the higher vital urge.

April 1932

*

I shall be obliged if you will indicate the origin of the few
examples below—only the first of which is from my own
work.

Plumbless inaudible waves of shining sleep.

Illumined mind.

The diamond dimness of the domèd air.

Illumined mind.

Withdrawn in a lost attitude of prayer.

Intuition.

This patter of time's marring steps across the solitude
Of Truth's abidingness, self-blissful and alone.

Illumined mind with an intuitive element and strong overmind
touch.

Million d'oiseaux d'or, ô future Vigueur!

Illumined mind.

Rapt above earth by power of one fair face.

Difficult to say. More of higher mind perhaps than anything else
— but something of illumination and intuition also.

Measuring vast pain with his immortal mind.

Don't know.

Piercing the limitless unknowable,
Breaking the vacancy and voiceless peace.

Don't know — the substance is overmental, but for the rest I
cannot judge.

2 March 1934

*

From what plane do these lines by Vaughan come?

I see them walking in an air of glory,
Whose light doth trample on my days:
My days, which are at best but dull and hoary,
Mere glimmering and decays.

I thought they were from the illumined mind.

It is a mixture. Something of the illumined mind, something
of the poetic intelligence diluting it and preventing the full
sovereignty of the higher expression.

17 March 1935

*

What about these lines of Vaughan's—are they from the illumined mind?

- 1) But felt through all this fleshly dress
Bright shoots of everlastingness . . .
 - 2) I saw Eternity the other night
Like a great Ring of pure and endless light,
All calm, as it was bright . . .

This Ring the Bridegroom did for none provide
But for his Bride.

Yes, for the first two. In (1) there is something from the Intuition also and in (2) from the Overmind. 21 March 1935

21 March 1935

*

Is this table showing the degrees of style and rhythm of revelation in mystic poetry correct? —

- 1) solitary thinkings; such as dodge
Conception to the very bourne of heaven
(Higher Mind)¹

 - 2) I saw Eternity the other night
Like a great Ring of pure and endless light,
All calm, as it was bright.
(Illumined Mind)

 - 3) Your spirit in my spirit, deep in the deep,
Walled by a wizardry of shining sleep
(Intuition)

 - 4) Voyaging through strange seas of Thought, alon
(Overmind)

Though the expression and the rhythm differ, the substance of 1, 2, 4 is Overmind: what about 3? I suppose the table would be more consistent if the substance came in each case from the Overmind.

¹ combined with Illumined [*Sri Aurobindo's addition*]

Overmind is very various in its expression. All forms and rhythms are there in the Overmind.

From what planes are these lines?

Withdrawn in a lost attitude of prayer . . .

The lonely waters of eternal ease . . .

A hush dew-drenched with immortality . . .

A sea unheard where spume nor spray is blown . . .

Eternal truth's time-measuring sun-blaze . . .

The first two are intuitive. The last is higher mind mixed with illumination. The other two are mixed.

23 March 1935

**Examples from Amal Kiran
Evaluations of 1934–1937**

Madonna Mia

I echo her life's rhythm of reverie
By spacious vigil-lonelinesses drawn
From star-birds winging through the vacancy
Of night's incomprehensible spirit-dawn.

My whole heart fills but with the glowing gloom
Where God-love blossoms her ethereal grace:
The sole truth my lips bear is the perfume
From the ecstatic flower of her face.

Will you please tell me its effect as a whole and, if possible,
where the inspiration comes from?

It is good. I could not very definitely say from where the inspiration comes. It seems to come from the Illumination through the higher Mind — but there is an intuitive touch here and there, even some indirect touch of “mental overmind”² vision hanging

² There are two ranges of overmind which might be called “mental” and “gnostic” overmind respectively — the latter in direct touch with supermind, the former more like a widened and massive intuition.

about the first stanza.

9 February 1934

*

May I ask whether, when you speak of inspiration, you mean the substance only or the rhythm as well? I had the impression that lines 2 and 3 of the first stanza had some mantric quality, but I felt it would be too presumptuous to ask you about it before you had indicated their source.

Yes, that was what I meant by the touch of the overmind.

10 February 1934

*

Is it only lines 2 and 3 that have a touch of the Overmind, or line 4 also?

Line 4 also though 2 and 3 have most of it.

Have you felt that touch anywhere else in my poetry? And is this rhythm in any way similar to that of Wordsworth's

Voyaging through strange seas of Thought, alone?

No — it is quite a different rhythm — a rhythm of flight through sky-space not of ploughing lonely seas.

Of course by "similarity" I mean the source of inspiration being more or less the same.

There may have been other lines, but I do not remember any.

12 February 1934

*

What I should have said is: "Does that line of Wordsworth's have those special qualities which mark out the substance, language and rhythm of a line from the mental Overmind — the same qualities which are to be found in the three lines of my poem, which you consider to have an Overmind touch?" I am no competent judge, but I think that it contains all those qualities in a more intense and undiluted form: is that true?

Probably you are right.

Of my three lines, only

From star-birds winging through the vacancy

seems to be somewhere near it in pure inspiration from the
mental Overmind.

I am not sure about the *pure* inspiration—I said a *touch* from
the *mental* overmind. But perhaps I am overcautious in these
matters.

*

To help me distinguish the planes of inspiration, would you
just indicate where the following lines from various poems of
mine have their sources?

What visionary urge

Has stolen from horizons watched alone

Into thy being with ethereal guile?

[Second line] Intuitive with overmind touch.

[Third line] Imaginative poetic intelligence.

A huge sky-passion sprouting from the earth
In branchèd vastnesses of leafy rapture.

Ditto with something of the higher Mind.

The mute unshadowed spaces of her mind.

Intuitive with overmind touch.

A sea unheard where spume nor spray is blown.

Intuitive.

Irradiant wing-waft through eternal space,
Pride of lone rapture and invincible sun-gaze.

Higher Mind with mental overmind touch.

Born nomad of the infinite heart!
Time-tamer! star-struck debauchee of light!

Warrior who hurls his spirit like a dart
 Across the terrible night
 Of death to conquer immortality!

Illumined Mind with mental overmind touch.

. . . And to the earth-self suddenly
 Came through remote entrancèd marvelling
 Of adoration ever-widening
 A spacious sense of immortality.

Mixture of higher and illumined mind — in the last line the
 mental overmind touch.

Here life's lost heart of splendour beats immense.

Illumined mind with mental overmind touch.

The haunting rapture of the vast dream-wind
 That blows, star-fragrant, from eternity.

Ditto.

An ocean-hearted ecstasy am I
 Where time flows inward to eternal shores.

Intuitive, illumined, overmind touch all mixed together.

I have analysed but very imperfectly — because these influences
 are so mixed together that the descriptions are not exhaustive.

Also remember that I speak of a *touch*, of the *mental* overmind touch and that when there is the touch it is not always complete — it may be more apparent from something either in the language or substance or rhythm than in all three together.

Even so perhaps some of my descriptions are overhasty and denote the impression of the moment. Also the poetical value of the poetry exists independent of its source. 13 February 1934

*

It was extremely kind of you to analyse, as you did, a few weeks back, the influences of different planes in my poetry. I seem to have some feeling now for the qualities in them.

I should like to know whether you intend any distinction when you speak of "Overmind touch" and "mental Overmind touch."

Yes — the overmind proper has some gnostic light in it which is absent in the mental overmind.

2 March 1934

*

Overself

All things are lost in Him, all things are found;
He rules an infinite hush that hears each sound.

But fragmentary quivers blossom there
To voice on mingling voice of shadowless air,

Bodies of fire and ecstasies of line
Where passion's mortal music grows divine —

For in that vasty region glimmers through
Each form one single trance of breakless blue!

Well, the first and third couplets are quite admirable. The rest not quite as inevitable as it should be though lines 4 and 8 could be so if coupled with perfect lines that made them also perfect. Your emendations do not mend matters; the first [*"rules"* changed to *"makes"*] only spoils the second line of the couplet without bringing the first up to level. . . . "Vasty region" does not appeal to me — it sounds pseudo-Miltonic and ineffective.

P.S. Higher mind throughout, illumined.

10 October 1936

*

I understand your objection to "vasty region" . . . though I don't know if Milton ever used "vasty". It is a Shakespearean word, a famous instance being in that line about calling "spirits from the vasty deep". . . .

I am describing, of course, the Overmind, but does the fact that the poem is only from the Higher Mind, however illumined, come in the way?

I know very well the Shakespearean line and I don't think Milton

uses “vasty”; but I did not at all mean that the choice of the word “vasty” was Miltonic. I meant that the phrase here gave a pseudo-Miltonic effect and so do “lofty region” and “myriad region” [*proposed by the poet as emendations*]; in some other context they might give some other impression, but that is the effect here. . . .

I don’t think the lines express distinctively the Overmind — they would apply equally to any plane where the unity of the Self governed the diversity of its creation, — so the illumined Higher Mind is quite appropriate for the purpose.

P.S. By pseudo-Miltonic I mean a certain kind of traditional poetic eloquence which finds its roots in Milton but even when well done lacks in originality and can easily be vapid and sonantly hollow. In the last line there is inspiration but it has to be brought out by this preceding line; that must be inspired also. An expression like “lofty region”, “vasty region”, “myriad region” even expresses nothing but a bare intellectual fact with no more vision in it than would convey mere wideness without any significance in it.

13 October 1936

*

[*after revision of line 7 to “For in that spacious revel glimmers through”*]

There is nothing to be altered in what I said about the poem. It is a fine poem — in the first and third couplets exceedingly fine, perfect poetic expressions of what they want to say, — the other couplets are less inevitable, although the second lines in both are admirable. Line 2, lines 5, 6 are among the best you have written; they have a certain revelatory power. 17 October 1936

*

Consummation

Immortal overhead the gold expanse —
An ultimate crown of inexhaustible joy!
But a king-power must grip all passion numb

And with gigantic loneliness draw down
This large gold throbbing on its silver hush.
For only an ice-pure peak of trance can bear
The benediction of that aureole.

I would suggest “a gigantic loneliness”. “With” makes the line rather weak; the loneliness must be brought out in its full effect and “with” subordinates it and prevents it from standing out.

There is something wrong in the fifth line. Perhaps it is the excess of sibilants—not that one cannot have a sibilant line, but the sounds must be otherwise dispersed. Besides your style of consonant and vowel harmonisation is of the liquid kind and here such combinations as “its silver hush” are best avoided. How would “the large gold throbbing in a silver hush” do?

The second line is strong and dignified, but it impresses me as too mental and Miltonic. Milton has very usually (in *Paradise Lost*) some of the largeness and rhythm of the higher mind, but his substance except at certain heights is mental, mentally grand and noble. The interference of this mental Miltonic is one of the great stumbling-blocks when one tries to write from “above”.

17 November 1936

*

[*after revision*]

It is very fine now—it is the higher mind vision and movement throughout, except that in the fifth line a flash of illumination comes through. Intense light-play and colour in this kind of utterance is usually the illumined mind’s contribution.

18 November 1936

*

Mere of Dream

The Unknown above is a mute vacancy—
But in the mere of dream wide wings are spread,
An ageless bird poising a rumour of gold
Upon prophetic waters hung asleep.

A ring of hills around a silver hush,
 The far mind haloed with mysterious dawn
 Treasures in the deep eye of thought-suspense
 An eagle-destiny beaconing through all time.

You say this poem is “not as a whole quite as absolute as some that went before.” . . . I am glad you have mentioned that the highest flight is not present here on the whole, for I am thereby stung to make an intenser effort. I should like, however, to have a formulation from you of the ideal you would like me to follow.

What you are writing now is “overhead” poetry—I mean poetry inspired from those planes; before you used to write poems very often from the intuitive mind—these had a beauty and perfection of their own. What I mean by absoluteness here is a full intensely inevitable expression of what comes down from above. These lines are original, convincing, have vision, they are not to be rejected, but they are not the highest flight except in single lines. Such variations are to be expected and will be more prominent if you were writing longer poems, for then to keep always or even usually to that highest level would be an extraordinary feat—no poet has managed as yet to write always at his highest flight and here in that kind of poetry it would be still more difficult. The important point is not to fall below a certain level.

12 May 1937

*

A Poet's Stammer

My dream is spoken
 As if by sound
 Were tremulously broken
 Some oath profound.

A timeless hush
 Draws ever back
 The winging music-rush
 Upon thought's track.

Though syllables sweep
Like golden birds,
Far lonelihoods of sleep
Dwindle my words.

Beyond life's clamour,
A mystery mars
Speech-light to a myriad stammer
Of flickering stars.

It is a very true and beautiful poem — the subject of the outward stammer seems to be only a starting point or excuse for expressing an inner phenomenon of inspiration. Throughout the inspiration of the poem is intuitive.

You have said before I used to write poems very often from the intuitive mind, but the term you have employed connotes for us the plane between the Illumined Mind and the Overmind. But that would be an overhead source of inspiration. Do you mean the intuitivised poetic intelligence? If so, what is its character as compared to the mystic or inner mind?

The intuitive mind, strictly speaking, stretches from the Intuition proper down to the intuitivised inner mind — it is therefore at once an overhead power and a mental intelligence power. All depends on the amount, intensity, quality of the intuition and how far it is mixed with mind or pure. The inner mind is not necessarily intuitive, though it can easily become so. The mystic mind is mind turned towards the occult and spiritual, but the inner mind can act without direct reference to the occult and spiritual, it can act in the same field and in the same material as the ordinary mind, only with a larger and deeper power, range and light and in greater unison with the Universal Mind; it can open also more easily to what is within and what is above. Intuitive intelligence, mystic mind, inner mind intelligence are all part of the inner mind operations. In today's poem, for instance, it is certainly the inner mind that has transformed the idea of stammering into a symbol of inner phenomena and into that operation a certain strain of mystic mind enters, but what is

prominent is the intuitive inspiration throughout. It starts with the intuitive poetic intelligence in the first stanza, gets touched by the overhead intuition in the second, gets full of it in the third and again rises rapidly to that in the two last lines of the fourth stanza. This is what I call poetry of the intuitive Mind.

13 May 1937

Bengali Overhead Poetry

We are sorry to hear that you can't decide about Bengali overhead poetry. I consider it a defect, Sir, in your poetic supramental make-up, which you should try to mend or remove!

Why a defect? In any case all qualities have their defects, which are also a quality. For the rest, by your logic, I ought to be able to pronounce on the merits of Czechoslovakian or Arabic poetry. To pronounce whether a rhythm is O.P. or not, one must have an infallible ear for overtones and undertones of the sound music of the language — that expertness I have not got with regard to Bengali.

23 September 1938

Overhead Poetry: Re-evaluations of 1946

It is a bit of a surprise to me that Virgil's

sunt lacrimae rerum et mentem mortalia tangunt

is now considered by you "an almost direct descent from the overmind consciousness" [see page 33]. I was under the impression that, like that other line of his —

O passi graviora, dabit deus his quoque finem

it was a perfect mixture of the Higher Mind with the Psychic; and the impression was based on something you had yourself written to me in the past [see page 295]. Similarly I remember you definitely declaring Wordsworth's

The Winds come to me from the fields of sleep

to be lacking precisely in the Overmind note and having only the note of Intuition in an intense form [see pages 25–26].

What you write now means a big change of opinion in both the instances—but how and why the change?

Yes, certainly, my ideas and reactions to some of the lines and passages about which you had asked me long ago, have developed and changed and could not but change. For at that time I was new to the overhead regions or at least to the highest of them—for the higher thought and the illumination were already old friends—and could not be sure or complete in my perception of many things concerning them. I hesitated therefore to assign anything like overmind touch or inspiration to passages in English or other poetry and did not presume to claim any of my own writing as belonging to this order. Besides, the intellect took still too large a part in my reactions to poetry; for instance, I judged Virgil's line too much from what seemed to be its surface intellectual import and too little from its deeper meaning and vision and its reverberations of the Overhead. So also with Wordsworth's line about the "fields of sleep": I have since then moved in those fields of sleep and felt the breath which is carried from them by the winds that came to the poet, so I can better appreciate the depth of vision in Wordsworth's line. I could also see more clearly the impact of the Overhead on the work of poets who wrote usually from a mental, a psychic, an emotional or other vital inspiration, even when it gave only a tinge.

The context of Virgil's line has nothing to do with and cannot detract from its greatness and its overhead character. If we limit its meaning so as to unify it with what goes before, if we want Virgil to say in it only, "Oh yes, even in Carthage, so distant a place, these foreigners too can sympathise and weep over what has happened in Troy and get touched by human misfortune," then the line will lose all its value and we would only have to admire the strong turn and *recherché* suggestiveness of its expression. Virgil certainly did not mean it like that; he starts indeed by stressing the generality of the fame of Troy and the interest in her misfortune but then he passes from the particularity of this idea and suddenly rises from it to a feeling of the universality of mortal sorrow and suffering and of the chord

of human sympathy and participation which responds to it from all who share that mortality. He rises indeed much higher than that and goes much deeper: he has felt a brooding cosmic sense of these things, gone into the depth of the soul which answers to them and drawn from it the inspired and inevitable language and rhythm which came down to it from above to give to this pathetic perception an immortal body. Lines like these seldom depend upon their contexts, they rise from it as if a single Himalayan peak from a range of low hills or even from a flat plain. They have to be looked at by themselves, valued for their own sake, felt in their own independent greatness. Shakespeare's lines upon sleep³ depend not at all upon the context which is indeed almost irrelevant, for he branches off into a violent and resonant description of a storm at sea which has its poetic quality, but that quality has something comparatively quite inferior, so that these few lines stand quite apart in their unsurpassable magic and beauty. What has happened is that the sudden wings of a supreme inspiration from above have swooped down upon him and abruptly lifted him for a moment to highest heights, then as abruptly dropped him and left him to his own normal resources. One can see him in the lines that follow straining these resources to try and get something equal to the greatness of this flight but failing except perhaps partly for one line only. Or take those two lines in *Hamlet*.⁴ They arise out of a rapid series of violent melodramatic events but they have a quite different ring from all that surrounds them, however powerful that may be. They come from another plane, shine with another light: the close of the sentence — “to tell my story” — which connects it with the thread of the drama, slips down in a quick incline to a lower inspiration. It is not a dramatic interest we feel when we read these lines; their appeal does not arise from the story but would be the same anywhere and in any context. We have passed from

³ *Wilt thou upon the high and giddy mast
Seal up the ship-boy's eyes, and rock his brains
In cradle of the rude imperious surge,*

⁴ *Absent thee from felicity awhile,
And in this harsh world draw thy breath in pain*

the particular to the universal, to a voice from the cosmic self, to a poignant reaction of the soul of man and not of Hamlet alone to the pain and sorrow of this world and its longing for some unknown felicity beyond. Virgil's

O passi graviora, dabit deus his quoque finem. . . .
. . . forsan et haec olim meminisse iuvabit

is only incidentally connected with the storm and wreck of the ships of Aeneas; its appeal is separate and universal and for all time; it is again the human soul that is speaking moved by a greater and deeper inspiration of cosmic feeling with the thought only as a mould into which the feeling is poured and the thinking mind only as a passive instrument. This applies to many or most of the distinctly overhead lines we meet or at least to those which may be called overhead transmissions. Even the lines that are perfect and absolute, though not from the Overhead, tend to stand out if not away from their surroundings. Long passages of high inspiration there are or short poems in which the wing-beats of some surpassing Power and Beauty gleam out amidst flockings of an equal or almost equal radiance of light. But still the absolutely absolute is rare; it is not often that the highest peaks crowd together.

As to the translations of Virgil's great line I may observe that the English translation you quote repeats the "here too" of the previous line and so rivets his high close to its context, thus emphasising unduly the idea of a local interest and maiming the universality.⁵ Virgil has put in no such close riveting, he keeps a bare connection from which he immediately slips away; his single incomparable line rises sheer and abrupt into the heights both in its thought and in its form out of the sustained Virgilian elegance of what precedes it. The psychological movement by which this happens is not at all mysterious; he speaks first of the local and particular, then in the penultimate line passes to the general — "here too as wherever there are human beings are

⁵ *Here, too, virtue has its due rewards; here, too, there are tears for misfortune and mortal sorrows touch the heart.* — H. R. Fairclough

rewards for excellence”, and then passes to the universal, to the reaction of all humanity, to all that is human and mortal in a world of suffering. In your prose translation also there are superfluities which limit and lower the significance.⁶ Virgil does not say “tears for earthly things”, “earthly” is your addition; he says nothing about “mortal fortune” which makes the whole thing quite narrow. His single word *rerum* and his single word *mortalia* admit in them all the sorrow and suffering of the world and all the affliction and misery that beset mortal creatures in this transient and unhappy world, *anityam asukham lokam imam*. The superfluous words bring in a particularising intellectual insistence which impoverishes a great thought and a great utterance. Your first hexametric version⁷ is rather poor; the second⁸ is much better and the first half is very fine; the second half is good but it is not an absolute hit. I would like to alter it to

Haunted by tears is the world and our hearts by the touch of things
mortal.

But this version has a density of colour which is absent from the bare economy and direct force Virgil manages to combine with his subtle and unusual turn of phrase. As for my own translation — “the touch of tears in mortal things” — it is intended not as an accurate and scholastic prose rendering but as a poetic equivalent. I take it from a passage in *Savitri* where the mother of Savitri is lamenting her child’s fate and contrasting the unmoved and unfeeling calm of the gods with human suffering and sympathy. I quote from memory,

We sorrow for a greatness that has passed
And feel the touch of tears in mortal things.
Even a stranger’s anguish rends my heart,
And this, O Narad, is my well-loved child.

⁶ Here too there is reward for honour, there are tears for earthly things and mortal fortunes touch the heart.

⁷ Tears are in all things and touched is our heart by the fate of the mortals.

⁸ Haunted by tears is the world; on our heart is the touch of things mortal.

In Virgil's line the two halves are not really two separate ideas and statements; they are one idea with two symmetrical limbs; the meaning and force of *mortalia tangunt* derives wholly from the *lacrimae rerum* and this, I think, ought to be brought out if we are to have an adequate poetic rendering. The three capital words, *lacrimae*, *mortalia*, *tangunt*, carry in them in an intimate connection the whole burden of the inner sense; the touch which falls upon the mind from mortal things is the touch of tears *lacrimae rerum*. I consider therefore that the touch of tears is there quite directly enough, spiritually, if not syntactically, and that my translation is perfectly justifiable.

As to the doubt you have expressed, I think there is some confusion still about the use of the word "great" as distinct from the beautiful. In poetry greatness must, no doubt, be beautiful in the wider and deeper sense of beauty to be poetry, but the beautiful is not always great. First, let me deal with the examples you give, which do not seem to me to be always of an equal quality. For instance, the lines you quote from Squire⁹ do not strike me as deserving supreme praise. There is one line "on rocks forlorn and frore" which is of a very high beauty, but the rest is lofty and eloquent poetry and suggestive of something deep but not more than that; above all, there is a general lack of the rhythm that goes home to the soul and keeps sounding there except indeed in that one line and without such a rhythm there cannot be the absolute perfection; a certain kind of perfection there may be with a lesser rhythmic appeal but I do not find it here, the pitch of sound is only that of what may be described as the highly moved intellect. In the lines from Dryden¹⁰ the second has

⁹ *And that aged Brahmapootra
Who beyond the white Himalayas
Passes many a lamasery
On rocks forlorn and frore,
A block of gaunt grey stone walls
With rows of little barred windows,
Where shrivelled monks in yellow silk
Are hidden for evermore. . . . — J. C. Squire*

¹⁰ *In liquid burnings or on dry to dwell
Is all the sad variety of hell. — Dryden*

indeed the true note but the first is only clever and forcible with that apposite, striking and energetic cleverness which abounds in the chief poets of that period and imposes their poetry on the thinking mind but usually fails to reach deeper. Of course, there can be a divine or at least a deified cleverness, but that is when the intellect after finding something brilliant transmits it to some higher power for uplifting and transfiguration. It is because that is not always done by Pope and Dryden that I once agreed with Arnold in regarding their work as a sort of half poetry; but since then my view and feeling have become more catholic and I would no longer apply that phrase,—Dryden especially has lines and passages which rise to a very high poetic peak,—but still there is something in this limitation, this predominance of the ingenious intellect which makes us understand Arnold's stricture. The second quotation from Tennyson¹¹ is eloquent and powerful, but absolute perfection seems to me an excessive praise for these lines,—at least I meant much more by it than anything we find here. There is absolute perfection of a kind, of sound and language at least, and a supreme technical excellence in his moan of doves and murmur of bees.¹² As to your next comparison, you must not expect me to enter into a comparative valuation of my own poetry¹³ with that of Keats;¹⁴ I will only say that the "substance" of these lines of Keats is of the highest kind and the expression is not easily surpassable, and even as regards the plane of their origin it is above and not below the boundary of the overhead line. The other lines you quote have their own perfection; some have the touch from above while

¹¹ Well is it that no child is born of thee.
The children born of thee are sword and fire,
Red ruin, and the breaking up of laws.—Tennyson

¹² The moan of doves in immemorial elms,
And murmuring of innumerable bees.—Tennyson

¹³ Above the reason's brilliant slender curve,
Released like radiant air dimming a moon,
White spaces of a vision without line
Or limit . . .—Sri Aurobindo

¹⁴ . . . solitary thinkings; such as dodge
Conception to the very bourne of heaven,
Then leave the naked brain.—Keats

others, it might be said, touch the Overhead from below.

But what is the point? I do not think I have ever said that all overhead poetry is superior to all that comes from other sources. I am speaking of greatness and said that greatness of substance does count and gives a general superiority; I was referring to work in the mass and not to separate lines and passages. I said, practically, that art in the sense of perfect mastery of technique, perfect expression in word and sound was not everything and greatness and beauty of the substance of the poetry entered into the reckoning. It might be said of Shakespeare that he was not predominantly an artist but rather a great creator, even though he has an art of his own, especially an art of dramatic architecture and copious ornament; but his work is far from being always perfect. In Racine, on the other hand, there is an unfailing perfection; Racine is the complete poetic artist. But if comparisons are to be made, Shakespeare's must surely be pronounced to be the greater poetry, greater in the vastness of its range, in its abundant creativeness, in its dramatic height and power, in the richness of his inspiration, in his world-view, in the peaks to which he rises and the depths which he plumbs — even though he sinks to flatnesses which Racine would have abhorred — and generally a glory of God's making which is marvellous and unique. Racine has his heights and depths and widenesses, but nothing like this; he has not in him the poetic superman, he does not touch the superhuman level of creation. But all this is mainly a matter of substance and also of height and greatness in language, not of impeccable beauty and perfection of diction and rhythm which ought to rank higher on the principle of art for art's sake.

That is one thing and for the sake of clarity it must be seen by itself in separation from the other points I put forward. The comparison of passages each perfectly beautiful in itself but different in their kind and source of inspiration is a different matter. Here it is a question of the perfection of the poetry, not of its greatness. In the valuation of whole poems Shelley's *Skylark* may be described as a greater poem than his brief and exquisite lyric — "I can give not what men call love" — because of its

greater range and power and constant flow of unsurpassable music, but it is not more perfect; if we take separate lines and passages, the stanza "We look before and after" is not superior in perfection or absoluteness to that in the other poem "The desire of the moth for the star", even though it strikes a deeper note and may be said to have a richer substance. The absolute is the absolute and the perfect perfect, whatever difference there may be in the origin of the inspiration; but from the point of view of greatness one perfection may be said to be greater, though not more perfect than another. I would myself say that Wordsworth's line about Newton is greater, though not more perfect than many of those which you have put side by side with it. And this I say on the same principle as the comparison between Shakespeare and Racine: according to the principle of art for art's sake Racine ought to be pronounced a poet superior to Shakespeare because of his consistent and impeccable flawlessness of word and rhythm, but on the contrary Shakespeare is universally considered greater, standing among the few who are supreme. Theocritus is always perfect in what he writes, but he cannot be ranked with Aeschylus and Sophocles. Why not, if art is the only thing? Obviously, because what the others write has an ampler range, a much more considerable height, breadth, depth, largeness. There are some who say that great and long poems have no true value and are mainly composed of padding and baggage and all that matters are the few perfect lines and passages which shine like jewels among a mass of inferior half-worked ore. In that case, the "great" poets ought to be debunked and the world's poetic production valued only for a few lyrics, rare superb passages and scattered lines that we can rescue from the laborious mass production of the artificers of word, sound and language.

I come now to the question of the Overmind and whether there is anything in it superior or more perfectly perfect, more absolutely absolute than in the lower planes. If it is true that one can get the same absolute fully on any plane and from any kind of inspiration, whether in poetry or other expressions of the One, then it would seem to be quite useless and superfluous

for any human being to labour to rise above mind to Overmind or Supermind and try to bring them down upon earth; the idea of transformation would become absurd since it would be possible to have the "form" perfect and absolute anywhere and by a purely earthly means, a purely earthly force. I am reminded of Ramana Maharshi's logical objection to my idea of the descent of the Divine into us or into the world on the ground, as he put it, that "the Divine is here, from where is He to descend?" My answer is that obviously the Divine is here, although very much concealed; but He is here in essence and He has not chosen to manifest all His powers or His full power in Matter, in Life, in Mind; He has not even made them fit by themselves for some future manifestation of all that, whereas on higher planes there is already that manifestation and by a descent from them the full manifestation can be brought here. All the planes have their own power, beauty, some kind of perfection realised even among their imperfections; God is everywhere in some power of Himself though not everywhere in His full power, and if His face does not appear, the rays and glories from it do fall upon things and beings through the veil and bring something of what we call perfect and absolute. And yet perhaps there may be a more perfect perfection, not in the same kind but in a greater kind, a more utter revelation of the absolute. Ancient thought speaks of something that is highest beyond the highest, *parātparam*; there is a supreme beyond what is for us or seems to us supreme. As Life brings in something that is greater than Matter, as Mind brings in something that is greater than Life, so Overmind brings in something that is greater than Mind, and Supermind something that is greater than Overmind,—greater, superior not only in the essential character of the planes, but in all respects, in all parts and details, and consequently in all its creation.

But you may say each plane and its creations are beautiful in themselves and have their own perfection and there is no superiority of one to the other. What can be more perfect, greater or more beautiful than the glories and beauties of Matter, the golden splendours of the sun, the perpetual charm of the moon,

the beauty and fragrance of the rose or the beauty of the lotus, the yellow mane of the Ganges or the blue waters of the Jamuna, forests and mountains, and the leap of the waterfall, the shimmering silence of the lake, the sapphire hue and mighty roll of the ocean and all the wonder and marvel that there is on the earth and in the vastness of the material universe? These things are perfect and absolute and there can be nothing more perfect or more greatly absolute. Life and mind cannot surpass them; they are enough in themselves and to themselves: Brindavan would have been perfect even if Krishna had never trod there. It is the same with Life: the lion in its majesty and strength, the tiger in its splendid and formidable energy, the antelope in its grace and swiftness, the bird of paradise, the peacock with its plumes, the birds with their calls and their voices of song, have all the perfection that Life can create and thinking man cannot better that; he is inferior to the animals in their own qualities, superior only in his mind, his thought, his power of reflection and creation: but his thought does not make him stronger than the lion and the tiger or swifter than the antelope, more splendid to the sight than the bird of paradise or the human beauty of the most beautiful man and woman superior to the beauty of the animal in its own kind and perfect form. Here too there is a perfection and absoluteness which cannot be surpassed by any superior greatness of nature. Mind also has its own types of perfection and its own absolutes. What intrusion of Overmind or Supermind could produce philosophies more perfect in themselves than the systems of Shankara or Plato or Plotinus or Spinoza or Hegel, poetry superior to Homer's, Shakespeare's, Dante's or Valmiki's, music more superb than the music of Beethoven or Bach, sculpture greater than the statues of Phidias and Michael Angelo, architecture more utterly beautiful than the Taj Mahal, the Parthenon or Borobudur or St. Peter's or of the great Gothic cathedrals? The same may be said of the crafts of ancient Greece and Japan in the Middle Ages or structural feats like the Pyramids or engineering feats like the Dnieper Dam or inventions and manufactures like the great modern steamships and the motor car. The mind of man may not

be equally satisfied with life in general or with its own dealings with life, it may find all that very imperfect, and here perhaps it may be conceded that the intrusion of a higher principle from above might have a chance of doing something better: but here too there are sectional perfections, each complete and sufficient for its purpose, each perfectly and absolutely organised in its own type, the termite society for instance, the satisfying structure of ant societies or the organised life of the beehive. The higher animals have been less remarkably successful than these insects, though perhaps a crows' parliament might pass a resolution that the life of the rookery was one of the most admirable things in the universe. Greek societies like the Spartan evidently considered themselves perfect and absolute in their own type and the Japanese structure of society and the rounding off of its culture and institutions were remarkable in their pattern of perfect organisation. There can be always variations in kind, new types, a progress in variation, but progress in itself towards a greater perfection or towards some absolute is an idea which has been long indulged in but has recently been strongly denied and at least beyond a certain point seems to have been denied by fact and event. Evolution there may be, but it only creates new forms, brings in new principles of consciousness, new ingenuities of creation but not a more perfect perfection. In the old Hebrew scriptures it is declared that God created everything from the first, each thing in its own type, and looked on his own creation and saw that it was good. If we conclude that Overmind or Supermind do not exist or, existing, cannot descend into mind, life and body or act upon them or, descending and acting, cannot bring in a greater or more absolute perfection into anything man has done, we should, with the modification that God has taken many ages and not six days to do his work, be reduced to something like this notion, at any rate in principle.

It is evident that there is something wrong and unsatisfying in such a conclusion. Evolution has not been merely something material, only a creation of new forms of Matter, new species of inanimate objects or animate creatures as physical science has at first seen it: it has been an evolution of consciousness,

a manifestation of it out of its involution and in that a constant progress towards something greater, higher, fuller, more complete, ever increasing in its range and capacity, therefore to a greater and greater perfection and perhaps finally to an absolute of consciousness which has yet to come, an absolute of its truth, an absolute of its dynamic power. The mental consciousness of man is greater in its perfection, more progressive towards the absolute than the consciousness of the animal, and the consciousness of the overman, if I may so call him, must very evidently be still more perfect, while the consciousness of the superman may be absolute. No doubt, the instinct of the animal is superior to that of man and we may say that it is perfect and absolute within its limited range and in its own type. Man's consciousness has an infinitely greater range and is more capable in the large, though less automatically perfect in the details of its work, more laborious in its creation of perfection: the Overmind when it comes will decrease whatever deficiencies there are in human intelligence and the Supermind will remove them altogether; they will replace the perfection of instinct by the more perfect perfection of intuition and what is higher than intuition and thus replace the automatism of the animal by the conscious and self-possessed automatic action of a more luminous gnosis and finally, of an integral truth-consciousness. It is after all the greater consciousness that comes in with mind that enables us to develop the idea of values and this idea of the quality of certain values which seem to us perfect and absolute is a viewpoint which has its validity but must be completed by others if our perception of things is to be entire. No single and separate idea of the mind can be entirely true by itself, it has to complete itself by others which seem to differ from it, even others which seem logically to contradict it, but in reality only enlarge its viewpoints and put its idea in its proper place. It is quite true that the beauty of material things is perfect in itself and you may say that the descent of Overmind cannot add to the glory of the sun or the beauty of the rose. But in the first place I must point out that the rose as it is is something evolved from the dog-rose or the wild rose and is largely a creation of man

whose mind is still creating further developments of this type of beauty. Moreover, it is to the mind of man that these things are beautiful, to his consciousness as evolution has developed it, in the values that mind has given to them, to his perceptive and sometimes his creative aesthetics: Overmind, I have pointed out, has a greater aesthetics and, when it sees objects, sees in them what the mind cannot see, so that the value it gives to them can be greater than any value that the mind can give. That is true of its perception, it may be true also of its creation, its creation of beauty, its creation of perfection, its expression of the power of the absolute.

This is in principle the answer to the objection you made, but pragmatically the objection may still be valid; for what has been done by any overhead intervention may not amount for the present to anything more than the occasional irruption of a line or a passage or at most of a new still imperfectly developed kind or manner of poetry which may have larger contents and a higher or richer suggestion but is not intrinsically superior in the essential elements of poetry, word and rhythm and cannot be confidently said to bring in a more perfect perfection or a more utter absolute. Perhaps it does sometimes, but not so amply or with such a complete and forcible power as to make it recognisable by all. But that may be because it is only an intervention in mind that it has made, a touch, a partial influence, at most a slight infiltration: there has been no general or massive descent or, if there has been any such descent in one or two minds, it has been general and not yet completely organised or applied in every direction; there has been no absolute transformation of the whole being, whole consciousness and whole nature. You say that if the Overmind has a superior consciousness and a greater aesthetics it must also bring in a greater form. That would be true on the overmind level itself: if there were an overmind language created by the Overmind itself and used by overmind beings not subject to the limitations of the mental principle or the turbidities of the life principle or the opposition of the inertia of Matter, the half light of ignorance and the dark environing wall of the Inconscient, then indeed all things might be transmuted

and among the rest there might be a more perfect and absolute poetry, perfect and absolute not only in snatches and within boundaries but always and in numberless kinds and in the whole: for that is the nature of Overmind, it is a cosmic consciousness with a global perception and action tending to carry everything to its extreme possibility; the only thing lacking in its creation might be a complete harmonisation of all possibles, for which the intervention of the highest Truth-Consciousness, the Supermind, would be indispensable. But at present the intervention of Overmind has to take mind, life and matter as its medium and field, work under their dominant conditions, accept their fundamental law and method; its own can enter in only initially or partially and under the obstacle of a prevailing mental and vital mixture. Intuition entering into the human mind undergoes a change; it becomes what we may call the mental intuition or the vital intuition or the intuition working unconsciously in physical things: sometimes it may work with a certain perfection and absoluteness, but ordinarily it is at once coated in mind or life with the mental or vital substance into which it is received and gets limited, deflected or misinterpreted by the mind or the life; it becomes a half intuition or a false intuition and its light and power gives indeed a greater force to human knowledge and will but also to human error. Life and mind intervening in Matter have been able only to vitalise or mentalise small sections of it, to produce and develop living bodies or thinking lives and bodies but they have not been able to make a complete or general transformation of the ignorance of life, of the inertia and unconsciousness of Matter and large parts of the minds, lives and forms they occupy remain subconscious or unconscious or are still ignorant, like the human mind itself or driven by subconscious forces. Overmind will certainly, if it descends, go further in that direction, effect a greater transformation of life and bodily function as well as mind but the integral transformation is not likely to be in its power; for it is not in itself the supreme consciousness and does not carry in it the supreme force: although different from mind in the principle and methods of its action, it is only a highest kind of mind with the pure intuition, illumination

and higher thought as its subordinates and intermediaries; it is an instrument of cosmic possibilities and not the master. It is not the supreme Truth-Consciousness; it is only an intermediary light and power.

As regards poetry, the Overmind has to use a language which has been made by mind, not by itself, and therefore fully capable of receiving and expressing its greater light and greater truth, its extraordinary powers, its forms of greatness, perfection and beauty. It can only strain and intensify this medium as much as possible for its own uses, but not change its fundamental or characteristically mental law and method; it has to observe them and do what it can to heighten, deepen and enlarge. Perhaps what Mallarmé and other poets were or are trying to do was some fundamental transformation of that kind, but that incurs the danger of being profoundly and even unfathomably obscure or beautifully and splendidly unintelligible. There is here another point of view which it may be useful to elaborate. Poets are men of genius whose consciousness has in some way or another attained to a higher dynamis of conception and expression than ordinary men can hope to have,—though ordinary men often have a good try for it, with the result that they sometimes show a talent for verse and an effective language which imposes itself for a time but is not durable. I have said that genius is the result of an intervention or influence from a higher consciousness than the ordinary human mental, a greater light, a greater force; even an ordinary man can have strokes of genius resulting from such an intervention but it is only in a few that the rare phenomenon occurs of a part of the consciousness being moulded into a habitual medium of expression of its greater light and force. But the intervention of this higher consciousness may take different forms. It may bring in, not the higher consciousness itself but a substitute for it, an uplifted movement of mind which gives a reflection of the character and qualities of the overhead movement. There is a substitute for the expression of the Higher Thought, the Illumination, the pure Intuition giving great or brilliant results, but these cannot be classed as the very body of the higher consciousness. So also there can be a mixed move-

ment, a movement of mind in its full force with flashes from the overhead or even a light sustained for some time. Finally, there can be the thing itself in rare descents, but usually these are not sustained for a long time though they may influence all around and produce long stretches of a high utterance. All this we can see in poetry but it is not easy for the ordinary mind to make these distinctions or even to feel the thing and more difficult still to understand it with an exact intelligence. One must have oneself lived in the light or have had flashes of it in oneself in order to recognise it when it manifests outside us. It is easy to make mistakes of appreciation: it is quite common to miss altogether the tinge of the superior light even while one sees it or to think and say only, "Ah, yes, this is very great poetry."

There are other questions that can arise, objections that can be raised against our admission of a complete equality between the best of all kinds in poetry. First of all, is it a fact that all kinds of poetry actually stand on an equal level or are potentially capable by intensity in their own kind, of such a divine equality? Satirical poetry, for instance, has often been considered as inferior in essential quality to the epic or other higher kinds of creation. Can the best lines of Juvenal, for instance, the line about the *graeculus esuriens* be the equal of Virgil's *O passi graviora*, or his *sunt lacrimae rerum*? Can Pope's attack on Addison, impeccable in expression and unsurpassable in its poignancy of satiric point and force and its still more poignant conclusion

Who would not laugh, if such a man there be?
Who would not weep if Atticus were he?

be put on a same poetical level with the great lines of Shakespeare which I have admitted as having the overmind inspiration? The question is complicated by the fact that some lines or passages of what is classed as satirical verse are not strictly satirical but have the tone of a more elevated kind of poetry and rise to a very high level of poetic beauty,—for instance Dryden's descriptions of Absalom and Achitophel as opposed to his brilliant assault on the second duke of Buckingham. Or can we say that apart

from this question of satire we can equal together the best from poetry of a lighter kind with that which has a high seriousness or intention, for instance the mock epic with the epic? There are critics now who are in ecstasies over Pope's *Rape of the Lock* and put it on the very highest level, but we could hardly reconcile ourselves to classing any lines from it with a supreme line from Homer or Milton. Or can the perfect force of Lucan's line

Victrix causa deis placuit sed victa Catoni

which has made it immortal induce us to rank it on a level of equality with the greater lines of Virgil? We may escape from this difficulty of our own logic by pointing out that when we speak of perfection we mean perfection of something essential for poetic beauty and not only perfection of speech and verse however excellent and consummate in its own inferior kind. Or we may say that we are speaking not only of perfection but of a kind of perfection that has something of the absolute. But then we may be taxed with throwing overboard our own first principle and ranking poetry according to the greatness or beauty of its substance, its intention and its elevation and not solely on its artistic completeness of language and rhythm in its own kind.

We have then to abandon any thorough-going acceptance of the art for art's sake standpoint and admit that our proposition of the equality of absolute perfection of different kinds, different inspirations of poetry applies only to all that has some quintessence of highest poetry in it. An absolutely accomplished speech and metrical movement, a sovereign technique, are not enough; we are thinking of a certain pitch of flight and not only of its faultless agility and grace. Overmind or overhead poetry must always have in its very nature that essential quality, although owing to the conditions and circumstances of its intervention, the limitations of its action, it can only sometimes have it in any supreme fullness or absoluteness. It can open poetry to the expression of new ranges of vision, experience and feeling, especially the spiritual and the higher mystic, with all their inexhaustible possibilities, which a more mental inspiration could not so fully and powerfully see and express except

in moments when something of the overhead power came to its succour; it can bring in new rhythms and a new intensity of language: but so long as it is merely an intervention in mind, we cannot confidently claim more for it. At the same time if we look carefully and subtly at things we may see that the greatest lines or passages in the world's literature have the overmind touch or power and that they bring with them an atmosphere, a profound or an extraordinary light, an amplitude of wing which, if the Overmind would not only intervene but descend, seize wholly and transform, would be the first glimpses of a poetry, higher, larger, deeper and more consistently absolute than any which the human past has been able to give us. An evolutionary ascent of all the activities of mind and life is not impossible.

20 November 1946

Section Two

The Poetry of the Spirit

Psychic, Mystic and Spiritual Poetry

Inspiration from the Illumined Mind and from the Psychic

Your question — “What distinguishes, in manner and quality, a pure inspiration from the illumined mind from that which has the psychic for its origin?” — reads like a poser in an examination paper. Even if I could give a satisfactory definition, Euclidean rigid, I don’t know that it would be of much use or would really help you to distinguish between the two kinds: these things have to be felt and perceived by experience. I would prefer to give examples. I suppose it would not be easy to find a more perfect example of psychic inspiration in English literature than Shelley’s well-known lines,

I can give not what men call love,
But wilt thou accept not
The worship the heart lifts above
And the Heavens reject not,—
The desire of the moth for the star,
Of the night for the morrow,
The devotion to something afar
From the sphere of our sorrow?

— you will find there the true rhythm, expression and substance of poetry full of the psychic influence. For full examples of the poetry which comes from the illumined mind purely and simply and that in which the psychic and the spiritual illumination meet together, one has to go to poetry that tries to express a spiritual experience. You have yourself written things which can illustrate the difference. The lines

The longing of ecstatic tears
From infinite to infinite

will do very well as an instance of the pure illumination, for here what would otherwise be a description of a spiritual heart-experience, psychic therefore in its origin, is lifted up to a quite different spiritual level and expressed with the vision and language sufficiently characteristic of a spiritual-mental illumination. In another passage there is this illumination but it is captured and dominated by the inner heart and by the psychic thrill, a certain utterance of the yearning and push of psychic love for the Divine incarnate.

If Thou desirest my weak self to outgrow
Its mortal longings, lean down from above,
Temper the unborn light no thought can trace,
Suffuse my mood with a familiar glow!
For 'tis with mouth of clay I supplicate.
Speak to me heart to heart words intimate,
And all Thy formless glory turn to love
And mould Thy love into a human face.

July 1931

Psychic and Overhead Inspiration

There is too the psychic source of inspiration which can give a beautiful spiritual poetry. The psychic has two aspects — there is the soul principle itself which contains all soul possibilities and there is our psychic personality which represents whatever soul-power is developed from life to life or put forward for action in our present life-formation. The psychic being usually expresses itself through its instruments, mental, vital and physical; it tries to put as much of its own stamp on them as possible. But it can seldom put on them the full psychic stamp — unless it comes fully out from its rather secluded and overshadowed position and takes into its hands the direct government of the nature. It can then receive and express all spiritual realisations in its own way and manner. For the tone of the psychic is different from that of the overhead planes, — it has less of greatness, power, wideness, more of a smaller sweetness, delicate beauty; there is an intense beauty of emotion, a fine subtlety of true perception,

an intimate language. The expression “sweetness and light” can very well be applied to the psychic as the kernel of its nature. The spiritual plane, when it takes up these things, gives them a wider utterance, a greater splendour of light, a stronger sweetness, a breath of powerful authority, strength and space.

20 October 1936

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To get the psychic being to emerge is not easy, though it is a very necessary thing for sadhana and when it does it is not certain that it will switch on to the above-head planes at once. But obviously anyone who could psychicise his poetry would get a unique place among the poets.

20 October 1936

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I don't suppose the emergence of the psychic would interfere at all with the inspiration from above. It would be more likely to help it by making the connection with these planes more direct and conscious. . . . The direct psychic touch is not frequent in poetry. It breaks in sometimes — more often there is only a tinge here and there.

20 October 1936

Psychic and Esoteric Poetry

These poems are quite new in manner — simple and precise and penetrating.¹ What you describe is the psychic fire, *agni pāvaka*, which burns in the deeper heart and from there is lighted in the mind, the vital and the physical body. In the mind Agni creates a light of intuitive perception and discrimination which sees at once what is the true vision or idea and the wrong vision or idea, the true feeling and the wrong feeling, the true movement and the wrong movement. In the vital he is kindled as a fire of right emotion and a kind of intuitive feeling, a sort of tact which makes for the right impulse, the right action, the right sense of things and reaction to things. In the body he initiates a similar

¹ Certain poems in Bengali by Dilip Kumar Roy: Agni Disha, Agni Bedan, etc. — Ed.

but still more automatic correct response to the things of physical life, sensation, bodily experience. Usually it is the psychic light in the mind that is first lit of the three, but not always—for sometimes it is the psycho-vital flame that takes precedence.

In ordinary life also there is no doubt an action of the psychic—without it man would be only a thinking and planning animal. But its action there is very much veiled, needing always the mental or vital to express it, usually mixed and not dominant, not unerring therefore; it does often the right thing in the wrong way, is moved by the right feeling but errs as to the application, person, place, circumstance. The psychic, except in a few extraordinary natures, does not get its full chance in the outer consciousness; it needs some kind of Yoga or sadhana to come by its own and it is as it emerges more and more “in front” that it gets clear of the mixture. That is to say, its presence becomes directly felt, not only behind and supporting, but filling the frontal consciousness and no longer dependent on or dominated by its instruments—mind, vital and body, but dominating them and moulding them into luminosity and teaching them their own true action.

It is not easy to say whether the poems are esoteric; for these words “esoteric” and “exoteric” are rather ill-defined in their significance. One understands the distinction between exoteric and esoteric religion—that is to say, on one side, creed, dogma, mental faith, religious worship and ceremony, religious and moral practice and discipline, on the other an inner seeking piercing beyond the creed and dogma and ceremony or finding their hidden meaning, living deeply within in spiritual and mystic experience. But how shall we define an esoteric poetry? Perhaps what deals in an occult way with the occult may be called esoteric—e.g., the *Bird of Fire*, *Trance*, etc. *The Two Moons*² is, it is obvious, desperately esoteric. But I don’t know whether an intimate spiritual experience simply and limpidly told without veil or recondite image can be called esoteric—for the word usually brings the sense of something kept back

² Now called Moon of Two Hemispheres.—Ed.

from the ordinary eye, hidden, occult. Is *Nirvana* for instance an esoteric poem? There is no veil or symbol there—it tries to state the experience as precisely and overtly as possible. The experience of the psychic fire and psychic discrimination is an intimate spiritual experience, but it is direct and simple like all psychic things. The poem which expresses it may easily be something deeply inward, esoteric in that sense, but simple, unveiled and clear, not esoteric in the more usual sense. I rather think, however, the term "esoteric poem" is a misnomer and some other phraseology would be more accurate.

30 April 1935

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I don't think your poetry is more "esoteric" than in the earlier poems—for esoteric means something that only the initiated in the mysteries can understand; to be concerned with spiritual aspiration does not make a poem esoteric, such poems can be perfectly well understood by those who are not mystics or Yogis. Yours are certainly not more esoteric or Yogic than Nishikanta's with his frequent incursions into the occult and if Tagore could be knocked over by the Rajahansa poem, that shows that Yogic poetry can be appreciated by him and by others. I take it that it is a transition to a new style of writing that meets with so much opposition and these are only excuses for the refusal of the mind to appreciate what is new. On the other hand those who have not the prejudice have not the difficulty. With time the obstacle will disappear.

24 July 1936

Mystic Poetry

Mystic poetry does not mean anything exactly or apparently; it means things suggestively and reconditely,—things that are not known and classified by the intellect.

What you are asking is to reduce what is behind to intellectual terms, which is to make it something quite different from itself.

3 December 1936

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Mystic poetry has a perfectly concrete meaning, much more than intellectual poetry which is much more abstract. The nature of the intellect is abstraction; spirituality and mysticism deal with the concrete by their very nature.

8 December 1936

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The difficulty most people feel is that they expect an intellectual meaning quite clear on the surface and through that they get at the *bhāva* of the deeper significance (if there is any)—but in mystic poetry, often though not always, one has to catch the *bhāva* of the deeper significance directly through the figures and by that arrive at the form of the intellectual meaning or else share in the inner vision, whichever may be the thing to be conveyed by the poem.

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Mystic poetry can be written from any plane, provided the writer gets an inspiration from the inner consciousness whether mind, vital or subtle physical.

20 October 1936

The Aim of the Mystic Poet

There are truths and there are transcriptions of truths; the transcriptions may be accurate or may be free and imaginative. The truth behind a poetic creation is there on some plane or other, supraphysical generally—and from there the suggestion of the image too originally comes; even the whole transcription itself can be contributed from there, but ordinarily it is the mind's faculty of imagination which gives it form and body. Poetic imagination is very usually satisfied with beauty of idea and image only and the aesthetic pleasure of it, but there is something behind it which supplies the Truth in its images, and to get the transcription also direct from that something or somewhere behind should be the aim of mystic or spiritual poetry. When Shelley made the spirits of Nature speak, he was using his imagination, but there was something behind in him which felt and knew and believed in the truth of the thing he was expressing—

he felt that there were forms more real than living man behind the veil. But his method of presentation was intellectual and imaginative, so one misses the full life in these impalpable figures. To get a more intimate and spiritually concrete presentation should be the aim of the mystic poet.

16 November 1933

Symbolism and Allegory

There is a considerable difference between symbolism and allegory; they are not at all the same thing. Allegory comes in when a quality or other abstract thing is personalised and the allegory proper should be something carefully stylised and deliberately sterilised of the full aspect of embodied life, so that the essential meaning or idea may come out with sufficient precision and force of clarity. One can find this method in the old mystery plays and it is a kind of art that has its value. Allegory is an intellectual form; one is not expected to believe in the personalisation of the abstract quality, it is only an artistic device. When in an allegory as in Spenser's *Faerie Queene* the personalisation, the embodiment takes first place and absorbs the major part of the mind's interest, the true style and principle of this art have been abandoned. The allegorical purpose here becomes a submerged strain and is really of secondary importance, our search for it a by-play of the mind; we read for the beauty and interest of the figures and movements presented to us, not for this submerged significance. An allegory must be intellectually precise and clear in its representative figures as well as in their basis, however much adorned with imagery and personal expression; otherwise it misses its purpose. A symbol expresses on the contrary not the play of abstract things or ideas put into imaged form, but a living truth or inward vision or experience of things, so inward, so subtle, so little belonging to the domain of intellectual abstraction and precision that it cannot be brought out except through symbolic images — the more these images have a living truth of their own which corresponds intimately to the living truth they symbolise, suggests the very vibration of the experience itself, the greater becomes the art of the symbolic

expression. When the symbol is a representative sign or figure and nothing more, then the symbolic approaches nearer to an intellectual method, though even then it is not the same thing as allegory. In mystic poetry the symbol ought to be as much as possible the natural body of the inner truth or vision, itself an intimate part of the experience.

16–18 November 1933

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Lord, what an incorrigible mentaliser and allegorist you are! If the bird were either consciousness or the psychic or light, it would be an allegory and all the mystic beauty would be gone. A living symbol and a mental allegorical symbol are not the same thing. You can't put a label on the Bird of Marvel any more than on the Bird of Fire or any other of the fauna or flora or population of the mystic kingdoms. They can be described, but to label them destroys their life and makes them only stuffed specimens in an allegorical museum. Mystic symbols are living things, not abstractions. Why insist on killing them? Jyoti has described the Bird and told you all that is necessary about him — the rest you have to feel and live inside, not dissect and put the fragments into neatly arranged drawers.

8 August 1936

Symbolic Poetry and Mystic Poetry

I suppose the poem you sent me might be described as the poetic rendering of a symbolic vision — it is not a mystic poem. A poem can no doubt be symbolic and mystic at the same time. For instance Nishikanta's English poem of the vision of the Lion-flame and the Deer-flame, beauty and power, was symbolic and mystic at once. It is when the thing seen is spiritually lived and has an independent vivid reality of its own which exceeds any conceptual significance it may have on the surface that it is mystic. Symbols may be of various kinds; there are those that are concealing images capable of intellectual interpretation but still different from either symbolic or allegorical figures — and there are those that have a more intimate life of their own and are not conceptual so much as occultly vital in their significance; there

are still others that need a psychic or spiritual or at least an inner and intuitive insight to identify oneself fully with their meaning. In a poem which uses conceptual symbols the mind is more active and the reader wants to know what it means to the mind; but as minds differ, the poet may attach one meaning to it and the reader may find another, if the image used is at all an enigmatic one, not mentally clear and precise. In the more deeply symbolist — still more in the mystic — poem the mind is submerged in the vividness of the reality and any mental explanation falls far short of what is felt and lived in the deeper vital or psychic response. This is what Housman in his book tries to explain with regard to Blake's poetry, though he seems to me to miss altogether the real nature of the response. It is not the mere sensation to which what he calls pure poetry appeals but to a deeper inner life or life-soul within us which has profounder depths than the thinking mind and responds with a certain kind of soul-excitement or ecstasy — the physical vibrations on which he lays stress are merely a very outward result of this sudden stir within the occult folds of the being. Mystic poetry can strike still deeper — it can stir the inmost and subtlest recesses of the life-soul and the secret inner mind at the same time; it can even, if it is of the right kind, go beyond these also to the pure inmost psyche.

Some Mystic Symbols

If you expect matter of fact verisimilitude from N. or a scientific ornithologically accurate swan, you are knocking at the wrong door. But I don't see exactly the point of your objection. The lake [*in a poem*] is not a lake but a symbol; the swan is not a swan but a symbol. You can't expect the lake merely to ripple and do nothing else or the swan simply to swim and eat and do nothing else. It is as much a symbol as the Bird of Fire or the Bird of the Vedic poet who faced the guardians of the Soma and brought the Soma to Indra (or was it to a Rishi? I have forgotten) — perhaps carrying a pot or several pots in his claws and beak!! for I don't know how else he could have done it. How is he to use his symbol if you do not make allowances

for a miraculous Swan? If the swan does nothing but what an ordinary swan does, it ceases to be a symbol and becomes only a metaphor. The animals of these symbols belong not to earth but to Wonderland.

13 March 1936

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The objection that stars do not get নত stands only if the poem describes objective phenomena or aims at using purely objective images. But if the vision behind the poem is subjective, the objection holds no longer. The mystic subjective vision admits a consciousness in physical things and gives them a subtle physical life which is not that of the material existence. If a consciousness is felt in the stars and if that consciousness expresses itself in subtle physical images to the vision of the poet, there can be no impossibility of a star being নত আপনহারা — such expressions attribute a mystical life to the stars and can appropriately express this in mystic images. I agree with you about the fineness of the line.

27 May 1936

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Surely the image of a “last star of the night” is not so difficult to understand. It is not a physical star obviously. It is a light in the night and the night is not physical. There is no variation.

Star is a light in the night, I suppose — night is the night of ignorance here, very evidently — so a star is an illumination of the ignorance which is very different from the illumination of dawn and must disappear in the dawn. That is common sense, it seems to me. I am not aware that I have set up “deer” as a symbol of beauty. It was Nishikanta who did so in his fable of the deer and the lion. Every poet can use symbols in his own way, he is not bound by any fixed mathematics of symbolism.

26 January 1937

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A symbol must always convey a sense of reality to the feeling (not the intellect), but here (if it has the meaning I give it) it is obviously only a metaphorical figure for a ray of Light, Consciousness etc.

29 December 1936

Some Problems in Writing Mystic Poetry

This is the real stumbling-block of mystic poetry and specially mystic poetry of this kind. The mystic feels real and present, even ever-present to his experience, intimate to his being, truths which to the ordinary reader are intellectual abstractions or metaphysical speculations. He is writing of experiences that are foreign to the ordinary mentality. Either they are unintelligible to it and in meeting them it flounders about as in an obscure abyss or it takes them as poetic fancies expressed in intellectually devised images. He uses words and images in order to convey to the mind some perception, some figure of that which is beyond thought. To the mystic there is no such thing as an abstraction. Everything which to the intellectual mind is abstract has a concreteness, substantiality which is more real than the sensible form of an object or of a physical event. To him, consciousness is the very stuff of existence and he can feel it everywhere enveloping and penetrating the stone as much as man or the animal. A movement, a flow of consciousness is not to him an image but a fact. What is to be done under these circumstances? The mystical poet can only describe what he has felt, seen in himself or others or in the world just as he has felt or seen it or experienced through exact vision, close contact or identity and leave it to the general reader to understand or not understand or misunderstand according to his capacity. A new kind of poetry demands a new mentality in the recipient as well as in the writer.

Another question is the place of philosophy in poetry or whether it has any place at all. Some romanticists seem to believe that the poet has no right to think at all, only to see and feel. I hold that philosophy has its place and can even take a leading place along with psychological experience as it does in the Gita. All depends on how it is done, whether it is a dry or a living philosophy, an arid intellectual statement or the expression not only of the living truth of thought but of something of its beauty, its light or its power.

The theory which discourages the poet from thinking or at

least from thinking for the sake of the thought proceeds from an extreme romanticist temper; it reaches its acme on one side in the question of the surrealist, "Why do you want poetry to mean anything?" and on the other in Housman's exaltation of pure poetry which he describes paradoxically as a sort of sublime nonsense which does not appeal at all to the mental intelligence but knocks at the solar plexus and awakes a vital and physical rather than intellectual sensation and response. It is of course not that really but a vividness of imagination and feeling which disregards the mind's positive view of things and its logical sequences; the centre or centres it knocks at are not the brain-mind, not even the poetic intelligence but the subtle physical, the nervous, the vital or the psychic centre. The poem he quotes from Blake is certainly not nonsense, but it has no positive and exact meaning for the intellect or the surface mind; it expresses certain things that are true and real, not nonsense but a deeper sense which we feel powerfully with a great stirring of some inner emotion, but any attempt at exact intellectual statement of them sterilises their sense and spoils their appeal. This is not the method of the highest spiritual poetry. Its expression aims at a certain force, directness and spiritual clarity and reality. When it is not understood, it is because the truths it expresses are unfamiliar to the ordinary mind or belong to an untrodden domain or domains or enter into a field of occult experience; it is not because there is any attempt at a dark or vague profundity or at an escape from thought. The thinking is not intellectual but intuitive or more than intuitive, always expressing a vision, a spiritual contact or a knowledge which has come by entering into the thing itself, by identity.

It may be noted that the greater romantic poets did not shun thought; they thought abundantly, almost endlessly. They have their characteristic view of life, something that one might call their philosophy, their world-view, and they express it. Keats was the most romantic of poets, but he could write "To philosophise I dare not yet"; he did not write "I am too much of a poet to philosophise." To philosophise he regarded evidently as mounting on the admiral's flag-ship and flying an almost royal banner.

Spiritual philosophic poetry is different; it expresses or tries to express a total and many-sided vision and experience of all the planes of being and their action upon each other. Whatever language, whatever terms are necessary to convey this truth of vision and experience it uses without scruple, not admitting any mental rule of what is or is not poetic. It does not hesitate to employ terms which might be considered as technical when these can be turned to express something direct, vivid and powerful. That need not be an introduction of technical jargon, that is to say, I suppose, special and artificial language, expressing in this case only abstract ideas and generalities without any living truth or reality in them. Such jargon cannot make good literature, much less good poetry. But there is a "poeticism" which establishes a sanitary cordon against words and ideas which it considers as prosaic but which properly used can strengthen poetry and extend its range. That limitation I do not admit as legitimate.

I am justifying a poet's right to think as well as to see and feel, his right to "dare to philosophise". I agree with the modernists in their revolt against the romanticist's insistence on emotionalism and his objection to thinking and philosophical reflection in poetry. But the modernist went too far in his revolt. In trying to avoid what I may call poeticism he ceased to be poetic; wishing to escape from rhetorical writing, rhetorical pretension to greatness and beauty of style, he threw out true poetic greatness and beauty, turned from a deliberately poetic style to a colloquial tone and even to very flat writing; especially he turned away from poetic rhythm to a prose or half-prose rhythm or to no rhythm at all. Also he has weighed too much on thought and has lost the habit of intuitive sight; by turning emotion out of its intimate chamber in the house of Poetry, he has had to bring in to relieve the dryness of much of his thought, too much exaggeration of the lower vital and sensational reactions untransformed or else transformed only by exaggeration. Nevertheless he has perhaps restored to the poet the freedom to think as well as to adopt a certain straightforwardness and directness of style.

Now I come to the law prohibiting repetition. This rule aims at a certain kind of intellectual elegance which comes into poetry when the poetic intelligence and the call for a refined and classical taste begin to predominate. It regards poetry as a cultural entertainment and amusement of the highly civilised mind; it interests by a faultless art of words, a constant and ingenious invention, a sustained novelty of ideas, incidents, word and phrase. An unfailing variety or the outward appearance of it is one of the elegances of this art. But all poetry is not of this kind; its rule does not apply to poets like Homer or Valmiki or other early writers. The Veda might almost be described as a mass of repetitions; so might the work of Vaishnava poets and the poetic literature of devotion generally in India. Arnold has noted this distinction when speaking of Homer; he mentioned especially that there is nothing objectionable in the close repetition of the same word in the Homeric way of writing. In many things Homer seems to make a point of repeating himself. He has stock descriptions, epithets always reiterated, lines even which are constantly repeated again and again when the same incident returns in his narrative, e.g. the line,

doupēsen de pesōn arabēse de teuche' ep' autōi.
“Down with a thud he fell and his armour clangoured upon him.”

He does not hesitate also to repeat the bulk of a line with a variation at the end, e.g.

bē de kat' Oulumpio karēnōn chōomenos kēr.

And again the

bē de kat' Oulumpio karēnōn aïxasa.

“Down from the peaks of Olympus he came, wrath vexing his heart-strings” and again, “Down from the peaks of Olympus she came impetuously darting.” He begins another line elsewhere with the same word and a similar action and with the same nature of a human movement physical and psychological in a scene of Nature, here a man’s silent sorrow listening to the roar of the ocean:

bē d'akeōn para thina poluphloisboio thalassēs
“Silent he walked by the shore of the many-rumoured ocean.”

In mystic poetry also repetition is not objectionable; it is resorted to by many poets, sometimes with insistence. I may note as an example the constant repetition of the word Ritam, truth, sometimes eight or nine times in a short poem of nine or ten stanzas and often in the same line. This does not weaken the poem, it gives it a singular power and beauty. The repetition of the same key ideas, key images and symbols, key words or phrases, key epithets, sometimes key lines or half lines is a constant feature. They give an atmosphere, a significant structure, a sort of psychological frame, an architecture. The object here is not to amuse or entertain but the self-expression of an inner truth, a seeing of things and ideas not familiar to the common mind, a bringing out of inner experience. It is the true more than the new that the poet is after. He uses *āvṛtti*, repetition, as one of the most powerful means of carrying home what has been thought or seen and fixing it in the mind in an atmosphere of light and beauty. Moreover, the object is not only to present a secret truth in its true form and true vision but to drive it home by the finding of the true word, the true phrase, the *mot juste*, the true image or symbol, if possible the inevitable word; if that is there, nothing else, repetition included, matters much. This is natural when the repetition is intended, serves a purpose; but it can hold even when the repetition is not deliberate but comes in naturally in the stream of the inspiration. I see, therefore, no objection to the recurrence of the same or similar image such as sea and ocean, sky and heaven in a lone long passage provided each is the right thing and rightly worded in its place. The same rule applies to words, epithets, ideas. It is only if the repetition is clumsy or awkward, too burdensomely insistent, at once unneeded and inexpressive or amounts to a disagreeable and meaningless echo that it must be rejected.

19 March 1946

Repetition of Images in Mystic Poetry

What she writes has a living beauty in it. But this constant repetition of the same images has been there since the beginning. It is perhaps inevitable in a restricted mystic vision; for you find it in the Veda and the Vaishnava poets and everywhere almost. To be more various one must get a wide consciousness where all is possible.

17 February 1937

Mystic Poetry and Spiritual Poetry

I do not remember the context of the passage you quote from *The Future Poetry*,³ but I suppose I meant to contrast the veiled utterance of what is usually called mystic poetry with the luminous and assured clarity of the fully expressed spiritual experience. I did not mean to contrast it with the mental clarity which is aimed at usually by poetry in which the intelligence or thinking mind is consulted at each step. The concreteness of intellectual imaged description is one thing and spiritual concreteness is another. “Two birds, companions, seated on one tree, but one eats the fruit, the other eats not but watches his fellow”—that has an illuminating spiritual clarity and concreteness to one who has had the experience, but mentally and intellectually it might mean anything or nothing. Poetry uttered with the spiritual clarity may be compared to sunlight—poetry uttered with the mystic veil to moonlight. But it was not my intention to deny beauty, power or value to the moonlight. Note that I have distinguished between two kinds of mysticism, one in which the realisation or experience is vague, though inspiringly vague, the other in which the experience is revelatory and intimate, but the utterance it finds is veiled by the image, not thoroughly revealed by it. I do not know to which Tagore’s recent poetry belongs, I have not read it.

³ “... mysticism in its unfavourable or lesser sense comes when either we glimpse but do not intimately realise the now secret things of the spirit or, realising, yet cannot find their direct language, their intrinsic way of utterance, and have to use obscurely luminous hints or a thick drapery of symbol, when we have the revelation, but not the inspiration, the sight but not the word.”—Sri Aurobindo, *The Future Poetry*, volume 26 of THE COMPLETE WORKS OF SRI AUROBINDO, pp. 213–14.

The latter kind of poetry (where there is the intimate experience) can be of great power and value — witness Blake. Revelation is greater than inspiration — it brings the direct knowledge and seeing, inspiration gives the expression, but the two are not always equal. There is even an inspiration without revelation, when one gets the word but the thing remains behind the veil; the transcribing consciousness expresses something with power, like a medium, of which it has not itself the direct sight or the living possession. It is better to get the sight of the thing itself than merely express it by an inspiration which comes from behind the veil, but this kind of poetry too has often a great light and power in it. The highest inspiration brings the *intrinsic* word, the spiritual mantra; but even where the inspiration is less than that, has a certain vagueness or fluidity of outline, you cannot say of such mystic poetry that it has no inspiration, not the inspired word at all. Where there is no inspiration, there can be no poetry.

10 June 1936

Spiritual Poetry

The spiritual vision must never be intellectual, philosophical or abstract, it must always give the sense of something vivid, living and concrete, a thing of vibrant beauty or a thing of power. An abstract spiritual poetry is possible but that is not Amal's manner. The poetry of spiritual vision as distinct from that of spiritual thought abounds in images, unavoidably because that is the straight way to avoid abstractness; but these images must be felt as very real and concrete things, otherwise they become like the images used by the philosophic poets, decorative to the thought rather than realities of the inner vision and experience.

28 May 1937

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Spiritual imagery is perfectly free. Occult imagery usually fixes itself to a system of symbols, otherwise it can't be understood even by the initiates. But spiritual imagery is usually simple and clear.

26 January 1937

Use of "High Light" Words in Spiritual Poetry

A. E.'s remarks about "immensity" etc. are very interesting to me; for these are the very words, with others like them, that are constantly recurring at short intervals in my poetry when I express, not spiritual thought, but spiritual experience. I knew perfectly well that this recurrence would be objected to as bad technique or an inadmissible technique; but this seems to me a reasoning from the conventions of a past order which cannot apply to a new poetry dealing with spiritual things. A new art of words written from a new consciousness demands a new technique. A. E. himself admits that this rule makes a great difficulty because these "high light" words are few in the English language. This solution may do well enough for him, because the realisations which they represent are in him *mental* realisations or intuitions occurring on the summits of the consciousness, rare "high lights" over the low tones of the ordinary natural or occult experience (ordinary, of course, to him, not to the average man), and so his solution does not violate the truth of his vision, does not misrepresent the balance or harmony of its natural tones. But what of one who lives in an atmosphere full of these high lights — in a consciousness in which the finite, not only the occult but even the earthly finite is bathed in the sense of the eternal, the illimitable and infinite, the immensities or intimacies of the timeless. To follow A. E.'s rule might well mean to falsify this atmosphere, to substitute a merely aesthetic fabrication for a true seeing and experience. Truth first — a technique expressive of the truth in the forms of beauty has to be found, if it does not exist. It is no use arguing from the spiritual inadequacy of the English language; the inadequacy does not exist and, even if it did, the language will have to be made adequate. It has been plastic enough in the past to succeed in expressing all that it was asked to express, however new; it must now be urged to a new progress. In fact, the power is there and has only to be brought out more fully to serve the full occult, mystic, spiritual purpose.

5 February 1932

Spiritual Poetry in India

But what a change in India. Once religious or spiritual poetry held the first place (Tukaram, Mirabai, Tulsidas, Surdas, the Tamil Alwars and Shaiva poets, and a number of others)—and now spiritual poetry is not poetry, altogether অচল! But luckily things are সচল and the movability may bring back an older and sounder feeling.

Poet, Yogi, Rishi, Prophet, Genius

The Poet, the Yogi and the Rishi

It is quite natural for the poets to vaunt their *métier* as the highest reach of human capacity and themselves as the top of creation; it is also natural for the intellectuals to run down the Yogi or the Rishi who claims to reach a higher consciousness than that which they conceive to be the summit of human achievement. The poet indeed lives still in the mind and is not yet a spiritual seer, but he represents to the human intellect the highest point of mental seership where the imagination tries to figure and embody in words its intuition of things, though that stands far below the vision of things that can be grasped only by spiritual experience. It is for that the poet is exalted as the real seer and prophet. There is too, helping the idea, the error of the modern or European mentality which so easily confuses the mentalised vital or life being with the soul and the idealising mind with spirituality. The poet imaging mental or physical beauty is for the outer mind something more spiritual than the seer or the God-lover experiencing the eternal peace or the ineffable ecstasy. Yet the Rishi or Yogi can drink of a deeper draught of Beauty and Delight than the imagination of the poet at its highest can conceive. (রসো বৈ সং—*The Divine is Delight.*) And it is not only the unseen Beauty that he can see but the visible and tangible also has for him a face of the All-Beautiful which the mind cannot discover.

10 November 1934

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You seem almost to say that the poet is necessarily not a seer or Rishi. But if the mere poet is not a Rishi, the Rishi after all can be a poet—the greater can contain the less, even though the less is not the greater.

11 November 1934

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A Rishi is one who *sees* or discovers an inner truth and puts it into self-effective language — the mantra. Either new truth or old truth made new by expression and intuitive realisation.

He [*Ramana Maharshi*] has experienced certain eternal truths by process of Yoga — I don't think it is by Rishilike intuition or illumination, nor has he the mantra.

10 February 1936

*

A Rishi may be a Yogi, but also he may not; a Yogi too may be a Rishi, but also he may not. Just as a philosopher may or may not be a poet and a poet may or may not be a philosopher.

Poetic intuition and illumination is not the same thing as Rishi intuition and illumination.

11 February 1936

The Poet and the Prophet

Essentially the poet's value lies in his poetic and not in his prophetic power. If he is a prophet also, the intrinsic worth of his prophecy lies in its own value, his poetic merit does not add to that, only it gives to its expression a power that perhaps it would not have otherwise.

7 November 1934

The Poet and the Verse Writer

No poet feels his poetry as a "normal phenomenon" — he feels it as an inspiration — of course anybody could "make" poetry by learning the rules of prosody and a little practice. In fact many people write verse, but the poets are few. Who are the ordinary poets? There is no such thing as an ordinary poet.

30 June 1936

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All that is written in metre is called verse. If it is written with inspiration, it is poetry.

27 May 1937

The “Born” Poet

You must remember that you are not a “born” poet — you are trying to bring out something from the Unmanifest inside you. You can’t demand that that should be an easy job. It may come out suddenly and without apparent reason like the Ananda — but you can’t demand it. The pangs of delivery cannot always be avoided.

8 June 1934

*

A born poet is usually a genius, poetry with any power or beauty in it implies genius.

13 February 1936

Poetic Genius

Poetic genius — without which there cannot be any originality — is inborn, but it takes time to come out — the first work even of great poets is often unoriginal. That is in ordinary life. In Yoga poetic originality can come by an opening from within, even if it was not there before in such a way as to be available in this life.

22 March 1934

*

For poetry one must have a special inspiration or genius. With literary capacity one can write good verse only.

Genius usually means an inborn power which develops of itself. Talent and capacity are not genius, that can be acquired. But that is the ordinary rule, by Yoga one can manifest what is concealed in the being.

22 September 1934

Genius

I never heard of anyone getting genius by effort. One can increase one’s talent by training and labour, but genius is a gift of Nature. By sadhana it is different, one can do it; but that is not the fruit of effort, but either of an inflow or by an opening or liberation of some impersonal power or manifestation of unmanifested

power. No rule can be made in such things; it depends on persons and circumstances how far the manifestation of genius by Yoga will go or what shape it will take or to what degree or height it will rise.

28 July 1938

*

Of course it is quite possible to be an idiot and a genius at the same time — one can, that is to say, be the medium of a specialised and specific force which leaves the rest of the being brute stuff, unchanged and undeveloped. Genius is a phenomenon *sui generis* and many anomalies occur in its constitution by Nature.

13 February 1936

The Poet and the Poem

Power of Expression and Spiritual Experience

All depends on the power of expression of the poet. A poet like Shakespeare or Shelley or Wordsworth though without spiritual experience may in an inspired moment become the medium of an expression of spiritual Truth which is beyond him and the expression, as it is not that of his own mind, may be very powerful and living, not merely aesthetically agreeable. On the other hand a poet with spiritual experience may be hampered by his medium or by his transcribing brain or by an insufficient mastery of language and rhythm and give an expression which may mean much to him but not convey the power and breath of it to others. The English poets of the 17th century often used a too intellectual mode of expression for their poetry to be a means of living communication to others—except in rare moments of an unusual vision and inspiration; it is these that give their work its value.

8 July 1935

Experience and Imagination

But is it necessary to say which is which?¹ It is not possible to deny that it was an experience, even if one cannot affirm it—not being in the consciousness of the writer. But even if it is an imagination, it is a powerful poetic imagination which expresses what would be the exact feeling in the real experience. It seems to me that that is quite enough. There are so many things in Wordsworth and Shelley which people say were only mental feelings and imaginations and yet they express the deeper

¹ Someone said to the correspondent, in regard to a certain poem: "This may not be an experience at all; who knows if it is not an imagination, and how are we to say which is which?" —Ed.

seeings or feelings of the seer. For poetry it seems to me the point is irrelevant.

27 May 1936

Poetic Expression and Personal Feeling

What you say is quite true. Poets are mediums for a force of vision and expression that is not theirs, so they need not feel except by reflection the emotions they utter. But of course that is not always the case—sometimes they express what they feel or at any rate what a part of their being feels. 25 September 1934

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What the poets feel when writing (those who are truly inspired) is the great Ananda of creation, possession by a great Power superior to their ordinary minds which puts some emotion or vision of things into a form of beauty. They feel the emotion of the thing they express, but not always as a personal feeling, but as something which seizes hold of them for self-expression. But the personal feeling also may form a basis for the creation.

26 September 1934

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These designations, a magnified ego, an exalted outlook of the vital mind, apply in sadhana, but hardly to poetic expression which lifts or ought to lift to a field of pure personal-impersonal *bhāva*. An utterance of this kind can express a state of consciousness or an experience which is not necessarily the writer's personal position or ego attitude but that of an inner spirit. So long as it is so the question of ego does not arise. It arises only if one turns away from the poem to the writer and asks in what mood he wrote it and that is a question of psychological fact alien to the purpose of poetry.

29 June 1935

The Two Parts of the Poetic Creator

Your poem² is forcible enough, but the quality is rather rheto-

² To a German Soldier Left Behind in Retreat by Arjava. —Ed.

rical than poetic. Yet at the end there are two lines that are very fine poetry

Gay singing birds caught in a ring of fire

and

A silent scorn that sears Eternity.

If you could not write the whole in that strain, which would have made it epic almost in pitch, it is, I think, because your indignation was largely mental and moral, the emotion though very strong being too much intellectualised in expression to give the poetic intensity of speech and movement. Indignation, the *saeva indignatio* of Juvenal, can produce poetry, but it must be either vividly a vital revolt which stirs the whole feeling into a white heat of self-expression—as in Milton's famous sonnet—or a high spiritual or deep psychic rejection of the undivine. Besides, it is well known that the emotion of the external being, in the raw as it were, does not make good material for poetry; it has to be transmuted into something deeper, less externally personal, more permanent before it can be turned into good poetry. There are always two parts of oneself which collaborate in poetry—the instrumental which lives and feels what is written, makes a sort of projective identification with it, and the Seer-Creator within who is not involved, but sees the inner significance of it and listens for the word that shall entirely express this significance. It is in some meeting-place of these two that what is felt or lived is transmuted into true stuff of poetry. Probably you are not sufficiently detached from this particular life-experience and the reactions it created to go back deeper into yourself and transmute it in this way. And yet you have done it in the two magnificent lines I have noted, which have the virtue of seizing the inner significance behind the thing experienced in the poetic or interpretative and not in the outward mental way. The first of these two lines conveys the pathos and tragedy of the thing and also the stupidity of the waste much more effectively than pages of denunciation or comment and the other stresses with an extraordinary power in a few words the problem as

flung by the revolting human mind and life against the Cosmic Impersonal.

The detachment of which you speak, comes by attaining the poise of the Spirit, the equality, of which the Gita speaks always, but also by sight, by knowledge. For instance, looking at what happened in 1914 — or for that matter at all that is and has been happening in human history — the eye of the Yogi sees not only the outward events and persons and causes, but the enormous forces which precipitate them into action. If the men who fought were instruments in the hands of rulers and financiers, these in turn were mere puppets in the clutch of those forces. When one is habituated to see the things behind, one is no longer prone to be touched by the outward aspects — or to expect any remedy from political, institutional or social changes; the only way out is through the descent of a consciousness which is not the puppet of these forces but is greater than they are and can compel them either to change or disappear.

17 July 1931

Personal Character and Creative Work

The statement that a man's poetry or art need not express anything that has happened in his outer personal life is too obvious to be made so much of; the real point is how far his work can be supposed to be a transcript of his inner mind or mental life. It is obvious that his vital cast, his character may have very little to do with his writing, it may be its very opposite. His physical mind also does not determine it; the physical mind of a romantic poet or artist may very well be that of a commonplace respectable bourgeois. One who in his fiction is a benevolent philanthropist and reformer full of sentimental pathos, gushful sympathy or cheery optimistic sunshine may have been in actual life selfish, hard, even cruel. All that is now well known and illustrated by numerous examples in the lives of great poets and artists. It is evidently in the inner mental personality of a man that the key to his creation must be discovered, not in "his" outward mind or life or not solely or chiefly these. But a poem or work of art need not be (though it may be) an exact transcription of a

mental or spiritual experience; even, if the creating mind takes up an incident of the life, a vital impression, emotion or reaction that had actually taken place, it need not be anything more than a starting point for the poetic creation. The "I" of a poem is more often than not a dramatic or representative I, nothing less and nothing more. But it does not help to fall back on the imagination and say that a man's poetry or art is only the web of his imagination working with whatever material it may happen to choose. The question is how the imagination of a poet came to be cast in this peculiar mould which differentiates him as a creator not only from the millions who do not create but from all other poetic creators. There are two possible answers. A poet or artist may be merely a medium for a creative Force which uses him as a channel and is concerned only with expression in art and not with the man's personality or his inner or outer life. Or, man being a multiple personality, a crowd of personalities which are tangled up on the surface, but separate within, the poet or artist in him may be only one of these many personalities concerned solely with its inner and creative function; it may retire when the creative act is over leaving the field to the others. In his work the poet personality may — or may not — use the experiences of the others as material for his work, but he will then modify them to suit his own turns and tendencies or express his own ideal of self or ideal of things. He may too take a hand in the life of the composite personality, meddle with the activity of the others, try to square their make-up and action with his own images and ideals. In fact there is a mixture of the two things that makes the poet. Fundamentally he is a medium for the creative Force, which acts through him and uses or picks up anything stored up in his mind from its inner life or its memories or impressions of outer life and things, or anything subconscious, subliminal or superconscious in him, anything it can or cares to make use of and it moulds it as it chooses for its purpose. But still it is through the poet personality in him that it works and this poet personality may be either a mere reed through which the Spirit blows but which is laid aside after the tune is over or it may be an active power having some say even in the surface

mental composition and vital and physical activities of the total composite creature. In that general possibility there is room for a hundred degrees and variations and no rule can be laid down that covers all possible or actual cases.

7 November 1935

Literary Style and Hereditary Influences

It seems to me that this statement³ is quite untrue. A man's style expresses himself, not the sum and outcome of his ancestors.

24 January 1937

Life-Experience and Literary Creation

Emotion alone is not enough for producing anything that can be called great creation. It can bring out something lyrical and slight or subjectively expressive and interpretative; but for a great or significant creation there must be a background of life, a vital rich and stored or a mind and an imagination that has seen much and observed much or a soul that has striven and been conscious of its strivings. These or at least one or other of them are needed, but a limited and ignorant way of living is not likely to produce them. There may indeed be a lucky accident even in the worst circumstances — but one cannot count on accidents. A George Eliot, a George Sand, a Virginia Woolf, a Sappho, or even a Comtesse de Noailles grew up in other circumstances.

30 April 1933

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What a stupidly rigid principle!⁴ Can Buddhadev really write nothing except what he has seen or experienced? What an

³ "For style in the full sense is more than the deliberate and designed creation, more even than the unconscious and involuntary creation, of the individual man who therein expresses himself. The self that he thus expresses is a bundle of inherited tendencies that came the man himself can never entirely know whence." — Havelock Ellis, *The Dance of Life* (London: Constable, 1923), p. 175.

⁴ The Bengali writer Buddhadev Bose remarked that great literature could not be produced by people living in entire seclusion in Pondicherry.—Ed.

unimaginative man he must be! And how dull his stories must be and how limited.

I wonder whether Victor Hugo had to live in a convicts' prison before he created Jean Valjean. Certainly one has to look at life, but there is no obligation to copy faithfully from life. The man of imagination carries a world in himself and a mere hint or suggestion from life is enough to start it going. It is recognised now that Balzac and Dickens created out of themselves their greatest characters which were not at all faithful to the life around them. Balzac's descriptions of society are hopelessly wrong, he knew nothing about it, but his world is much more striking and real than the actual world around him which he misrepresented—even life has imitated the figures he made rather than the other way round.

Besides who is living in entire seclusion in Pondicherry? There are living men and women around you and human nature is in full play here as much as in the biggest city—only one has to have an eye to see what is within them and the imagination that takes a few bricks and can make out of them a great edifice—one must be able to see that human nature is one everywhere and pick out of it the essential things or the interesting things that can be turned into great art.

26 May 1934

The Illusion of Realism

I am afraid your correspondent is under the grip of what I may call the illusion of realism. What all artists do is to take something from life—even if it be only a partial hint—and transfer it by the magic of their imagination and make a world of their own; the realists, e.g., Zola, Tolstoy, do it as much as anybody else. Each artist is a creator of his own world—why then insist on this legal fiction that the artist's world must appear as an exact imitation of the actual world around us? Even if it does so seem, that is only a skilful make-up, an appearance. It may be constructed to look like that—but why must it be? The characters and creations of even the most sternly objective fiction, much more the characters and creations of poetry live by

the law of their own life, which is something in the inner mind
of their creator — they cannot be constructed as copies of things
outside.

30 January 1933

Section Three

Poetic Technique

Technique, Inspiration, Artistry

Inspiration and Technique

You do not need at all to afflict your inspiration by studying metrical technique — you have all the technique you need, within you. I have *never* studied prosody myself — in English, at least, — what I know I know by reading and writing and following my ear and using my intelligence. If one is interested in the technical study of prosody for its own sake, that is another matter — but it is not at all indispensable.

28 April 1934

Knowledge of Technique and Intuitive Cognition

As for the technique, there are two different things, the intellectual knowledge which one applies, the intuitive cognition which acts in its own right, even if it is not actually possessed by the worker. Many poets for instance have little knowledge of metrical or linguistic technique and cannot explain how they write or what are the qualities and elements of their success, but they write all the same things that are perfect in rhythm and language. Intellectual knowledge of technique helps of course, provided one does not make of it a mere device or a rigid fetter. There are some arts that cannot be done well without some technical knowledge, e.g. painting, sculpture.

14 May 1936

Artistry of Technique

I don't know that Swinburne failed for this reason — before assenting to such a dictum I should like to know which were these poems he spoiled by too much artistry of technique. So far as I remember, his best poems are those in which he is most perfect in artistry, most curious or skilful, most subtle. I think

his decline began when he felt himself too much at ease and poured himself out in an endless waste of melody without caring for substance and the finer finesses of form. Attention to technique harms only when a writer is so busy with it that he becomes indifferent to substance. But if the substance is adequate, the attention to technique can only give it greater beauty. Even devices like a refrain, internal rhymes, etc. can indeed be great aids to the inspiration and the expression — just as can ordinary rhyme. It is in my view a serious error to regard metre or rhyme as artificial elements, mere external and superfluous equipment restraining the movement and sincerity of poetic form. Metre, on the contrary, is the most natural mould of expression for certain states of creative emotion and vision, it is much more natural and spontaneous than a non-metrical form; the emotion expresses itself best and most powerfully in a balanced rather than in a loose and shapeless rhythm. The search for technique is simply the search for the best and most appropriate form for expressing what has to be said and once it is found, the inspiration can flow quite naturally and fluently into it. There can be no harm therefore in close attention to technique so long as there is no inattention to substance.

24 August 1935

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There are only two conditions about artistry: (1) that the artistry does not become so exterior as to be no longer art and (2) that substance (in which of course I include *bhāva*) is not left behind in the desert or else art and *bhāva* not woven into each other.

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Swinburne's defect is his preference of sound to sense, but I would find it difficult to find fault with his music or his rhythmical method. There is no reason why one should not use assonance and alliteration, if one knows how to use them as Swinburne did. Everybody cannot succeed like that and those who cannot must be careful and restrained in their use.

2 November 1934

Art for Art's Sake

Art for Art's sake? But what after all is meant by this slogan and what is the real issue behind it? Is it meant, as I think it was when the slogan first came into use, that the technique, the artistry is all in all? The contention would then be that it does not matter what you write or paint or sculpt or what music you make or about what you make it so long as it is beautiful writing, competent painting, good sculpture, fine music. It is very evidently true in a certain sense,—in this sense that whatever is perfectly expressed or represented or interpreted under the conditions of a given art proves itself by that very fact to be legitimate material for the artist's labour. But that free admission cannot be confined only to all objects, however common or deemed to be vulgar—an apple, a kitchen pail, a donkey, a dish of carrots,—it can give a right of citizenship in the domain of art to a moral theme or thesis, a philosophic conclusion, a social experiment; even the Five Years' Plan or the proceedings of a District Board or the success of a drainage scheme, an electric factory or a big hotel can be brought, after the most modern or the still more robustious Bolshevik mode, into the artist's province. For, technique being all, the sole question would be whether he as poet, novelist, dramatist, painter or sculptor has been able to triumph over the difficulties and bring out creatively the possibilities of his subject. There is no logical basis here for accepting an apple and rejecting the Apple-Cart. But still you may say that at least the object of the artist must be art only,—even if he treats ethical, social or political questions, he must not make it his main object to wing with the enthusiasm of aesthetic creation a moral, social or political aim. But if in doing it he satisfies the conditions of his art, shows a perfect technique and in it beauty, power, perfection, why not? The moralist, preacher, philosopher, social or political enthusiast is often doubled with an artist—as shining proofs and examples there are Plato and Shelley, to go no farther. Only, you can say of him on the basis of this theory that as a work of art his creation should be judged by its success of craftsmanship and not by its contents; it is not

made greater by the value of his ethical ideas, his enthusiasms or his metaphysical seekings.

But then the theory itself is true only up to a certain point. For technique is a means of expression; one does not write merely to use beautiful words or paint for the sole sake of line and colour; there is something that one is trying through these means to express or to discover. What is that something? The first answer would be—it is the creation, it is the discovery of Beauty. Art is for that alone and can be judged only by its revelation or discovery of Beauty. Whatever is capable of being manifested as Beauty, is the material of the artist. But there is not only physical beauty in the world—there is moral, intellectual, spiritual beauty also. Still one might say that Art for Art's sake means that only what is aesthetically beautiful must be expressed and all that contradicts the aesthetic sense of beauty must be avoided,—Art has nothing to do with Life in itself, things in themselves, Good, Truth or the Divine for their own sake, but only in so far as they appeal to some aesthetic sense of beauty. And that would seem to be a sound basis for excluding the Five Years' Plan, a moral sermon or a philosophical treatise. But here again, what after all is Beauty? How much is it in the thing itself and how much in the consciousness that perceives it? Is not the eye of the artist constantly catching some element of aesthetic value in the plain, the ugly, the sordid, the repellent and triumphantly conveying it through his material,—through the word, through line and colour, through the sculptured shape?

There is a certain state of Yogic consciousness in which all things become beautiful to the eye of the seer simply because they spiritually are—because they are a rendering in line and form of the quality and force of existence, of the consciousness, of the Ananda that rules the worlds,—of the hidden Divine. What a thing is to the exterior sense may not be, often is not beautiful for the ordinary aesthetic vision, but the Yогin sees in it the something More which the external eye does not see, he sees the soul behind, the self and spirit, he sees too lines, hues, harmonies and expressive dispositions which are not to the first surface sight visible or seizable. It may be said that he brings into

the object something that is in himself, transmutes it by adding out of his own being to it—as the artist too does something of the same kind but in another way. It is not quite that however,—what the Yogin sees, what the artist sees, is there—his is a transmuting vision because it is a revealing vision; he discovers behind what the object appears to be the something More that it is. And so from this point of view of a realised supreme harmony all is or can be subject-matter for the artist because in all he can discover and reveal the Beauty that is everywhere. Again we land ourselves in a devastating catholicity; for here too one cannot pull up short at any given line. It may be a hard saying that one must or may discover and reveal beauty in a pig or its poke or in a parish pump or an advertisement of somebody's pills, and yet something like that seems to be what modern Art and literature are trying with vigour and a conscientious labour to do. By extension one ought to be able to extract beauty equally well out of morality or social reform or a political caucus or allow at least that all these things can, if he wills, become legitimate subjects for the artist. Here too one cannot say that it is on condition he thinks of beauty only and does not make moralising or social reform or a political idea his main object. For if with that idea foremost in his mind he still produces a great work of art, discovering Beauty as he moves to his aim, proving himself in spite of his unaesthetic preoccupations a great artist, it is all we can justly ask from him—whatever his starting point—to be a creator of Beauty. Art is discovery and revelation of Beauty and we can say nothing more by way of prohibition or limiting rule.

But there is one thing more that can be said, and it makes a big difference. In the Yogin's vision of universal beauty all becomes beautiful, but all is not reduced to a single level. There are gradations, there is a hierarchy in this All-Beauty and we see that it depends on the ascending power (*vibhuti*) of consciousness and Ananda that expresses itself in the object. All is the Divine, but some things are more divine than others. In the artist's vision too there are or can be gradations, a hierarchy of values. Shakespeare can get dramatic and therefore aesthetic

values out of Dogberry and Malvolio, and he is as thorough a creative artist in his treatment of them as in his handling of Macbeth or Lear. But if we had only Dogberry or Malvolio to testify to Shakespeare's genius, no Macbeth, no Lear, would he be so great a dramatic artist and creator as he now is? It is in the varying possibilities of one subject or another that there lies an immense difference. Apelles' grapes deceived the birds that came to peck at them, but there was more aesthetic content in the Zeus of Phidias, a greater content of consciousness and therefore of Ananda to express and with it to fill in and intensify the essential principle of Beauty even though the essence of beauty might be realised perhaps with equal aesthetic perfection by either artist and in either theme.

And that is because just as technique is not all, so even Beauty is not all in Art. Art is not only technique or form of Beauty, not only the discovery or the expression of Beauty,—it is a self-expression of Consciousness under the conditions of aesthetic vision and a perfect execution. Or to put it otherwise there are not only aesthetic values but life-values, mind-values, soul-values, that enter into Art. The artist puts out into form not only the powers of his own consciousness but the powers of the Consciousness that has made the worlds and their objects. And if that Consciousness according to the Vedantic view is fundamentally equal everywhere, it is still in manifestation not an equal power in all things. There is more of the Divine expression in the Vibhuti than in the common man, *prākrto janah*; in some forms of life there are less potentialities for the self-expression of the Spirit than in others. And there are also gradations of consciousness which make a difference, if not in the aesthetic value or greatness of a work of art, yet in its contents value. Homer makes beauty out of man's outward life and action and stops there. Shakespeare rises one step farther and reveals to us a life-soul and life-forces and life-values to which Homer had no access. In Valmiki and Vyasa there is the constant presence of great Idea-Forces and Ideals supporting life and its movements which were beyond the scope of Homer and Shakespeare. And beyond the Ideals and Idea-Forces even there are other presences,

more inner or inmost realities, a soul behind things and beings, the spirit and its powers, which could be the subject-matter of an art still more rich and deep and abundant in its interest than any of these could be. A poet finding these and giving them a voice with a genius equal to that of the poets of the past might not be greater than they in a purely aesthetical valuation, but his art's contents-value, its consciousness-values could be deeper and higher and much fuller than in any achievement before him. There is something here that goes beyond any considerations of Art for Art's sake or Art for Beauty's sake; for while these stress usefully sometimes the indispensable first elements of artistic creation, they would limit too much the creation itself if they stood for the exclusion of the something More that compels Art to change always in its constant seeking for more and more that must be expressed of the concealed or the revealed Divine, of the individual and the universal or the transcendent Spirit.

If we take these three elements as making the whole of Art, perfection of expressive form, discovery of beauty, revelation of the soul and essence of things and the powers of creative consciousness and Ananda of which they are the vehicles, then we shall get perhaps a solution which includes the two sides of the controversy and reconciles their difference. Art for Art's sake certainly — Art as a perfect form and discovery of Beauty; but also Art for the soul's sake, the spirit's sake and the expression of all that the soul, the spirit wants to seize through the medium of beauty. In that self-expression there are grades and hierarchies — widenings and steps that lead to the summits. And not only to enlarge Art towards the widest wideness but to ascend with it to the heights that climb towards the Highest is and must be part both of our aesthetic and our spiritual endeavour.

17 April 1933

Rhythm

Two Factors in Poetic Rhythm

If your purpose is to acquire not only metrical skill but the sense and the power of rhythm, to study the poets may do something, but not all. There are two factors in poetic rhythm,—there is the technique (the variation of movement without spoiling the fundamental structure of the metre, right management of vowel and consonantal assonances and dissonances, the masterful combination of the musical element of stress with the less obvious element of quantity, etc.), and there is the secret soul of rhythm which uses but exceeds these things. The first you can learn, if you read with your ear always in a *tapasyā* of vigilant attention to these constituents, but without the second what you achieve may be technically faultless and even skilful, but poetically a dead letter. This soul of rhythm can only be found by listening in to what is behind the music of words and sounds and things. You will get something of it by listening for that subtler element in great poetry, but mostly it must either grow or suddenly open in yourself. This sudden opening can come if the Power within wishes to express itself in that way. I have seen more than once a sudden flowering of capacities in every kind of activity come by a rapid opening of the consciousness, so that one who laboured long without the least success to express himself in rhythm becomes a master of poetic language and cadences almost in a day. Poetry is a question of the right concentrated silence or seeking somewhere in the mind with the right openness to the Word that is trying to express itself—for the Word is there ready to descend in those inner planes where all artistic forms take birth, but it is the transmitting mind that must change and become a perfect channel and not an obstacle.

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How can rhythm be explained? It is a matter of the ear, not of the intellect. Of course there are the technical elements, but you say you do not understand yet about them. But it is not a matter of technique only,—the same outer technique can produce successful or unsuccessful rhythms (live or dead rhythms). One has to learn to distinguish by the ear, and the difficulty for you is to get the right sense of the cadences of the English language. That is not easy, for it has many outer and inner elements.

8 September 1938

Rhythical Overtones and Undertones

I was speaking of rhythmical overtones and undertones. That is to say, there is a metrical rhythm which belongs to the skilful use of metre—any good poet can manage that; but besides that there is a music which rises up out of this rhythm or a music that underlies it, carries it as it were as the movement of the water carries the movement of a boat. They can both exist together in the same line; but it is more a matter of the inner than the outer ear and I am afraid I can't define farther. To go into the subject would mean a long essay. But to give examples

Journeys end in lovers' meeting,
Every wise man's son doth know,

is excellent metrical rhythm, but there are no overtones and undertones. In

Golden lads and girls all must
As chimney-sweepers come to dust

there is a beginning of undertone, but no overtone, while the “Take, O take those lips away” (the whole lyric) is all overtones. Again

Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears;
I come to bury Caesar, not to praise him

has admirable rhythm, but there are no overtones or undertones. But

In maiden meditation fancy-free
 has beautiful running undertones, while
 In the deep backward and abyssm of Time
 is all overtones, and
 Absent thee from felicity awhile
 And in this harsh world draw thy breath in pain
 is all overtones and undertones together. I don't suppose this will
 make you much wiser, but it is all I can do for you at present.

11 May 1937

Rhythm and Significance

You seem to suggest that significance does not matter and need not enter into the account in judging or feeling poetry! Rhythm and word music are indispensable, but are not the whole of poetry. For instance lines like these —

In the human heart of Heligoland
 A hunger wakes for the silver sea;
 For waving the might of his magical wand
 God sits on his throne in eternity,

have plenty of rhythm and word music — a surrealist might pass it, but I certainly would not. Your suggestion that my seeing the inner truth behind a line magnifies it to me, i.e. gives a false value to me which it does not really have as poetry, may or may not be correct. But, certainly, the significance and feeling suggested and borne home by the words and rhythm are in my view a capital part of the value of poetry. Shakespeare's lines

Absent thee from felicity awhile
 And in this harsh world draw thy breath in pain,

have a skilful and consummate rhythm and word combination, but this gets its full value as the perfect embodiment of a profound and moving significance, the expression in a few words of

a whole range of human world-experience.¹ 1 September 1938

English Metre and Rhythm

English metre is simple on the contrary. It is the management of the rhythm that makes a more difficult demand on the writer.

5 May 1937

¹ This is an abbreviated and lightly revised version of a letter published in full on pages 496–97—Ed.

English Metres

Octosyllabic Metre

The regular octosyllabic metre is at once the easiest to write and the most difficult to justify by a strong and original rhythmic treatment; it may be that it is only by filling it with very original thought-substance and image and the deeper tones and sound-significances which these would bring that it could be saved from its besetting obviousness. On the other hand, the melody to which it lends itself, if raised to a certain intensity, can be fraught with a rescuing charm that makes us forget the obviousness of the metre.

4 February 1932

Iambic Pentameter

An inspiration which leans more on sublimated or illumined thought than on some strong or subtle or very simple psychic or vital intensity and swiftness of feeling, seems to call naturally for the iambic pentameter, though it need not confine itself to that form. I myself have not yet found another metre which gives room enough along with an apposite movement — shorter metres are too cramped, the longer ones need a technical dexterity (if one is not to be either commonplace or clumsy) for which I have not leisure.

8 March 1932

Blank Verse

I have often seen that Indians who write in English, immediately they try blank verse, begin to follow the Victorian model and especially a sort of pseudo-Tennysonian movement or structure which makes their work in this kind weak, flat and ineffective. The language inevitably suffers by the same faults, for with a

weak verse-cadence it is impossible to find a strong or effective turn of language. But Victorian blank verse at its best is not strong or great, though it may have other qualities, and at a more common level it is languid or crude or characterless. Except for a few poems, like Tennyson's early *Morte d'Arthur*, *Ulysses* and one or two others or Arnold's *Sohrab and Rustam*, there is nothing of a very high order. Tennyson is a perilous model and can have a weakening and corrupting influence and the *Princess* and *Idylls of the King* which seem to have set the tone for Indo-English blank verse are perhaps the worst choice possible for such a role. There is plenty of clever craftsmanship but it is mostly false and artificial and without true strength or inspired movement or poetic force—the right kind of blank verse for a Victorian drawing-room poetry, that is all that can be said for it. As for language and substance his influence tends to bring a thin artificial decorative prettiness or picturesqueness varied by an elaborate false simplicity and an attempt at a kind of brilliant, sometimes lusciously brilliant sentimental or sententious commonplace. The higher quality in his best work is not easily assimilable; the worst is catching but undesirable as a model.

Blank verse is the most difficult of all English metres; it has to be very skilfully and strongly done to make up for the absence of rhyme, and if not very well done, it is better not done at all. In the ancient languages rhyme was not needed, for they were written in quantitative metres which gave them the necessary support, but modern languages in their metrical forms need the help of rhyme. It is only a very masterly hand that can make blank verse an equally or even a more effective poetic movement. You have to vary your metre by a skilful play of pauses or by an always changing distribution of caesura and of stresses and supple combinations of long and short vowels and by much weaving of vowel or consonant variation and assonance; or else, if you use a more regular form you have to give a great power and relief to the verse as did Marlowe at his best. If you do none of these things, if you write with effaced stresses, without relief and force or, if you do not succeed in producing harmonious variations in your rhythm, your blank

verse becomes a monotonous vapid wash and no amount of mere thought-colour or image-colour can save it.

28 April 1931

Blank Verse Technique

I don't know any factors by which blank verse can be built up. When good blank verse comes one can analyse it and assign certain elements of technique, but these come in the course of the formation of the verse. Each poet finds his own technique—that of Shakespeare differs from Marlowe's, both from Milton's and all from Keats'. In English I can say that variations of rhythm, of lengths of syllable, of caesura, of the structure of lines help and neglect of them hinders—so too with pause variations if used; but to explain all that would mean a treatise. Nor could anyone make himself a great blank verse writer by following the instructions deliberately and constructing his verse. Only if he knows, the inspiration answers better and if there is failure in the inspiration he can see and call again and the thing will come. But I am no expert in Bengali blank verse.

30 April 1937

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Building of each line, building of the passage, variation of balance, the arrangement of tone and stress and many other things have to be mastered before you can be a possessor of the instrument—unless you are born with a blank verse genius; but that is rare.

7 July 1933

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It is in order to make it more flexible—to avoid the “drumming decasyllabon” and to introduce other relief of variety than can be provided by differing caesura, enjambement etc.¹ There are four possible principles for the blank verse pentameter.

(1) An entirely regular verse with sparing use of enjambements—here an immense skill is needed in the variation of

¹ *The question was: “Why is so much irregularity in the rhythm of consecutive lines permissible in blank verse?” — Ed.*

caesura, use of long and short vowels, closed and open sounds, all the devices of rhythm. Each line must be either sculptured and powerful, a mighty line — as Marlowe tried to write it — or a melodious thing of beauty by itself as in much of Shakespeare's earlier blank verse.

(2) A regular iambic verse (of course with occasional trochees and rare anapaests) and frequent play of enjambement etc.

(3) A regular basis with a frequent intervention of irregular movements to give the necessary variety and surprise to the ear.

(4) A free irregular blank verse as in some of Shakespeare's later dramas (*Cymbeline* if I remember right).

The last two principles, I believe, are coming more and more to be used as the possibilities of the older forms have come to be exhausted — or seem to be — for it is not sure that they are.

24 January 1933

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In English variation of pauses is not indispensable to blank verse. There is much blank verse of the first quality in which it is eschewed or minimised, much also of the first quality in which it is freely used. Shakespeare has both kinds. 30 April 1937

The Alexandrine

I suppose the Alexandrine has been condemned because no one has ever been able to make effective use of it as a staple metre. The difficulty, I suppose, is its normal tendency to fall into two monotonously equal halves while the possible variations on that monotony seem to stumble often into awkward inequalities. The Alexandrine is an admirable instrument in French verse because of the more plastic character of the movement, not bound to its stresses, but only to an equality of metric syllables capable of a sufficient variety in the rhythm. In English it does not work so well; a single Alexandrine or an occasional Alexandrine couplet can have a great dignity and amplitude of sweep in English, but a succession fails or has most often failed to impose itself on the

ear. All this, however, may be simply because the secret of the right handling has not been found: it is at least my impression that a very good rhythmist with the Alexandrine movement secretly born somewhere in him and waiting to be brought out could succeed in rehabilitating the metre. 5 February 1932

The Loose Alexandrine

I do not understand how this² can be called an accentual rhythm except in the sense that all English rhythm, prose or verse, is accentual. What one usually means by accentual verse is verse with a fixed number of accents for each line, but here accents can be of any number and placed anywhere as it would be in a prose cut up into lines. The only distinctive feature is thus of the number of “effective” syllables. The result is a kind of free verse movement with a certain irregular regularity in the lengths of the lines.

1936

The Caesura

Voltaire's dictum is quite baffling,³ unless he means by caesura any pause or break in the line; then of course a comma does create such a break or pause. But ordinarily caesura is a technical term meaning a rhythmical (not necessarily a metrical) division of a line in two parts equal or unequal, in the middle or near the middle, that is, just a little before or just a little after. I think in my account of my Alexandrines I myself used the word caesura

² “The novelty (in English) [of Robert Bridges's “loose alexandrine”] is to make the number of syllables the fixt base of the metre; but these are the effective syllables, those which pronunciation easily slurs or combines with following syllables being treated as metrically ineffective. The line consists of twelve metrically effective syllables; and within this constant scheme the metre allows of any variation in the number and placing of the accents. Thus the rhythm obtained is purely accentual, in accordance with the genius of the English language; but a new freedom has been achieved within the confines of a new kind of discipline.” — Lascelles Abercrombie, *Poetry: Its Music and Meaning* (London: Oxford University Press, 1932), p. 35.

³ The “dictum” of Voltaire that the correspondent sent to Sri Aurobindo was the following: “la césure . . . rompt le vers . . . partout où elle coupe la phrase.”

in the sense of a pause anywhere which breaks the line in two equal or unequal parts, but usually such a break very near the beginning or end of a line would not be counted as an orthodox caesura. In French there are two metres which insist on a caesura — the Alexandrine and the pentameter. The Alexandrine always takes the caesura in the middle of the line, that is after the sixth *sonant* syllable, the pentameter always after the fourth, there is no need for any comma there, e.g.

Ce que dit l'aube || et la flamme à la flamme.

This is the position and all the Voltaires in the world cannot make it otherwise. I don't know about the modernists however, perhaps they have broken this rule like every other.

As for caesura in English I don't know much about it in theory, only in the practice of the pentameter decasyllabic and hexameter verses. In the blank verse decasyllabic I would count it as a rule for variability of rhythm to make the caesura at the fourth, fifth, sixth, or seventh syllable, e.g. from Milton:

- | | | |
|-----|---|--------------------|
| (1) | for who would lose
Though full of pain, this intellectual being,
Those thoughts that wander through eternity,
To perish rather, swallowed up and lost? | (4th)

(5th) |
| (2) | Here we may reign secure, and in my choice
To reign is worth ambition though in hell:
Better to reign in hell, than serve in heaven. | (6th)

(7th) |

Or from Shakespeare:

- | | | |
|-----|--|-------|
| (1) | Sees Helen's beauty in a brow of Egypt | (5th) |
| (2) | To be or not to be, that is the question | (6th) |

But I don't know whether your prosodist would agree to all that. As for the hexameter, the Latin classical rule is to make the caesura either at the middle of the third or the middle of the fourth foot, e.g. (you need not bother about the Latin words but follow the scansion only):

- (1) Quadrupe|dante pu|trem || cur|su quatit | ungula | campum.
(Virgil)
Horse-hooves | trampled the | crumbling | plain || with
a | four-footed | gallop.

(2) O pass|i gravi|ora, || dab|it deus | his quoque | finem. (Virgil)
Fiercer | griefs you have | suffered; || to | these too | God will
give | ending.

(3) Nec fa|cundia | deseret | hunc || nec | lucidus | ordo
(Horace)
Him shall not | copious | eloquence | leave || nor | clearness
and | order.

In the first example, the caesura comes at the third foot; in the second example, it comes at the third foot but note that it is a trochaic caesura; in the third example the caesura comes at the fourth foot. In the English hexameter you can follow that or you may take greater liberties. I have myself cut the hexameter sometimes at the end of the third foot and not in the middle, e.g.

- (1) Opaline | rhythm of | towers, || notes of the | lyre of the | Sun
God . . .

(2) Even the | ramparts | felt her, || stones that the | Gods had
e|rected . . .

and there are other combinations possible which can give a great variety to the run of the line as if standing balanced between one place of caesura and another.

Some Questions of Scansion

Words like "tire", "fire" etc. can be scanned as a dissyllable in verse as well as a monosyllable, though it is something of a licence nowadays, but a still well-recognised licence. Of course, it would not do to do it always. 19 November 1930

19 November 1930

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You have taken an anapaestic metre varied by an occasional

iambus or spondee. But you have inserted sometimes four syllables in a foot instead of three — this is not allowed in normal anapaestic verse which is always $\sim\sim\perp$ and never $\sim\sim\perp$. But I have accepted this and put occasionally an amphibrach foot $\perp\sim\sim$ instead of $\sim\sim$ — as Arjava and myself are trying to vary the normal metre in this way.

In ordinary English scansion no account is taken of naturally short and long syllables. All unaccented syllables are treated as short, all accented syllables as long, thus bright-|nighted day | [*in a poem by the correspondent*] would count metrically as bright-|nighted day | in the scansion, but the variation of natural long and natural short syllables is a very important element in the beauty or failure of beauty of the *rhythm* as opposed to mere scansion of *metre*. So I have indicated the naturally long and short syllables — if you study it, you may get an idea of this important element in the rhythm.

18 October 1933

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I certainly think feet longer than the three syllable maximum can be brought in and ought to be. I do not see for instance why a foot like this $\sim\sim\sim$ should not be as legitimate as the anapaest. Only, of course, if frequently used, they would mean the institution of another principle of harmony not provided for by the essentially melodic basis of English prosody in the past; as

Interspersed | in the immense | and unavailing void, | winging
their | light through the | darkness in|ane. |

Or,

Interspersed | in the immense | and unavailing void, | scattering |
their light through | the darkness | inane. |

I agree that this freedom would be more pressingly needed in longer metres than in short ones, but they need not be excluded from the short ones either.

Iambics and Anapaests — Free Verse

Iambics and anapaests can be combined in English verse at any time, provided one does not set out to write a purely iambic or a purely anapaestic metre. Mixed anapaest and iamb make a most beautifully flexible lyric rhythm. It has no more connection with free verse than the constellation of the Great Bear has to do with a cat's tail! "Free" verse indicates verse free from the shackles of rhyme and metre, but rhythmic (or trying to be rhythmic) in one way or another. If you put rhymes, that will be considered a shackle and the "free" will kick at the chain.

10 December 1935

The Problem of Free Verse

The problem of free verse is to keep the rhythm and afflatus of poetry while asserting one's liberty as in prose to vary the rhythm and movement at will instead of being tied down to metre and to a single unchangeable form throughout the whole length of a poem. But most writers in this kind achieve prose cut up into lines or something that is half and half and therefore unsatisfying. I think few have escaped this kind of shipwreck.

18 September 1936

Prose Poetry and Free Verse

Prose poetry or free verse, if it is to be effective, must be very clear-cut in each line so that the weight of the thought and expression may compensate for the absence of the supporting metrical rhythm. From that standpoint the weakness here [*in two poems submitted by the correspondent*] would be too much profusion of word and image, preventing a clear strong outline of the significance.

5 November 1936

Greek and Latin Classical Metres

Acclimatisation of Classical Metres in English

In the attempt to acclimatise the classical scensions in English, everything depends on whether they are acclimated or not. That is to say, there must be a spontaneous, natural, seemingly native-born singing or flowing or subtly moving rhythm. The lines must glide or run or walk easily or, if you like, execute a complex dance, stately or light, but not stumble, not shamble and not walk like the Commander's statue suddenly endowed with life but stiff and stony in its march. Now the last is just what happens to classical metres in English when they are not acclimated, naturalised, made to seem even natively English, although new. It is like cardboard cut into measures, there is no life or movement of life. . . . It was this inability to naturalise that ruined the chances of the admission of classic metres in the attempts of earlier poets — we must avoid that mistake.

23 November 1933

The Hexameter in English

Former poets failed in the attempt at hexameter because they did not find the right basic line and measure; they forgot that stress and quantity must both be considered in English; even though in theory the stress alone makes the quantity, there is another kind of true quantity which must be given a subordinate but very necessary recognition; besides, even in stress there are kinds, true and fictitious, major and minor. In analysing the movement of an English line, one could make three independent schemes according to these three bases and the combination would give the value of the rhythm. You can ignore all this in an established metre and go safely by the force of instinct and habit; but for

making so difficult an innovation as the hexameter instinct and habit were not enough, a clear eye upon all these constituents was needed and it was not there. Longfellow, even Clough, went on the theory of accentual quantity alone and in spite of their talent as versifiers made a mess — producing something that discredited the very idea of the creation of an English hexameter. Other poets made no serious or sustained endeavour. Arnold was interesting so long as he theorised about it, but his practical specimens were disastrous. I have not time to make my point clearer for the moment; I may return to it hereafter.

23 July 1932

Hexameters, Alcaics, Sapphics

Lines from [*an early version of*] *Ilion*, an unfinished poem in English hexameter (quantitative):

Triumph and agony changing hands in a desperate measure
Faced and turned, as a man and a maiden trampling the grasses
Face and turn and they laugh for their joy in the dance and each other.
These were gods and they trampled lives. But though Time is immortal,
Mortal his works are and ways and the anguish ends like the rapture.
Artisans satisfied now with their works in the plan of the transience,
Beautiful, wordless, august, the Olympians turned from the carnage.
Vast and unmoved they rose up mighty as eagles ascending,
Fanning the world with their wings. In the bliss of a sorrowless ether
Calm they reposed from their deeds and their hearts were inclined to
the Stillness.
Less now the burden laid on our race by their star-white presence,
There was a respite from height; the winds breathed freer, delivered.

But their immortal content from the struggle titanic departed.
 Vacant the noise of the battle roared like a sea on the shingles;
 Wearily hunted the spears their quarry, strength was disheartened;
 Silence increased with the march of the months on the tents of the
 leaguer.

The principle is a line of six feet, preponderantly dactylic, but anywhere the dactyl can be replaced by a spondee; but in English hexameter a trochee can be substituted, as the spondee comes in rarely in English rhythm. The line is divided by a caesura, and the variations of the caesura are essential to the harmony of the verse.

An example of Alcaics from the *Jivanmukta* (Alcaics is a Greek metre invented by the poet Alcaeus):

There is | a si|lence | greater than | any | known |
 To earth's | dumb spi|rit, | motionless | in the | soul |
 That has | become | eter|nity's foot|hold
 Touched by the | infini|tudes for | ever. |

In the Latin it is:

— | — | — | — | — | — |
 — | — | — | — | — | — |
 — | — | — | — | — |
 — | — | — | — | — |

But in English, variations (modulations) are allowed, only one has to keep to the general plan.

Swinburne's Sapphics are to be scanned thus:

All the | night sleep | came not u|pon my | eyelids, |
 Shed not | dew, nor | shook nor un|closed a | feather, |
 Yet with | lips shut | close and with | eyes of | iron
 Stood and be|held me. |

Two trochees at the beginning, two trochees at the end, a dactyl

separating the two trochaic parts of the line — that is the Sapphics in its first three lines, then a fourth line composed of a dactyl and a trochee.

May 1934

Quantitative Metre in English and Bengali

English Quantitative Verse—Rhythm in English and Bengali

There have been attempts to write in English quantitative verse on the Greek and Latin principle with the classical metres, attempts which began in the Elizabethan times, but they have not been successful because the method was either too slipshod or tried to adhere too rigidly to the rules of quantity natural to Greek and Latin but not to the English tongue instead of making an adaptation of it for the English ear or, still better, discovering directly in English itself the true principle of an English quantitative metre. I believe it is perfectly possible to acclimatise the quantitative principle in English and with great advantage. I have not seen Bridges' attempts, but I do not see why his failure—if it was one—should damn the possibility. I think one day it will be done.

It is true that English rhythm falls most naturally into the iambic movement. But I do not admit the adverse strictures passed on the other bases of metre. All depends on how you handle them,—if as much pain is bestowed as on the iambic, the fault attributed to them will disappear. Even as it is, the trochaic metre in the hands of great poets like Milton, Shelley, Keats does not pall—I do not get tired of the melody of the *Skylark*. Swinburne's anapaestic rhythms, as in *Dolores*, are kept up for pages without difficulty with the most royal ease, without fatigue either to the writer or the reader. Both trochee and anapaest are surely quite natural to the language. The dactyl is more difficult to continue, but I believe it can be done, even in a long dactylic metre like the hexameter, if interspersed with spondees (as the metre allows) and supported by subtle modulations of rhythm, variations of pause and caesura. The iambic metre itself was at first taxed with monotony in a drumming beat until it was used

in a more plastic way by Shakespeare and Milton. All depends on the skill which one brings to the work and the tool is quarrelled with only when the workman does not know how to use it.

The English language is not naturally melodious like the Italian or Bengali — no language with a Teutonic base can be — but it is capable of remarkable harmonic effects and also it can by a skilful handling be made to give out the most beautiful melodies. Bengali and Italian are soft, easy and mellifluous languages — English is difficult and has to be struggled with in order to produce its best effects, but out of that very difficulty has arisen an astonishing plasticity, depth and manifold subtlety of rhythm. These qualities do not repose on metrical building alone but much more on the less analysable elements of the entire rhythmic structure. The metrical basis itself is a peculiar and subtle combination on which English rhythm depends without explicitly avowing it, a skilful and most extraordinarily variable combination of three elements — the numeric foot dependent on the number of syllables, the use of the stress foot and a play of stresses, and a recognisable but free and plastic use of quantitative play (not quantitative feet), all three running into each other.

I am afraid your estimate here is marred by the personal or national habit. One is always inclined to make this claim for one's own language because one can catch every shade and element of it while in another language, however well-learned, the ear is not so clair-audient. I cannot agree that the examples you give of Bengali melody beat hollow the melody of the greatest English lyrists. Shakespeare, Swinburne's best work in *Atalanta* and elsewhere, Shelley at his finest and some others attain a melody that cannot be surpassed. It is a different kind of melody, but not inferior.

Bengali has a more melodious basis, it can accomplish melody more easily than English, it has a freer variety of melodies now, for formerly as English poetry was mostly iambic, Bengali poetry used to be mostly *akṣaravṛtta*. (I remember how my brother Manmohan would annoy me by denouncing the absence of melody, the featureless monotony of Bengali rhythm

and tell me how Tagore ought to be read to be truly melodious —like English in stress, with ludicrous effects. That however is by the way.) What I mean is that variety of melodic bases was not conspicuous at that time in Bengali poetry. Nowadays this variety is there and undoubtedly opens possibilities such as perhaps do not exist in other languages.

I do not see, however, how the metrical aspect by itself can really be taken apart from other more subtle elements. I do not mean the spirit and feeling or the sense of the language only, though without depth or adequacy there metrical melody is only a melodious corpse, but the spirit and feeling or subtle (not intellectual) elements of rhythm and it is on these that English depends for the greater power and plasticity of its harmonic and even if to a less extent of its melodic effects. In a word there is truth in what you say but it cannot be pushed so far as you push it.

May 1934

Bengali and English Quantitative Poetry

Nishikanta's poem in *laghu-guru* is splendid. But perhaps Girija would say that it is a pure Bengali rhythm, which means I suppose that it reads as well and easily in Bengali as if it were not written on an unusual rhythmic principle. I suppose that must necessarily be the aim of a new metre or metrical principle; it is what I am trying to do with quantitative efforts in English.

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Is it true that the *laghu-guru* is to the Bengali ear as impossible as would be to the English ear the line made up by Tagore: "Autumn flaunteth in his bushy bowers"? In English such a violence could not be entertained for a moment. It was because Spenser and others tried to base their hexameters and pentameters on this flagrant violation of the first law of English rhythm that the first attempt to introduce quantitative metres in English proved a failure. Accent cannot be ignored in English rhythm — it is why in my attempts at quantitative metre I always count a strongly accentuated syllable, even if the vowel is short, as a long one —

for the stress does really make it long for metrical purposes.

21 July 1936

English Prosody and Bengali Metrics

You have set me two very intricate subjects to wrestle with — English prosody and the *yāugmīka-akṣara* tangle! English prosody is neither syllabic nor quantitative nor anything else; it is simply English prosody — that is to say, everything together, except what it pretends to be. As to the other, you and Prabodh Sen and Anilbaran and Tagore and the rest are already in such a tangle of controversy from which there seems no hope of your ever getting out that I don't propose to add any cord of my own to the knot, and probably, if I tried, it would be a very incorrect cord indeed. However I will try to explain myself as soon as possible. . . .

4 June 1934

Metrical Experiments in Bengali

New Metres in Bengali

Of course, Prabodh Sen is right. I suppose what Buddhadev means is that none of the very great poets invented a metre — they were all too lazy and preferred stealing other people's rhythms and polishing them up to perfection, just as Shakespeare stole all his plots from wherever he could find any worth stealing. But all the same, if that applies to Shakespeare, Homer, Virgil, what about Alcaeus, Sappho, Catallus, Horace? they did a good deal of inventing or of transferring — introducing Greek metres into Latin, for example. I can't spot a precedent in modern European literature, but there must be some. And after all, hang precedents! A good thing — I mean, combining metric invention with perfect poetry — would be still a good thing to do, even if no one had had the good sense to do it before.

4 November 1932

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It is certainly not true that a good metre must necessarily be an easy metre — easy to read or easy to write. In fact even with old established perfectly familiar metres how many of the readers of poetry have an ear which seizes the true movement and the whole subtlety and beauty of the rhythm — it is only in the more popular kind of poems that it gets in their hearing its full value. It is all the more impossible when you bring in not only new rhythms but a new principle of rhythm — or at least one that is not very familiar — to expect it to be easily followed at first by the many. It is only if you are already a recognised master that by force of your reputation you can impose whatever you like on your public — for then even if they do not catch your drift, they will still applaud you and will take some pains to learn

the new principle. If you are imposing a principle not only of rhythm but of scansion to which the ear in spite of past attempts is not trained so as to seize the basic law of the movement in all its variations, a fair amount of incomprehension, some difficulty in knowing how to read the verse is very probable. Easier forms of a new rhythm may be caught in their movement,—even if some will not be able to scan it; but other more difficult forms may give trouble. All that is no true objection to the attempt at something new; novelty is difficult for the human mind—or ear—to accept, but novelty is asked for all the same in all human activities for their growth, amplitude, richer life. As you say, the ear has to be educated—once it is trained, familiar with the principle, what was a difficulty becomes easy, the unusual,—first condemned as abnormal or impossible,—becomes a normal and daily movement.

As for the charge of being cryptic, that is quite another matter. Obscurity due to inadequate expression is one thing, but the cryptic may be simply the expression of more than can be seized at first sight by the ordinary mind. It may be that the ideas are not of a domain in which that mind is accustomed to move or that there is a new turn of expression other than the kind which it has been trained to follow. Again the ordinary turn of a language, as in French or Bengali, may be lucid, direct, easy: if you bring into it a more intricate and suggestive manner in which the connections or transitions of thought are less obvious, that may create a difficulty. A poet can be too easy to read, because there is not much in what he writes and it is exhausted at the first glance,—or too difficult because you have to burrow for the meaning. But otherwise it makes no difference to the excellence of the work, if the reader can catch its burden at the first glance or has to dwell a little on it for the full force of it to come to the surface. The feeling, the way of expression, the combinations of thought, word or image tend often to be new and unfamiliar, but that can very well be a strength and a merit, not an element of failure.

28 January 1933

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I am, as you know quite in agreement with you as regards the principle. At the same time there is a greater difficulty in Bengali than in Hindi and Gujarati. For in these languages the stylisation is a long-accepted fact and the ear of the writer and reader are trained to appreciate it, but in Bengali the trend has been on the contrary to more and more naturalism in metre and such stylisation as there was was not quantitative. Now the writer has the double difficulty of finding out how to stylise successfully in detail and of getting the ear of the public to train itself also. . . .

Quantitative Metre in Bengali

This question of quantity is one in which I find it difficult to arrive at a conclusion. You can prove that it can be done and has been successfully done in Bengali, and you can prove and have proved it yourself over again by writing these poems and bringing in the rhythm, the কঙ্গল, which is absent in Satyen Datta. It is quite true also that stylisation is permissible and a recognised form of art—I mean professed and overt stylisation and not that which hides itself under a contrary profession of naturalness or faithful following of external nature. The only question is how much of it Bengali poetry can bear. I do not think the distinction between song and poem goes at all to the root of the matter. The question is whether it is possible to have ease of movement in this kind of quantitative metre. For a few lines it can be very beautiful or for a short poem or a song; that much cannot be doubted. But can it be made a spontaneous movement of Bengali poetry like the ordinary *mātrā-vṛtta* or the others, in which one can walk or run at will without looking at one's steps to see that one does not stumble and without concentrating the reader's mind too much on the technique so that his attention is diverted from the sense and *bhāva*? If you can achieve some large and free structure in which quantity takes a recognised place as part of the foundation,—it need not be reproduction of a Sanskrit metre,—that would solve the problem in the affirmative.

31 May 1932

Quantity in Classical and Modern Languages

I can't agree with your statement about Sanskrit आ, ए, ओ, that they are long by stylisation only! In fact, I don't quite understand what this can mean; for in Sanskrit आ at least is the corresponding long to the short vowel अ and is naturally as long as the devil — and the other two are in fact no better. The difference between ए and ऐ and ओ and औ is the difference between long and ultra-long, not between short and long. Take for instance the Sanskrit phrase येन तेन प्रकारेण; I can't for the life of me see how anyone can say that the ये ते रे or the का there are naturally short to the ear, but long by stylisation. The classical languages (Sanskrit, Greek, Latin) are perfectly logical, coherent and consistent in the matter of quantity; they had to be because quantity was the very life of their rhythm and they could not treat longs as shorts and shorts as longs as it is done, at every step, in English. Modern languages can do that because their rhythm rests on intonation and stress, quantity is only a subordinate element, a luxury, not the very basis of the rhythmic structure. In English you can write "the old road runs" pretending that "road" is short and "runs" is long, or "a great hate" — where the sound corresponding to Sanskrit ए (great hate) or that corresponding to Sanskrit ओ (old road) is made short or long at pleasure; but to the Sanskrit, Greek or Latin ear it would have sounded like a defiance of the laws of Nature. Bengali is a modern language, so there this kind of stylisation is possible, for there ए can be long, short or doubtful.

All this, not to write more about stylisation, but only as a protest against forcing modern ideas of language sound on an ancient language. Bengali can go on its way very freely without that, Sanskritising when it likes, refusing to Sanskritise when it doesn't like.

2 June 1932

Akṣara-vṛtta and Mātrā-vṛtta

I have read your account of the *tridhārā* and my mind is now clear about it; I have not yet read Anilbaran's contentions, so

there I am still in the dark. But here are certain points that I want to make clear.

(1) Prabodh Sen's rule of the *yaugika-vṛtta* does not agree with what I was taught about the *akṣara-vṛtta*. When I first heard of Bengali metre in England, my informant was quite at sea. He confidently described Michael's blank verse as a 14 syllable line (8+6), but when asked to give examples we found that the lines as pronounced were of 12, 13, 14 or more syllables and when my brother Manmohan asked him to explain this discrepancy, he could merely gape — no explanation was forthcoming! However, when I took up seriously the study of the literature, it was explained to me by competent people, themselves poets and *littérateurs* — thus

“The line is strictly a line of 14 syllables, no more, no less (i.e. it is a true *akṣara-vṛtta*), but the *akṣara* or syllable here is not the sonant Bengali syllable as it is actually pronounced, but the syllable as it is understood on the Sanskrit principle. In Sanskrit each consonant letter (*akṣara*) is supposed to make a separate sound (syllable), either with the aid of other vowels or by force of the short *a* sound inherent in it — except in two cases. First, if there is a conjunct consonant, e.g. *gandha*, the *n* is not sonant, not separate, but *yukta* to the *dh*, and therefore does not stand for a separate syllable; secondly, if there is a *virāma-cihna* as in *daibāṭ*, then also it loses its sonant force, there is no third syllable — it is a dissyllable, not a trisyllable. Bengali has applied this rule, dropping only the last part of it, in disregard of the actual pronunciation. Thus দান or ধন is in Sanskrit (as in Oriya) a dissyllable, in Bengali also it is treated as such in poetry, although in fact it is a monosyllable to the ear. Externally this sounds artificial and false to fact, but rhythmically it is unexceptionable, the cadence of the voice supplying a double metre there. গন্ধ will be a dissyllable as in Sanskrit, because *ndh* is a *yuktākṣara*. On the other hand দৈবাং will be a trisyllable because there is no distinction made of a *virāma-cihna*, no distinction therefore between সরিং and নিধন, each is a trisyllable.”

According to this explanation and the rule it supplies, it is

true that a *yugma-dhvani* at the close of a word has always two *mātrās*, but the other part of Prabodh Sen's rule is not always true, viz. that in the middle of a word it counts only as one. That would be invariably true of an indubitable যুক্তক্ষর, as in গৰু, but not otherwise. On this principle there is no difficulty at all about মহাভারতের কথা, the line is of 14 syllables and cannot be reckoned in *akṣara-vṛtta* as anything else. There is no difficulty about such lines as Michael's

ରାବণ ଶଶ୍ରୀର ମମ ମେଘନାଦ ସ୍ଵାମୀ,—

10 *svaras*, but 14 *akṣaras*,—because the মেঘ, though in the middle of a word, must be two *mātrās*, since the *ghn* in Meghnad is not a compound consonant, but two separate *akṣaras*. There is a difficulty about দিকপ্রাণ্তে and মৃৎপাত্ৰ, but that is because one is undecided whether to treat it as a compound কপ্রা and a compound ত্পা or as two separate words joined together, দিক্, মৃৎ being kept apart as with the *t* of সরিৎ or the *k* of সক্. In the latter case মৃৎ and দিক্ are dissyllables, in the former, trisyllables. And so on, as regards other doubtful points like চাওয়া.

This, I say, was what I was taught and it is according to this rule that I have hitherto scanned the *akṣara-vṛtta*. I am quite prepared to adopt a new principle if it is more scientific, but I think that *historically* this explanation is not unsound, that it represents the idea Michael and Nabin Sen and the rest had of the basis of their verse and shows why it was considered as of a syllabic character.

(2) I did not think or hear that Tagore invented the *mātrā-vṛtta*—I could not, because I never heard of the *mātrā-vṛtta* at that time. What I understood was that the *svara-vṛtta* was not recognised as a serious or poetic metre before Tagore,—it was used only for nursery rhymes etc. or in some kinds of loose popular verse. Tagore did not invent, but he popularised the *svara-vṛtta* as a vehicle for serious poetry—it was at least professedly under his banner that a violent attack was made on the supremacy of the *akṣara-vṛtta*. I remember reading articles even in which it was reviled as a nonsensical conventional fiction: Oriya Bengali. “If you want to keep it” thundered the

polemist, “let us all learn to read like Oriyas, ‘Rabana swasura mama, Meghanada swami’, but let us rather be Bengalis and drop this absurd convention of a pseudo-Sanskritic past.” The article amused me so much by its violence in spite of my preposition for the *akṣara-vṛtta* that I remember it as if I had read it yesterday—and it was only one of a numerous type. At any rate as a result of this campaign, *svara-vṛtta* fixed itself on an equal throne by the side of *akṣara-vṛtta*. I mention it only as a point of literary history of which I was a contemporary witness. I suppose, as usually happens, Tagore’s share in the revolution was exaggerated and there were others who played a large part in its success.

(3) *Mātrā-vṛtta* is therefore to me a new development, not as an invention perhaps, but as a clearly understood distinct principle of metre. But it exists, if I have understood your explanation, by a thorough extension of the principle which the *akṣara-vṛtta* applied only with restrictions. As the Sanskrit limitation about the *virāma-cihna* was swept away in the *akṣara-vṛtta*, so now in the *mātrā-vṛtta* the limitation about conjuncts like ক্ষ is swept away and all *yugma-dhvani*s are reckoned as two *mātrās*. In that sense Anilbaran’s description of it as সংগোত্তম of the *akṣara-vṛtta* would have some meaning, but at the same time it would not diminish the validity of your contention that it is a new opening with endless possibilities in a new principle of metrical rhythm. Two men may be cousins or brothers or near relatives, but one a conservative, the other a revolutionary creating a new world and a new order.

All this is no part of my final formed opinion in the matter. I have not yet gone through either Anilbaran’s writing or Prabodh Sen’s letter. It is only to put down my present understanding of the situation and explain what I meant in my letter.

Mātrā-vṛtta

I am quite convinced of the possibilities of the *mātrā-vṛtta*—which would exist even if Anilbaran is right in insisting that it is the সংগোত্তম of the *akṣara-vṛtta*. Two people may be cousins and

yet have different characters, possibilities and destinies — and so may two metres.

9 September 1932

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I shall go through Prabodh Sen's letter, but it may take me some time. What is the exact scope of the discussion with Anilbaran, is it that he does not recognise the reality of the *mātrā-vṛtta* as a separate principle of Bengali metre? That I suppose was the position before. Originally, indeed, there was only one stream recognised, — that I remember very well, for it was the time when I was learning and assiduously reading Bengali literature; at that time what you now call *svara-vṛtta* was regarded as mere popular verse or an old irregular verse-form. Afterwards with the advent and development of Tagore's poetry, one began to hear of two recognised principles of Bengali metre, Swara (I was going to say Kshara) and Akshara. Is it Anilbaran's contention that only these two are real and legitimate? Whatever it be Anilbaran is a born fighter and if you tell him that all the *Mahārathas* are against him and his squashing defeat a foregone conclusion, he will only gallop faster towards the battle. My own difficulty is that I have not yet grasped the principle of the *mātrā-vṛtta* — *what* is it that determines the long or the short *mātrā* in Bengali?

Mātrā-vṛtta and Laghu-guru

I return you the former letter from Prabodh Sen which I managed to find time to read only today. He has a most acute, ingenious and orderly mind, and what he says is always thought-provoking and interesting; but I am not persuaded that the form of Bengali *mātrā-vṛtta* and Sanskrit *laghu-guru* is *really and intrinsically* the same. Equivalent, no doubt, in a way, — if we substitute Bengali metre for Sanskrit quantity; but not the same because Bengali metre and Sanskrit quantity are two quite different things. It is something like the equivoque by which one pretends that an English iambic metre or any other with a Greek name is the same as a Latin or Greek metre with that name — an equivoque based on the fiction that a stressed and an unstressed English syllable are

quantitatively long and short. There is a certain kind of general equivalence, but a fundamental difference—as those who have tried to find an equivalent in the English stress system to the quantitative Latin or Greek hexameter, alcaic or sapphic metres have discovered—they could not be transplanted, because it is only in true quantity that they can live.

23 September 1932

Laghu-guru

If you can establish *laghu-guru* as a recognised metrical principle in Bengali, you will fulfil one of my two previsions for the future with regard to the language. When I was first introduced to Bengali prosody, I was told that Madhusudan's blank verse was one of fourteen syllables, but to my astonishment found that sometimes ten syllables even counted as fourteen—e.g.

রাবণ শশুর মম মেঘনাদ স্বামী

Of course, it was afterwards explained to me that the syllables were counted on the Sanskrit system, and I got the real run of the rhythmic movement; but I always thought: why not have an alternative system with a true sonant syllabic basis—and, finally, I saw the birth (I mean as a recognised serious metre) of the *svara-vṛtta*. Afterwards I came across Hemchandra's experiments in bringing in a quantitative element and fell in love with the idea and hoped somebody would try it on a larger scale. But up till now this attempt to influence the future did not materialise. Now perhaps in your hands it will—even apart from songs.

20 October 1932

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It [*a song composed by a disciple*] is good. But there is a tendency to run into a conventional model. Originality, plasticity, vigour, a new utterance and a new music are needed to give the *laghu-guru* an undisputed standing equal to that of the other rhythms.

4 June 1934

Gadya-chanda

I can't say that I have studied or even read Bengali গদ্যচন্দ, so I am unable to pronounce. In fact what is গদ্যচন্দ? Is it the equivalent of European free verse? But there the essence of the thing is that you model each line freely as you like — regularity of any kind is out of court there. Is it Nishikanta's aim to create a kind of rhymed prose metre? On what principle? He seems to want a movement which will give more volume, strength and sonority than Bengali verse can succeed in creating but which is yet poetry, not prose arranged in lines and not even, at the best, poetic prose cut into lines of different lengths. All things can be tried — the test is success, true poetic excellence. Nishikanta has sent me some of his গদ্যচন্দ before. It seemed to me to have much flow and energy, but there is something hanging on to it which weighs, almost drags — is it the ghost of prose? But that is only a personal impression; as I have said, on this subject I am not a qualified judge.

29 September 1936

Rhyme

Rhyme and Inspiration

Some rhyme with ease — others find a difficulty. The coming of the rhyme is a part of the inspiration just like the coming of the form of the language. The rhyme often comes of itself and brings the language and connection of ideas with it. For all these things are quite ready behind somewhere and it is only a matter of reception and transmission — it is the physical mind and brain that make the difficulty.

2 February 1934

Imperfect Rhymes

These [*“life” and “cliff”*, *“smile” and “will”*] are called in English imperfect rhymes and can be freely but not too freely used. Only you have to understand the approximations and kinships of vowel sounds in English, otherwise you will produce illegitimate children like *“splendour”* and *“wonder”* which is not a rhyme but an assonance.

19 December 1935

*

It is no use applying a Bengali ear to English rhythms any more than a French ear to English or an English ear to French metres. The Frenchman may object to English blank verse because his own ear misses the rhyme or the Englishman to the French Alexandrine because he finds it rhetorical and monotonous. Irrelevant objections both. Imperfect rhymes are regarded in English metre as a source of charm in the rhythmic field bringing in possibilities of delicate variation in the constant clang of exact rhymes.

21 November 1935

*

“Lure” and “more” are rhymes? It is enough to make the English prosodists of the past turn in their graves or if they are in heaven to make their imaginative hair angelic or archangelic stand up erect on their beatified heads. I am aware that modernist poets rhyme anything with everything. They would not shudder even in rhyming “hand” with “fiend” or “heat” with “bit” or “kid”, — probably they would do it with a wicked leer of triumph. But all the same crime is crime even if it becomes fashionable.

21 May 1937

*

I never heard of two pronunciations of “lure” and “pure” one of which approximates to “lore” and “pore”— of course they may exist in some dialect, but anything that would make “pure” rhyme with “more” seems to be horribly impure and “lure” rhyming with “gore” does not lure me at all. I am aware of Arjava’s rhyming of “bore” and “law” etc.,— but that is quite new as a permissible imperfect rhyme— “dawn” and “morn” were in my time held up as a vulgarism, the type of all that is damnable. As for “decrease” and “earthiness” that is quite a different matter from “lure” and “more”; the former are long and short of the same vowel sounds, long e sound and short e sound, the latter are two quite different vowel sounds. If you can rhyme a pure long u sound with a pure long o sound, there is no reason why you should not rhyme Cockney fashion “day” with “high”, “paid” with “wide”, and by a little extension why not “jade” with “solitude”. Finally we can come to the rhyming of any word with any word provided there is the same or a similar consonant at the end. Modernism admits imperfect— very imperfect rhymes, but that is really a different principle and cannot be extended to blank verse, mongrelising all similar ending sounds.

22 May 1937

English Poetic Forms

The Sonnet — Regular and Irregular Rhyme Schemes

The two regular sonnet rhyme-sequences are (1) the Shakespearean ab ab cd cd ef ef gg—that is three quatrains with alternate rhymes with a closing couplet and (2) the Miltonic with an octet abba abba (as in your second and third quatrains) and a sestet of three rhymes arranged according to choice. The Shakespearean is closer to the natural lyric rhythm, the Miltonic to the ode movement—i.e. something large and grave. The Miltonic is very difficult for it needs either a strong armoured structure of the thought or a carefully developed unity of the building which all poets can't manage. However there have been attempts at an irregular sonnet rhyme-sequence. Keats tried his hand at one a century ago and I vaguely believe (but that may be only an illusion of Maya) that modern poets have played loose fantastic tricks of their own invention; but I don't have much first-hand knowledge of modern (contemporary) poetry. Anyhow I have myself written a series of sonnets with the most heterodox rhyme arrangements, so I couldn't very well go for you when you did the same. One who has committed many murders can't very well rate another for having done a few. All the same, this sequence is rather rather—a Miltonic octet with a Shakespearean close would be more possible; I think I have done something of the kind with not too bad an effect, but I have no time to consult my poetry file and am not sure. In the sonnet too it might be well for you to do the regular thing first, soberly and well, and afterwards when you are sure of your steps, frisk and dance.

22 February 1936

Sonnet and Satire

In a sonnet thought should be set to thought, line added to line in a sort of architectural sequence, or else there should be a progression like the pressing of waves to the shore, with the finality of arrival swift in a closing couplet or deliberate as in the Miltonic form.

As to your other proposition, I am not sure that satiric verse and the metaphysical lyrical can rightly be put together. Naturally, a great poetic genius could or might do it with success; but genius can do anything. Satire is more often than not a kind of half-poetry, because its inspiration comes primarily from the critical mind and a not very high part of it, not from the creative vision or a moved intensity of poetic feeling. Creative vision or the moved intensity can come in to lift this motive but, except rarely, it does not lift it very high.

It is Dryden and Juvenal who have oftenest made something like genuine poetry out of satire, the first because he often changes satire into a vision of character and the play of psychological forces, the other because he writes not from a sense of the incongruous but from an emotion, from a strong poetic "indignation" against the things he sees around him. Aristophanes is a comic creator — like Shakespeare when he turns in that direction — the satiric is only a strong line in his creation; that is a different kind of inspiration, not the ordinary satire. Pope attempted something creative in his *Rape of the Lock*, but the success, if brilliant, is thin because the deeper creative founts and the kindlier sources of vision are not there. 27 April 1931

The Ode

A successful ode must be a perfect architectural design and Keats' Odes are among the best, if not the best in English poetry, as I think they are, at any rate from the point of view of artistic creation, because of the perfect way in which the central thought is developed and each part related to the whole like the design of the masses in a perfect building — each taking its inevitable place

in the whole. In yours the ideas, words, images flow like your "Ocean" with a certain fluent grandeur of diction and richness of colour, but there is not any inevitable beginning, middle, connections and end. An ode in that respect should be like a sonnet though on a bigger scale and with a different principle of structure — but it must be, like the sonnet, a perfect structure.

4 March 1935

The Ballad

I have not much taste for the English ballad form; it is generally either too flat or too loud and artificial and its basic stuff is a strenuous popular obviousness that needs a very rare genius to transform it.

20 November 1932

Poem and Song

No, a song is not a kind of poem — or, at least, it need not be. There are some very good songs which are not poems at all. In Europe, song-writers as such or the writers of the librettos of the great operas are not classed among poets. In Asia the attempt to combine song-quality with poetic value has been more common; in ancient Greece also lyric poetry was often composed with a view to being set to music. But still poetry and song-writing, though they can be combined, are two different arts, because the aim and the principle of their building is not the same.

The difference is not that poetry has to be understood and music or singing has to be felt (*anubhūti*); that one has to reach the soul through the precise written sense and the other through the suggestion of sound and its appeal to some inner chord within us. If you only understand the intellectual content of a poem, its words and ideas, you have not really appreciated the poem at all, and a poem which contains only that and nothing else, is not true poetry. A true poem contains something more which has to be felt just as you feel music, and that is its more important and essential part. Poetry has a rhythm, just as music has, though of a different kind, and it is the rhythm that helps this

something else to come out through the medium of the words. The words by themselves do not carry it or cannot bring it out altogether, and this is shown by the fact that the same words written in a different order and without rhythm or without the proper rhythm would not at all move or impress you in the same way. This something else is an inner content or suggestion, a soul-feeling or soul-experience, a life-feeling or life-experience, a mental emotion, vision or experience (not merely an idea), and it is only when you can catch this and reproduce some vibration of the experience — if not the experience itself — in you that you have got what the poem can give you, not otherwise.

The real difference between a poem and a song is that a song is written with a view to be set to musical rhythm and a poem is written with the ear listening for the needed poetic rhythm or word-music. These two rhythms are quite different. That is why a poem cannot be set to music unless it has either been written with an eye to both kinds of rhythm or else happens to have (without especially intending it) a movement which makes it easy or at least possible to set it to music. This happens often with lyrical poetry, less often with other kinds. There is also this usual character of a song that it is satisfied to be very simple in its content, just bringing out an idea or feeling, and leaving it to the music to develop its unspoken values. Still this reticence is not always observed; the word claims for itself sometimes a larger importance.

4 July 1931

*

No, a song need not have a less intricate metre than a poem; and if it appears usually more simple in its rhythmical turns, yet in that apparent simplicity a considerable, though very delicate subtlety is possible. A certain *liquidity* of sound is essential, but so long as you keep that, you can play variations to a great extent. I don't think an identical regularity or unbroken recurrence is imperative — though equivalence of sound values may be. It is a matter of the inner ear and its guidance rather than of any exact external measurements — especially in the English language, which is too free and plastic for the theories which

are sometimes imposed upon its movements. The theories don't matter much, because the language contrives to go its own way even while pretending to conform to the theories. I don't know what models to propose to you — old style English practice was too regular for the freer spirit of the modern lyric and my reading in contemporary poetry has been too fragmentary and unsystematic for me to remember the right models, though they must be there.

17 December 1931

*

About French or German songs I know nothing — but as for the English, except for a few like Cardinal Newman's hymn "Lead, kindly Light" they don't exist so far as I know, — I mean of course as regards their contents, manner, style. I believe in European music the words are of a very minor importance, they matter only as going with the music. But I am not an expert on the subject, so I can't go farther into it. When religious songs were written in mediaeval Latin, they were very fine, but with the use of the modern languages the art was lost — the modern European hymnals are awful stuff.

13 May 1936

Nursery Rhymes and Folk Songs

The question you have put, as you put it, can admit of only one answer. I cannot agree that nursery rhymes or folk songs are entitled to take an important place or any place at all in the history of the prosody of the English language or that one should start the study of English metre by a careful examination of the rhythm of "Humpty Dumpty", "Mary, Mary, quite contrary" or the tale of the old woman in a shoe. There are many queer theories abroad nowadays in all the arts, but I doubt whether any English or French critic or prosodist would go so far as to dub "Who killed Cock Robin?" the true movement of English rhythm, putting aside Chaucer, Spenser, Pope or Shelley as too cultivated and accomplished or too much under foreign influence or to seek for his models in popular songs or the products of the *café chantant* in preference to Hugo or Musset or Verlaine.

But perhaps something else is meant — is it that one gets the crude indispensable elements of metre better from primitive just-shaped or unshaped stuff than from more perfect work in which these are overlaid by artistic developments and subtle devices — an embryo or a skeleton is more instructive for the study of men than the developed flesh-and-blood structure? That may have a certain truth in some lines of scientific research, but it cannot stand in studying the technique of an art. At that rate one could be asked to go for the basic principles of musical sound to the jazz or even to the hurdy-gurdy and for the indispensable rules of line and colour to the pavement artist or to the signboard painter. Or perhaps the suggestion is that here one gets the primary unsophisticated rhythms native to the language and free from the artificial movements of mere literature. Still, I hardly fancy that the true native spirit or bent of English metre is to be sought or can be discovered in

Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall,
Humpty Dumpty had a great fall

and is lost in

Rarely, rarely, comest thou,
Spirit of Delight.

Popular verse catches the child ear or the common ear much more easily than the music of developed poetry because it relies on a crude jingle or infantile lilt — not because it enshrines in its movement the true native spirit of the tongue. I hold it to be a fallacy to think that the real spirit and native movement of a language can be caught only in crude or primitive forms and that it is disguised in the more perfect work in which it has developed its own possibilities to their full pitch, variety and scope. It is as if one maintained that the true note and fundamental nature of the evolving soul were to be sought in the earthworm or the scarabaeus and not in the developed human being — or in the divinised man or Jivanmukta.

As for foreign influences, most of the elements of English prosody, rhyme, foot-scansion, line lengths, stanza forms and

many others have come in from outside and have altered out of all recognition the original mould, but the spirit of the language has found itself as much in these developments as in the first free alliterative verse — as much and more. The spirit of a language ought to be strong enough to assimilate any amount of imported elements or changes of structure and measure.

23 February 1933

Substance, Style, Diction

Form and Substance

On the general question [*of rhythm vs. substance*] the truth seems to me to be very simple. It may be quite true that fine or telling rhythms without substance (substance of idea, suggestion, feeling) are hardly poetry at all, even if they make good verse. But that is no ground for belittling beauty or excellence of form or ignoring its supreme importance for poetic perfection. Poetry is after all an art and a poet ought to be an artist of word and rhythm, even though, necessarily, like other artists, he must also be something more than that, even much more. I hold therefore that harshness and roughness, কঁকশ্তা, are not merits, but serious faults to be avoided by anyone who wants his work to be true poetry and survive. One can be strong and powerful, full of sincerity and substance without being harsh, rough or aggressive to the ear. Swinburne's later poetry is a mere body of rhythmic sound without a soul; but what of Browning's constant deliberate roughness or, let us say, excessive sturdiness which deprives much of his work of the claim to be poetry — it is already much discredited and it is certain there is much in it that posterity will carefully and with good reason forget to read. Energy enough there is and abundance of matter and these carry the day for a time and give fame, but it is only perfection that endures. Or, if the cruder work lasts, it is only by association with the perfection of the same poet's work at his best. I may say also that if mere rhythmic acrobacies of the kind to which you very rightly object condemn a poet's work to inferiority and a literature deviating on to that line to decadence, the drive towards a harsh strength and rough energy of form and substance may easily lead to other kind of undesirable acrobacy and an opposite road towards individual inferiority and general decadence. Why

should not Bengali poetry go on the straight way of its progress without running either upon the rocks of roughness or into the shallows of mere melody? Austerity of course is another matter — rhythm can be either austere to bareness or sweet and subtle, and a harmonious perfection can be attained in either of these extreme directions if the mastery is there.

As for rules, — rules are necessary but they are not absolute; one of the chief tendencies of genius is to break old rules and make departures, which create new ones. English poetry of today luxuriates in movements which to the mind of yesterday would have been insanity or chaotic licence, yet it is evident that this freedom of experimentation has led to discoveries of new rhythmic beauty with a very real charm and power and opened out possible lines of growth, — however unfortunate many of its results may be. Not the formal mind, but the ear must be the judge.

Moreover the development of a new note — the expression of a deeper yogic or mystic experience in poetry — may very well demand for its fullness new departures in technique, a new turn or turns of rhythm, but these should be, I think, subtle in their difference rather than aggressive.

4 January 1932

Richness of Image

Richness of image is not the whole of poetry. There are many “born poets” who avoid too much richness of image. There are certain fields of consciousness which express themselves naturally through image most — there are others that do it more through idea and feeling.

13 February 1936

*

Poetry depends on power of thought, feeling, language — not on abundance of images. Some poets are rich in images, all need not be.

18 February 1936

*

What is this superstition? At that rate Sophocles, Chaucer, Milton, Wordsworth are not good poets, because their poetry is not

full of images? Is Kalidasa a greater poet than Vyasa or Valmiki because he is fuller of images?

18 February 1936

*

Poetry does not consist only in images or fine phrases. When Homer writes simply "Sing, Goddess, the baleful wrath of Achilles, son of Peleus, which laid a thousand woes on the Achaeans and hurled many strong souls of heroes down to Hades and made their bodies a prey for dogs and all the birds; and the will of Zeus was accomplished", he is writing in the highest style of poetry.

13 June 1936

Conceit

When an image comes out from the mind not properly transmuted in the inner vision or delivered by the alchemy of language, it betrays itself as coin of the fancy or the contriving intellect and is then called a conceit.¹

26 August 1931

*

Conceit means a too obviously ingenious or far-fetched or extravagant idea or image which is evidently an invention of a clever brain, not a true and convincing flight of the imagination. E.g. Donne's (?) comparison of a child's small-pox eruptions to the stars of the milky way or something similar: I have forgotten the exact thing, but that will serve.

This hill turns up its nose at heaven's height,
Heaven looks back with a blue contemptuous eye—

that's a conceit.

O cloud, thou wild black wig on heaven's bald head
would be another. These are extravagant specimens.

¹ This sentence was extracted for separate publication from a letter given in full on pages 505–06.—Ed.

I haven't time to think out any ingenious ones, nor to discuss trochees adequately—have given one or two hints in the margin.

Some more conceits, ingenious all of them.

Am I his tail and is he then my head?
But head by tail, I think, is often led.

Also

Like a long snake came wriggling out his laugh.

Also

How the big Gunner of the upper sphere
Is letting off his cannon in the sky!
Flash, bang bang bang! he has some gunpowder
With him, I think. Again! Whose big bow-wow
Goes barking through the hunting fields of Heaven?
What a magnificent row the gods can make!

And don't forget

The long slow scolopendra of the train.

Or if you think these are not dainty or poetic enough, here's another

God made thy eyes sweet cups to hold blue wine;
By sipping at them rapture-drunk are mine.

Enough? Amen!

16 May 1937

Oxymoron

An oxymoron often necessitates what you call echolalia — e.g.

For good like this can be
An obstacle against the highest Good
And light itself denial of the Light.

Whether such things make good poetry or not is a matter of opinion.

28 January 1934

Simplicity and Condensation

Simplicity is not the test. There can be a supreme beauty of simplicity and there can be the opposite. 10 November 1938

*

Too violent condensations of language or too compressed thoughts always create a sense either of obscurity or, if not that, then of effort and artifice, even if a powerful and inspired artifice. It is why Yeats finds your sonnets stiff and laboured, I suppose. Yet very great poets and writers have used them, so great a poet as Aeschylus or so great a prose stylist as Tacitus. Then there are the famous “knots” in the Mahabharata, the recurrence of lines so compressed in thought and speech (although the normal style of the poem is of a crystal clearness,) that even the divine scribe Ganesha, lord of wisdom and learning who wrote the poem to Vyasa’s dictation, had to stop and cudgel his brains for minutes to find out their significance,—thus giving the poet a chance to breathe and compose his lines. For the condition laid down was that the inspiration must be continuous and Ganesha would not even once have to pause for want of lines to write! I think one can say that these condensations are justified when they say something with more power and depth and full, if sometimes recondite, significance than an easier speech would give, but to make it a constant element of the language (without a constant justification of that kind) would turn it into a mannerism or artifice.

1 October 1932

Barenness and Ruggedness

I am afraid the language of your appreciations or criticisms here is not apposite. There is nothing “bare and rugged” in the two lines you quote;² on the contrary they are rather violently figured—the *osé* image of a fire opening a door of a treasure-house would probably be objected to by Cousins or any other

² *A rhythmic fire that opens a secret door,
And the treasures of eternity are found;*

purist. The language of poetry is called bare when it is confined rigorously to just the words necessary to express the thought or feeling or to visualise what is described, without superfluous epithets, without images, without any least rhetorical turn in it. E.g. Cowper's

Toll for the brave,
The brave who are no more —

is bare. Byron's

Jehovah's vessels hold
The godless heathen's wine;

does not quite succeed because of a rhetorical tinge that he has not been able to keep out of the expression. When Baxter (I think it was Baxter) writes

I spoke as one who never would speak again
And as a dying man to dying men,

that might be taken as an example of strong and bare poetic language. I have written of Savitri waking on the day of destiny —

Immobile in herself she gathered force.
This was the day when Satyavan must die, —

that is designedly bare.

But none of these lines or passages can be called rugged; for ruggedness and austerity are not the same thing; poetry is rugged when it is rough in language and rhythm or rough and unpolished but sincere in feeling. Donne is often rugged, —

Yet dare I almost be glad, I do not see
That spectacle of too much weight for me.
Who sees God's face that is self-life must die;
What a death were it then to see God die?

but it is only the first line that is at all bare.

On the other side you describe the line of your preference

My moments pass with moon-imprinted sail

by the epithets “real, wonderful, flashing”. Real or surreal? It is precisely its unreality that makes the quality of the line; it is surreal, not in any depreciatory sense, but because of its supraphysical imaginativeness, its vivid suggestion of occult vision; one does not quite know what it means, but it suggests something that one can vividly see. It is not flashing—gleaming or glinting would be nearer the mark—it penetrates the imagination and awakens sight and stirs or thrills with a sense of beauty but it is not something that carries one away by its sudden splendour.

You say that it is more poetic than the other quotation—perhaps, but not for the reason you give, rather because it is more felicitously complete in its image and more suggestive. But you seem to attach the word poetic to the idea of something remotely beautiful, deeply coloured or strangely imaged with a glitter in it or a magic glimmer. On the whole, what you seem to mean is that this line is “real” poetry, because it has this quality and because it has a melodious sweetness of rhythm, while the other is of a less attractive character. Your solar plexus refuses to thrill where these qualities are absent—obviously that is a serious limitation in the plasticity of your solar plexus, not that it is wrong in thrilling to these things but that it is sadly wrong in thrilling to them only. It means that your plexus will remain deaf and dead to most of the greater poetry of the world—to Homer, Milton, Valmiki, Vyasa, a great part even of Shakespeare. That is surely a serious limitation of the appreciative faculty. What is strange and beautiful has its appeal, but one ought to be able also to stir to what is great and beautiful or strong and noble or simple and beautiful or pure and exquisite. Not to do so would be like being blind of one eye and seeing with the other only very vividly strange outlines and intensely bright colours.

I may add that if really I appreciate any lines for something which I see behind them but they do not actually suggest or express, then I must be a very bad critic. The lines you quote

not only say nothing about the treasures except that they are found but do not suggest anything more. If then I see from some knowledge that has nothing to do with the actual expression and suggestion of the lines all the treasures of eternity and cry "How rich" — meaning the richness, not of the treasures, but of the poetry, then I am doing something quite illegitimate which is the sign of a great unreality and confusion in my mind, very undesirable in a critic. It is not for any reason of that kind that I made a mark indicating appreciation but because I find in the passage a just and striking image with a rhythm and expression which are a sufficient body for the significance.

2 September 1938

Nobility and Grandeur

I am unable to agree with you that Chapman's poetry is noble or equal, even at its best, to Homer and it seems to me that you have not seized the subtler quality of what Arnold means by noble. "Muscular vigour, strong nervous rhythm" are forceful, not noble. Everywhere in your remarks you seem to confuse nobility and forcefulness, but there is between the two a gulf of difference. Chapman is certainly forceful, next to Marlowe, I suppose, the most forceful poet among the Elizabethans. Among the lines you quote from him to prove your thesis, there is only one that approaches nobility:

Much have I suffered for thy love, much laboured, wishèd much
and even then it is spoilt for me by the last two words which are almost feeble. The second quotation:

When the unmeasured firmament bursts to disclose her light

has a rhythm which does not mate with the idea and the diction; these are exceedingly fine and powerful — but not noble. There is no nobility at all in the third:

And such a stormy day shall come, in mind and soul I know,
When sacred Troy shall shed her towers, for tears of overthrow.

The first line of the couplet is rhetorical and padded, the second is a violent, indeed an extravagant conceit which does not convey any true and high emotion but is intended to strike and startle the intellectual imagination. One has only to compare Homer's magnificent lines absolute in their nobility of restrained yet strong emotion, in which the words and rhythm give the very soul of the emotion

essetai ēmar hot' an pot' olōlē Ilios hirē
(There shall be a day when sacred Ilion shall perish)

but in its depths, not with any outward vehemence. In the fourth quotation:

Heard Thetis' foul petition and wished in any wise
The splendour of the burning ships might satiate his eyes

the first line has the ordinary ballad movement and diction and cannot rank, the second is fine poetry, vivid and impressive, with a beginning of grandeur — but the nobility of Homer, Virgil or Milton is not there. The line strikes at the mind with a great vehemence in order to impress it — nobility in poetry enters in and takes possession with an assured gait, by its own right. It would seem to me that one has only to put the work of these greater poets side by side with Chapman's best to feel the difference. Chapman no doubt lifts rocks and makes mountains suddenly to rise — in that sense he has elevation or rather elevations; but in doing it he gesticulates, wrestles, succeeds finally with a shout of triumph; that does not give a noble effect or a noble movement. See in contrast with what a self-possessed grandeur, dignity or godlike ease Milton, Virgil, Homer make their ascensions or keep their high levels.

Then I come to Arnold's examples of which you question the nobility on the strength of my description of one essential of the poetically noble. Mark that the calm, self-mastery, beautiful control which I have spoken of as essential to nobility is a poetic, not an ethical or Yogic calm and control. It does not exclude the poignant expression of grief or passion, but it expresses it with a certain high restraint so that even when the mood is personal it

yet borders on the widely impersonal. Cleopatra's words³ are an example of what I mean; the disdainful compassion for the fury of the chosen instrument of self-destruction which vainly thinks it can truly hurt her, the call to death to act swiftly and yet the sense of being high above what death can do, which these few simple words convey has the true essence of nobility. "Impatience" only! You have not caught the significance of the words "poor venomous fool", the tone of the "Be angry and despatch", the tense and noble grandeur of the suicide scene with the high light it sheds on Cleopatra's character. For she was a remarkable woman, a great queen, a skilful ruler and politician, not merely the erotic *détraquée* people make of her. Shakespeare is not good at describing greatness, he poetised the *homme moyen*, but he has caught something here. The passage stands comparison with the words of Antony "I am dying, Egypt, dying" (down to "A Roman by a Roman, valiantly vanquished") which stand among the noblest expressions of high, deep, yet collected and contained emotion in literature — though that is a masculine and this a feminine nobility. There is in the ballad of Sir Patrick Spense the same poignancy and restraint — something that gives a sense of universality and almost impersonality in the midst of the pathetic expression of sorrow. There is a quiver but a high compassionate quiver, there is no wail or stutter or vehemence. As for the rhythm, it may be the ballad "alive", but it is not "kicking" — and it has the overtones and undertones which ballad rhythm has not at its native level. Then for the other example you have given — lines didactic in intention can be noble, as for instance, the example quoted by Arnold from Virgil,

Disce, puer, virtutem ex me verumque labore,
Fortunam ex aliis

³ *If thou and nature can so gently part,
The stroke of death is as a lover's pinch
Which hurts and is desired. . . .
. . . Come, thou mortal wretch,
With thy sharp teeth this knot intrinsicate
Of life at once untie. Poor venomous fool,
Be angry and dispatch.*

— Shakespeare, Antony and Cleopatra

or the line quoted from Apollo's speech about the dead body of Hector and Achilles' long-nourished and too self-indulgent rage against it

tlēton gar Moirai thumon thesan anthrōpoisin.

These two lines

Still raise for good the supplicating voice,
But leave to heaven the measure and the choice,

are less fine and harmonious in their structure; there is something of a rhetorical turn and therefore it reaches a lower height of nobility, but nobility there is, especially in the second line of the couplet. I do not find it cold; there is surely a strong touch of poetic emotion there.

I may say however that grandeur and nobility are kindred but not interchangeable terms. One can be noble without reaching grandeur — one can be grand without the subtle quality of nobility. Zeus Olympius is grand and noble; Ravana or Briareus with the thousand arms is grand without being noble. Lear going mad in the storm is grand, but too vehement and disordered to be noble. I think the essential difference between the epic movement and ballad rhythm and language lies in this distinction between nobility and force — in the true ballad usually a bare, direct and rude force. The ballad metre has been taken by modern poets and lifted out of its normal form and movement, given subtle turns and cadences and made the vehicle of lyric beauty and fervour or of strong or beautiful narrative; but this is not the true original ballad movement and ballad motive. Scott's movement is narrative, not epic — there is also a lyrical narrative movement and that is the quality reached by Coleridge, perhaps the finest use yet made of the ballad movement. It is doubtful whether the ballad form can bear the epic lift for more than a line or two, a stanza or two — under the epic stress the original jerkiness remains while the lyric flow smooths it out. When it tries to lift to the epic height, it does so with a jerk, an explosive leap or a quick canter; one feels the rise, but there is still something of the old trot underneath the movement. It is at least what I feel

throughout in Chesterton — there is a sense of effort, of disguise with the crudity of the original material still showing through the brilliantly coloured drapery that has been put upon it. If there is no claim to epic movement, I do not mind and can take it for what it can give, but comparisons with Homer and Virgil and the classic hexameter are perilous and reveal the yawning gulf between the two movements. As to the line of fourteen syllables, Chapman often overcomes its difficulties but the jog-trot constantly comes out. It may be that all that can be surmounted, but Chapman and Chesterton do not surmount it — whatever their heights of diction or imagination, the metre interferes with their maintenance, even, I think, with their attaining their full eminence. Possibly a greater genius might wipe out the defect — but would a greater genius have cared to make the endeavour?

I have left myself no space or time for Chesterton as a poet and it is better so because I have not read the poem [*The Ballad of the White Horse*] and know him only by extracts. Your passages establish him as a poet, a fine and vivid poet by intervals, but not as a great or an epic poet — that is my impression. Sometimes I find your praise of particular passages extravagant, as when you seem to put Marlowe's mighty line

See, see where Christ's blood streams in the firmament

and Chesterton's facetious turn about the stretched necks and burned beards on a par. Humour can be poetic and even epic, like Kaikeyi's praise of Manthara's hump in the Ramayana; but this joke of Chesterton's does not merit such an apotheosis. That is ballad style, not mighty or epic. Again all that passage about Colan and Earl Harold is poor ballad stuff — except the first three lines and the last two — poor in diction, poor in movement. I am unable to enthuse over

It smote Earl Harold over the eye
And blood began to run.

The lines marrying the soft sentimentalism of the "small white daisies" with the crude brutality of the "blood out of the brain" made me at first smile with the sense of the incongruous, it

seemed almost like an attempt at humour — at least at the grotesque. I prefer Scott's *Marmion*; in spite of its want of imagination and breadth it is as good a thing as any Scott has written; on the contrary, these lines show Chesterton far below his best. The passage about the cholera and wheat is less flat; it is even impressive in a way, but impressive by an exaggerated bigness and forced attempt at epic greatness on one side and a forced and exaggerated childish sentimentalism on the other. The two do not fuse and the contrast is grotesque. This cholera image might be fine out of its context, it is at least powerful and vivid, but applied to a man (not a god or a demigod) it sounds too inflated — while the image of the massacer muttering sentimentally about bread while he slew is so unnatural as to tread on or over the borders of the grotesque — it raises even a smile like the poor small white daisies red with blood out of Earl Harold's brain. I could criticise farther, but I refrain. On the other hand, Chesterton is certainly very fine by flashes. His images and metaphors and similes are rather explosive, sometimes they are mere conceits like the "cottage in the clouds", but all the same they have very often a high poetic quality of revealing vividness. At times also he has fine ideas finely expressed and occasionally he achieves a great lyrical beauty and feeling. He is terribly unequal and unreliable, violent, rocketlike, ostentatious, but at least in parts of this poem he does enter into the realms of poetry. Only I refuse to regard the poem as an epic — a sometimes low-falling, sometimes high-swinging lyrical narrative is the only claim I can concede to it.

2 February 1935

*

"Noble" has a special meaning, also "elevation" is used in a certain sense by Arnold. In that sense these words do not seem to me to be applicable either to Chapman or to the ballad metre. Strong, forceful, energetic, impressive they may be — but nobility is a rarer, calmer, more self-mastered, highly harmonious thing than these are. Also nobility and grandeur are not quite the same thing.

2 February 1935

Austerity and Exuberance

I am still at a loss what to answer about উচ্ছ্঵াস, because I still don't understand exactly what your correspondent is aiming at in his criticism. There is not more *ucchvāsa* in Bengali poetry than in English, if by the word is meant rhetoric, free resort to imagery, prolix weaving of words and ideas and sentiments around what one has to say. Indian poetry in the Sanskritic languages — there are exceptions of course — was for the most part more restrained and classic in taste or else more impressionist and incisive than most English poetry; the qualities or defects noted above came into Bengali under the English influence. I don't see therefore the point of his remark that the English language cannot express the Indian temperament. It is true of course to a certain extent, first, because no foreign language can express what is intimate and peculiar in a national temperament, it tends at once to become falsified and seems exotic, and especially the imagery or sentiment of one language does not go well into that of another; least of all can the temperament of an Oriental tongue be readily transferred into a European tongue — what is perfectly simple and straightforward in one becomes emphatic or over-coloured or strange in the other. But that has nothing to do with *ucchvāsa* in itself. As to emotion — if that is what is meant, — your word effusiveness is rather unfortunate, for effusiveness is not praiseworthy in poetry anywhere; but vividness of emotion is no more reprehensible in English than in Bengali poetry. You give as examples of *ucchvāsa* among other things Madhusudan's style, Tagore's poem to me, a passage from Gobinda Das. I don't think there is anything in Madhusudan which an English poet writing in Bengali would have hesitated to father. Tagore's poem is written at a high pitch of feeling perfectly intelligible to anyone who had passed through the exaltation of the Swadeshi days, but not more high pitched than certain things in Milton, Shelley, Swinburne. In Gobinda Das's lines, — let us translate them into English

Am I merely thine? O Love, I am there clinging
In every limb of thee — there ever is my creation and my
dissolution,

the idea is one that would not so easily occur to an English poet, it is an erotic mysticism, easily suggested to a mind familiar with the experiences of Vedantic or Vaishnava mystics; but this is not effusiveness, it is intensity — and an English writer — e.g. Lawrence — could be quite as intense but would use a different idea or image.

1 October 1932

*

It is not easy to say precisely what is austerity in the poetic sense — for it is a quality that can be felt, a spirit in the writer and the writing, but if you put it in the strait-waistcoat of a definition — or of a set technical method — you are likely to lose the spirit altogether. In the spirit of the writing you can feel it as something constant, — self-gathered, grave and severe; it is the quality that one at once is aware of in Milton, Wordsworth, Aeschylus and which even their most fervent admirers would hardly attribute to Shakespeare, Shelley, Keats, Tennyson, Euripides. But there is also an austerity in the poetic manner and that is more difficult to describe or to fix its borders. At most one can say that it consists in a will to express the thing of which you write, thought, object or feeling, in its just form and exact power without addition and without exuberance. The austerer method of poetry avoids all lax superfluity, all profusion of unnecessary words, excess of emotional outcry, self-indulgent daub of colour, over-brilliant scattering of images, all mere luxury of external art or artifice. To use just the necessary words and no others, the thought in its simplicity and bare power, the one expressive or revealing image, the precise colour and nothing more, just the exact impression, reaction, simple feeling proper to the object, — nothing spun out, additional, in excess. Any rioting in words, colour, images, emotions, sound, phrase for their own sake, for their own beauty, attraction, luxury of abundant expression or creation would, I suppose, be what your friend means by

ucchvāsa. Even, an extreme contemporary tendency seems to condemn the use of image, epithet, colour, pitch or emphasis of any kind, except on the most sparing scale, as a vice. Length in a poem is itself a sin, for length means padding—a long poem is a bad poem, only brief work, intense, lyrical in spirit can be throughout pure poetry. Milton, for example, considered austere by the common run of mortals, would be excluded from the list of the pure for his sprawling lengthiness, his epic rhetoric, his swelling phrases, his cult of the grandiose. To be perfect you must be small, brief and restrained, meticulous in cut and style.

This extremism in the avoidance of excess is perhaps itself an excess. Much can be done by barenness in poetry—a poetic nudism if accompanied by either beauty and grace or strength and power has its excellence. There can be a vivid or striking or forceful or a subtle, delicate or lovely barenness which reaches to the highest values of poetic expression. There can be also a compact or a stringent barenness—the kind of style deliberately aimed at by Landor; but this can be very stiff and stilted as Landor is in his more ambitious attempts—although he did magnificent things sometimes, like his lines on Rose Aylmer,—you can see there how emotion itself can gain by a spare austerity in self-expression. But it is doubtful whether all these kinds—Wordsworth's lyrics, for example, the “Daffodils”, the “Cuckoo”—can be classed as austere. On the other hand there can be a very real spirit and power of underlying austerity behind a considerable wealth and richness of expression. Arnold in one of his poems gives the image of a girl beautiful, rich and sumptuous in apparel on whose body, killed in an accident, was found beneath the sumptuousness, next to the skin, an under-robe of sackcloth. If that is admitted, then Milton can keep his claim to austerity in spite of his epic fullness and Aeschylus in spite of the exultant daring of his images and the rich colour of his language. Dante is, I think, the perfect type of austerity in poetry, standing between the two extremes and combining the most sustained severity of expression with a precise power and fullness in the language which gives the sense of packed riches—no mere barenness anywhere.

But after all exclusive standards are out of place in poetry; there is room for all kinds and all methods. Shakespeare was to the French classicists a drunken barbarian of genius; but his spontaneous exuberance has lifted him higher than their willed severity of classical perfection. All depends on the kind one aims at—expressing what is in oneself—and an inspired faithfulness to the law of perfection in that kind. That needs some explanation, perhaps,—but I have here perforce to put a dash and finish—

8 October 1932

*

I said that Aeschylus like Milton was austere *au fond*—there is as in Dante a high serious restrained power behind all they write; but the outward form in Milton is grandiose, copious, lavish of strength and sweep, in Aeschylus bold, high-imaged, strong in colour, in Dante full of concise, packed and significantly forceful turn and phrase. These external riches might seem not restrained enough to the purists of austerity: they want the manner and not the *fond* only to be impeccably austere. I did not mean that Dante reached the summit of austerity in this sense; in fact I said he stood between the two extremes of bare austerity and sumptuousness of language. But even in his language there is a sense of *tapasyā*, of concentrated restraint in his expressive force. Amal in his translation [*from Dante*] has let himself go in the direction of eloquence more than Dante who is too succinct for eloquence, and he uses also a mystical turn of phrase which is not Dante's—yet he has got something of the spirit in the language, something of Dante's concentrated force of expression into his lines. You have spread yourself out more even than Amal, but still there is the Dantesque in your lines also,—very much so, I should say; with only this difference that Dante would have put it into fewer words than you do. It is the Dantesque stretching itself out a little—more large-limbed, permitting itself more space.

Aeschylus' manner cannot be described as *ucchvāsa*, at least in the sense given to it in my letter. He is not carefully restrained and succinct in his language like Dante, but there is a certain royal measure even in his boldness of colour and image which

has in it the strength of *tapasyā* and cannot be called *ucchvāsa*. I suppose in Bengali this term is used a little indiscriminately for things that are not quite the same in spirit. If mere use of bold image and fullness of expression, epithet, colour, splendour of phrase is *ucchvāsa*, apart from the manner of their use, I would say that austerity and *ucchvāsa* of a certain kind are perfectly compatible. At any rate two-thirds of the poetry hitherto recognised as the best in different literatures comes of a combination of these two elements. If I find time I shall one day try to explain this point with texts to support it.

I don't know the Bengali for austerity. গান্ধীর and other kindred things are or can be elements of austerity, but are not austerity itself. *Anucchvāsa* is not accurate; one can be free from উচ্ছ্঵াস without being austere. The soul of austerity in poetry as in Yoga is আত্মসংযম all the rest is variable, the outward quality of the austerity itself may be variable.

9 October 1932

Sentimentality and Clichés

It is all right as it is except the first lines, “ . . . so grief-hearted . . . strangely lone”, strike at once the romantically sentimental note of more than a hundred years ago which is dead and laughed out of court nowadays. Especially in writing anything about vital love, avoid like the plague anything that descends into the sentimental or, worse, the namby-pamby.

30 May 1932

*

“Young heart”, “thrilled companionship”, “warm hour . . . lip to lip”, “passionate unease” are here poorly sensuous *clichés* — they or any one or two of them might have been carried off in a more moved and inspired style, gathering colour from their surroundings or even a new and rich life; but here they stand out in a fashionable dressed-up insufficiency. This secret of fusing all in such a white heat or colour heat of sincerity of inspiration that even the common or often-used phrases and ideas catch fire and burn brilliantly with the rest is one of the secrets of the true poetic afflatus. But if you stop short of that inspiration and

begin to write only efficient poetry, then you must be careful about your “P”s and “Q”s.

19 March 1932

Undignified Words

I dispute the legitimacy of the comment.⁴ It is based on a conventional objection to undignified and therefore presumably unpoetic words and images — an objection which has value only when the effect is uncouth or trivial, but cannot be accepted otherwise as a valid rule. Obviously, it might be difficult to bring in “bobbing” in an epic or other “high” style, although I suppose Milton could have managed it and one remembers the famous controversy about Hugo’s “*mouchoir*”. But in poetry of a mystic (occult or spiritual) kind this does not count. The aim is to bring up a vivid suggestion of the thing seen and some significance of the form, movement, etc. through which one can get at the life behind and its meaning; a familiar adjective here can serve its purpose very well as a touch in the picture and there are occasions when no other could be as true and living or give so well the precise movement needed.

It is the same with the metre — an identical principle applies, a natural kinship between the subject or substance of the poem and its soul-movement. For instance, a certain lightness, a suggestion of faery dance or faery motion may be needed as one element and this would be lost by the choice of a heavier more dignified rhythm. After all, subject to a proper handling, that is the first important desideratum, an essential harmony between the metrical rhythm and the thing it has to express.

5 February 1932

Sensuousness and Vulgarity

ପୂର୍ଣ୍ଣକୁଣ୍ଡ, if it means the breasts, would be described in English as sensuous but not as vulgar. The word vulgar is only used for coarse and crude expressions of the sensual, trivial or ugly. But

⁴ Someone commented, apropos of a poem written by the correspondent: “There is one adjective I take objection to, ‘bobbing globelets’.” — Ed.

it does not seem to me that it should naturally be taken = breast, but indicate the whole vital and physical being regarded as a vessel or jar which can be filled with honey or water or poison. Nothing vulgar in that.

30 January 1937

Erotic Poetry

An expression of the lower vital lashed to imaginative fury is likely to produce not poetry but simply “sound and fury”, — “tearing a passion to tatters” — and in its full furiousness may even rise to rant and fustian. Erotic poetry more than any other needs the restraint of beauty and form and measure, otherwise it risks being no longer poetic but merely pathologic.

14 June 1932

Poetry and Philosophy

What does your correspondent mean by “philosophy” in a poem? Of course if one sets out to write a metaphysical argument or treatise in verse like the Greek Empedocles or the Roman Lucretius, it is a risky business and is likely to land you into prosaic poetry which is a less pardonable mixture than poetic prose! Even when philosophising in a less perilous way, one has to be careful not to be flat or heavy. It is obviously easier to be poetic when singing about a skylark than when one tries to weave a robe of verse to clothe the attributes of the Brahman! But that does not mean that there can be no spiritual thought or no expression of truth in poetry; there is no great poet who has not tried to philosophise. Shelley wrote about the skylark, but he also wrote about the Brahman. “Life, like a dome of many-coloured glass” is as good poetry as “Hail to thee, blithe Spirit!”. There are flights of unsurpassable poetry in the Gita and the Upanishads. These rigid dicta are always excessive and there is no reason why a poet should allow the expression of his personality or the spirit within him or his whole poetic mind to be clipped, cabined or stifled by any theories or “thou shalt not”s of that character.

7 December 1931

*

I can take no stock in your friend's theories — at that rate half the world's poetry would have to disappear. And what is meant by philosophy — there is none in your poem, there is only vision and emotion of spiritual experience, which is a different thing altogether. Truth and thought and sight cast into forms of beauty cannot be banished in that cavalier way. Music and art and poetry have striven from the beginning to express the vision of the deepest and greatest things and not the things of the surface only, and it will be so as long as there are poetry and art and music.

27 February 1932

*

The only remedy is to extend the philosophy through the whole poem so as to cure the dispareteness. Also it must be a figured philosophy. Philosophy can become poetry if it ceases to be intellectual and abstract in statement and becomes figured and carries a stamp of poetic emotion and vision.

14 June 1938

Grades of Perfection in Poetic Style

Grades of Perfection in Poetry

I suppose “inevitability of expression” consists of two things producing one effect: (1) the rightness of individual words and phrases, (2) the rightness of the general lingual reconstruction of the poetic vision — that is, the manner, syntactical and psychological, of whole sentences and their coordination.

To the two requisites you mention which are technical, two others have to be added, a certain smiling sureness of touch and inner breath of perfect perfection, born not made, in the words themselves, and a certain absolute winging movement in the rhythm. Without an inevitable rhythm there can be no inevitable wording. If you understand all that, you are lucky. But how to explain the inexplicable, something that is self-existent? That simply means an absoluteness, one might say, an inexplicably perfect and in-fitting thusness and thereness and thatness and everything-elseness so satisfying in every way as to be unalterable. All perfection is not necessarily inevitability. I have tried to explain in *The Future Poetry* — very unsuccessfully I am afraid — that there are different grades of perfection in poetry: adequateness, effectivity, illumination of language, inspiredness — finally, inevitability. These are things one has to learn to feel, one can't analyse.

All the styles, “adequate”, “effective”, etc. can be raised to inevitability in their own line.¹

The supreme inevitability is something more even than that, a speech overwhelmingly sheer, pure and true, a quintessential essence of convincingly perfect utterance. That goes out of

¹ This item is composed of parts of three letters that were typed together and revised by Sri Aurobindo in that form. This sentence is from a letter reproduced in full on page 191.—Ed.

all classifications and is unanalysable. Instances would include the most different kinds of style—Keats' “magic casements”, Wordsworth's [*lines on*] Newton and his “fields of sleep”, Shakespeare's “Macbeth has murdered sleep”, Homer's descent of Apollo from Olympus, Virgil's “Sunt lachrimae rerum” and his “O passi graviora”. 16 September 1934

*

You write, in regard to a poem of mine, “it is difficult to draw the line” between the illumined and inspired styles. Was that a general statement, or was it meant to apply only in that particular instance? I suppose there must be some characteristic in the rhythm and the manner of expression to mark out the inspired style.

It is often a little difficult. The illumined is on the way to the inspired and a little more intensity of vision and expression is enough to make the difference. 24 September 1934

Grades of Perfection and Planes of Inspiration

Is there any coordination between the differences of style and the different planes of inspiration?

I don't think so—unless one can say that the effective style comes from the higher mind, the illumined from the illumined mind, the inspired from the plane of intuition. But I don't know whether that would stand at all times—especially when each style reaches its inevitable power. 23 September 1934

*

If one can write from the highest plane, i.e. overmind and supermind plane—as you have done in *Savitri*—is it evidently going to be greater poetry than any other poetry?

Nobody ever spoke of supermind plane poetry. Is *Savitri* all from overhead plane? I don't know.

You lay down certain features of overhead poetry, e.g. greater depth and height of spiritual vision, inner life and experience

and character of rhythm and expression. But it won't necessarily outshine Shakespeare in poetic excellence.

Obviously if properly done it would have a deeper and rarer substance, but would not be necessarily greater in poetic excellence.

You say also that for overhead poetry technique, it must be the right word and no other in the right place, right sounds and no others in a design of sound that cannot be changed even a little. Well, is that not what is called sheer inevitability which is the sole criterion of highest poetry?

Yes, but mental and vital poetry can be inevitable also. Only in O.P. there must be a rightness throughout which is not the case elsewhere—for without this inevitability it is no longer fully O.P., while without this sustained inevitability there can be fine mental and vital poetry. But practically that means O.P. comes usually by bits only, not in a mass.

You may say that in overhead poetry expression of spiritual vision is more important. True, but why can't it be clothed in as fine poetry as in the case of Shakespeare? The highest source of inspiration will surely bring in all the characteristics of highest poetry, no?

It can, but it is more difficult to get. It can be as fine poetry as Shakespeare's if there is the equal genius, but it needn't by the fact of being O.P. become finer.

17 May 1937

Examples of Grades of Perfection in Poetic Style

Examples from Classical and Mediaeval Writers

Would you please tell me where in Homer the “descent of Apollo” occurs?¹

It is in the first fifty or a hundred lines of the first book of the Iliad.²

I don’t suppose Chapman or Pope have rendered it adequately.

Of course not — nobody could translate that — they have surely made a mess of it.

Homer’s passage translated into English would sound perfectly ordinary. He gets the best part of his effect from his rhythm. Translated it would run merely like this, “And he descended from the peaks of Olympus, wroth at heart, bearing on his shoulders arrows and doubly pent-in quiver, and there arose the clang of his silver bow as he moved, and he came made like unto the night.” His words too are quite simple but the vowelisation and the rhythm make the clang of the silver bow go smashing through the world into universes beyond while the last words give a most august and formidable impression of godhead.

Would you consider this line of Dante’s as miraculously inevitable as Virgil’s “O passi graviora”?

e venni dal martiro a questa pace

That is rather the adequate inevitable.

¹ See page 186 — Ed.

² The passage begins with line 44 of the first book of the Iliad: bē de kat’ Oulumpoio karēnōn chōomenos kēr. — Ed.

And, is it possible to achieve a prose-inevitability—with rhythm and everything as perfectly wonderful as in poetry? Take, for instance (I quote from memory):

O mors quam amara est memoria tua homini pacem
habenti in substantiis suis.

or

Fulcite me floribus stipate me malis quia amore langueo

or

Et his malis omnibus mors furibunda succedit.

I don't think any of these has at all the same note as poetry gets—
it is fine writing, but not the inevitable. 18 September 1934

*

What exactly is Dante's style? Is it the forceful adequate (of course at an "inevitable" pitch)? Or is it a mixture of the adequate and the effective? A line like—

e venni dal martiro a questa pace—

is evidently adequate; but has this the same style—

sí come quando Marsia traesti
della vagina delle membra sue?

The "forceful adequate" might apply to much of his writing, but much else is pure inevitable; elsewhere it is the inspired style as in the last lines quoted. I would not call the other line merely adequate; it is much more than that. Dante's simplicity comes from a penetrating directness of poetic vision, it is not the simplicity of an adequate style. 3 November 1936

Examples from Amal Kiran and Sri Aurobindo

I should like to know whether, when you call a poem very good, very fine, very beautiful, very powerful, or magnificent, you mean that it is inevitable—at least in its total impression, whatever slight declivities there may be in one or two places.

Not necessarily.

And does the difference of epithet in the above descriptions indicate levels of excellence or merely kinds of excellence on the same level?

Rather kinds than levels.

Also, if you say that a poem or part of it is very effective, do you always have in mind that which you have termed "effectivity" in the grade of perfections, as distinct from "adequateness", "illumination of language", "inspiredness" and "inevitability"?

No, I am not usually thinking of that classification.

For example, what do you think of these lines?

. . . For I have viewed,
Astir within my clay's engulfing sleep,
An alien astonishment of light!
Let me be merged with its unsoundable deep
And mirror in futile farness the full height
Of a heaven barred for ever to my distress,
Rather than hoard life's happy littleness!

This is indeed an example of the effective style at its best, that is to say rising to some touch of illumination, especially in the second, fourth and sixth lines.

16 September 1934

*

Do you find the lines of this sonnet any good?

Seeing You walk our little ways, they wonder
That I who scorn the common loves of life
Should kneel to You in absolute surrender,
Deeming Your visible perfection wife
Unto my spirit's immortality.
They think I have changed one weakness for another,
Because they mark not the new birth of me —

This body which by You, the Mystic Mother,
Has now become a child of my vast soul!
Loving Your feet's earth-visitation, I
Find each heart-throb miraculously flower
Out of the unplumbable God-mystery
Behind dark clay, and hour by dreamful hour,
Upbear that fragrance like an aureole.

Exceedingly good. Here you have got to inevitability. I forgot to say that all the styles “adequate”, “effective” etc. can be raised to inevitability in their own line.³ The octet here is adequateness raised to inevitability except the fourth and fifth lines in which the effective undergoes the same transformation. In the sestet on the other hand it is the illumined style that becomes inevitable.

17 September 1934

*

What kind of style are these lines?

Is the keen voice of tuneful ecstasy
To be denied its winged omnipotence,
Its ancient kinship to immensity
And the swift suns?

This seems to me the effective style at a high pitch.

Or these?

But plunged o'er difficult gorge and prone ravine
And rivers thundering between dim walls,
Driven by immense desire, until he came
To dreadful silence of the peaks and trod
Regions as vast and lonely as his love.

This is also high-pitch effective except the last line which is in the inspired style — perhaps!

23 September 1934

*

³ This sentence was incorporated in the composite letter printed on pages 185–86, which was revised in that form by Sri Aurobindo. — Ed.

What about these lines?

Far-visaged wanderer, dost Thou rejoice
Straining towards the empty-hearted gloom
To kiss the cold lips of eternity?

Not with sage calm but thrilled vast hands I claim
The unfathomed dark which round my spirit lies —
And touch immortal rapturous loveliness!

All effective-illuminated.

O star of creation pure and free,
Halo-moon of ecstasy unknown,
Storm-breath of the soul-change yet to be,
Ocean self enraptured and alone!

Can't say.

Withdrawn in a lost attitude of prayer.

Illumined passing into the inspired.

24 September 1934

*

I feel my poem *The Triumph of Dante* has now been sufficiently quintessenced. If it satisfies you, will you make whatever analysis is possible of its inspirational qualities?

For, how shall earth be dark when human eyes
Mirror the love whose smile is paradise? —
A smile that misers not its golden store
But gives itself and yearns to give yet more,
As though God's light were inexhaustible
Not for His joy but this one heart to fill!

There are three different tones or pitches of inspiration in the poem, each in its own manner reaching inevitability. The first seven lines up to "gaze" bear as a whole the stamp of a high elevation of thought and vision — height and illumination lifted up still farther by the Intuition to its own inspired level; one passage (lines 3, 4) seems to me almost to touch in its tone of expression an overmind seeing. But here "A light, a hush . . . a voice of tears" anticipates the second movement by an element of subtle inner intensity in it. This inner intensity — where a deep secret intimacy of feeling and seeing replaces the height and large luminosity — characterises the rest of the first part. This passage has a seizing originality and authenticity in it — it is here that one gets a pure inevitability. In the last lines the intuition descends towards the mental plane with a less revelatory power in it but more precise in its illumination. That is the difference between sheer vision and thought. But the poem is exceedingly fine as a whole; the close also is of the first order.

16 November 1936

Examples from Harindranath Chattopadhyaya

Your satisfaction with today's poems is certainly justified, for they are very fine — they are among the best. The conciseness and clarity — which, by the way, were always there in lyric and sonnet — have grown very rapidly and there is nothing here of their opposites. To quote particular lines is difficult, but I may instance

a tremulous drop of rain
Silverly slipped over the voiceless hill

as an example of some kind of inevitability, — for there are many kinds, — or again in another kind

His marvellous experiment of wings
 Crowned with a rich assurance of the height;

or, in yet another

Unmemory yourself of sign and mark
 Which draw you still towards the greying earth.

The mark of this inevitability or perfect perfection is the saying of a thing that has to be said with such a felicity of phrase and rhythm that it seems as if it could not be better or otherwise said in the highest poetic way, it sounds final and irrevocable. All in a poem cannot be like that; one has to be satisfied with a more ordinary perfection — some critics even hold that this should be so as a matter of deliberate technique so as to bring the greater moments of the poetry into relief — all ought not to be Himalayan peaks clustering one upon the other, there must be valleys, plains, plateaus from which they rise. But in any case these moments lift poetical expression to its highest possibilities. There are other lines that could be quoted, but these will suffice.

Examples from Nirodbaran

About yesterday's poem . . . I don't see what beauty is there to make you mark certain lines twice — e.g. "Into a heaven of light", which is a very simple, ordinary sort of line.

There is probably a defect in your solar plexus which makes it refuse to thrill unless it receives a strong punch from poetry — an ornamental, romantic or pathetic punch. But there is also a poetry which expresses things with an absolute truth but without effort, simply and easily, without a word in excess or any laying on of colour, only just the necessary. That kind of achievement is considered as among the greatest things poetry can do.

A phrase, word or line may be quite simple and ordinary and yet taken with another phrase, line or word become the perfect thing.

A line like "Life that is deep and wonder-vast" has what I have called the inevitable quality; with a perfect simplicity and

straightforwardness it expresses something in a definitive and perfect way that cannot be bettered; so does “lost in a breath of sound” with less simplicity but with the same inevitability. I don’t mean that highly coloured poetry cannot be absolutely inevitable, it can, e.g. Shakespeare’s “In cradle of the rude impetuous surge” and many others. But most often highly coloured poetry attracts too much attention to the colour and its brilliancy so that the thing in itself is less felt than the magnificence of its dress. All kinds are legitimate in poetry. I only wanted to point out that poetry can be great or perfect even if it uses simple or ordinary expressions, e.g. Dante simply says “In His will is our peace” and in writing that in Italian produces one of the greatest lines in all poetic literature.

1 April 1938

Section Four

Translation

Translation: Theory

Literalness and Freedom

A translator is not necessarily bound to the exact word and letter of the original he chooses; he can make his own poem out of it, if he likes, and that is what is very often done. This is all the more legitimate since we find that literal translations more completely betray than those that are reasonably free — turning life into death and poetic power into poverty and flatness. It is not many who can carry over the spirit of a poem, the characteristic power of its expression and the turn of its rhythmical movement from one language to another, especially when the tongues in question are so alien in temperament to each other as English and Bengali. When that can be done, there is the perfect translation.

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The proper rule about literalness, I suppose, is that one should keep as close as possible to the original provided the result is that the translation does not read like a translation but like an original poem in Bengali and as far as possible as if it were the original poem originally written in Bengali. Whether that ideal is always realisable is another matter. When it can't be done one has to dodge or deviate. I admit that I have not practised what I preached, — whenever I translated, I was careless of the hurt feelings of the original text and transmogrified it without mercy into whatever my fancy chose. But that is a high and mighty criminality which one ought not to imitate. Latterly I have tried to be more moral in my ways, I don't know with what success. But anyhow it is a case of "Do what I preach and avoid what I practise."

10 October 1934

Translation of Prose into Poetry

I think it is quite legitimate to translate poetic prose into poetry; I have done it myself when I translated *The Hero and the Nymph* on the ground that the beauty of Kalidasa's prose is best rendered by poetry in English, or at least that I found myself best able to render it in that way. Your critic's rule seems to me rather too positive; like all rules it may stand in principle in a majority of cases, but in the minority (which is the best part, for the less is often greater than the more) it need not stand at all. Pushed too far, it would mean that Homer and Virgil can be translated only in hexameters. Again, what of the reverse cases — the many fine prose translations of poets so much better and more akin to the spirit of the original than any poetic version of them yet made? One need not go farther than Tagore's English version of his *Gitanjali*. If poetry can be translated so admirably (and therefore legitimately) into prose, why should not prose be translated legitimately (and admirably) into poetry? After all, rules are made more for the convenience of critics than as a binding law for creators.

9 November 1931

Translation: Practice

Remarks on Some Translations

I do not think it is the ideas that make the distinction between European and Indian tongues — it is the turn of the language. By taking over the English turn of language into Bengali one may very well fail to produce the effect of the original because this turn will seem outlandish in the new tongue, but one can always by giving a right turn of language more easily acceptable to the Bengali mind and ear make the idea as natural and effective as in the original; or even if the idea is strange to the Bengali mind one can by the turn of language acclimatise it, make it acceptable. The original thought in the passage you are translating¹ may be reduced to something like this: “Here is all this beautiful world, the stars, the forest, the birds—I have not yet lived long enough to know them all or for them to know me so that there shall be friendship and familiarity between us and now I am thus untimely called away to die.” That is a perfectly human feeling, quite as possible, more easily possible, to an Indian than to a European (witness Kalidasa’s *Shakuntala*) and can very well be acceptable. But the turn given it in English is abrupt and bold though quite forcible and going straight home—in Bengali it may sound strange and not go home. If so you have to find a turn in Bengali for the idea which will be as forcible and direct; not here only but everywhere this should be the rule. Naturally one should not go too far away from the original and say something quite different in substance but, subject to that limitation, any necessary freedom is quite admissible.

October 1934

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¹ *I have not numbered half the brilliant birds
In one green forest . . .
Nor have I seen the stars so very often
That I should die.*

—Sri Aurobindo, Love and Death

It is not that I find the translations here satisfactory in the full sense of the word, but they are better than I expected. There is none of them, not even the best, which I would pronounce to be quite the thing. But this “quite the thing” is so rare a *trouvaille*, it is as illusive as the capture of eternity in the hours. As for catching the subtleties, the difficulty lies in one supreme faculty of the English language which none other I know possesses, the ease with which it finds the packed allusive turn, the suggestive unexpressed, the door opening on things ineffable. Bengali, like French, is very clear and luminous and living and expressive, but to such clear languages the expression of the inexpressible is not so easy — one has to go out of one’s way to find it. Witness Malarmé’s wrestlings with the French language to find the symbolic expression — the right turn of speech for what is behind the veil. I think that even in these languages the power to find it with less effort must come; but meanwhile there is the difference.

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Your translations.

1. Translation of Baudelaire,² very good, third and fourth verse superb. Literalness here does not matter so long as you are faithful to the spirit and the sense. But I don’t think you are justified in inserting হিন্দুয়ের — *volupté* here means bold and intense pleasure of the higher vital, not the lesser pleasure of the senses, — it is the *volupté* you do actually get when you rise, whether inwardly or outwardly like the aviators into the boundless heights.

2. Shelley.³ Good poetry, but as a translation vulnerable in the head and the tail. In the head because, it seems to me that your সে ধন and তা বলি lays or may lay itself open to the construction that human love is a rich precious thing which the poet unfortunately does not possess and it is only because of this deplorable poverty that he offers the psychic devotion, less warm and rich and desirable: but still in its own way rare and

² Élégation (*in Les fleurs du mal*) — *Ed.*

³ One word is too often profaned — *Ed.*

valuable! I exaggerate perhaps, but, still, if it is at all open to a meaning of this kind, then it says the very reverse of Shelley's intended significance. For in the English "what men call love" is strongly depreciatory, and can only mean something inferior, something that is poor and not rich, not truly love. Shelley says, in substance, "Human vital love is a poor inferior thing, a counterfeit of true love, which *I* cannot offer to *you*. But there is a greater thing, a true psychic love, all worship and devotion, which men do not readily value, being led away by the vital glamour, but which the heavens do not reject, though it is offered from something so far below them, so maimed and ignorant and sorrow-vexed as the human consciousness which is to the divine consciousness as the moth to the star, as night to the day. And will not you accept this from me, you who in your nature are kin to the heavens, you who seem to me to have something of the divine nature, to be something bright and happy and pure, far above the 'sphere of our sorrow'?" Of course all that is not said, but only suggested — but it is obviously the spirit of the poem. As to the tail, I doubt whether your last line brings out the sense of "something afar from the sphere of our sorrow". If I make these criticisms at all, it is not because your version is not good, but because you have accustomed me to find in you a power of rendering the spirit and sense of your original while turning it into fine poetry in its new tongue which I would not expect or exact from any other translator.

3. Amal.⁴ I think here you have not so much rendered the English lines into Bengali as translated Amal into Dilip. Is not that the sense of your plea for Bengali colour and simile? Amal's lines are not easily translatable, least of all, I imagine, into Bengali. There is in them a union or rather fusion of high severity of speech with exaltation and both with a pervading intense sweetness which it is almost impossible to transfer bodily without loss into another language. There is no word in excess, none that could have been added or changed without spoiling the expression, every word just the right revelatory one — no colour,

⁴ This errant life (see page 501–02) — Ed.

no ornamentation, but a sort of suppressed burning glow; no similes, but images which have been fused inseparably into the substance of the thought and feeling — the thought itself perfectly developed, not idea added to idea at the will of the fancy, but perfectly interrelated and linked together like the limbs of an organic body. It is high poetic style in its full perfection and nothing of all that is transferable. You have taken his last line and put in a lotus face and made divine love bloom in it, — a pretty image, but how far from the glowing impassioned severity of phrase, “And mould thy love into a human face”! So with your মধুর গোপনে and the “heart to heart words intimate”. I do not suppose it could have been done otherwise, however, or done better; and what you write now is always good poetry — which is what I suppose Tagore meant to say when he wrote “তোমার আর ভয় নাহি”.

And after all I have said nothing about Huxley or Baudelaire!

11 July 1931

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Your translations are very good, but much more poetic than the originals: some would consider that a fault, but I do not. The songs of these Bhaktas (Kabir and others) are very much in a manner and style that might be called the “hieratic primitive”, like a picture all in intense line, but only two or three essential lines at a time; the only colour is the hue of a single and very simple strong spiritual idea or emotion or experience. It is hardly possible to carry that over into modern poetry; the result would probably be, instead of the bare sincerity of the original, some kind of ostensible artificial artlessness that would not be at all the same thing.

I have no objection to your substituting Krishna for Rama, and if Kabir makes any, which is not likely, you have only to sing to him softly, “*Rām Shyām judā mat karo bhāī*”, and he will be silenced at once.

The bottom reason for the preference of Rama or Krishna is not sectarian but psychological. The Northerner prefers Rama because the Northerner is the mental, moral and social man in

his type, and Rama is a congenial Avatar for that type; the Bengali, emotional and intuitive, finds all that very dry and plumps for Krishna. I suspect that is the whole mystery of the choice. Apart from these temperamental preferences and turning to essentials, one might say that Rama is the Divine accepting and glorifying a mould of the human mental, while Krishna seems rather to break the human moulds in order to create others from the higher planes; for he comes down direct from the Overmind and hammers with its forces on the mind and vital and heart of man to change and liberate and divinise them. At least that is one way of looking at their difference.

March 1932

*

If your translations are read as independent poems they are very beautiful, but they have more of the true "eclogue" than Baudelaire. To be literal (grammatically) is hardly possible in a poetic version and the style of Baudelaire is not easy to transcribe into another language. There is an effect of masculine ease and grace which is really the result of the verbal economy and restraint of which you speak and has therefore at its base a kind of strong austerity supporting the charm and apparent ease—it is very difficult to get all that in together. It is what has happened in your translation—one element has been stressed at the expense of the other. Certain elements that are not Baudelaire have got in here and there, as in the lines you point out. On the other hand at other places by departing from closeness to the original you have got near to the Baudelaire manner at its strongest, e.g.

I'd have my eyrie hard against the sky.

20 March 1934

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There is no question of defective poetry or lines. There are two ways of rendering a poem from one language into another—one is to keep strictly to the manner and turn of the original, the other to take its spirit, sense and imagery and reproduce them freely so as to suit the new language. Amal's poem is exceedingly

succinct, simply-direct and compact in word, form, rhythm, yet full of suggestion — it would perhaps not be possible to do the same thing in Bengali; it is necessary to use an ampler form, and this is what you have done. Your translation is very beautiful; only, side by side with the original, one looks like a delicate miniature, the other like a rich enlargement. If you compare his

Where is it calling
The eyes of night

with the corresponding lines in your poem, you can see the difference. I did not mean to suggest that it was necessary to change anything.

11 July 1937

The English Bible

The English Bible is a translation, but it ranks among the finest pieces of literature in the world.

27 February 1936

Part Two
On His Own and Others' Poetry

Section One
On His Poetry and Poetic Method

Inspiration, Effort, Development

Writing and Rewriting

It will be valuable knowledge to learn how *Six Poems* were written and the three recent sonnets and how *Savitri* is being led forward to its consummation.

There is no invariable how — except that I receive from above my head and receive changes and corrections from above without any initiation by myself or labour of the brain. Even if I change a hundred times, the mind does not work at that, it only receives. Formerly it used not to be so; the mind was always labouring at the stuff of an unshaped formation. The sonnets by the way are not recent, except *Nirvana* — two are some years old already. In any case, the poems come as a stream, beginning at the first line and ending at the last — only some remain with one or two changes only, others have to be recast if the first inspiration was an inferior one. *Savitri* is a work by itself unlike all the others. I made some eight or ten recasts of it originally under the old insufficient inspiration. Afterwards I am altogether rewriting it, concentrating on the first Book and working on it over and over again with the hope that every line may be of a perfect perfection — but I have hardly any time now for such work.

31 October 1934

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Harin used to write ten or twelve poems in a day or any number more. It takes me usually a day or two days to write and perfect one or three days even, or if very inspired, I get two short ones out, and have perhaps to revise the next day. Another poet will be like Virgil writing nine lines a day and spending all the rest of his time polishing and polishing. A fourth will be like Manmohan

as I knew him setting down half lines and fragments and taking 2 weeks or 2 months to put them into shape. The time does not matter, getting it done and the quality alone matter. So forge ahead and don't be discouraged by the prodigious rapidity of Nishikanta.

8 December 1935

*

If Harin could receive his inspiration without any necessity for rewriting, why not you?

So could I if I wrote every day and had nothing else to do and did not care what the level of inspiration was so long as I produced something exciting.

Do you have to rewrite because of some obstruction in the way of the inspiration?

The only obstruction is that I have no time to put myself constantly into the poetic creative posture and if I write at all have to get out something in the intervals of quite another concentration.

With your silent consciousness, it should be possible to draw from the highest planes with the slightest pull.

The highest planes are not so accommodating as all that. If they were so, why should it be so difficult to bring down and organise the supermind in the physical consciousness? What happy-go-lucky fancy-web-spinning ignoramuses you all are. You speak of silence, consciousness, overmental, supramental etc. as if they were so many electric buttons you have only to press and there you are. It may be one day but meanwhile I have to discover everything about the working of all possible modes of electricity, all the laws, possibilities, perils etc., construct modes of connection and communication, make the whole far-wiring system, try to find out how it can be made fool-proof and all that in the course of a single lifetime. And I have to do it while my blessed disciples are firing off their gay or gloomy *a priori* reasonings at me from a position of entire irresponsibility

and expecting me to divulge everything to them not in hints—but at length. Lord God *in omnibus!* 29 March 1936

29 March 1936

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Every time I complain of difficulty in writing, you quote the names of Milton and Virgil, but you forget they had no Supramental Avatar or Guru to push them on.

Considering that the Supramental Avatar himself is quite incapable of doing what Nishikanta or Jyoti do, i.e. producing a poem or several poems a day, why do you bring him in? In England indeed I could write a lot every day but most of that has gone to the Waste Paper Basket. 13 November 1936

13 November 1936

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A great bother and an uninteresting business, this chiselling, I find. But perhaps it is very pleasant to you, as you cast and recast *ad infinitum*, we hear, poetry or prose.

Poetry only, not prose. And in poetry only one poem, *Savitri*. My smaller poems are written off at once and if any changes are to be made, it is done the same day or the next day and very rapidly done. 9 May 1937

9 May 1937

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After so much trouble and pain, yesterday's poem was maimed! What a capricious Goddess is the Muse! But how partial to you!

Not at all. I have to labour much more than you, except for sonnets which come easily and short lyrics which need only a single revision. But for the rest I have to rewrite 20 or 30 times. Moreover I write only at long intervals. 3 October 1938

3 October 1938

Pressure of Creative Formation

I know very well these pressures of a mental Power or creative formation to express itself and be fulfilled. When it presses like that, there is nothing to do but to let it have way, so as to leave

the mind unoccupied and clear; otherwise it will be pushed two ways and not in the condition of ease and clearness necessary for the concentration.

Inspiration and the Silent Mind

When I ask for “advice” I want to know how to direct my consciousness. Should I concentrate on anything in particular or just quiet my mind and turn it upwards and inwards? And I should like you also to tell me why it is that poetry seems to have fled.

I don’t know why poetry has fled you — it seems to me to have intervals in its visits to you very often, is it not? I used to have the same malady myself when I was writing poetry. I rather think it is fairly common: Dilip and Nishikanta who can write whenever they feel inclined are rare birds, now-infant phenomena.

I don’t know about the direction of consciousness. My own method is not to quiet the mind, for it is eternally quiet, but to turn it upward and inward. You, I suppose, would have to quiet it first which is not always easy. You have tried it?

5 October 1936

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Do you mean that the method you advised [*to “sit in vacant meditation and see what comes from the intuitive Gods”*] can really do something?

It was a joke. But all the same that is the way things are supposed to come. When the mind becomes decently quiet, an intuition perfect or imperfect is supposed to come hopping along and jump in and look round the place. Of course, it is not the only way.

I understand that you wrote many things in that way, but people also say that Gods — no, Goddesses — used to come and tell you the meaning of the Vedas.

People talk a stupendous amount of rubbish. I wrote everything

I have written since 1909 in that way, i.e. out of or rather through a silent mind and not only a silent mind but a silent consciousness. But Gods and Goddesses had nothing to do with the matter.

22 October 1935

Reading, Yogic Force and the Development of Style

To manufacture your style, you will hardly deny that your enormous reading contributed to it.

Excuse me! I never manufactured my style; style with any life in it cannot be manufactured. It is born and grows like any other living thing. Of course it was fed on my reading which was not enormous—I have read comparatively little—(there are people in India who have read fifty times or a hundred times as much as I have) only I have made much out of that little. For the rest it is Yoga that has developed my style by the development of consciousness, fineness and accuracy of thought and vision, increasing inspiration and an increasing intuitive discrimination (self-critical) of right thought, word form, just image and figure.

29 October 1935

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Methinks you are making just a little too much of Yogic Force. Its potency as regards matters spiritual is undeniable, but for artistic or intellectual things one can't be so sure about its effectiveness. Take Dilip's case; one could very well say: "Why give credit to the Force? Had he been as assiduous, sincere etc. elsewhere, he would have done just the same."

Will you explain to me how Dilip who could not write a single good poem and had no power over rhythm and metre before he came here, suddenly, not after long "assiduous" efforts, blossomed into a poet, rhythmist and metrist after he came here? Why was Tagore dumbfounded by the "lame man throwing away his crutches and running freely" and surely on the paths of rhythm? Why was it that I who never understood or cared for painting, suddenly in a single hour by an opening of vision

got the eye to see and the mind of understanding about colour, line and design? How was it that I who was unable to understand and follow a metaphysical argument and whom a page of Kant or Hegel or Hume or even Berkeley left either dazed and uncomprehending and fatigued or totally uninterested because I could not fathom or follow, suddenly began writing pages of the stuff as soon as I started the *Arya* and am now reputed to be a great philosopher? How is it that at a time when I felt it difficult to produce more than a paragraph of prose from time to time and more than a rare poem, short and laboured, perhaps one in two months, suddenly after concentrating and practising Pranayama daily began to write pages and pages in a single day and kept sufficient faculty to edit a big daily paper and afterwards to write 60 pages of philosophy every month? Kindly reflect a little and don't talk facile nonsense. Even if a thing can be done in a moment or a few days by Yoga which would ordinarily take a long, "assiduous, sincere and earnest" cultivation, that would of itself show the power of the Yoga force. But here a faculty that did not exist appears quickly and spontaneously or impotence changes into highest potency or an obstructed talent changes with equal rapidity into fluent and facile sovereignty. If you deny that evidence, no evidence will convince you, because you are determined to think otherwise.

So about your style too, it is difficult to understand how much
the Force has contributed towards its perfection.

It may be difficult for you to understand, but it is not difficult for me, since I have followed my own evolution from stage to stage with a perfect vigilance and following up of the process. I have made no endeavours in writing. I have simply left the higher Power to work and when it did not work I made no efforts at all. It was in the old intellectual days that I sometimes tried to force things, but not after I started the development of poetry and prose by Yoga. Let me remind you also that when I was writing the *Arya* and also since whenever I write these letters or replies, I never think or seek for expressions or try to write in

good style; it is out of a silent mind that I write whatever comes ready-shaped from above. Even when I correct, it is because the correction comes in the same way. Where then is the place for even a slight endeavour or any room at all for "my great endeavours"? Well?

By the way, please try to understand that the supra-intellectual (not the supramental only) is the field of a spontaneous automatic action. To get it or to get yourself open to it needs efforts, but once it acts there is no effort. Your grey matter does not easily open; it closes up also too easily, so each time an effort has to be made, perhaps too much effort—if your grey matter would sensibly accommodate itself to the automatic flow there would not be the difficulty and the need of "assiduous, earnest and sincere endeavour" each time. Methinks. Well?

I challenge your assertion that the Force is more easily potent to produce spiritual results than mental (literary) results. It seems to me the other way round. In my own case the first time I started Yoga, Pranayama etc., I laboured 5 hours a day for a long time and concentrated and struggled for five years without any least spiritual result¹, but poetry came like a river and prose like a flood and other things too that were mental, vital or physical, not spiritual, richnesses and openings. I have seen in many cases an activity of the mind in various directions as the first or at least an early result. Why? Because there is less resistance, more cooperation from the confounded lower members for these things than for a psychic or a spiritual change. That is easy to understand at least. Well? 1 November 1935

*

To try to be a literary man and yet not to know what big literary people have contributed would be inexcusable.

Why is it inexcusable? I don't know what the Japanese or the Soviet Russian writers have contributed, but I feel quite happy and moral in my ignorance. As for reading Dickens in order to be

¹ N.B. When the spiritual experiences did come, they were as unaccountable and automatic as—as blazes.

a literary man, that's a strange idea. He was the most unliterary bloke that ever succeeded in literature and his style is a howling desert.

19 September 1936

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You have nowhere said anything about Firdausi, the epic poet of Persia, author of *Shahnameh*? How is it that you who have made your own culture so wide by means of learning so many languages have allowed a serious gap in it by not knowing Persian?

I have read Firdausi in a translation long ago, but it gave no idea at all of the poetic qualities of the original. As for gaps in the culture — well, I don't know Russian or Finnish (missing the *Kalevala*) and have not read the *Nibelungenlied* in the original, nor for that matter Pentaur's poem on the conquests of Rameses in ancient Egyptian or at least the fragment of it that survives. I don't know Arabic either but I don't mind that having read Burton's translation of the *Arabian Nights* which is as much a classic as the original. Anyhow the gaps are vast and many.

13 July 1937

Old Forms into New Shapes

Jyoti doesn't want to rest content with the forms. The *yuga-dharma* must be satisfied.

I don't follow the युगधर्म myself in English poetry. There I have done the opposite, tried to develop old forms into new shapes instead of being gloriously irregular. In my blank verse, I have minimised or exiled pauses and overflows.

20 March 1937

Exceeding Past Formulas

I have crossed out "turned Rishi" [in an essay called "Sri Aurobindo — the Poet"], because that suggests an old formula of the past, and the future poet should exceed all past formulas.

5 February 1931

Early Poetic Influences

Influences on *Love and Death*

I shall be really happy if you will tell me the way in which you created *Love and Death*—the first falling of the seed of the idea, the growth and maturing of it, the influences assimilated from other poets, the mood and atmosphere you used to find most congenial and productive, the experience and the frequency of the afflatus, the pace at which you composed, the evolution of that multifarious, many-echoed yet perfectly original style . . . In my essay, “Sri Aurobindo—the Poet”, I tried to show the white harmony, so to speak, of *Love and Death* in a kind of spectrum analysis, how colours from Latin, Italian, Sanskrit and English verse had fused here together with an absolutely original ultra-violet and infra-red not to be traced anywhere. Among English influences the most outstanding are, to my mind, Shakespeare, Milton, Keats and Stephen Phillips, along with something of Shelley and Coleridge.

I cannot tell you much about it from that point of view; I did not draw consciously from any of the poets you mention except from Phillips. I read *Marpessa* and *Christ in Hades* before they were published and as I was just in the stage of formation then—at the age of 17—they made a powerful impression which lasted until it was worked out in *Love and Death*. I dare say some influence of most of the great English poets and of others also, not English, can be traced in my poetry—I can myself see that of Milton, sometimes of Wordsworth and Arnold; but it was of the automatic kind—they came in unnoticed. I am not aware of much influence of Shelley and Coleridge, but since I read Shelley a great deal and took an intense pleasure in some of Coleridge’s poetry, they may have been there without my knowledge. The one work of Keats that influenced me was *Hyperion*—I dare say my blank verse got something of his stamp through that. The

poem itself was written in a white heat of inspiration during 14 days of continuous writing—in the mornings only of course, for I had to attend office the rest of the day and saw friends in the evening. I never wrote anything with such ease and rapidity before or after. Your other questions I can't very well answer—I have lived ten lives since then and don't remember. I don't think there was any falling of the seed of the idea or growth and maturing of it; it just came—from my reading about the story of Ruru in the *Mahabharata*; I thought, Well, here's a subject, and the rest burst out of itself. Mood and atmosphere? I never depended on these things that I know of—something wrote in me or didn't write, more often didn't, and that is all I know about it. Evolution of style and verse? Well, it evolved, I suppose—I assure you I didn't build it. I was not much of a critic in those days—the critic grew in me by Yoga like the philosopher, and as for self-criticism the only standard I had was whether I felt satisfied with what I wrote or not, and generally I felt it was very fine when I wrote it and found it was very bad after it had been written, but I could not at that time have given you a reason either for the self-eulogy or the self-condemnation. Nowadays it is different, of course,—for I am conscious of what I do and how things are done. I am afraid this will not enlighten you much but it is all I can tell you.

3 July 1933

General Influences on His Early Poetry

In that long letter on your own poetry, apropos of my friend's criticisms [see pp. 332–57], you have written of certain influences of the later Victorian period on you. Meredith's from *Modern Love* I have been unable to trace concretely—unless I consider some of the more pointed and bitter-sweetly reflective turns in *Songs to Myrtilla* to be Meredithian. That of Tennyson is noticeable in only a delicate picturesqueness here and there or else in the use of some words. Perhaps more than in your early blank verse the Tennysonian influence of this kind in general is there in *Songs to Myrtilla*. Arnold has influenced your blank verse in respect of particular constructions like two or three "buts" as in

No despicable wayfarer, but Ruru,
But son of a great Rishi,

or

But tranquil, but august, but making easy . . .

Arnold is also observable in the way you build up and elaborate your similes both in *Urvasio* and in *Love and Death*. Less openly, a general tone of poetic mind from him can also be felt: it persists subtly in even the poems collected in *Ahana*, not to mention *Baji Prabhoo*. I don't know whether Swinburne is anywhere patent in your narratives: he probably does have something to do with *Songs to Myrtilla*. Stephen Phillips is the most direct influence in *Urvasio* and *Love and Death*. But as I have said in my essay on your blank verse he is assimilated into a stronger and more versatile genius, together with influences from the Elizabethans, Milton and perhaps less consciously Keats. In any case, whatever the influences, your early narratives are intensely original in essential spirit and movement and expressive body. It is only unreceptiveness or inattention that can fail to see this and to savour the excellence of your work.

The influences I spoke of were of course influences only such as every poet undergoes before he has entirely found himself. What you say about Arnold's influence is quite correct; it acted mainly however as a power making for restraint and refinement, subduing any uncontrolled romanticism and insisting on clear lucidity and right form and building. Meredith had no influence on *Songs to Myrtilla*; even afterwards I did not make myself acquainted with all his poetry, it was only *Modern Love* and poems like the sonnet on Lucifer and on the ascent to earth of the daughter of Hades [*The Day of the Daughter of Hades*] that I strongly admired and it had its effect in the formation of my poetic style and its after-effects in that respect are not absent from *Savitri*. It is only Swinburne's early lyrical poems that exercised any power upon me, *Dolores*, *Hertha*, *The Garden of Proserpine* and others that rank among his best work,—also *Atalanta in Calydon*; his later lyrical poetry I found too empty and his dramatic and narrative verse did not satisfy me.

One critic characterised *Love and Death* as an extraordinarily brilliant and exact reproduction of Keats: what do you say to that? I think Stephen Phillips had more to do with it.

7 July 1947

On Early Translations and Poems

Translation of the Meghadut

I did translate the *Meghadut*, but it was lost by the man with whom I kept it — so mention of it is useless. 28 January 1931

The Hero and the Nymph and Urvsie

On an old advertisement page of the *Arya* I find: “*The Hero and the Nymph*, a translation in verse of Kalidasa’s *Vikramorvasie*.”

Yes, I had forgotten the *Hero and the Nymph*.

Our library hasn’t got this translation, nor your poem *Urvsie*, both of which are out of print.

I don’t think I have the *Urvsie*, neither am I very anxious to have this poem saved from oblivion. 5 February 1931

Love and Death, Urvsie and The Hero and the Nymph

Was *Love and Death* your first achievement in blank verse, or did a lot of trial and experiment precede it? Was the brilliant success of your translation from Kalidasa its forerunner?

There was no trial or experiment — as I wrote, I did not proceed like that, — I put down what came, changing afterwards, but there too only as it came. At that time I had no theories, no methods or process. But *Love and Death* was not my first blank verse poem — I had written one before in the first years of my stay in Baroda which was privately published, but afterwards I got disgusted with it and rejected it. I made also some transla-

tions from the Sanskrit (in blank verse and heroic verse); but I don't remember to what you are referring as the translations of Kalidasa. Most of all that has disappeared into the unknown in the whirlpools and turmoil of my political career. 4 July 1933

The Hero and the Nymph and Baji Prabhau

It is curious how you repeatedly forget that you have so wonderfully Englished Kalidasa's *Hero and the Nymph*. Surely it cannot be that you want it to be rejected and forgotten? Its blank verse is excellent, and I shall be very much obliged if out of the three typed copies of it I sent you a couple of years ago you will kindly let me have one. Was this work composed before *Love and Death*? Does *Baji Prabhau* also antedate the latter?

Baji Prabhau was written much later. I do not remember just now about the *Hero and the Nymph* — it might have been earlier, but I am not sure. I shall see about the typed copy of the translation. No, I do not reject it. I had merely forgotten all about it. 5 July 1933

Urvaside

On Sunday also I shall look at the *Urvaside*. It is a poem I am not in love with — not that there is not some good poetry in it, but it seems to me as a whole lacking in originality and life. However, I may be mistaken; a writer's opinions on his productions generally are. 5 April 1935

Love and Death

Those that buy books like *Love and Death* do so to get the yogic knowledge — the mystery of death solved. I bought it for the same reason and was disappointed to find it is a story!

There is no Yogic knowledge there. It was written before I started Yoga.

*

The other day Arjava told me that he considered the long speech of the Love-god Kama or Madan about himself in *Love and Death* one of the peaks in that poem—he as good as compared it to the descent into Hell.¹ Somehow I couldn't at the time wax extremely enthusiastic about it. Except for the opening eight or ten lines and some three or four in the middle, I couldn't regard it as astonishing poetry—at least not one of the peaks. What is your own private opinion? I need not of course, quote it to anyone.

My private opinion agrees with Arjava's estimate rather than with yours. These lines may not be astonishing in the sense of an unusual effort of constructive imagination and vision like the descent into Hell; but I do not think I have, elsewhere, surpassed this speech in power of language, passion and truth of feeling and nobility and felicity of rhythm all fused together into a perfect whole. And I think I have succeeded in expressing the truth of the godhead of Kama, the godhead of vital love (I am not using "vital" in the strict Yogic sense; I mean, the love that draws lives passionately together or throws them into or upon each other) with a certain completeness of poetic sight and perfection of poetic power, which puts it on one of the peaks—even if not the highest possible peak—of achievement. That is my private opinion—but, of course, all do not need to see alike in these matters.

10 February 1932

Chitrangada

Months ago I typed out, from the last two numbers (I think) of *The Karmayogin*, part of a poem by you called *Chitrangada*. Is it possible to get the whole of it from you, so that I could type it for you as well as for the library and myself?

The publication of *Chitrangada* was a mistake. I wrote the poem hastily—a rough draught, intending to rewrite it and make it worth something. But the rewriting was never done. I am not

¹ See *Love and Death*, lines 409–53, in *Collected Poems, Volume 2 of THE COMPLETE WORKS OF SRI AUROBINDO*.

very anxious for the thing to survive in its present crude form.

21 May 1931

*

Was *Chitrangada* ever finished?

It was certainly finished, but I suppose the MS is now lost.

24 June 1937

*

Am I to conclude either that your *Chitrangada* is not worth revising because it is a fragment or that whatever of it we have is already perfect poetry? Else why have you shelved the question of revision?

It is under consideration and will probably remain so for some time. As for perfect poetry, I don't know that it can be made into that — some revision here and there at the most is all that is possible. But this is not the moment.

25 June 1937

Ilion

Ilion is a fragment — and by no means *ne plus ultra* — only the verse is good; I imagine I have found the solution for introducing the hexameter into English verse which others have tried but, till now, without success. That is all I can say about it at present; we shall see hereafter.

19 September 1931

On Poems Published in *Ahana and Other Poems*

On Two Translations of *Revelation*

The rendering of *Revelation* is even better than the two others, well inspired from beginning to end; the colouring is not quite the same as in my poem, but that is hardly avoidable in a poetic version in another language. To alter it, as you propose, would be to spoil it. There is no point in rendering literally “wind-blown locks”, and it would be a pity to throw out দিশিময়ী, for it is just the touch needed to avoid the suggestion of a merely human figure. It *is* needed — for readers are often dense. An Indian critic (very competent, if a little academic) disregarding all the mystic suggestions and even the plain statement of the closing couplet, actually described the poem as the poet’s memory of a girl running past him on the seashore!!

25 January 1931

*

The translation is very good poetry. It is perhaps not quite the original, for what you describe is an obviously superhuman figure while the details in the poem might be those of a human figure and it is something subtle and not expressed but only hinted which gives the impression expressed only at the end that it is someone of the heavenly rout. That however does not matter; your version can be taken as an adaptation of the idea in the poem and not a strict translation of it.

On Two Translations of *The Vedantin’s Prayer*

You have made a very fine and true rendering of the *Vedantin’s Prayer*. Perhaps so hard and rocky a person as the Vedantin, who is very much of a converted Titan, would not have thought of such a sweet and luxurious word as কুসুম in the midst of his

ascent and struggle, but these few alterations do not make any real difference to the spirit. There is a quite sufficient nobility and power in your translation. With that, it seems to me as literal as it can be.

6 May 1932

*

Kshitish Sen's translation of the opening lines of the *Vedantin's Prayer* are magnificently done. He has quite caught the tone of the original, its austerity and elevation of thought and feeling and severe restraint of expression with yet a certain massiveness of power in it,—these at least were what tried to come out when I wrote it, and they are all unmistakably and nobly there in his rendering. If he can complete it without falling from the high force of this opening, it will be a *chef-d'oeuvre*. I notice he has got the exactly corresponding verse movement also.

24 June 1932

On a Translation of God

It is not a very satisfactory translation, but your changes improve it as far as it can be improved.

Why वृ in the fourth line? The idea is that work and knowledge and power can only obey the Divine and give him service; Love alone can compel him—because, of course, Love is self-giving and the Divine gives himself in return.

As for the second verse it does not give the idea at all. To have no contempt for the clod or the worm does not indicate that the non-despiser is the Divine,—such an idea would be absolutely meaningless and in the last degree feeble. Any Yogi could have that equality, or somebody much less than a Yogi. The idea is that, being omnipotent, omniscient, infinite, Supreme, the Divine does not scorn to descend even into the lowest forms, the obscurest figures of Nature and animate them with the divine Presence,—that shows his Divinity. The whole sense has fizzled out in the translation.

You need not say all that to the poetess, but perhaps you might very delicately hint to her that if she could bring in this

point, it would be better. Then perhaps she would herself change
the verse.

25 December 1930

On a Word in *In the Moonlight*

What is the meaning of the word “ground” in these two lines
from your poem *In the Moonlight*? —

. . . Are Nature’s bye-laws merely, meant to ground
A grandiose freedom building peace by strife.

Does “ground” mean “crush”?

“Ground” means here not to crush, but to make a ground or foundation for the freedom. What Science calls laws of Nature are not the absolute or principal laws of existence, but only minor rules meant to build up a material basis for the life of the Spirit in the body. On that has to be erected in the end, not a rule of material Law, but an immortal Liberty — not law of Nature, but freedom of the Spirit. The strife of forces which is regulated by these minor laws of Nature is only the battle through which man has to win the peace of Spirit. This is the sense.

February 1929

James Cousins on *In the Moonlight* and *The Rishi*

I hear that James Cousins said about your poem *The Rishi*
that it was only spiritual philosophy, not poetry.

I never heard that. If I had I would have noted that Cousins had no capacity for appreciating intellectual poetry. But that I knew already — just as he had no liking for epic poetry either, only for poetic “jewellery”. His criticism was of *In the Moonlight* which he condemned as brain-stuff only except the early stanzas for which he had high praise. That criticism was of great use to me — though I did not agree with it. But the positive part of it helped me to develop towards a supra-intellectual style. As *Love and Death* was poetry of the vital, so *Ahana* [*Ahana and other Poems*] is mostly work of the poetic intelligence. Cousins’

criticism helped me to go a stage farther. 11 November 1936

*

Amal says Cousins ignored *The Rishi* while speaking of the others. Isn't that far worse?

Neither worse nor better. What does Cousins' bad opinion about *The Rishi* matter to me? I know the limitations of my poetry and also its qualities. I know also the qualities of Cousins as a critic and also his limitations. If Milton had written during the life of Cousins instead of having an established reputation for centuries, Cousins would have said of *Paradise Lost* and still more of *Paradise Regained* "This is not poetry, this is theology." Note that I don't mean to say that *The Rishi* is anywhere near *Paradise Lost*, but it is poetry as well as spiritual philosophy.

13 November 1936

Metrical Experiments

The Genesis of *In Horis Aeternum*

Is there some way of keeping the loose swinging gait of ana-paests within bounds? If one has used them freely in one or more lines, does it sound too abrupt to close with a strict iambic line — as in the final Alexandrine of:

The wind hush comes, the varied colours westward stream:
Were they joy-tinted coral, or song-light seen-heard in a
shell fitfully,
Drifted ashore by the hours as a waif from the day-wide sea
Of Loveliness that smites awake our sorrow-dream?

It is perhaps a pity that the rhythm of the first three lines runs in such well-worn familiar channels. Is this intensified by the sing-song of the second line, which slipped into the Satur-nian metre lengthened out by anapaests? The third line might possibly be taken as four dactyls followed by the spondee "day-wide" and the monosyllabic foot "sea". What do you think? And would the four dactyls make the earlier part of a passable hexameter, or would at least one spondee be needed to break up the monotony and too-obvious lilt?

These are things decided by the habit or training of the ear. The intervention of a dactylic (or, if you like, anapaestic) line followed by an Alexandrine would to the ear of a former generation have sounded abrupt and inadmissible. But, I suppose, it would not to an ear accustomed to the greater liberty — or even licence — of latter-day movements.

I do not find that the rhythm of the first three lines is well-worn, though that of the first and third are familiar in type. The second seems to me not only not familiar, but unusual and very effective.

The canter of anapaests can, I suppose, be only relieved

by variation or alternation with another metre, as you have done here—or by a very powerful music which would turn the canter into a torrent rush or an oceanic sweep or surge. But the proper medium for the latter up till now has been a large dactylic movement like the Greek or Latin hexameter; Swinburne has tried to get it into the anapaest, but with only occasional success because of his excessive facility and looseness, which makes the sound empty owing to want of spiritual substance. But this third line seems to be naturally dactylic and not anapaestic. Can one speak of catalectic and acatalectic hexameters? If so, this is a very beautiful catalectic hexameter.

I may say that the four lines seem to be in their variation very remarkably appropriate and effective, each exactly expressing by the rhythm the spirit and movement of the thing inwardly seen. I am speaking of each line by itself; the only objection that could be made is to the coming together of so many variations in so brief a whole (if it had been longer, I imagine it would not have mattered) as disturbing to the habit of the ear; but I am inclined to think that this objection would rest less on a reality than a prejudice. The habit of the ear is not fundamental, it can change. What is fundamental in the inner hearing is not, I think, disturbed by the swiftness of the change from the controlled flow of the first line to the wave dance and shimmer of the second, the rapid drift of the third and then the deliberate subtlety of the last line.

Is there in recent poetry an unconscious push towards a new metrical basis altogether for English poetry—shown by the outbreak of free verse, which fails because it is most often not verse at all—and the seeking sometimes for irregularity, sometimes for greater plasticity of verse-movement? Originally, Anglo-Saxon verse depended, if I remember right, on alliteration and rhythm, not on measured feet; Greece and Rome through France and Italy imposed the foot measure on English; perhaps the hidden seeking for freedom, for elbow-room, for the possibility of a varied rhythmic expression necessitated by the complexity of the inner consciousness might find some vent in a measure which would depend not on feet but on lengths

and stresses. I have sometimes thought that and it recurred to me while looking at your second line, for on that principle it might be read

Were they joy-tinted coral, or song-light seen-heard in a shell fitfully.

One could imagine a measure made of lines in a given number of lengths like that and each length allowed a given number of stresses; there would be many combinations and variations possible. For example (not of good poetry, but of the form),

A far sail on the unchangeable monotone of a slow slumbering sea,
A world of power hushed into symbols of hue, silent unendingly;
Over its head like a gold ball the sun tossed by the gods in their play
Follows its curve, — a blazing eye of Time watching the motionless day.

Perhaps it is only a curious imagination, too difficult and complex to realise, but it came on me strongly, so I put it down on paper.

*

I have written two more stanzas of the stress-scansion poem so as to complete it and send them to you. In this scansion as I conceive it, the lines may be analysed into feet, as you say all good rhythm can, but in that case the foot measures must be regarded as a quite subsidiary element without any fixed regularity — just as the (true) quantitative element is treated in ordinary verse. The whole indispensable structure of the lines depends upon stress and they must be read on a different principle from the current view — full value must be given to the true stresses and no fictitious stresses, no weight laid on naturally unstressed syllables must be allowed — that is the most important point. Thus:

A far sail on the unchangeable monotone of a slow slumbering sea,
A world of power hushed into symbols of hue, silent unendingly;
Over its head like a gold ball the sun tossed by the gods in their play
Follows its curve, — a blazing eye of Time watching the motionless day.

Here or elsewhere, — poised on the unreachable abrupt
Earth aspiring lifts to the illimitable Light, then ceases broken and
Or in the glowing expanse, arid, fiery and austere, of the desert's
A breath, a cry, a glimmer from Eternity's face, in a fragment the

It is an experiment and I shall have to do more before I can be sure that I have caught the whole spirit or sense of this movement; nor do I mean to say that stress-scansion cannot be built on any other principle, — say, on one with more concessions to the old music or with less, breaking more away in the direction of free verse; but the essential, I think, is there.

P.S. It is with some hesitation that I write "a once Nothing", because I am far from sure that the "once" does not overweight the rhythm and make the expression too difficult and compact; but on the other hand without it the sense appears ambiguous and incomplete,—for "a Nothing that was all" might be taken in a too metaphysical light and my object is not to thrust in a metaphysical subtlety but to express the burden of an experience. In the final form I shall probably risk the ambiguity and reject the intruding "once".

19 April 1932

The Genesis of Winged *with dangerous deity*

Your model is exceedingly difficult for the English language—for this reason that except in lines closing with triple rhymes the

language draws back from a regular dactylic ending — more still from a dactylic last foot to a stanza. It can be done perhaps in a rhymeless lyrical movement such as Arnold was fond of, taking his inspiration from the Greek choruses — a first unconscious step towards the licence of free verse. I have at any rate made the following attempt.

Winged with dangerous deity,
Passion swift and implacable
Arose and, storm-footed
In the dim | heart of him,

Ran, insatiate, conquering,
Worlds devouring and hearts of men,
Then perished, broken by
The irres|istible

Occult masters of destiny,—
They who sit in the secrecy
And watch un|moved ever
Unto the | end of all.

But there are several snags here. Especially the tribrach is difficult to keep up: the average reader will turn it into a dactyl or amphibrach. I started a rhymed endeavour also, but had no time to pursue it; it is not easy either.

20 June 1934

The Genesis of *Moon of Two Hemispheres*

After two days of wrestling I have to admit that I am beaten by your last metre. I have written something, but it is a fake. I will first produce the fake.

A gold moon|-raft floats | and swings | slowly
And it casts | a fire | of pale | holy | blue light
On the drag|on tail | aglow | of the | faint night |

That glimm|ers far, | swim|m̄ing,
 The illum|ined shoals | of stars | skimm̄ing,
 Ov̄erspread|ing earth | and drown|ing the | heart in sight |
 With the | ocean-depths | and breadths | of the | Inf̄in̄ite. |

That is the official scansion and except in the last foot of the two last lines it professes to follow very closely the metre of Nishikanta's poem. But in fact it is full of sins and the appearance is a counterfeit. In the first line the first foot is really a bacchius:

A gold moon|-raft floats

and quantitatively though not accentually the second is a spondee which also disturbs the true rhythmic movement. "Slowly" and "holy" are in truth trochees disguised as pyrrhics, and if "slowly" can pass off the deceit a little, "holy" is quite unholy in the brazenness of its pretences. If I could have got a compound adjective like "god-holy", it would have been all right and saved the situation, but I could find none that was appropriate. The next three lines are, I think, on the true model and have an honest metre. But the closing cretic of the last two is nothing but a cowardly flight from the difficulty of the spondee. I console myself by remembering that even Hector ran when he found himself in difficulties with Achilles and that the Bhagavat lays down पलायनम् as one of the ordinary occupations of the Avatar. But the evasion is a fact and I am afraid it spoils the correspondence of the metres. I have some idea of adding a second stanza,—this one will look less guilty perhaps if it has a companion in sin—but if you use this at all, you need not wait for the other, as it may never take birth at all.

2 July 1934

The Genesis of O pall of black Night

At first sight your metre seemed to me impossible in English, especially because of the four short syllables at the end of two lines and the five short syllables in two others. English rhythm hardly allows of that—quantitatively it can be managed, but

five unaccented unstressed syllables altogether even if it can be done once in a way causes an extreme difficulty when it is made a regular feature of the metre. But it seems that there is hardly anything impossible in the realm of metre and I succeeded after all subject to one change, the substitution of a long for a short syllable at the end of the fourth and fifth lines. I suppose I could have avoided even this concession if I had fallen back on the device of unrhymed verse, but I wanted to use rhyme. However after finishing I found my stanza right enough as metre, but poor in rhythmic opulence, something bald and lame. So I had to make yet another concession; I took the option, used in all but one line, to prefix a metrically superfluous syllable to each or any line. I give you the finished stanza below; if you want to get it such as I originally wrote it, you have only to strike off the first syllable or word in each line except the fifth; but it is better rhythm and better poetry as it is.

I hope you will find this satisfactory in spite of the two departures from your model.

P.S. In Horace's line upon the eloquence and clear order, I have found that I dropped a word and truncated the hexameter. I have restored the full line.

The Genesis of *Thought the Paraclete* and *Rose of God*

I am sending you copies of two poems. One, *Thought the Paraclete*, is a development of four lines (now 3–6) originally written some time ago as an English metrical correspondence for a Bengali new metre of Dilip's. He had asked for some more lines and I thought the four I had written good enough to warrant a complete poem. Dilip's scheme was

—˘—|—˘|˘˘|—˘—|,

but in English another arrangement might be preferable, either

—˘—|—˘˘|˘˘—|—

or

—˘—|—˘˘|˘˘—|—

It is not an easy metre and does not seem to admit of sufficient variations for a longer poem.

The other, *Rose of God*, is a lyric, an invocation. The metrical plan is—for the first two lines of the stanza, three parts with 2 main stresses in each, the first identical throughout, the other two variable at pleasure; for the last two lines, two parts of equal length, three stresses in each part.

On Some Poems Written during the 1930s

[*The first five letters were published together as an appendix to Six Poems of Sri Aurobindo in 1934*]

The Bird of Fire and Trance

These two poems are in the nature of metrical experiments. The first is a kind of compromise between the stress system and the foot measure. The stanza is of four lines, alternately of twelve and ten stresses. The second and fourth line in each stanza can be read as a ten-foot line of mixed iambs and anapaests, the first and third, though a similar system subject to replacement of a foot anywhere by a single-syllable half-foot could be applied, are still mainly readable by stresses.

The other poem is an experiment in the use of quantitative foot measures not following any existing model, but freely invented. It is a four-line stanza reading alternately

—~—|~—~|—~—|
and —~—|~—~|—~—|

It could indeed be read otherwise, in several ways, but read in the ordinary way of accentual feet it would lose all lyrical quality and the soul of its rhythm.

The Bird of Fire is the living vehicle of the gold fire of the Divine Light and the white fire of the Divine Tapas and the crimson fire of Divine Love — and everything else of the Divine Consciousness.

Shiva — The Inconscient Creator

The quantitative metre of *Trance* is suited only for a very brief lyrical poem. For longer poems I have sought to use it as a base

but to liberate it by the introduction of an ample number of modulations which allow a fairly free variation of the rhythm without destroying the consistency of the underlying rhythmic measure. This is achieved in *Shiva* by allowing as the main modulations (1) a paeon anywhere in place of an amphibrach, (2) the substitution of a long for a short syllable either in the first or the last syllable of an amphibrach, at will, thus substituting a bacchius or anti-bacchius (3) the substitution of a dactyl for an initial amphibrach, (4) the substitution of a long instead of short syllable in the middle of the final anapaest, both this and the ultimate syllable to be in that case stressed in reading, e.g.,

deathless | and lone head —

a bacchius replacing the anapaest.

The suppression of the full value of long syllables to make them figure as metrical shorts has to be avoided in quantitative metre.

Scan:

A face on | the cold dire | mountain peaks
 Grand and still; | its lines white | and ¹austere
 Match with the | unmeasured | snowy streaks
 Cutting heav'en, | implacable and sheer.

The Inconscient as the source and author of all material creation is one of the main discoveries of modern psychology, but it agrees with the idea of a famous Vedic hymn. In the Upanishads, Prajna, the Master of Sushupti, is the Ishwara and therefore the original Creator out of a superconscious sleep. The idea of the poem is that this creative Inconscient also is Shiva creating here life in matter out of an apparently inconscient material trance as from above he creates all the worlds (not the material only) from a superconscious trance. The reality is a supreme Consciousness — but that is veiled by the appearance on one side of the superconscious sleep, on the other of the material Inconscience.

¹ Intermediate stress.

Here the emphasis is on the latter; the superconscious is only hinted at, not indicated,—it is the Infinity out of which comes the revealing Flame.

The Life Heavens

Further modulations have been introduced in this poem—a greater use is made of tetrasyllabic feet such as paeons, epitrites, di-iamb, double trochees, ionics and, once only, the antispast—and in a few places the foot of three long syllables (molossus) has been used, and in others a foot extending to five syllables (e.g., *Délivré* from grief).

Scan:

A life of | intensities | wide, immune
Floats behind | the earth and | her life-fret,
A magic of | realms mastered by | spell and rune,
Grandiose, bliss|ful, coloured, | increate.

There were two places in which at the time of writing there did not seem to me to be a satisfactory completeness and the addition of a stanza seemed to be called for—one at the end of the description of the Life Heavens, a stanza which would be a closing global description of the essence of the vital Heavens, the other (less imperatively called for) in the utterance of the Voice. There it is no doubt very condensed, but it cannot be otherwise. I thought, however, that one stanza might be added hinting rather than stating the connection between the two extremes. The connection is between the Divine suppressed in its opposites and the Divine eternal in its own unveiled and undescended nature. The idea is that the other worlds are not evolutionary but typal and each presents in a limited perfection some aspect of the Infinite, but each complete, perfectly satisfied in itself, not asking or aspiring for anything else, for self-exceeding of any kind. That aspiration, on the contrary, is self-imposed on the imperfection of Earth; the very fact of the Divine being there, but suppressed

in its phenomenal opposites, compels an effort to arrive at the unveiled Divine — by ascent, but also by a descent of the Divine Perfection for evolutionary manifestation here. That is why the Earth declares itself a deeper Power than Heaven because it holds in itself that possibility implied in the presence of the suppressed Divine here,— which does not exist in the perfection of the vital (or even the mental) Heavens.

Jivanmukta

Written in Alcaics. These Alcaics are not perhaps very orthodox. I have treated the close of the first two lines not as a dactyl but as a cretic and have taken the liberty in any stanza of turning this into a double trochee. In one closing line I have started the dactylic run with two short preliminary syllables and there is occasionally a dactyl or anapaest in unlawful places; the dactyls too are not all pure dactyls. The object is to bring in by modulations some variety and a more plastic form and easier run than strict orthodoxy could give. But in essence, I think, the alcaic movement remains in spite of these departures.

The basic form of this Alcaic would run,

1, 2 $\asymp = | \sim - | \asymp || - \sim \sim | = \asymp = \sim$
 3 $\sim - | \sim - | \sim - | \sim - | \asymp$
 4 $- \sim \sim | - \sim \sim | - \sim = \asymp$

but with an opening to other modulations.

The subject is the Vedantic ideal of the living liberated man — *jivanmukta* — though perhaps I have given a pull towards my own ideal which the strict Vedantin would consider illegitimate.

In Horis Aeternum

This poem on its technical side aims at finding a halfway house between free verse and regular metrical poetry. It is an attempt to avoid the chaotic amorphousness of free verse and keep to a

regular form based on the fixed number of stresses in each line and part of a line while yet there shall be a great plasticity and variety in all the other elements of poetic rhythm, the number of syllables, the management of the feet, if any, the distribution of the stress-beats, the changing modulation of the rhythm. *In Horis Aeternum* was meant as a first essay in this kind, a very simple and elementary model. The line here is cast into three parts, the first containing two stresses, the second and third each admitting three, four such lines rhymed constituting the stanza.

The Bird of Fire

Your *Bird of Fire* is full of symbolic images, but if one can follow the *bhāva* behind or through them, I believe the appreciation becomes complete.

What do you mean by following the *bhāva* behind? Putting a label on the bird and keeping it dried up in your intellectual museum, for Professors to describe to their pupils—"this is the species and that's how it is constituted, these are the bones, feathers etc. etc. and now you know all about the bird. Or would you like me to dissect it farther?"

3 December 1936

Replies to Questions on *The Bird of Fire*

Does the line

Late and slow you have come from the timeless Angel
mean that the sadhaka struggled long before the attainment?
Does the "timeless Angel" mean the transcendent?

There must be a mistake in the copy. There is a full stop at "timeless". "Angel" begins a new sentence and is addressed to the bird. It is the Bird who went out to reach the Timeless Divine and comes late (while the Sadhak and the world have been long struggling and waiting in vain) with the gift.

Purani thinks that the "Bird of Fire" represents aspiration. Is this true?

No — the Bird is not merely aspiration.

Is the “Dancer in Time” Nataraja?

Yes.

The “flame-petalled love” you mention in one of the lines is,
I think, possible only at some level near the Supermind.

It is possible in the psychic also.

The phrase “arrives at its luminous term thy flight” means, I suppose, the complete descent into the material consciousness after breaking the barriers of mind and life.

No. It reaches the Eternal and brings back to the material world that which is beyond Mind and Life. 25 October 1933

*

The Dancer is not the Time-Spirit, but the Divine in Time.

1933

*

The flame means the Bird of Flame and the Bird is the symbol of an inner Power that rises from the “sacrifice” i.e. the Yoga. The last lines mean that it has the power of going beyond mind and life to that which is beyond mind and life. 2 December 1933

Replies to Questions on *Trance*

Were *Trance* and the *Bird of Fire* each composed at a single sitting and can the date be given?

The *Bird of Fire* was written on two consecutive days — and afterwards revised. The *Trance* at one sitting — it took only a few minutes. You may perhaps have the date as they were both completed on the same day and sent to you the next.

*

In the line —

Halo-moon of ecstasy unknown —

is the “o” assonance satisfactory, or does the ear feel the two sounds come too close or for some reason are too insistent?

It seems to me that there is a sufficient space between to prevent the assonance from being too prominent; it came like that and I kept it because the repetition and prolongation of the full “o” sound seemed to me to carry in it a certain unexpressed (and inexpressible) significance.

What exactly does “Halo-moon” signify? In line 2 there was the concrete physical moon ringed with a halo. Is the suggestion of line 10 that a glory or indefinable presence is imaged by a lunar halo—the moon as a distinct object now being swallowed up in the halo? My difficulty is that if it is “halo” simply it cannot be a “moon” as well. But possibly the compound “halo-moon” is elliptical for “moon with its surrounding halo”.

Well, it is of course the “moon with its halo”, but I wanted to give a suggestion if not of the central form being swallowed up in the halo, at least of moon and halo being one ecstatic splendour as when one is merged in ecstasy.

*

The last line —

Ocean self enraptured and alone —

I took as meaning “self, who art symbolised by this ocean”, since otherwise you would probably have written “self-enraptured”?

Yes, that is right.

The Metre of *Trance*

Have you yourself invented the metre of *Trance* or is it adopted from some former poet?

No. I am not aware that anyone has used this metre before. It came to me just as I finished the *Bird of Fire* and I put it down.

23 October 1933

*

Is it not the case that, in the metre of *Trance* (quantitative trimeter) one must either keep a rather staccato movement, pausing with almost unbroken regularity at the end of each foot, or else risk the iambic pentameter approximation by the use of an easy and fluent movement? Thus it is your very beautiful line

Mute the body aureate with light,
that would seem least out of place if inserted amidst other
iambic pentameters.

Possibly — though the line does not read to my ear very well as an iambic pentameter — the movement sounds then common and rather lame. It goes better as a trochaic rhythm. It is true that there is this dilemma and the whole skill will then be in avoiding the staccato effect, but that necessitates a very light movement.

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I think the principle of this metre should be to say a few very clear-cut things in a little space. At least it looks so to me at present — though a more free handling of the metre might show that the restriction was not justifiable.

*

I had chosen this metre — or rather it came to me and I accepted it — because it seemed to me both brief and easy, so suitable for an experiment. But I find now that it was only seemingly easy and in fact very difficult. The ease with which I wrote it only came from the fact that by a happy inspiration the right rhythm for it came into my consciousness and wrote itself out by virtue of the rhythm being there. If I had consciously experimented, I might have stumbled over the same difficulties as have come in your way.

On Some Words in *The Life Heavens*

The “last finite” is the material finite where finiteness reaches its acme (based on the atomic infinitesimal). It is this finite that on earth yearns and strives to reach the last (highest, farthest) infinity’s Unknown.

*

By the way in the last line “bore” does not mean “carried” but “endured”. I had written originally “through seas of light to epiphanies of love”. The epiphanies of love are above the seas of light and part of the goal reached. 1933

Tagore and *The Life Heavens*

The other day Prithwi Singh said that Tagore has said your *Life Heavens* was not poetry proper.

I am very much intrigued by Tagore’s dictum. I am always ready to admit and profit by criticism of my poetry however adverse, if it is justified — but I should like to understand it first. Why is it not poetry proper? Is it because it is not good poetry — the images, language are unpoetic or not sufficiently poetic, the rhythm harsh or flat? Or is it because it is too intellectual, dealing in ideas more than in vision and feelings? Or is it that the spiritual genre is illegitimate — spiritual subjects not proper for poetic treatment? But in that case much of Tagore’s poetry would be improper, not to speak of much of Donne (now considered a great poet), Vaughan, Crashaw etc., Francis Thompson and I do not know how many others in all climes and ages. Is it the dealing with other worlds that makes it not proper? But what then about Blake, whose work Housman declares to be the essence of poetry? I am at sea about this “poetry proper”. Did he only use this cryptic expression? Was there nothing elucidatory said which would make it intelligible? Or has Tagore by any chance thought that I was trying to convey a moral lesson or a philosophical tenet — there is nothing of the kind there, it is a frequent experience on the spiritual path that is being described

in its own proper, one might almost say, objective figures—and that is surely a method of poetry proper. Or is it that the expression is too bad or clear-cut for the soft rondures of poetry proper. I swim helplessly in conjectures.

1934

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In regard to Tagore, I understand from Prithwi Singh that his objections to *The Life Heavens* were personal rather than in principle—that is, *he himself* had no such experience and could not take them as true (for himself), so they aroused in him no emotion, while *Shiva* was just the contrary. I can't say anything to that, as I could not say anything if somebody condemned a poem of mine root and branch because he did not like it or on good grounds—such as Cousins' objection to the inferiority of the greater part of *In the Moonlight* to the opening stanzas. I learned a great deal from that objection; it pointed me the way I had to go towards the Future Poetry. Not that I did not know before, but it gave precision and point to my previous perception. But still I don't quite understand Tagore's objection. I myself do not take many things as true in poetry—e.g. Dante's Hell etc.—of which I yet feel the emotion. It is surely part of the power of poetry to open new worlds to us as well as to give a supreme voice to our own ideas, experiences and feelings. *The Life Heavens* may not do that for its readers, but, if so, it is a fault of execution, not of principle.

4 October 1934

On Bengali Translations of *Shiva* and *Jivanmukta*

Your translation of *Shiva* is a very beautiful poem, combining strength and elegance in the Virgilian manner. I have put one or two questions relating to the correctness of certain passages as a translation, but except for the care for exactitude it has not much importance.

Anilbaran's translation [of *Shiva*] pleased me on another ground—he has rendered with great fidelity and, as it seemed to me, with considerable directness, precision and force the thought and spiritual substance of the poem—he has rendered,

of course in more mental terms than mine, exactly what I wanted to say. What might be called the “mysticity” of the poem, the expression of spiritual vision in half-occult, half-revealing symbols is not successfully caught, but that is a thing which may very well be untranslatable; it depends on an imponderable element which can hardly help escaping or evaporating in the process of transportation from one language to another. What he has done seems to me very well done. Questions of diction or elegance are another matter.

There remains Nishikanta's two translations of *Jivanmukta*. I do not find the *mātra-vṛtta* one altogether satisfactory, but the other is a very good poem. But as a translation! Well, there are some errors of the sense which do not help, e.g., *mahimā* for splendour; splendour is light. Silence, Light, Power, Ananda, these are the four pillars of the Jivanmukta consciousness. So too the all-seeing, flame-covered eye gets transmogrified into something else; but the worst is the divine stillness surrounding the world which is not at all what I either said or meant. The lines:

Revealed it wakens when God's stillness
Heavens the ocean of moveless Nature

express an exact spiritual experience with a visible symbol which is not a mere ornamental metaphor but corresponds to exact and concrete spiritual experience, an immense oceanic expanse of Nature-consciousness (not the world) in oneself covered with the heavens of the Divine Stillness and itself rendered calm and motionless by that over-vaulting influence. Nothing of that appears in the translation; it is a vague mental statement with an ornamental metaphor. . . .

I do not stress all that to find fault, but because it points to a difficulty which seems to me insuperable. This *Jivanmukta* is not merely a poem, but a transcript of a spiritual condition, one of the highest in the inner Overmind experience. To express it at all is not easy. If one writes only ideas about what it is or should be, there is failure. There must be something concrete, the form, the essential spiritual emotion of the state. The words chosen must be the right words in their proper place and each

part of the statement in its place in an inevitable whole. Verbiage, flourishes there must be none. But how can all that be turned over into another language without upsetting the apple-cart? I don't see how it can be easily avoided. For instance in the fourth stanza, "Possesses", "sealing", "grasp" are words of great importance for the sense. The feeling of possession by the Ananda rapture, the pressure of the ecstatic force sealing the love so that there can never again be division between the lover and the All-Beloved, the sense of the grasp of the All-Beautiful are things more than physically concrete to the experience ("grasp" is specially used because it is a violent, abrupt, physical word—it cannot be replaced by "In the hands" or "In the hold") and all that must have an adequate equivalent in the translation. But reading [*Nishikanta's Bengali line*] I no longer know where I am, unless perhaps in a world of Vedantic abstractions where I never intended to go. So again what has [*Nishikanta's Bengali line*] to do with the tremendous and beautiful experience of being ravished, thoughtless and wordless, into the "breast" of the Eternal who is the All-Beautiful, All-Beloved?

That is what I meant when I wrote yesterday about the impossibility—and also what I apprehended when I qualified my assent to Nolini's proposal [*to print Bengali translations of the poems*] with a condition.

3 June 1934

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These translations [of the line "Although consenting here to a mortal body"] only state what is true of everybody, not only of the jivanmukta. They have therefore no force. In the English the word "consenting" has a great force which makes the meaning of "He is the Undying" quite clear, viz. He is consciously that and his consenting to the mortal body does not diminish that consciousness—the consent being also free and quite conscious.

1934

In Horis Aeternum and The Bird of Fire

Is *The Bird of Fire* more of a compromise between a quan-

titative and a purely stress scansion than *In Horis Aeternum* (where the quantity-aspect seems to be less important than in *The Bird of Fire*)?

In the *In Horis Aeternum* I did not follow any regular scheme of quantities, letting them come as was needed by the rhythm. In *The Bird of Fire* I started with the idea of a quantitative element but abandoned it and remodelled the part of the poem in which I had used the quantitative system.

On a Bengali Translation of *In Horis Aeternum*

I think it is a very fine rendering.

In line 4 however I would note that there is no reference to day as a movement of time but one to the noon, the day as sunlit space rather than time, it is the fixed moment, as it were, the motionless scene of noon. The eye is of course the sun itself. I mark by the dash that I have finished with my first symbol of the gold ball and go off to a second, quite different one.

In the last line your translation is indeed very clear and precise in meaning, but it is perhaps too precise — the “something” twice repeated is meant to give a sense of just the opposite, an imprecise unseizable something which is at once nothing and all things at a time. It is found no doubt in the momentary things and all is there but the finding is less definite than your translation suggests. But the expression নাস্তিরাপে ছিল যে সরাস্তি is very good.

One point more. “Caught by the spirit in sense” means “there is a spirit in sense (sense not being sense alone) that catches the eternal out of the perishable hours in these things.”

*

But it is not the spirit in the body; it is the spirit in sense, why then দেহে? দেহ brings in something much too solid and it would mean the soul in the body which is not at all my meaning — it is a spiritual something in sight, sound, touch etc. that catches the eternal essential in what seems to be a thing of the moment.

I may add that “moment mere” does not and cannot mean

“merely one moment” — it means “something that seems to be merely of the moment”. It is not the moment that is caught but the essence of the momentary scene, etc. or as is next said something essential and eternal (not “fixed, intense”, but slight and fugitive) in a sound, smile, etc.

1934

On a Review of *Six Poems*

I dare say Swaminathan is a good critic of a sort. But I cannot see what is the objection to “O marvel bird”. His “raw metaphysics” refers I suppose to expressions like the “unthinkable Above”. But he is quite out there. It is a rendering not of metaphysics whether raw or ripe, but of a concrete experience, and for my part I don’t see how else it can be expressed unless one launches into literary circumvolutions and padding for which I have no inclination. “Moment mere” is an unusual combination but there again there is nothing else which will give the sense with the necessary compactness and it seems to me to be a very good phrase. Has Swaminathan a phobia for new or unusual or bold turns of language? “Good scholars” in a language very often have. For myself, I think they are necessary to keep the language alive.

I do not quite know what he wants me to do — is it to dilute my experiences or my seeing into diffuse intellectual expression? That seems to me what he means by electric light. It can be done, but it was not my purpose in writing these poems. I wrote what came as the closest expression of the thing seen and was not at all occupied with the repercussions or absence of repercussions in the ordinary reader. I dare say the critic is right in his view of what those repercussions would be. But what does he mean by his reference to the Vedas? The Vedas are the most enigmatic book in the world and nobody has the least idea what they mean; they out-Blake Blake all together. As for the Old Testament, it expresses not mystic but religious experience which is quite another affair altogether.

I am afraid Swaminathan’s capacities for responding to mystic poetry are not very brilliant. His reference to Blake shows

that — for Blake is an acid test for critics in this matter. However these are only passing comments. I shall consider the review more at leisure hereafter and defer till then the subject of metre.

15 February 1935

*

About Swaminathan, I think his chief defect as a critic must be that he has no ear or very little of an ear. The man who can approve of the dictum “Take care of the sense and the metre will take care of itself”, ignoring the fact that the metre is only the basis of the rhythm without which poetry cannot exist or who says that the true quantity of “its” and of the last syllable of “delivered” cannot be short, must have something lacking in his auditory sense. He has also totally mistaken my phrase “Read in the ordinary way”² which means read in the way of the ordinary conventional iambic or trochaic metre. For instance

Ocean | self en|raptured | and a|lone.

If that is read as a trochaic line with a fictitious accent on “and”, the lyrical movement disappears. If it is read as it would be in ordinary speech with the natural stresses and quantities, you get the exact movement of my verse. If for example you find in prose “As he looked on the ocean’s radiant solitude, the seen passed into the unseen and he seemed to be looking on his own ocean self enraptured and alone”; the notation of the last words would be $\ddot{\text{o}}\text{cean}$ self | $\ddot{\text{e}}\text{n}\ddot{\text{r}}\text{apt}\ddot{\text{u}}\text{red}$ | and $\ddot{\text{a}}\text{lone}$ |, which is just the metre of the even lines in my poem. The rhythm is at once accentual and quantitative. I quite agree that you cannot ignore the accentual basis of the English language, but what you can do is to take account of both stress accent and quantity, assuming it as a rule that a major and true accent (as opposed to minor and fictitious ones) is sufficient to transform a naturally short syllable into a long one for practical purposes. That is what I have done, and that is why the accented syllables in delivered, magic, implacable are taken as long. The result may be a success for this kind of

² See page 239.

quantitative verse or not, but the basis must be understood before it can be judged, and Swaminathan has missed the basis altogether. I shall have to write someday an essay on the data of the problem of quantitative verse in English and the true road to the solution of the difficulty — it is badly needed. 15 February 1935

On a Word in Nirvana

In *Nirvana*, does “reef” mean a piece of sail or a rock?

No, it is not a sail — it is a long rock. I was thinking especially of coral reefs which sometimes subside in the sea.

31 August 1934

On an Image in Moon of Two Hemispheres

I am unable to get the connection between the first three lines and the next three.

Connection of syntax or sense? It is the dragon tail of the Night illumined by the moon that goes swimming through the stars and imposing on the earth the sense of a dark Infinite.

2 September 1934

Thought the Paraclete

Thought the Paraclete is a difficult poem liable to many interpretations. I would be very happy if you could give a brief analysis of the thought-structure of the poem or at least indicate the main lines of the ascent.

Well, then leave each to find out one of the many interpretations for himself. Analysis! Well, well!

There is no thought-structure in the poem; there is only a succession of vision and experience; it is a mystic poem, its unity is spiritual and concrete, not a mental and logical building. When you see a flower, do you ask the gardener to reduce the flower to its chemical components? There would then be no flower left and no beauty. The poem is not built upon intellectual definitions or philosophical theorisings; it is something seen. When you ascend

a mountain, you see the scenery and feel the delight of the ascent; you don't sit down to make a map with names for every rock and peak or spend time studying its geological structure — that is work for the geologist, not for the traveller. Iyengar's geological account (to make one is part of his *métier* as a critic and a student and writer on literature) is probably as good as any other is likely to be; but each is free to make his own according to his own idea. Reasoning and argumentation are not likely to make one account truer and invalidate the rest. A mystic poem may explain itself or a general idea may emerge from it, but it is the vision that is important or what one can get from it by intuitive feeling, not the explanation or idea; it [*Thought the Paraclete*] is a vision or revelation of an ascent through spiritual planes, but gives no names and no photographic descriptions of the planes crossed. I leave it there.

The "pale blue" or intuitivised aspect of the face is only at the start; when it "gleamed" it had already overpassed the Overmind phase beyond which there are only the "world-bare summits".

How do you know there are not many world-bare summits one above the other? Where do you place the self of the last line?

18 March 1944

*

As thought rises in the scale, it ceases to be intellectual, becomes illumined, then intuitive, then overmental and finally disappears seeking the last Beyond. The poem does not express any philosophical thought, however, it is simply a perception of a certain movement, that is all. "Pale blue" is the colour of the higher ranges of mind up to the intuition. Above it begins to be golden with the supramental light.

14 January 1935

*

Thought is not the giver of Knowledge but the "mediator" between the Inconscient and the Superconscious. It compels the world born from the Inconscient to reach for a Knowledge other

than the instinctive vital or merely empirical, for the Knowledge that itself exceeds thought; it calls for that superconscious Knowledge and prepares the consciousness here to receive it. It rises itself into the higher realms and even in disappearing into the supramental and Ananda levels is transformed into something that will bring down their powers into the silent Self which its cessation leaves behind it.

Gold-red is the colour of the supramental in the physical — the poem describes Thought in the stage when it is undergoing transformation and about to ascend into the Infinite above and disappear into it. The “flame-word rune” is the Word of the higher Inspiration, Intuition, Revelation which is the highest attainment of Thought.

29 December 1936

Rose of God

Two questions have arisen in the mind in connection with *Rose of God*.

(1) Does the rose of all flowers most perfectly and aptly express the divine ecstasies or has it not any symbolic allusion in the Veda or the Upanishad?

There were no roses in those times in India — roses came in with the Mahomedans from Persia. The rose is usually taken by us as the symbol of surrender, love etc. But here it is not used in that sense, but as the most intense of all flowers it is used as symbolic of the divine intensities — Bliss, Light, Love etc.

(2) Are the seven ecstasies referred to there the following: Bliss, Light, Power, Immortality, Life, Love and Grace?

No, it is not seven kinds, but seven levels of Ananda that are meant by the seven ecstasies.

2 January 1935

Overhead Inspiration in Some Poems of the 1930s

A long time ago, you wrote to me that the Overmind has two levels — the intuitive and the gnostic. There are surely several passages in your own poetry as well as in the Upanishads and

the Gita that sustain an inspiration from the former; but has no poetry ever come from the Overmind proper which is turned towards the full supramental Gnosis? Do you remember anything either in Sanskrit or in your own work which derives from there? If not, is it possible to give some idea as to what quality of rhythm, language and substance would constitute the difference between the expression of the Overmind Intuition and the Overmind Gnosis? Those four lines I quoted to you from yourself the other day — where do they hail from?

Arms taking to a voiceless supreme delight,
Life that meets the Eternal with close breast,
An unwalled mind dissolved in the Infinite,
Force one with unimaginable rest?

It is really very difficult for me to say anything in this respect about my own poetry; there is too complex a working of the Consciousness for it to be possible for me to classify and define. As for the Overmind Gnosis, I cannot yet say anything — I am familiar with its workings, but they are not easily definable or describable and, as for poetry, I have not yet observed sufficiently to say whether it enters in anywhere or not. I should expect its intervention to be extremely rare even as a touch; but I refer at present all higher overmind intervention to the O.I. [Overmind *Intuition*] in order to avoid any risk of overstatement. In the process of overmental transformation what I have observed is that the Overmind first takes up the illumined and higher mind and intellect (thinking, perceiving and reasoning intelligence) into itself and modifies itself to suit the operation — the result is what may be called a mental Overmind — then it lifts these lower movements and the intuitive mind together into a higher reach of itself, forming there the Overmind Intuition, and then all that into the Overmind Gnosis awaiting the supramental transformation. The overmind “touch” on the Higher Mind and Illumined Mind can thus raise towards the O.I. or to the O.G. or leave it in the M.O.; but, estimating at a glance as I have to do, it is not easy to be quite precise. I may have to revise my estimates later on a little, though not perhaps very appreciably, when I am able to look at things in a more leisurely way and

fix the meeting lines which often tend to fade away, leaving an indefinable border.

3 May 1937

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I mentioned your recent poems as my aid to drawing inspiration from the Overhead planes. I quoted also the famous lines from other poets which have derived from the highest levels. Jyoti begged me to type for her all the lines of this character from your poems. I have chosen the following:

1. O marvel bird with the burning wings of light and the unbarred lids that look beyond all space . . .
2. Lost the titan winging of the thought.
3. Arms taking to a voiceless supreme delight,
Life that meets the Eternal with close breast,
An unwalled mind dissolved in the Infinite,
Force one with unimaginable rest?
4. My consciousness climbed like a topless hill . . .
5. He who from Time's dull motion escapes and thrills
Rapt thoughtless, wordless into the Eternal's breast,
Unrolls the form and sign of being,
Seated above in the omniscient Silence.
6. Calm faces of the gods on backgrounds vast
Bringing the marvel of the infinitudes . . .
7. A silent unnamed emptiness content
Either to fade in the Unknowable
Or thrill with the luminous seas of the
Infinite.
8. Crossing power-swept silences rapture-stunned,
Climbing high far ethers eternal-sunned . . .
9. I have drunk the Infinite like a giant's wine.
10. My soul unhorizoned widens to measureless sight . . .
11. Rose of God, like a blush of rapture on Eternity's face,

Rose of Love, ruby depth of all being, fire-passion of
Grace!
Arise from the heart of the yearning that sobs in
Nature's abyss:
Make earth the home of the Wonderful and life
beatitude's kiss.

I shan't ask you to tell me in detail the sources of all these lines — but what do you think in general of my choice? Only for one quotation I must crave the favour of your closer attention. Please do try to tell me something about it, for I like it so much that I cannot remain without knowing all that can be known: it is, of course, Number 3 here. I consider these lines the most satisfying I have ever read: poetically as well as spiritually, you have written others as great — but what I mean to say is that the whole essence of the truth of life is given by them and every cry in the being seems answered. So be kind enough to take a little trouble and give me an intimate knowledge of them. I'll be very happy to know their sources and the sort of *enthousiasmos* you had when writing them. How exactly did they come into being?

The choice is excellent. I am afraid I could not tell you in detail the sources, though I suppose they all belong to the overhead inspiration. In all I simply remained silent and allowed the lines to come down shaped or shaping themselves on the way — I don't know that I know anything else about it. All depends on the stress of the *enthousiasmos*, the force of the creative thrill and largeness of the wave of its Ananda, but how is that describable or definable? What is prominent in No. 3 is a certain calm, deep and intense spiritual emotion taken up by the spiritual vision that sees exactly the state or experience and gives it its exact revelatory words. It is an overmind vision and experience and condition that is given a full power of expression by the word and the rhythm — there is a success in "embodying" them or at least the sight and emotion of them which gives the lines their force.

4 May 1937

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A General Comment on the Poems of the 1930s

Could you tell me what your object is in manifesting something through the form of poetry?

I am expressing spiritual truth or spiritual experience through poetry.

12 September 1934

On *Savitri*

On the Composition of the Poem Letters of 1931–1936

You once quoted to me two lines written by yourself:

Piercing the limitless unknowable,
Breaking the vacancy and voiceless peace.

Where do they occur? They produce such a wonderful impression of a slow, majestic widening out into infinity.

The lines I quoted from myself are not in any published poem, but in the unfinished first book of “*Savitri, A Legend and a Symbol*” which was in intention a sort of symbolic epic of the aim of supramental Yoga! I may send it to you for typing when I have completed it; but in view of my abundant absence of leisure, the completion seems still to lurk in the mists of the far-off future.

15 September 1931

*

As to *Savitri*, there is a previous draft, the result of the many retouchings of which somebody told you; but in that form it would not have been a magnum opus at all. Besides, it would have been only a legend and not a symbol. I therefore started recasting the whole thing; only the best passages and lines of the old draft will remain, altered so as to fit into the new frame. No, I do not work at the poem once a week; I have other things to do. Once a month perhaps, I look at the new form of the first book and make such changes as inspiration points out to me — so that nothing shall fall below the minimum height which I have fixed for it.

19 September 1931

*

I humbly pray that you may send me some quotations from your *Ilion* and, if I may dare name it, *Savitri*.

It is quite impossible for me to do it just now. If the sky clears a little, I shall see.

28 September 1932

*

What of the first version of *Savitri*? Do you consider it surpasses *Love and Death*, and if so in what respects? Is it less than crying for the moon to ask for a few passages from it? If it is in an untyped or ill-typed condition, I would deem it the seventh heaven of rapture to dedicate as many as possible of my bedridden hours as are needed to produce the neatest typed copy of it imaginable.

What is the first version of *Savitri*? What I wrote at first was only the first raw material of the *Savitri* I am evolving now. I made about ten versions of the first cantos and none were satisfactory — it is only now I have arrived at a stable something out of the nebula, — only for the first Canto — but it is still not *au point*.

4 July 1933

*

Will you be able after all to give quotations from *Savitri*?

Possibly — but in this world certitudes are few. Anyhow in the effort to quote I have succeeded in putting the first few hundred lines into something like a final form — which is a surprising progress and very gratifying to me — even if it brings no immediate satisfaction to you.

1 August 1933

*

If the first hundred lines or so of *Savitri* have attained their final form, it is indeed an occasion for great rejoicing — even for me, as you won't now be averse to quoting from it. If you like, I shall very carefully type out for you whatever you think does not need further improvement. In any case, please do send me the toes of the Hercules if not his whole foot.

The difficulty is that I had always an instinctive shrinking from

amputation or any other surgical operation of the kind in matters of art as well as the body.

2 August 1933

*

Dash it all! if you don't write for your disciples as well as for the Divine that is yourself, whom do you write for? I wonder if you realise how passionately I long to be in contact with the visions and vibrations that are the stuff of your highest poetry. Of course, anything you have written will be most welcome, but to get quotations from *Savitri*, if not all of it, is the top of my aspiration.

Well, I tried to do it—but the condition of timelessness = not enough time to do anything in which I am and have been for a long time, made it impossible. My box is full of things that ought to be done and are not done and, the box being insufficient, they are trailing all over the table and everywhere else—wherever there is a superficies capable of holding papers. Important correspondents are waiting for months for an answer. If I have a moment's leisure stern Duty, daughter of the voice of God, (or something of that kind) insists on my dealing with this labour of Sisyphus and if I even think of poetry she becomes as raucous and anathematous (don't consult Oxford — this is my own) as a revivalist preacher thundering about sin and hell-fire.

Once I promised you that I wouldn't send you any letter for a week if only you would employ the time thus saved in picking out a few things for me from your *Savitri*. I stuck to my part of the bargain and you did look at *Savitri* and even managed to give its first book a form that could at last satisfy you—but I got nothing! . . . You will say that you don't like sending fragments, but that excuse won't wash, for you *have* sent fragments: what about the opening lines of the *Ilion* which you sent Dilip?

A form that would at last satisfy me? No sir, that is a mistake. Part of the first book only and then also only "almost satisfy". "Fragments"? yes, but they should be perfected fragments. Perhaps some day I shall be able to throw a few lines at your head

from time to time which you can carefully collect? Oh, I promise nothing — it is only a wild, wandering idea. 5 October 1936

*

I shall consider it such a great favour if you will give me an instance in English of the inspiration of the pure Overmind — I don't mean just a line (like Milton's "Those thoughts . . ." or Wordsworth's "Voyaging . . .") which has only a touch of it, but something sustained and plenary. . . . Please don't disappoint me by saying that, as no English writer has a passage of this kind, you cannot do anything for me.

Good Heavens! how am I to avoid saying that when it is the only possible answer — at least so far as I can remember. Perhaps if I went through English poetry again with my present consciousness I might find more intimations like the line of Wordsworth, but a passage sustained and plenary? These surely are things yet to come — the "future poetry" perhaps, but not the past.

22 October 1936

*

I think the favour I asked was expressed in perfectly clear language. If no English poet has produced the passage I want, then who has done so in English? God alone knows. But who is capable of doing it? All of us know. Well, then why not be kind enough to grant this favour? If difficult metres could be illustrated on demand, is it impossible to illustrate in a satisfying measure something so natural as the Overmind? I am not asking for hundreds of lines — even eight will more than do.

I have to say Good Heavens again. Because difficult metres can be illustrated on demand, which is a matter of metrical skill, how does it follow that one can produce poetry from any blessed plane on demand? It would be easier to furnish you with hundreds of lines already written out of which you could select for yourself anything overmindish if it exists (which I doubt) rather than produce 8 lines of warranted overmind manufacture to order. All I can do is to give you from time to time some lines from *Savitri*, on condition you keep them to yourself for

the present. It may be a poor substitute for the Overmental, but if you like the sample, the opening lines, I can give you more hereafter — and occasionally better. E.g.

It was the hour before the Gods awake.
 Across the path of the divine Event
 The huge unslumbering spirit of Night, alone
 In the unlit temple of immensity,
 Lay stretched immobile upon silence' marge,
 Mute with the unplumbed prevision of her change.
 The impassive skies were neutral, waste and still.
 Then a faint hesitating glimmer broke.
 A slow miraculous gesture dimly came,
 The insistent thrill of a transfiguring touch
 Persuaded the inert black quietude
 And beauty and wonder disturbed the fields of God.
 A wandering hand of pale enchanted light
 That glowed along the moment's fading brink,
 Fixed with gold panel and opalescent hinge
 A gate of dreams ajar on mystery's verge.

There! Promise fulfilled for a wonder.

24 October 1936

On the Composition of the Poem Letters of 1936–1937

Sorry to impose on you this labour of Penelope, but new lines — unless the lightning-footed comes through whole-bodied, — generally need three or four revisions before I am reasonably satisfied, so again these scratchings and trans-shipments. I hope the latter won't baffle you.

10 November 1936

*

When shall I see more of your *Savitri*? It has been six days since you have sent anything.

It is because the Asuras refuse to enter into any harmonious expression; they are too jagged and discordant altogether. There are also the worlds of Mind and the Mind is always a cause of

trouble. But I haven't got so far yet. As soon as I have traversed this gulf I shall resume.

27 November 1936

*

Are the "Asuras" ready?

Not yet — the first part of them has got into some kind of form, but the latter half has still gaps to be filled etc. etc. and the whole thing has to be given its final revision.

5 December 1936

*

As for what awaits you on your return, I mean the typing work — Hell and the Asuras have been dealt with in a sort of way, I am now labouring in the mental worlds and trying to negotiate a passage through the psychic regions — beyond that things are more easy.

22 December 1936

*

Since I wrote to you I have been once more overwhelmed with correspondence, no time for poetry — so the Mind Worlds are still in a crude embryonic form and the Psychic World not yet begun. The remainder of the vital worlds is finished but only in a way — nothing yet final and a line missing here and there, but that last defect can be filled up *ambulando*. The revision of the last preceding section is also done, but that too in a way — not many changes, but a good number of lines added, and I shall have to wait and see whether all these will stand or not. But the whole thing has been lengthening out so much that I expect I shall have to rearrange the earlier part of *Savitri*, turning the Book of Birth into a Book of Beginnings and lumping together in the second a Book of Birth and Quest.

5 January 1937

*

Any climbing done in *Savitri* of the "mountains of mind"?

Not quite reached the summit yet — the lower heights are negotiated, but the tops are still too rough, have to be made more practicable.

27 January 1937

*

Is it possible to proceed with *Savitri*? Today is Sunday, so please try to do something, or at least let me have the third section, revised.

I have not had time to think even of *Savitri* or of poetry at all: so none of these things are ready. 28 February 1937

*

May I dare to hope that tomorrow you really will send me an instalment of *Savitri*?

Physically, mentally, psychologically and temporally impossible. 29 March 1937

*

But why is *Savitri* impossible—and in so many ways?

Physically, I have to expend too much energy continuously on other things to have any left for poetry. Psychologically, I have no push to poetry just now even if I had the time, which I haven't. Poetry needs time and space to be born and neither exists for me now. Temporally, your undeniable decrease in correspondence means only that instead of having no time to finish the correspondence except by a breakneck hurry—and even then not—I have just time to do it. Even so outside letters pile up in a neglected heap. Of course, if I give up the little time I have for concentration, I might by slaving all the day make all other ends meet—but that I have no intention of doing. 30 March 1937

*

If at present you can't get any further in *Savitri*, please do me the favour of sending back the third section, finally corrected. Surely you can find some time for that on Sunday. May I send you a big empty envelope on Sunday evening?

There is no surely about it. On Sunday I try to decrease the ever increasing mountain of unanswered outside correspondence. You can always send a big empty envelope, but God knows when you will get it back. 2 April 1937

*

If you have time please look at the third section of *Savitri*.

I have gone over it once more and made some more changes, but now I have to keep it in a drawer for some time and then look again to see whether new and old are all right. 24 April 1937

*

When shall I get the third section of *Savitri*? I'll be much obliged if you will give it a final luminous look kindling up all that remains a little below the mark. But are you sure anything does remain unkindled?

God knows. I am trying to kindle, but each time I find something that could be more up to the mark; I have some hope however that today's revision is the penultimate. Let us see. When you get it you will find yourself in an awful tangle and I can only hope you will see your way through the forest. 9 May 1937

*

When will you continue *Savitri*? Your bucking-up seems to take a long time.

No time for the buck to appear — I mean inner, not outer time.
25 May 1937

*

Don't you think it's a pretty long time since you touched *Savitri* last? You wrote to me once that if those psychic and mental worlds could be captured, the rest would be smooth sailing. Can't you put yourself in the right mood and have done with the obstacle for good and all?

It is not a question of mood at all but inability to take up any poetry till certain preoccupying things have been done.

4 July 1937

On the Composition of the Poem Letters of 1938

Is it not possible to send me, as you used to, new instalments

of *Savitri* as they get written? I'll send you the next day a typed copy to revise. Why not file this sheet?

Nothing quite ready yet. If "Mind" gets ready before you go, I
shall send it.

12 February 1938

*

I have been kept too occupied with other things to make much headway with the poem — except that I have spoiled your beautiful neat copy of the "Worlds" under the oestrus of the restless urge for more and more perfection; but we are here for World-improvement, so I hope that is excusable. 12 March 1938

*

I have not been able to make any headway with *Savitri* — owing to lack of time and also to an appalled perception of the disgraceful imperfection of all the sections after the first two. But I have tackled them again as I think I wrote to you and have pulled up the third section to a higher consistency of level; the "Worlds" have fallen into a state of manuscript chaos, corrections upon corrections, additions upon additions, rearrangements on rearrangements out of which perhaps some cosmic beauty will emerge! 9 October 1938

*

I have done an enormous amount of work with *Savitri*. The third section has been recast if not rewritten — so as to give it a more consistent epic swing and amplitude and elevation of level. The fourth section, the Worlds, is undergoing transformation. The "Life" part is in a way finished, though I shall have to go over the ground perhaps some five or six times more to ensure perfection of detail. I am now starting a recasting of the "Mind" part of which I had only made a sort of basic rough draft. I hope that this time the work will stand as more final and definitive.

1938

*

Can't you send some of your poems? You owe me one, you know.

What poems? I am not writing any, except occasionally my long epic, *Savitri*, which cannot see the light of day in an embryonic state.¹

15 May 1938

**On the Composition of the Poem
Letters of 1945–1948**

Don't wait for any poems for your Annual, I think the Pondicherry poets will have to march without a captain, unless you take the lead. I have been hunting among a number of poems which I perpetrated at intervals, mostly sonnets, but I am altogether dissatisfied with the inspiration which led me to perpetrate them, none of them is in my present opinion good enough to publish, at any rate in their present form, and I am too busy to recast, especially as poetically I am very much taken up with *Savitri* which is attaining a giant stature, she has grown immensely since you last saw the baby. I am besides revising and revising without end so as to let nothing pass which is not up to the mark. And I have much else to do. 18 March 1945

*

Your inference that ten books have been completed is unfortunately not correct. What has been completed, in a general way, with a sufficient finality of the whole form but subject to final changes in detail, is the first three books of the second part, The Book of Birth and Quest, The Book of Love, The Book of Fate; also in the same way, two books of the third part, The Book of Eternal Light and The Book of the Double Twilight. But a drastic recasting of the last two books still remains to be done and only a part of the eleventh has been subjected to that process. Worse still, the original Book of Death has not only to be recast but has to be split into two, The Book of Yoga and The Book of Death,

¹ This letter was written to a different correspondent from the one who was the recipient of all the other letters in this section.—Ed.

and the first of these exists only in its first canto and a confused multi-versioned draft of the second, while all the rest, and that means many long cantos, has still to be written quite new, no draft of them yet exists.

22 April 1947

*

The first reason [*for not writing*] is my inability to write with my own hand, owing to the failure of the sight and other temporary reasons; the sight is improving but the improvement is not so rapid as to make reading and writing likely in the immediate future. Even *Savitri* is going slow, confined mainly to revision of what has already been written, and I am as yet unable to take up the completion of Parts II and III which are not yet finally revised and for which a considerable amount of new matter has to be written.

10 July 1948

*

I am afraid I am too much preoccupied with the constant clashes with the world and the devil to write anything at length even about your new poems: a few lines must suffice. In fact as I had to explain the other day to Dilip, my only other regular correspondent, my push to write letters or to new literary production has dwindled almost to zero—this apart from *Savitri* and even *Savitri* has very much slowed down and I am only making the last revisions of the First Part already completed; the other two parts are just now in cold storage.

1948

On the Inspiration and Writing of the Poem

I have gone through your article. I have struck out “like that of *Savitri*” and changed “will be” into “would be”. Don’t make prophecies. And how do you know that *Savitri* is or is going to be supramental poetry? It is not, in fact—it is only an attempt to render into poetry a symbol of things occult and spiritual.

1933

*

You wrote to me the other day that *Savitri* is not supramental poetry, but I suppose there are lines in it which can be considered supramental. And why have you refrained from making it all supramental? . . . As everything in the universe, including human language, is derived at the highest from the Overmind, I wonder if it will not be necessary to introduce some radical change in language to express supramental idea and rhythm. Can supramental speech be understood or appreciated by those who haven't any glimmering of the influence of its source? Of course if it has a special symbology, one who is not supramentalised will find it very hard to grasp it, until explained, but will even its rhythm be incomprehensible?

All these are questions for the Supermind to settle when it has got down and settled into power.

2 August 1933

*

We have been wondering why you should have to write and rewrite your poetry—for instance *Savitri*—ten or twelve times.

That is very simple. I used *Savitri* as a means of ascension. I began with it on a certain mental level, each time I could reach a higher level I rewrote from that level. Moreover I was particular—if part seemed to me to come from any lower level, I was not satisfied to leave it because it was good poetry. All had to be as far as possible of the same mint. In fact, *Savitri* has not been regarded by me as a poem to be written and finished, but as a field of experimentation to see how far poetry could be written from one's own Yogic consciousness and how that could be made creative. I did not rewrite *Rose of God* or the Sonnets except for two or three verbal alterations made at the moment.

29 March 1936

*

In *Savitri* there is no attempt—as in the poetry of us lesser fry—to make things specially striking or strange or new, but a simple largeness of gesture which most naturally makes one surprising revelation after another of beauty and power.

Well, it is the difference of receiving from above and living in the

ambience of the Above — whatever comes receives the breadth of largeness which belongs to that plane. 26 October 1936

*

I don't know yet whether every line [*of a passage*] is final, but I send it all the same. 29 October 1936

*

Why shouldn't every line be final? . . . Do you ever have to pay attention to technique? That is, when revising do you think whether you have varied the pauses and the rhythm-modulations and the sentence-lengths? I suppose that if the expression satisfies you it automatically means a perfection of technique also, without your having to keep a special eye on it.

Every line was not sure of being final because three or four were newly written in the rebuilding, and I can never be certain of newly written stuff (I mean in this *Savitri*) until I have looked at it again after an interval. Apart from the quality of new lines, there is the combination with others in the whole which I have modified more than anything else in my past revisions. . . .

I don't think about the technique because thinking is no longer in my line. But I see and feel first when the lines are coming through and afterwards in revision of the work. I don't bother about details while writing, because that would only hamper the inspiration. I let it come through without interference; only pausing if there is an obvious inadequacy felt, in which case I conclude that it is a wrong inspiration or inferior level that has cut across the communication. If the inspiration is the right one, then I have not to bother about the technique then or afterwards, for there comes through the perfect line with the perfect rhythm inextricably intertwined or rather fused into an inseparable and single unity; if there is anything wrong with the expression that carries with it an imperfection in the rhythm, if there is a flaw in the rhythm, the expression also does not carry its full weight, is not absolutely inevitable. If on the other hand the inspiration is not throughout the right one, then there is an after examination and recasting of part or whole. The things

I lay most stress on then are whether each line in itself is the inevitable thing not only as a whole but in each word; whether there is the right distribution of sentence lengths (an immensely important thing in this kind of blank verse); whether the lines are in their right place, for all the lines may be perfect, but they may not combine perfectly together — bridges may be needed, alterations of position so as to create the right development and perspective etc., etc. Pauses hardly exist in this kind of blank verse; variations of rhythm as between the lines, of caesura, of the distribution of long and short, clipped and open syllables, manifold combinations of vowel and consonant sounds, alliteration, assonances, etc., distribution into one line, two line, three or four or five line, many line sentences, care to make each line tell by itself in its own mass and force and at the same time form a harmonious whole sentence — these are the important things. But all that is usually taken care of by the inspiration itself, for as I know and have the habit of the technique, the inspiration provides what I want according to standing orders. If there is a defect I appeal to headquarters till a proper version comes along or the defect is removed by a word or phrase substitute that flashes — with the necessary sound and sense. These things are not done by thinking or seeking for the right thing — the two agents are sight and call. Also feeling — the solar plexus has to be satisfied and, until it is, revision after revision has to continue. I may add that the technique does not go by any set mental rule — for the object is not perfect technical elegance according to precept, but sound-significance filling out word-significance. If that can be done by breaking rules, well, so much the worse for the rule.

30 October 1936

*

The poem was originally written from a lower level, a mixture perhaps of the inner mind, psychic, poetic intelligence, sublimised vital, afterwards with the Higher Mind, often illumined and intuitivised, intervening. Most of the stuff of the first book is new or else the old so altered as to be no more what it was; the best of the old has sometimes been kept almost

intact because it had already the higher inspiration. Moreover there have been made successive revisions each trying to lift the general level higher and higher towards a possible Overmind poetry. As it now stands there is a general Overmind influence, I believe, sometimes coming fully through, sometimes colouring the poetry of the other higher planes fused together, sometimes lifting any one of these higher planes to its highest or the psychic, poetic intelligence or vital towards them. 3 November 1936

*

It will take you exactly eight minutes to read the third section and two more minutes are enough for you to decide in the matter of alternatives.

You have queer ideas about poetic time! Sometimes it takes me months to get the right form of a line. 19 November 1936

*

As far as I know, you don't need to recast anything in the third section, except an occasional word which is too closely repeated. As for the rest you have only to decide in a few places which of the two alternatives already found by you is the right one — a problem which your solar plexus can polish off in a jiffy.

Allow me to point out that whatever I did in a jiffy would not be any more than provisionally final. It is not a question of making a few changes in individual lines, that is a very minor problem; the real finality only comes when all is felt as a perfect whole, no line jarring with or falling away from the level of the whole though some may rise above it and also all the parts in their proper place making the right harmony. It is an inner feeling that has to decide that and my inner feeling is not as satisfied in that respect with parts of the third section as it is with the first two. Unfortunately the mind can't arrange these things, one has to wait till the absolutely right thing comes in a sort of receptive self-opening and calling-down condition. Hence the months.

20 November 1936

On the Characters of the Poem

What a flight! — nobody can describe so marvellously our Mother. Isn't Savitri she and she only?

Savitri is represented in the poem as an incarnation of the Divine Mother.

3 November 1936

*

If Savitri is represented as an incarnation of the Divine Mother, Aswapati must be meant to represent Theon.

What has Theon to do with it?

If Aswapati is he, I'll learn about his role from the poem — but couldn't you say something about him in direct reference to Mother and yourself?

This incarnation is supposed to have taken place in far past times when the whole thing had to be opened, so as to "hew the ways of Immortality". Theon and the circumstances of this life have nothing to do with it.

10 November 1936

On the Verse and Structure of the Poem

Please send me some passages from *Savitri* together with my selections from the blank-verse poetry of Abercrombie that I sent you in order to help me distinguish at a glance "Hyperion from a satyr".

Savitri is built on another plan altogether. It is blank verse without enjambements (except rarely) — each line a thing by itself and arranged in paragraphs of one, two, three, four, five lines (rarely a longer series), in an attempt to catch something of the Upanishadic and Kalidasian movements, so far as that is a possibility in English. You can't take that as a model — it is too difficult a rhythm-sculpture to be a model. I shall myself know whether it is a success or not, only when I have finished 2 or 3 books. But where is the time now for such a work? When the

supramental has finished coming down — then perhaps.

25 December 1932

*

This First Book is divided into sections and the larger sections into subsections; you might wait till one section is with you before you type. E.g. the first section is “the last Dawn”, i.e. the dawn of the day of Satyavan’s death (but it must be remembered that everything is symbolic or significant in the poem, so this dawn also,) the next is the Issue — both of these are short. Then comes a huge section of the Yoga of the Lord of the Horse (Aswapati, father of Savitri) relating how came about the birth of Savitri and its significance — finally the birth and childhood of Savitri.

25 October 1936

*

Savitri was originally written many years ago before the Mother came as a narrative poem in two parts, Part I Earth and Part II Beyond (these two parts are still extant in the scheme) each of four books — or rather Part II consisted of 3 books and an epilogue. Twelve books to an epic is a classical superstition, but this new *Savitri* may extend to ten books — if much is added in the final revision it may be even twelve. The first book has been lengthening and lengthening out till it must be over 2000 lines, but I shall break up the original first four into five, I think — in fact I have already started doing so. These first five will be, as I conceive them now, the Book of Birth, the Book of Quest, the Book of Love, the Book of Fate, the Book of Death. As for the second Part, I have not touched it yet. There was no climbing of planes there in the first version — rather Savitri moves through the worlds of Night, of Twilight, of Day — all of course in a spiritual sense — and ended by calling down the power of the Highest Worlds of Sachchidananda. I had no idea of what the supramental World could be like at that time, so it could not enter into the scheme. As for expressing the supramental inspiration, that is a matter of the future.

31 October 1936

*

Here is the beginning of the second section which is entitled “The Issue”—that is of course the issue between Savitri and Fate or rather between the incarnate Light, the Sun Goddess, and Death the Creator and Devourer of this world with his Law of darkness, limitation, ignorance.

31 October 1936

*

I was trying doublets again because in the third Section, first subsection (Yoga of the Lord of the Horse—Ascent to God-head) there is a long passage describing Aswapati's progress through the subtle physical, vital and mental worlds towards the Overmind which is far yet from being either complete or *au point*. It was only a brief interlude of a few lines formerly, but I had been lengthening it out afterwards with much difficulty in getting it right. I have now got the subtle physical and lower vital worlds into some kind of order, but the big dark Asuric vital and the vital heavens are still roaming about in a state of half solid incompleteness. Still I suppose as I am taking my vacation (from correspondence), I may have time to put all that right.

1 November 1936

*

Don't you consider it rather necessary that some interpretative hint ought to be given of the term “Horse” in this section? Otherwise the section title [“*The Yoga of the Lord of the Horse*”] may mystify somewhat.

No. The name is Aswapati, Lord of the Horse, and it will be explained elsewhere. I don't want to be allegorical, only mystic and allusive.

10 November 1936

*

I suppose the name of the section finished yesterday is “Aswapati, Lord of the Horse” and not, as originally conceived, “The Yoga of the Lord of the Horse”?

No. The proposed title would have no connection with the text except the name of the man which is not relevant as yet. “The Yoga of the Lord of the Horse” covers a number of sections

making the greater part of the first book,— it is not the title of one section only. This title is essential to the plan of the work. The subtitle “Ascent to Godhead” covers the two sections, the one just finished and the one now begun. 16 November 1936

*

I am not quite sure of the sections (titles) yet — the fourth section is obviously a continuation of the Ascent to Godhead — it is the realisation of Godhead with which it will ascend — after that the Unknowable Brahman, then the Purushottama and finally the Mother. 19 May 1937

*

You will see when you get the full typescript [*of the first three books*] that *Savitri* has grown to an enormous length so that it is no longer quite the same thing as the poem you saw then. There are now three books in the first part. The first, the Book of Beginnings, comprises five cantos which cover the same ground as what you typed but contains also much more that is new. The small passage about Aswapati and the other worlds has been replaced by a new book, the Book of the Traveller of the Worlds, in fourteen cantos with many thousand lines. There is also a third sufficiently long book, the Book of the Divine Mother. In the new plan of the poem there is a second part consisting of five books: two of these, the Book of Birth and Quest and the Book of Love, have been completed and another, the Book of Fate, is almost complete. Two others, the Book of Yoga and the Book of Death, have still to be written, though a part needs only a thorough recasting. Finally, there is the third part consisting of four books, the Book of Eternal Night, the Book of the Dual Twilight, the Book of Everlasting Day and the Return to Earth, which have to be entirely recast and the third of them largely rewritten. So it will be a long time before *Savitri* is complete.

In the new form it will be a sort of poetic philosophy of the Spirit and of Life much profounder in its substance and vaster in its scope than was intended in the original poem. I am trying of course to keep it at a very high level of inspiration, but in so

large a plan covering most subjects of philosophical thought and vision and many aspects of spiritual experience there is bound to be much variation of tone: but that is, I think, necessary for the richness and completeness of the treatment. 1946

Comments on Specific Lines and Passages of the Poem

As if solicited in an alien world
With timid and hazardous instinctive grace,
Orphaned and driven out to seek a home,
An errant marvel with no place to live,²

I see no sufficient reason to alter the passage; certainly, I could not alter the line beginning “Orphaned . . .”; it is indispensable to the total idea and its omission would leave an unfilled gap. If I may not expect a complete alertness from the reader,—but how without it can he grasp the subtleties of a mystical and symbolic poem?—he surely ought to be alert enough when he reads the second line to see that it is somebody who is soliciting with a timid grace and it can’t be somebody who is being gracefully solicited; also the line “Orphaned etc.” ought to suggest to him at once that it is some orphan who is soliciting and not the other way round: the delusion of the past participle passive ought to be dissipated long before he reaches the subject of the verb in the fourth line. The obscurity throughout, if there is any, is in the mind of the hasty reader and not in the grammatical construction of the passage. 1946

*

Then a faint hesitating glimmer broke.
A slow miraculous gesture dimly came,

² *Sri Aurobindo, Savitri: A Legend and a Symbol, volume 33 of THE COMPLETE WORKS OF SRI AUROBINDO, p. 3.* Subsequent page references are given in square brackets after the line or lines quoted. The passages Sri Aurobindo was asked to comment on were often revised later. Here the passages are reproduced from a version written at or near the time of Sri Aurobindo’s comment. Where this version differs significantly from the final version, the page reference is preceded by “cf.” (compare). The letters are arranged according to the order of the lines in the final text of Savitri.—Ed.

The insistent thrill of a transfiguring touch
Persuaded the inert black quietude
And beauty and wonder disturbed the fields of God.
A wandering hand of pale enchanted light
That glowed along the moment's fading brink,
Fixed with gold panel and opalescent hinge
A gate of dreams ajar on mystery's verge. [*cf. p. 3*]

Can't see the validity of any prohibition of double adjectives in abundance. If a slow rich wealth-burdened movement is the right thing, as it certainly is here in my judgment, the necessary means have to be used to bring it about — and the double adjective is admirably suited for the purpose.

25 October 1936

*

Now as to the double adjectives — well, man alive, your proposed emendations are an admirable exposition of the art of bringing a line down the steps till my poor "slow miraculous" above-mind line meant to give or begin the concrete portrayal of an act of some hidden Godhead finally becomes a mere metaphor thrown out from its more facile mint by a brilliantly imaginative poetic intelligence. First of all, you shift my "dimly" out of the way and transfer it to something to which it does not inwardly belong, make it an epithet of the gesture or an adverb qualifying its epithet instead of something that qualifies the atmosphere in which the act of the godhead takes place. That is a preliminary havoc which destroys what is very important to the action, its atmosphere. I never intended the gesture to be dim, it is a luminous gesture, but forcing its way through the black quietude it comes dimly. Then again the bald phrase "a gesture came" without anything to psychicise it becomes simply something that "happened", "came" being a poetic equivalent for "happened" instead of the expression of the slow coming of the gesture. The words "slow" and "dimly" assure this sense of motion and this concreteness to the word's sense here. Remove one or both whether entirely or elsewhere and you ruin the vision and change altogether its character. That is at least what happens wholly in

your penultimate version and as for the last the “came” gets another meaning and one feels that somebody very slowly decided to let out the gesture from himself and it was quite a miracle that it came out at all! “Dimly miraculous” means what precisely or what “miraculously dim”—it was miraculous that it managed to be so dim or there was something vaguely miraculous about it after all? No doubt they try to mean something else—but these interpretations lurk in their way and trip them over. The only thing that can stand is the first version which is no doubt fine poetry, but the trouble is that it does not give the effect I wanted to give, the effect which is necessary for the dawn’s inner significance. Moreover what becomes of the slow lingering rhythm of my line which is absolutely indispensable?

Do not forget that the *Savitri* is an experiment in mystic poetry, spiritual poetry cast into a symbolic figure. Done on this scale, it is really a new attempt and cannot be hampered by old ideas of technique except when they are assimilable. Least of all by standards proper to a mere intellectual and abstract poetry which makes “reason and taste” the supreme arbiters, aims at a harmonised poetic-intellectual balanced expression of the sense, elegance in language, a sober and subtle use of imaginative decoration, a restrained emotive element etc. The attempt at mystic spiritual poetry of the kind I am at demands above all a spiritual objectivity, an intense psycho-physical concreteness. I do not know what you mean exactly here by “obvious” and “subtle”. According to certain canons epithets should be used sparingly, free use of them is rhetorical, an “obvious” device, a crowding of images is bad taste, there should be a subtlety of art not displayed but severely concealed—*summa ars est celare artem*. Very good for a certain standard of poetry, not so good or not good at all for others. Shakespeare kicks over these traces at every step, Aeschylus freely and frequently, Milton whenever he chooses. Such lines as

In hideous ruin and combustion down

or

Wilt thou upon the high and giddy mast
Seal up the ship-boy's eyes, and rock his brains
In cradle of the rude imperious surge

(note two double adjectives in three lines in the last) — are not subtle or restrained, or careful to conceal their elements of powerful technique, they show rather a vivid richness or vehemence, forcing language to its utmost power of expression. That has to be done still more in this kind of mystic poetry. I cannot bring out the spiritual objectivity if I have to be miserly about epithets, images, or deny myself the use of all available resources of sound significance.

The double epithets are indispensable here and in the exact order in which they are arranged by me. You say the rich burdened movement can be secured by other means, but a rich burdened movement of any kind is not my primary object, it is desirable only because it is needed to express the spirit of the action here; and the double epithets are wanted because they are the best, not only one way of securing it. The "gesture" must be "slow miraculous" — if it is merely miraculous or merely slow that does not create a picture of the thing as it is, but of something quite abstract and ordinary or concrete but ordinary — it is the combination that renders the exact nature of the mystic movement, with the "dimly came" supporting it, so that "gesture" is not here a metaphor, but a thing actually done. Equally a pale light or an enchanted light may be very pretty, but it is only the combination that renders the luminosity which is that of the hand acting tentatively in the darkness. That darkness itself is described as a quietude, which gives it a subjective spiritual character and brings out the thing symbolised, but the double epithet "inert black" gives it the needed concreteness so that the quietude ceases to be something abstract and becomes something concrete, objective, but still spiritually subjective. I might go on, but that is enough. Every word must be the right word, with the right atmosphere, the right relation to all the other words, just as every sound in its place and the whole sound together must bring out the imponderable significance

which is beyond verbal expression. One can't chop and change about on the principle that it is sufficient if the same mental sense or part of it is given with some poetical beauty or power. One can only change if the change brings out more perfectly the thing behind that is seeking for expression — brings out in full objectivity and also in the full mystic sense. If I can do that, well, other considerations have to take a back seat or seek their satisfaction elsewhere.

31 October 1936

*

A lonely splendour from the invisible goal
Almost was flung on the opaque Inane. [p. 4]

No word will do except "invisible". I don't think there are too many "l's" — in fact such multiplications of a vowel or consonant assonance or several together as well as syllabic assonances in a single line or occasionally between line-endings (e.g. face-fate in the next instalment) are an accepted feature of the technique in *Savitri*. Purposeful repetitions also, or those which serve as echoes or key notes in the theme.

27 October 1936

*

I notice that you have changed "twixt" to "between" when substituting "link" for "step" in the line, "Air was a vibrant link between earth and heaven." [p. 4] Is it merely because several lines earlier "twixt" has been used?

No, it is because "link twixt", two heavy syllables (heavy because ending in two consonants) with the same vowel, makes an awkward combination which can only be saved by good management of the whole line — but here the line was not written to suit such a combination, so it won't do.

28 October 1936

*

Here where our half-lit ignorance skirts the gulfs
On the dumb bosom of the ambiguous earth,
Here where one knows not even the step in front
And Truth has her throne on the shadowy back of doubt,

An anguished and precarious field of toil
Outspread beneath some large indifferent gaze,
Our prostrate soil bore the awakening Light.
Here too the glamour and prophetic flame
Touched for an instant trivial daylong shapes,
Then the divine afflatus, lost, withdrew,
Dimmed, fading slowly from the mortal's range.
A sacred yearning lingered in its trace,
The worship of a Presence and a Power
Too perfect to be held by death-bound hearts,
The prescience of a marvellous birth to come.
Affranchised from its respite of fatigue,
Once more the rumour of the speed of Life
Renewed the cycles of the blinded quest.
All sprang to their unvarying daily acts;
The thousand peoples of the soil and tree
Obeyed the unforeseeing instant's urge,
And, leader here with his uncertain mind,
Alone who seeks the future's covered face,
Man lifted up the burden of his fate. [*cf. pp. 5–6*]

A deep and large suggestive tone is here, with every word doing perfect expressive duty; but it would be interesting to know if there is some shifting of the plane—if the poetry is nearer the Higher Mind than in the preceding passages where a more direct luminosity seemed to be at work.

The former pitch continues, as far as I can see, up to “Light”, then it begins to come down to an intuitivised higher mind in order to suit the change of the subject—but it is only occasionally that it is pure higher mind—a mixture of the intuitive or illumined is usually there except when some truth has to be stated to the philosophic intelligence in as precise a manner as possible.

28 October 1936

*

[*As typed*] Its passive flower of love and doom it gave.
[*cf. p. 7*]

Good Heavens! how did Gandhi come in there? Passion-flower,
sir — passion, *not* passive.

30 October 1936

*

Into how many feet do you scan the line

Draped in the leaves' emerald vivid monotone [*cf. p. 13*]?

Five, the first being taken as a dactyl. A little gambol like that
must be occasionally allowed in an otherwise correct metrical
performance.

2 November 1936

*

The Gods above and Nature sole below
Were the spectators of that mighty strife. [*p. 13*]

The last line drops only in appearance, I think, towards Mil-
tonism.

Miltonism? Surely not. The Miltonic has a statelier more spread-
ing rhythm and a less direct more loftily arranged language.
Miltonically I should have written

Only the Sons of Heaven and that executive She
Watched the arbitrament of the high dispute.

1 November 1936

*

Is the *r*-effect in

Never a rarer creature bore his shaft [*p. 14*]

deliberate?

Yes, like Shakespeare's

. . . rock his brains

In cradle of the rude imperious surge.

Mine has only three sonant *r*'s, the others being inaudible—
Shakespeare pours himself 5 in a close space.

2 November 1936

*

All in her pointed to a nobler kind. [p. 14]

It is a “connecting” line which prepares for what follows. It is sometimes good technique, as I think, to intersperse lines like that (provided they don’t fall below standard) so as to give the intellect the foothold of a clear unadorned statement of the gist of what is coming, before taking a higher flight. This is of course a technique for long poems and long descriptions, not for shorter things or lyrical writing.

2 November 1936

*

I refuse entirely to admit that that [*All in her pointed to a nobler kind*] is poor poetry. It is not only just the line that is needed to introduce what follows but it is very good poetry with the strength and pointed directness, not intellectualised like Pope’s, but intuitive, which we often find in the Elizabethans, for instance in Marlowe supporting adequately and often more than adequately his “mighty lines”. But the image must be understood, as it was intended, in its concrete sense and not as a vague rhetorical phrase substituted for a plainer wording,—it shows Savitri as the forerunner or first creator of a new race. All poets have lines which are bare and direct statements and meant to be that in order to carry their full force; but to what category their simplicity belongs or whether a line is only passable or more than that depends on various circumstances. Shakespeare’s

To be or not to be, that is the question

introduces powerfully one of the most famous of all soliloquies and it comes in with a great dramatic force, but in itself it is a bare statement and some might say that it would not be otherwise written in prose and is only saved by the metrical rhythm. The same might be said of the well-known passage in Keats which I have already quoted in this connection:

“Beauty is truth, truth beauty”—that is all
Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.

The same might be said of Milton’s famous line,

Fallen Cherub! to be weak is miserable.

But obviously in all these lines there is not only a concentrated force, power or greatness of the thought, but also a concentration of intense poetic feeling which makes any criticism impossible. Then take Milton's lines,

Were it not better done as others use,
To sport with Amaryllis in the shade,
Or with the tangles of Neaera's hair?

It might be said that the first line has nothing to distinguish it and is merely passable or only saved by the charm of what follows; but there is a beauty of rhythm and a *bhāva* or feeling brought in by the rhythm which makes the line beautiful in itself and not merely passable. If there is not some saving grace like that then the danger of laxity may become possible. I do not think there is much in *Savitri* which is of that kind. But I can perfectly understand your anxiety that all should be lifted to or towards at least the minimum overhead level or so near as to be touched by its influence or at the very least a good substitute for it. I do not know whether that is always possible in so long a poem as *Savitri* dealing with so many various heights and degrees and so much varying substance of thought and feeling and descriptive matter and narrative. But that has been my general aim throughout and it is the reason why I have made so many successive drafts and continual alterations till I felt that I had got the thing intended by the higher inspiration in every line and passage. It is also why I keep myself open to every suggestion from a sympathetic and understanding quarter and weigh it well, rejecting only after due consideration and accepting when I see it to be well-founded. But for that the critic must be one who has seen and felt what is in the thing written, not like your friend Mendonça, one who has not seen anything and understood only the word surface and not even always that; he must be open to this kind of poetry, able to see the spiritual vision it conveys, capable too of feeling the overhead touch when it comes,—the fit reader.

22 April 1947

*

Are not these lines a snatch of the sheer Overmind?

All in her pointed to a nobler kind.
Near to earth's wideness, intimate with heaven,
Exalted and swift her young large-visioned spirit,
Winging through worlds of splendour and of calm,
O'erflew the ways of Thought to unborn things.
Ardent was her self-poised unstumbling will,
Her mind, a sea of white sincerity,
Passionate in flow, had not one turbid wave.
As in a mystic and dynamic dance
A priestess of immaculate ecstasies,
Inspired and ruled from Truth's revealing vault,
Moves in some prophet cavern of the Gods,
A heart of silence in the hands of joy
Inhabited with rich creative beats
A body like a parable of dawn
That seemed a niche for veiled divinity
Or golden temple-door to things beyond.
Immortal rhythms swayed her time-born steps;
Her look, her smile awoke celestial sense
In this earth-stuff and their intense delight
Poured a supernal beauty on men's lives.
The great unsatisfied godhead here could dwell.
Vacant of the dwarf self's imprisoned air,
Her mood could harbour his sublimer breath
Spiritual that can make all things divine:
For even her gulfs were secracies of light.
At once she was the stillness and the Word,
An ocean of untrembling virgin fire,
A continent of self-diffusing peace.
In her he met a vastness like his own;
His warm high subtle ether he refound
And moved in her as in his natural home. [*cf. pp. 14–16*]

This passage is, I believe, what I might call the Overmind Intuition at work expressing itself in something like its own rhythm and language. It is difficult to say about one's own poetry, but I think I have succeeded here and in some passages later on

in catching that very difficult note; in separate lines or briefer passages (i.e. a few lines at a time) I think it comes in not unoften.

3 November 1936

*

I shall answer in this letter only about the passage in the description of Savitri which has been omitted.³ The simplest thing would be to leave the description itself and the article as they are. I am unable to accept the alterations you suggest because they are romantically decorative and do not convey any impression of directness and reality which is necessary in this style of writing. A "sapphire sky" is too obvious and common and has no significance in connection with the word "magnanimity" or its idea and "boundless" is somewhat meaningless and inapt when applied to sky. The same objections apply to both "opulence" and "amplitude"; but apart from that they have only a rhetorical value and are not the right word for what I want to say. Your "life's wounded wings of dream" and "the wounded wings of life" have also a very pronounced note of romanticism and do not agree with the strong reality of things stressed everywhere in this passage. In the poem I dwell often upon the idea of life as a dream, but here it would bring in a false note. It does not seem to me that magnanimity and greatness are the same thing or that this can be called a repetition. I myself see no objection to "heaven" and "haven"; it is not as if they were in successive lines; they are divided by two lines and it is surely an excessively meticulous ear that can take their similarity of sound at this distance as an offence. Most of your other objections hang upon your overscrupulous law against repetitions. I shall speak about that in a later letter; at present I can only say that I consider that this law has no value in the technique of a mystic poem of this

³ This letter was written in response to suggestions made by K. D. Sethna (Amal Kiran) before he reproduced certain passages from Savitri in his article "Sri Aurobindo—A New Age of Mystic Poetry" (Sri Aurobindo Circle 2 [1946]). In that article Sethna omitted a number of lines from passages he quoted from the poem. The lines under discussion here are those that begin "Near to earth's wideness, intimate with heaven" (pp. 14–16). —Ed.

kind and that repetition of a certain kind can be even part of the technique; for instance, I see no objection to "sea" being repeated in a different context in the same passage or to the image of the ocean being resorted to in a third connection. I cannot see that the power and force or inevitability of these lines is at all diminished in their own context by their relative proximity or that that proximity makes each less inevitable in its place.

Then about the image about the bird and the bosom, I understand what you mean, but it rests upon the idea that the whole passage must be kept at the same transcendental level. It is true that all the rest gives the transcendental values in the composition of Savitri's being, while here there is a departure to show how this transcendental greatness contacts the psychic demand of human nature in its weakness and responds to it and acts upon it. That was the purpose of the new passage and it is difficult to accomplish it without bringing in a normal psychic instead of a transcendental tone. The image of the bird and the bosom is obviously not new and original, it images a common demand of the human heart and does it by employing a physical and emotional figure so as to give it a vivid directness in its own kind. This passage was introduced because it brought in something in Savitri's relation with the human world which seemed to me a necessary part of a complete psychological description of her. If it had to be altered,—which would be only if the descent to the psychic level really spoils the consistent integrality of the description and lowers the height of the poetry,—I would have to find something equal and better, and just now I do not find any such satisfying alteration.

As for the line about the strength and silence of the gods, that has a similar motive of completeness. The line about the "stillness" and the "word" gives us the transcendental element in Savitri,—for the Divine Savitri is the word that rises from the transcendental stillness; the next two lines render that element into the poise of the spiritual consciousness; this last line brings the same thing down to the outward character and temperament in life. A union of strength and silence is insisted upon in this poem as one of the most prominent characteristics of Savitri and

I have dwelt on it elsewhere, but it had to be brought in here also if this description of her was to be complete. I do not find that this line lacks poetry or power; if I did, I would alter it. Your objection to the substitution of wideness for vastness⁴ is quite justified though not because of any reason of repetition, but because vastness is the right word and wideness is much inferior; the change was not deliberate but came by inadvertence due to a lapse of memory. I have restored vastness in the poem.

But, for all this, it may perhaps be better to keep the passage as you have written it [*with omissions*] since it is a particular characteristic of poetic style at its highest which you want to emphasise, and anything which you feel to lower or depart from that height may very properly be omitted. So unless you positively want to include the omitted passage kept as I have written it, we will leave your article and quotations to stand in their present form. The rest in another letter.

P.S. One thing occurs to me that the lines you most want to include might be kept, while the passage about the bird and the "haven" down to the "warmth and colour's rule" could be left out. This would throw out all the things to which you object except the frequency of the sea and sky images and the recurrence of "great" after "greatness"; those have to remain, for I feel no disposition to alter those defects, if defects they are. Unless you think otherwise, we will so arrange it. In that case the alteration you want made in your article will find its place.

11 March 1946

*

As might a soul fly like a hunted bird,
 Escaping with tired wings from a world of storms,
 And a quiet reach like a remembered breast,
 In a haven of safety and splendid soft repose
 One could drink life back in streams of honey-fire,
 Recover the lost habit of happiness, [p. 15]

⁴ *In her he met a wideness like his own; [cf. p. 16].*

"One" who is himself a soul is compared to "a soul" acting like a bird taking shelter, as if to say: "A soul who is doing so-and-so is like a soul doing something similar"—a comparison which perhaps brings in some loss of surprise and revelation.

The suggestion you make about the "soul" and the "bird" may have a slight justification, but I do not think it is fatal to the passage. On the other hand there is a strong objection to the alteration you propose; it is that the image of the soul escaping from a world of storms would be impaired if it were only a physical bird that was escaping: a "world of storms" is too big an expression in relation to the smallness of the bird, it is only with the soul especially mentioned or else suggested and the "bird" subordinately there as a comparison that it fits perfectly well and gets its full value. The word "one" which takes up the image of the "bird" has a more general application than the "soul" and is not quite identical with it; it means anyone who has lost happiness and is in need of spiritual comfort and revival. It is as if one said: "as might a soul like a hunted bird take refuge from the world in the peace of the Infinite and feel that as its own remembered home, so could one take refuge in her as in a haven of safety and like the tired bird reconstitute one's strength so as to face the world once more."

As to the sixfold repetition of the indefinite article "a" in this passage, one should no doubt make it a general rule to avoid any such excessive repetition, but all rules have their exception and it might be phrased like this, "Except when some effect has to be produced which the repetition would serve or for which it is necessary." Here I feel that it does serve subtly such an effect; I have used the repetition of this "a" very frequently in the poem with a recurrence at the beginning of each successive line in order to produce an accumulative effect of multiple characteristics or a grouping of associated things or ideas or other similar massings.

22 April 1947

*

My remarks about the Bird passage [*in the above letter*] are written from the point of view of the change made and the new

character and atmosphere it gives. I think the old passage was right enough in its own atmosphere, but not so good as what has replaced it: the alteration you suggest may be as good as that was but the objections to it are valid from the new standpoint.

7 July 1947

*

Almost they saw who lived within her light
 The white-fire dragon-bird of endless bliss,
 Her playmate in the sempiternal spheres
 In her attracting advent's luminous wake
 Descended from his unattainable realms,
 Drifting with burning wings above her days. [cf. p. 16]

I suppose the repetition of adjective and noun in four consecutive line-endings is meant to create an accumulating grandiose effect.

Yes; the purpose is to create a large luminous trailing repetitive movement like the flight of the Bird with its dragon tail of white fire.

Will you please say something about this bird?

What to say about him? One can only see. 4 November 1936

*

About that bird, it is true that "one can only see"; but if not more than one can see, don't others need a bit of explanation? To *what region* does it belong? Is it any relation of the Bird of Fire with "gold-white wings" or the Hippogriff with a face "lustred, pale-blue-lined"?

All birds of that region are relatives. But this is the bird of eternal Ananda, while the Hippogriff was the divinised Thought and the Bird of Fire is the Agni-bird, psychic and tapas. All that however is to mentalise too much and mentalising always takes most of the life out of spiritual things. That's why I say it can be seen, but nothing said about it.

But joy cannot endure until the end:
There is a darkness in terrestrial things
That will not suffer long too glad a note. [pp. 16–17]

Are these lines the poetic intelligence at its deepest, say, like a mixture of Sophocles and Virgil? They may be the pure or the intuitivised higher mind.

I do not think it is the poetic intelligence any more than Virgil's *Sunt lacrimae rerum et mentem mortalia tangunt*, which I think to be the Higher Mind coming through to the psychic and blending with it. So also his *O passi graviora, dabit deus his quoque finem*. Here it may be the intuitive inner mind with the psychic fused together.

5 November 1936

*

One dealt with her who meets the burdened great. [p. 17]

Who is "One" here? Is it Love, the godhead mentioned before? If not, does this "dubious godhead with his torch of pain" correspond to "the image white and high of godlike Pain" spoken of a little earlier? Or is it Time whose "snare" occurs in the last line of the preceding passage?

Love? It is not Love who meets the burdened great and governs the fates of men! Nor is it Pain. Time also does not do these things—it only provides the field and movement of events. If I had wanted to give a name, I would have done it, but it has purposely to be left nameless because it is indefinable. He may use Love or Pain or Time or any of these powers, but is not any of them. You can call him the Master of the Evolution, if you like.

5 November 1936

*

Her spirit refused struck from the starry list
To quench in dull despair the God-given light. [cf. p. 19]

Any punctuation missing in the first line? Perhaps a dash after "refused" as well as after "list"?

I omitted any punctuation because it is a compressed construc-

tion meant to signify refused to be struck from the starry list
and quenched in dull despair etc.—the quenching being the act
of assent that would make effective the sentence of being struck
from the starry list.

7 November 1936

*

Beyond life's arc in spirit's immensities. [p. 44]

"Spirit" instead of "spirit's" might mean something else, the
word "spirit" as an epithet is ambiguous — it might be spiritistic
and not spiritual.

1936

*

The calm immensities of spirit space,
The golden plateaus of immortal Fire,
The moon-flame oceans of unfallen Bliss. [cf. p. 47]

Less than 20 lines earlier you have

Beyond life's arc in spirit's immensities.

Is it not possible to recast a little the first half of that line?

"Immensities" was the proper word because it helped to give the
whole soul-scape of those worlds — the immensities of space, the
plateaus of fire, the oceans of bliss. "Infinities" could just replace
it, but now something has to be sacrificed. The only thing I can
think of now is

The calm immunity of spirit space.

22 May 1937

*

Why "immunity" — the singular — and not "immunities" to
replace "immensities"?

"Immunities" in the plural is much feebler and philosophically
abstract — one begins to think of things like "qualities" — naturally it suggested itself to me as keeping up the plural sequence,
but it grated on the sense of spiritual objective reality and I had
to reject it at once. The calm immunity was a thing I could at

once feel, with immunities the mind has to cavil: “Well, what are they?”

23 May 1937

*

As if the original Ukase still held back [*cf. p. 76*]

I have accented on the first syllable as I have done often with words like “occult”, “divine”. It is a Russian word and foreign words in English tend often to get their original accent shifted as far backward as possible. I have heard many do that with “ukase”.

20 May 1937

*

Resiled from poor assent to Nature’s terms, [*p. 77*]

It [“*resiled*”] is a perfectly good English word, meaning originally to leap back, rebound (like an elastic) — so to draw back from, recoil, retreat (in military language it means to fall back from a position gained or to one’s original position); but it is specially used for withdrawing from a contract, agreement, previous statement. It is therefore quite the just word here. Human nature has assented to Nature’s terms and been kept by her to them, but now Aswapati resiles from the contract and the assent to it made by humanity to which he belonged. Resiled, resilient, resilience are all good words and in use.

1937

*

The incertitude of man’s proud confident thought, [*p. 78*]

Is “incertitude” preferable to “uncertainty” — with “Infinities” so closely preceding it?

“Uncertainty” would mean that the thought was confident but uncertain of itself, which would be a contradiction. “Incertitude” means that its truth is uncertain in spite of its proud confidence in itself. I don’t think the repetition of the sound is objectionable in a technique of this kind.

12 November 1936

*

Aware of his occult omnipotent Source,
 Allured by the omniscient Ecstasy,
 He felt the invasion and the nameless joy. [p. 79]

I certainly won't have "attracted" [*in place of "allured"*] — there is an enormous difference between the force of the two words and merely "attracted" by the Ecstasy would take away all my ecstasy in the line — nothing so tepid can be admitted. Neither do I want "thrill" [*in place of "joy"*] which gives a false colour — precisely it would mean that the ecstasy was already touching him with its intensity which is far from my intention. Your statement that "joy" is just another word for "ecstasy" is surprising. "Comfort", "pleasure", "joy", "bliss", "rapture", "ecstasy" would then be all equal and exactly synonymous terms and all distinction of shades and colours of words would disappear from literature. As well say that "flashlight" is just another word for "lightning" — or that glow, gleam, glitter, sheen, blaze are all equivalents which can be employed indifferently in the same place. One can feel allured to the supreme omniscient ecstasy and feel a nameless joy touching one without that joy becoming itself the supreme Ecstasy. I see no loss of expressiveness by the joy coming in as a vague nameless hint of the immeasurable superior Ecstasy.

22 May 1937

*

But aren't there two tendencies in poetry — one to emphasise the shades, another to blend and blur them owing to technical exigencies? What poet would not use "gleam", "glow" and "sheen" indifferently for the sake of rhyme, rhythm or metre?

That might be all right for mental poetry — it won't do for what I am trying to create — in that one word *won't* do for the other. Even in mental poetry I consider it an inferior method. "Gleam" and "glow" are two quite different things and the poet who uses them indifferently has constantly got his eye upon words rather than upon the object.

23 May 1937

*

Across the soul's unmapped immensitudes. [cf. p. 80]

Whatever you have written, it is not "immensities".

The word is "immensitudes" as you have written. I take upon myself the right to coin new words. It is not any more fantastic than "infinitudes" to pair "infinity". 13 November 1936

*

Would you also use "eternitudes"?

Not likely! I would think of the French *éternuer* and sneeze.

The body and the life no more were all.⁵

Don't care to [*change the line*] — it says precisely what I want to convey and I don't see how I can say it otherwise without diminishing or exaggerating the significance.

14 November 1936

*

I still consider the line a very good one and it did perfectly express what I wanted to say — as for "baldness", an occasionally bare and straightforward line without any trailing of luminous robes is not an improper element. E.g. "This was the day when Satyavan must die", which I would not remove from its position even if you were to give me the crown and income of the Kavi Samrat for doing it. If I have changed here, it is because the alterations all around it made the line no longer in harmony with its immediate environment. 21 May 1937

*

Your line

The body and the life no more were all

is no doubt a very good line in itself but it seemed to be, in its context here, baldness for baldness' sake.

⁵ This line does not form part of the final version of Savitri. — Ed.

Not at all. It was bareness for expression's sake which is a different matter.

Even if not quite that, it did not appear to justify itself completely: if it had been so very *juste* you would have scorned the Kavi Samrat's crown and income resolutely for its sake also.

It was *juste* for expressing what I had to say then in a certain context. The context being entirely changed in its sense, bearing and atmosphere, it was no longer *juste* in that place. Its being an interloper in a new house does not show that it was an interloper in an old one. The colours and the spaces being heightened and widened this tint which was appropriate and needed in the old design could not remain in the new one. These things are a question of design; a line has to be viewed not only in its own separate value but with a view to its just place in the whole.

22 May 1937

*

What plane is spoken of by Virgil in these lines:

Largior hic campos aether et lumine vestit
 purpleo, solemque suum, sua sidera norunt.

I don't know, but purple is a light of the vital. It may have been one of the vital heavens he was thinking of. The ancients saw the vital heavens as the highest and most of the religions also have done the same. I have used the suggestion of Virgil to insert a needed new line:

And griefless countries under purple suns. [p. 120]

17 November 1936

*

Here too the gracious mighty Angel poured
 Her splendour and her swiftness and her thrill,
 Hoping to fill this new fair world with her joy, [cf. p. 130]

Would not "pours" be better?

No, that would take away all meaning from "new fair world"

— it is the attempted conquest of earth by life when earth had been created,— a past event though still continuing in its sequel and result.

18 November 1936

*

The hopes that fade to drab realities [*cf. p. 159*]

“Dun” occurred to me as less common than “drab” with “realities”.

I need “dun” afterwards, besides “drab” gives the more correct colour.

20 November 1936

*

The Mask is mentioned not twice but four times in this opening passage [*Book Two, Canto Seven, pp. 202–03*] and it is purposely done to keep up the central connection of the idea running through the whole. The ambassadors wear this grey Mask, so your criticism cannot stand since there is no separate mask coming as part of a new idea but a very pointed return to the principal note indicating the identity of the influence throughout. It is not a random recurrence but a purposeful touch carrying a psychological meaning.

1948

*

And overcast with error, grief and pain

The soul’s native will for truth and joy and light. [*p. 203*]

The two trios are not intended to be exactly correspondent; “joy” answers to both “grief” and “pain” while “light” is an addition in the second trio indicating the conditions for “truth” and “joy”.

1948

*

All evil starts from that ambiguous face. [*p. 205*]

Here again the same word “face” occurs a second time at the end of a line but it belongs to a new section and a new turn of ideas. I am not attracted by your suggestion; the word “mien” here is an obvious literary substitution and not part of a straight

and positive seeing: as such it sounds deplorably weak. The only thing would be to change the image, as for instance,

All evil creeps from that ambiguous source.

But this is comparatively weak. I prefer to keep the “face” and insert a line before it so as to increase a little the distance between the two faces:

Its breath is a subtle poison in men’s hearts.

1948

*

As to the two lines with “no man’s land” [*in Book Two, Canto Seven, pages 206 and 211*] there can be no capital in the first line because there it is a description while the capital is needed in the other line, because the phrase has acquired there the force of a name or appellation. I am not sure about the hyphen; it could be put but the no hyphen might be better as it suggests that no one in particular has as yet got possession.

1948

*

The cliché you object to . . . “he quoted Scripture and Law” was put in there with fell purpose and was necessary for the effect I wanted to produce, the more direct its commonplace the better. However, I defer to your objection and have altered it to

He armed untruth with Scripture and the Law. [p. 207]

I don’t remember seeing the sentence about

Agreeing on the right to disagree

anywhere in a newspaper or in any book either; colloquial it is and perhaps for that reason only out of harmony in this passage. So I substitute

Only they agreed to differ in Evil’s paths. [p. 208]

1946

*

Oft, some familiar visage studying,
Discovered suddenly Hell's trademark there. [*cf. p. 215*]

It is a reference to the beings met in the vital worlds that seem like human beings but, if one looks closely, they are seen to be Hostiles, often assuming the appearance of a familiar face, they try to tempt or attack by surprise, and betray the stamp of their origin — there is also a hint that on earth also they take up human bodies or possess them for their own purpose.

11 January 1937

*

Bliss into black coma fallen, insensible. [*p. 221*]

Neither of your scensions can stand. The best way will be to spell “fallen” “fall'n” as is occasionally done and treat “bliss into” as a dactyl.

1948

*

Bliss into black coma fallen, insensible,
Coiled back to itself and God's eternal joy
Through a false poignant figure of grief and pain
Still dolorously nailed upon a cross
Fixed in the soil of a dumb insentient world
Where birth was a pang and death an agony,
Lest all too soon should change again to bliss. [*p. 221*]

This has nothing to do with Christianity or Christ but only with the symbol of the cross used here to represent a seemingly eternal world-pain which appears falsely to replace the eternal bliss. It is not Christ but the world-soul which hangs here.

1948

*

Performs the ritual of her Mysteries. [*p. 221*]

It is “Mysteries” with capital M and means mystic symbolic rites as in the Orphic and Eleusinian “Mysteries”. When written with capital M it does not mean secret mysterious things, but has this sense, e.g. a “Mystery play”.

1936

*

The passage running from "It was the gate of a false Infinite" to "None can reach heaven who has not passed through hell" [pp. 221–27] suggests that there was an harmonious original plan of the Overmind Gods for earth's evolution, but that it was spoiled by the intrusion of the Rakshasic worlds. I should, however, have thought that an evolution, arising from the stark Inconscient's sleep and the mute void, would hardly be an harmonious plan. The Rakshasas only shield themselves with the covering "Ignorance", they don't create it. Do you mean that, if they had not interfered, there wouldn't have been resistance and conflict and suffering? How can they be called the artificers of Nature's fall and pain?

An evolution from the Inconscient need not be a painful one if there is no resistance; it can be a deliberately slow and beautiful efflorescence of the Divine. One ought to be able to see how beautiful outward Nature can be and usually is although it is itself apparently "inconscient" — why should the growth of consciousness in inward Nature be attended by so much ugliness and evil spoiling the beauty of the outward creation? Because of a *perversity* born from the Ignorance, which came in with Life and increased in Mind — that is the Falsehood, the Evil that was born because of the starkness of the Inconscient's sleep separating its action from the secret luminous Conscience that was all the time within it. But it need not have been so except for the overriding Will of the Supreme which meant that the possibility of Perversion by inconscience and ignorance should be manifested in order to be eliminated though being given their chance, since all possibility has to manifest somewhere. Once it is eliminated the Divine Manifestation in Matter will be greater than it otherwise could be because it will gather all the possibilities involved in this difficult creation and not some of them as in an easier and less strenuous creation might naturally be.

15 January 1937

*

And the articles of the bound soul's contract, [p. 231]

Liberty is very often taken with the last foot nowadays and

usually it is just the liberty I have taken here. This liberty I took
long ago in my earlier poetry.

1948

*

Their slopes were a laughter of delightful dreams . . .
[eight lines]

There Love fulfilled her gold and roseate dreams
And Strength her crowned and mighty reveries.
[two lines]

Dream walked along the highway of the stars; . . .

[cf. pp 234–35]

“Gold and roseate dreams” cannot be changed. “Muse” would make it at once artificial. “Dreams” alone is the right word there. “Reveries” also cannot be changed, especially as it is not any particular “reverie” that is meant. Also, “dream” at the beginning of a later line departs into another idea and is appropriate in its place; I see no objection to this purposeful repetition. Anyway the line cannot be altered. The only concession I can make to you is to alter the first.

1948

*

All reeled into a world of Kali’s dance. [p. 255]

It is “world”, not “whirl”. It means “all reeling in a clash and confusion became a world of Kali’s dance”.

1948

*

Knowledge was rebuilt from cells of inference
Into a fixed body flasque and perishable; [p. 267]

“Flasque” is a French word meaning “slack”, “loose”, “flaccid” etc. I have more than once tried to thrust in a French word like this, for instance, “A harlot empress in a bouge”—somewhat after the manner of Eliot and Ezra Pound.

1946

*

To unify their task, excluding life
 Which cannot bear the nakedness of the Vast, [p. 273]

I suppose the intransitive use of “unify” is not illegitimate,
 though the Oxford dictionary gives only the transitive.

Quite possible to use a transitive verb in this way with an unexpressed object, things in general being understood.

31 March 1948

*

For Truth is wider, greater than her forms.
 A thousand icons they have made of her
 And find her in the idols they adore;
 But she remains herself and infinite. [p. 276]

“They” means nobody in particular but corresponds to the French “On dit” meaning vaguely “people in general”. This is a use permissible in English; for instance, “They say you are not so scrupulous as you should be.”

1948

*

Would it be an improvement if one of the two successive “it”s in

In the world which sprang from it it took no part [p. 283]
 is avoided? Why not put something like “its depths” for the first “it”?

“Depths” will not do, since the meaning is not that it took no part in what came from the depths but did take part in what came from the shallows; the word would be merely a rhetorical flourish and take away the real sense. It would be easy in several ways to avoid the two “it”s coming together but the direct force would be lost. I think a comma at “it” and the slight pause it would bring in the reading would be sufficient. For instance, one could write “no part it took”, instead of “it took no part”, but the direct force I want would be lost.

1948

*

Travestied with a fortuitous sovereignty [p. 285]

I am unable to follow your criticism. I find nothing pompous or bombastic in the line unless it is the resonance of the word "fortuitous" and the many closely packed "t"s that give you the impression. But "fortuitous" cannot be sacrificed as it exactly hits the meaning I want. Also I fail to see what is abstract and especially mental in it. Neither a travesty nor sovereignty are abstract things and the images here are all concrete, as they should be to express the inner vision's sense of concreteness of subtle things. The whole passage is of course about mental movements and mental powers, therefore about what the intellect sees as abstractions, but the inner vision does not feel them as that. To it mind has a substance and its energies and actions are very real and substantial things. Naturally there is a certain sense of scorn in this passage, for what the Ignorance regards as its sovereignty and positive truth has been exposed by the "sceptic ray" as fortuitous and unreal.

1948

*

That clasped him in from day and night's pursuit, [p. 289]

I do not realise what you mean by "stickiness", since there are only two hard labials and some nasals; is it that combination which makes you feel sticky, or does the addition of some hard dentals also help? Anyhow, sticky or not, I am unwilling to change anything.

I do not want to put "day's" and "night's"; I find it heavy and unnecessary. It ought to be clear enough to the reader that "day and night" are here one double entity or two hounds in a leash pursuing a common prey.

1948

*

Your line,

In a stillness of the voices of the world, [*cf. p. 294*]

is separated by twenty lines from

In the formless force and the still fixity. [p. 294]

So there is no fault here in “stillness”, but an added poetic quality might come if “stillness” were avoided and some such word as “lulling” used, especially as the line before runs:

And cradles of heavenly rapture and repose.

“Lulling” will never do. It is too ornamental and romantic and tender. I have put “slumber” in its place.

*

A Panergy that harmonised all life [p. 300]

I do not think the word “Pancy” depends for its meaning on the word “energies” in a previous line. The “Pancy” suggested is a self-existent total power which may carry the cosmic energies in it and is their cause but is not constituted by them. 1948

*

Your new objection to the line,

All he had been and all that still he was, [cf. p. 307]

is somewhat self-contradictory. If a line has a rhythm and expressive turn which makes it poetic, then it must be good poetry; but I suppose what you mean is fine or elevated poetry. I would say that the line even in its original form is good poetry and is further uplifted by rising towards its subsequent context which gives it its full poetic meaning and suggestion, the evolution of the inner being and the abrupt end or failure of all that had been done unless it could suddenly transcend itself and become something greater. I do not think that this line in its context is merely passable, but I admit that it is less elevated and intense than what precedes or what follows. I do not see how that can be avoided without truncating the thought significance of the whole account by the omission of something necessary to its evolution or else overpitching the expression where it needs to be direct or clear and bare in its lucidity. In any case the emended version [“All he had been and all towards which he

grew"] cures any possibility of the line being merely passable as it raises both the idea and the expression through the vividness of image which makes us feel and not merely think the living evolution in Aswapati's inner being. 1946

General Comments on Some Criticisms of the Poem

Now as to the many criticisms contained in your letter I have a good deal to say; some of them bring forward questions of the technique of mystic poetry about which I wanted to write in an introduction to *Savitri* when it is published, and I may as well say something about that here.

I am glad, however, that you have called my attention to some lapses such as the inadvertent substitution of "wideness" for "vastness" in the line about love and Savitri.⁶ In all these cases there was the same inadvertent and unintentional change. "A prophet cavern" should certainly have remained as "some prophet cavern".⁷ Also, it should be "a niche for veiled divinity" and "of" is an obvious slip.⁸ Again, "still depths" is a similar inadvertent mistake for "sealed depths" which, of course, I have restored.⁹ Also "step twixt" instead of "link between" was a similar mistake.¹⁰

Now as to some other passages. You have made what seems to me a strange confusion as regards the passage about the "errant marvel"¹¹ owing to the mistake in the punctuation which is now corrected. You took the word "solicited" as a past participle passive and this error seems to have remained fixed in your mind so as to distort the whole building and sense of the passage. The word "solicited" is the past tense and the subject of this verb

⁶ *In her he met a wideness like his own, [cf. p. 16]*

⁷ *Moves in a prophet cavern of the gods, [cf. p. 15]*

⁸ *That seemed a niche of veiled divinity [cf. p. 15]*

⁹ *And, scattered on still depths, her luminous smile [cf. p. 4]*

¹⁰ *Air was a vibrant step twixt earth and heaven, [cf. p. 4]*

¹¹ *As if solicited in an alien world*

*With timid and hazardous instinctive grace,
Orphaned and driven out to seek a home*

is “an errant marvel” delayed to the fourth line by the parenthesis “Orphaned etc.” This kind of inversion, though longer than usual, is common enough in poetical style and the object is to throw a strong emphasis and prominence upon the line, “An errant marvel with no place to live”; that being explained, the rest about the “gesture” should be clear enough.

Your objection to the “finger” and the “clutch” moves me only to change “reminding” to “reminded” in the second line of that passage.¹² It is not intended that the two images “finger laid” and “clutch” should correspond exactly to each other; for the “void” and the “Mother of the universe” are not the same thing. The “void” is only a mask covering the Mother’s cheek or face. What the “void” feels as a clutch is felt by the Mother only as a reminding finger laid on her cheek. It is one advantage of the expression “as if” that it leaves the field open for such variation. It is intended to suggest without saying it that behind the sombre void is the face of a mother. The other two “as if”’s¹³ have the same motive and I do not find them jarring upon me. The second is at a sufficient distance from the first and it is not obtrusive enough to prejudice the third which more nearly follows. In any case your suggestion “as though” [*for the third “as if”*] does not appeal to me: it almost makes a suggestion of falsity and in any case it makes no real difference as the two expressions are too much kin to each other to repel the charge of reiteration.

In the passage about Dawn¹⁴ your two suggestions I again find unsatisfying. “Windowing hidden things” presents a vivid

*An errant marvel with no place to live,
Into a far-off nook of heaven there came
A slow miraculous gesture’s dim appeal. [cf. p. 3]*

¹² *As if a childlike finger laid on a cheek
Reminding of the endless need in things
The heedless Mother of the universe,
An infant longing clutched the sombre Vast. [cf. p. 2]*

¹³ *As if a soul long dead were moved to live: . . .
As if solicited in an alien world . . . [p. 3]*

¹⁴ *One lucent corner windowing hidden things
Forced the world’s blind immensity to sight.
The darkness failed and slipped like a falling cloak. [cf. p. 3]*

image and suggests what I want to suggest and I must refuse to alter it; "vistaing" brings in a very common image and does not suggest anything except perhaps that there is a long line or wide range of hidden things. But that is quite unwanted and not a part of the thing seen. "Shroud" sounds to me too literary and artificial and besides it almost suggests that what it covers is a corpse which would not do at all; a slipping shroud sounds inapt while "slipped like a falling cloak" gives a natural and true image. In any case, "shroud" would not be more naturally continuous in the succession of images than "cloak". As to this succession, I may say that rapid transitions from one image to another are a constant feature in *Savitri* as in most mystic poetry. I am not here building a long sustained single picture of the Dawn with a single continuous image or variations of the same image. I am describing a rapid series of transitions, piling one suggestion upon another. There is first a black quietude, then the persistent touch, then the first "beauty and wonder" leading to the magical gate and the "lucent corner". Then comes the failing of the darkness, the simile used suggesting the rapidity of the change. Then as a result the change of what was once a rift into a wide luminous gap,—if you want to be logically consistent you can look at the rift as a slit in the "cloak" which becomes a big tear.¹⁵ Then all changes into a "brief perpetual sign", the iridescence, then the blaze and the magnificent aura. In such a race of rapid transitions you cannot bind me down to a logical chain of figures or a classical monotone. The mystic Muse is more of an inspired Bacchante of the Dionysian wine than an orderly housewife.

As for other suggestions, I am afraid, "soil"¹⁶ must remain because that was what I meant, it cannot elevate itself even into a prostrate soul as that would be quite irrelevant. Your "barely enough", instead of the finer and more suggestive "hardly",¹⁷

¹⁵ *And through the pallid rift that seemed at first
Hardly enough for a trickle from the suns,
Outpoured the revelation and the flame.*

The brief perpetual sign recurred above. [cf. p. 3]

¹⁶ *Our prostrate soil bore the awakening ray. [p. 5]*

¹⁷ *Hardly enough for a trickle from the suns, [p. 3]*

falls flat upon my ear; one cannot substitute one word for another in this kind of poetry merely because it means intellectually the same thing; “hardly” is the *mot juste* in this context and, repetition or not, it must remain unless a word not only *juste* but inevitable comes to replace it. I am not disposed either to change “suns” to “stars” in the line about the creative slumber of the ignorant Force;¹⁸ “stars” does not create the same impression and brings in a different tone in the rhythm and the sense. This line and that which follows it bring in a general subordinate idea stressing the paradoxical nature of the creation and the contrasts which it contains, the drowsed somnambulist as the mother of the light of the suns and the activities of life. It is not intended as a present feature in the darkness of the Night. Again, do you seriously want me to give an accurate scientific description of the earth half in darkness and half in light so as to spoil my impressionist symbol¹⁹ or else to revert to the conception of earth as a flat and immobile surface? I am not writing a scientific treatise, I am selecting certain ideas and impressions to form a symbol of a partial and temporary darkness of the soul and Nature which seems to a temporary feeling of that which is caught in the Night as if it were universal and eternal. One who is lost in that Night does not think of the other half of the earth as full of light; to him all is Night and the earth a forsaken wanderer in an enduring darkness. If I sacrifice this impressionism and abandon the image of the earth wheeling through dark space I might as well abandon the symbol altogether, for this is a necessary part of it. As a matter of fact in the passage itself earth in its wheeling does come into the dawn and pass from darkness into the light. You must take the idea as a whole and in all its transitions

¹⁸ *Cradled the cosmic drowse of ignorant Force
Whose moved creative slumber kindles the suns
And carries our lives in its somnambulist whirl.* [p. 1]

¹⁹ *Athwart the vain enormous trance of Space,
Its formless stupor without mind or life,
A shadow spinning through a soulless Void,
Thrown back once more into unthinking dreams,
Earth wheeled abandoned in the hollow gulfs,
Forgetful of her spirit and her fate.* [p. 1]

and not press one detail with too literal an insistence. In this poem I present constantly one partial view of life or another temporarily as if it were the whole in order to give full value to the experience of those who are bound by that view, as for instance, the materialist conception and experience of life, but if any one charges me with philosophical inconsistency, then it only means that he does not understand the technique of the Overmind interpretation of life.

The line about “Wisdom nursing the child Laughter of Chance” [*cf. p. 41*] contained one of the inadvertent changes of which I have spoken; the real reading was and will remain “Wisdom suckling”. The verbal repetition of “nursing” and “nurse” therefore disappears, though there is the idea of nursing repeated in two successive lines and to that I see no objection. But for other reasons I have changed the two lines that follow as I was not altogether satisfied with them. I have changed them into

Silence, the nurse of the Almighty’s power,
The omnipotent hush, womb of the immortal Word. [*p. 41*]

As to the exact metrical identity in the first half of the two lines that follow,²⁰ it was certainly intentional, if by intention is meant, not a manufacture by my personal mind but the spontaneous deliberateness of the inspiration which gave the lines to me and an acceptance in the receiving mind. The first halves of the two lines are metrically identical closely associating together the two things seen as of the same order, the “still Timeless” and the “dynamic creative Eternity” both of them together originating the manifest world: the latter halves of the lines diverge altogether, one into the slow massiveness of the “still brooding face”, with its strong close, the other into the combination of two high and emphatic syllables with an indeterminate run of short syllables between and after, allowing the line to drop away into some unuttered endlessness rather than cease. In this rhythmical significance I can see no weakness.

²⁰ *And of the Timeless the still brooding face,
And the creative eye of Eternity. [p. 41]*

I come next to the passage which you so violently attack, about the Inconscient waking Ignorance. In the first place, the word "formless" is indeed defective, not so much because of any repetition but because it is not the right word or idea and I was not myself satisfied with it. I have changed the passage as follows:

Then something in the inscrutable darkness stirred;
 A nameless movement, an unthought Idea
 Insistent, dissatisfied, without an aim,
 Something that wished but knew not how to be,
 Teased the Inconscient to wake Ignorance. . . . [pp. 1-2]

But the teasing of the Inconscient remains and evidently you think that it is bad poetic taste to tease something so bodiless and unreal as the Inconscient. But here several fundamental issues arise. First of all, are words like Inconscient and Ignorance necessarily an abstract technical jargon? If so, do not words like consciousness, knowledge etc. undergo the same ban? Is it meant that they are abstract philosophical terms and can have no real or concrete meaning, cannot represent things that one feels and senses or must often fight as one fights a visible foe? The Inconscient and the Ignorance may be mere empty abstractions and can be dismissed as irrelevant jargon if one has not come into collision with them or plunged into their dark and bottomless reality. But to me they are realities, concrete powers whose resistance is present everywhere and at all times in its tremendous and boundless mass. In fact, in writing this line I had no intention of teaching philosophy or forcing in an irrelevant metaphysical idea, although the idea may be there in implication. I was presenting a happening that was to me something sensible and, as one might say, psychologically and spiritually concrete. The Inconscient comes in persistently in the cantos of the First Book of *Savitri*, e.g.

Opponent of that glory of escape,
 The black Inconscient swung its dragon tail
 Lashing a slumbrous Infinite by its force

Into the deep obscurities of form. [p. 79]

There too a metaphysical idea might be read into or behind the thing seen. But does that make it technical jargon or the whole thing an illegitimate mixture? It is not so to my poetic sense. But you might say, "It is so to the non-mystical reader and it is that reader whom you have to satisfy, as it is for the general reader that you are writing and not for yourself alone." But if I had to write for the general reader I could not have written *Savitri* at all. It is in fact for myself that I have written it and for those who can lend themselves to the subject-matter, images, technique of mystic poetry.

This is the real stumbling-block of mystic poetry and specially mystic poetry of this kind.²¹ The mystic feels real and present, even ever-present to his experience, intimate to his being, truths which to the ordinary reader are intellectual abstractions or metaphysical speculations. He is writing of experiences that are foreign to the ordinary mentality. Either they are unintelligible to it and in meeting them it flounders about as in an obscure abyss or it takes them as poetic fancies expressed in intellectually devised images. That was how a critic in *The Hindu* condemned such poems as *Nirvana* and *Transformation*. He said that they were mere intellectual conceptions and images and there was nothing of religious feeling or spiritual experience. Yet *Nirvana* was as close a transcription of a major experience as could be given in language coined by the human mind of a realisation in which the mind was entirely silent and into which no intellectual conception could at all enter. One has to use words and images in order to convey to the mind some perception, some figure of that which is beyond thought. The critic's non-understanding was made worse by such a line as: "Only the illimitable Permanent, Is there". Evidently he took this as technical jargon, abstract philosophy. There was no such thing; I felt with an overpowering vividness the illimitability or at least

²¹ This and the next five paragraphs were published separately in 1946 in a slightly different form. They are reproduced in that form on pages 93–97 of the present volume.—Ed.

something which could not be described by any other term and no other description except the "Permanent" could be made of That which alone existed. To the mystic there is no such thing as an abstraction. Everything which to the intellectual mind is abstract has a concreteness, substantiality which is more real than the sensible form of an object or of a physical event. To me, for instance, consciousness is the very stuff of existence and I can feel it everywhere enveloping and penetrating the stone as much as man or the animal. A movement, a flow of consciousness is not to me an image but a fact. If I wrote "His anger climbed against me in a stream", it would be to the general reader a mere image, not something that was felt by me in a sensible experience; yet I would only be describing in exact terms what actually happened once, a stream of anger, a sensible and violent current of it rising up from downstairs and rushing upon me as I sat in the veranda of the guest-house, the truth of it being confirmed afterwards by the confession of the person who had the movement. This is only one instance, but all that is spiritual or psychological in *Savitri* is of that character. What is to be done under these circumstances? The mystical poet can only describe what he has felt, seen in himself or others or in the world just as he has felt or seen it or experienced through exact vision, close contact or identity and leave it to the general reader to understand or not understand or misunderstand according to his capacity. A new kind of poetry demands a new mentality in the recipient as well as in the writer.

Another question is the place of philosophy in poetry or whether it has any place at all. Some romanticists seem to believe that the poet has no right to think at all, only to see and feel. This accusation has been brought against me by many that I think too much and that when I try to write in verse, thought comes in and keeps out poetry. I hold, to the contrary, that philosophy has its place and can even take a leading place along with psychological experience as it does in the Gita. All depends on how it is done, whether it is a dry or a living philosophy, an arid intellectual statement or the expression not only of the living truth of thought but of something of its beauty, its light or its power.

The theory which discourages the poet from thinking or at least from thinking for the sake of the thought proceeds from an extreme romanticist temper; it reaches its acme on one side in the question of the surrealist, "Why do you want poetry to mean anything?" and on the other in Housman's exaltation of pure poetry which he describes paradoxically as a sort of sublime nonsense which does not appeal at all to the mental intelligence but knocks at the solar plexus and awakes a vital and physical rather than intellectual sensation and response. It is of course not that really but a vividness of imagination and feeling which disregards the mind's positive view of things and its logical sequences; the centre or centres it knocks at are not the brain-mind, not even the poetic intelligence but the subtle physical, the nervous, the vital or the psychic centre. The poem he quotes from Blake is certainly not nonsense, but it has no positive and exact meaning for the intellect or the surface mind; it expresses certain things that are true and real, not nonsense but a deeper sense which we feel powerfully with a great stirring of some inner emotion, but any attempt at exact intellectual statement of them sterilises their sense and spoils their appeal. This is not the method of *Savitri*. Its expression aims at a certain force, directness and spiritual clarity and reality. When it is not understood, it is because the truths it expresses are unfamiliar to the ordinary mind or belong to an untrodden domain or domains or enter into a field of occult experience; it is not because there is any attempt at a dark or vague profundity or at an escape from thought. The thinking is not intellectual but intuitive or more than intuitive, always expressing a vision, a spiritual contact or a knowledge which has come by entering into the thing itself, by identity.

It may be noted that the greater romantic poets did not shun thought; they thought abundantly, almost endlessly. They have their characteristic view of life, something that one might call their philosophy, their world-view, and they express it. Keats was the most romantic of poets, but he could write "To philosophise I dare not yet"; he did not write "I am too much of a poet to philosophise." To philosophise he regarded evidently

as mounting on the admiral's flag-ship and flying an almost royal banner. The philosophy of *Savitri* is different but it is persistently there; it expresses or tries to express a total and many-sided vision and experience of all the planes of being and their action upon each other. Whatever language, whatever terms are necessary to convey this truth of vision and experience it uses without scruple, not admitting any mental rule of what is or is not poetic. It does not hesitate to employ terms which might be considered as technical when these can be turned to express something direct, vivid and powerful. That need not be an introduction of technical jargon, that is to say, I suppose, special and artificial language, expressing in this case only abstract ideas and generalities without any living truth or reality in them. Such jargon cannot make good literature, much less good poetry. But there is a "poeticism" which establishes a sanitary cordon against words and ideas which it considers as prosaic but which properly used can strengthen poetry and extend its range. That limitation I do not admit as legitimate.

I have been insisting on these points in view of certain criticisms that have been made by reviewers and others, some of them very capable, suggesting or flatly stating that there was too much thought in my poems or that I am even in my poetry a philosopher rather than a poet. I am justifying a poet's right to think as well as to see and feel, his right to "dare to philosophise". I agree with the modernists in their revolt against the romanticist's insistence on emotionalism and his objection to thinking and philosophical reflection in poetry. But the modernist went too far in his revolt. In trying to avoid what I may call poeticism he ceased to be poetic, wishing to escape from rhetorical writing, rhetorical pretension to greatness and beauty of style, he threw out true poetic greatness and beauty, turned from a deliberately poetic style to a colloquial tone and even to very flat writing; especially he turned away from poetic rhythm to a prose or half-prose rhythm or to no rhythm at all. Also he has weighed too much on thought and has lost the habit of intuitive sight; by turning emotion out of its intimate chamber in the house of Poetry, he has had to bring in to relieve

the dryness of much of his thought, too much exaggeration of the lower vital and sensational reactions untransformed or else transformed only by exaggeration. Nevertheless he has perhaps restored to the poet the freedom to think as well as to adopt a certain straightforwardness and directness of style.

Now I come to the law prohibiting repetition. This rule aims at a certain kind of intellectual elegance which comes into poetry when the poetic intelligence and the call for a refined and classical taste begin to predominate. It regards poetry as a cultural entertainment and amusement of the highly civilised mind; it interests by a faultless art of words, a constant and ingenious invention, a sustained novelty of ideas, incidents, word and phrase. An unfailing variety or the outward appearance of it is one of the elegances of this art. But all poetry is not of this kind; its rule does not apply to poets like Homer or Valmiki or other early writers. The Veda might almost be described as a mass of repetitions; so might the work of Vaishnava poets and the poetic literature of devotion generally in India. Arnold has noted this distinction when speaking of Homer; he mentioned especially that there is nothing objectionable in the close repetition of the same word in the Homeric way of writing. In many things Homer seems to make a point of repeating himself. He has stock descriptions, epithets always reiterated, lines even which are constantly repeated again and again when the same incident returns in his narrative, e.g. the line,

doupēsen de pesōn arabēse de teuche' ep' autōi.
 "Down with a thud he fell and his armour clangoured upon
 him."

He does not hesitate also to repeat the bulk of a line with a variation at the end, e.g.

bē de kat' Oulumpoio karēnōn chōomenos kēr.

And again the

bē de kat' Oulumpoio karēnōn aīxasa.

"Down from the peaks of Olympus he came, wrath vexing his heart-strings" and again, "Down from the peaks of Olympus she came impetuously darting." He begins another line elsewhere with the same word and a similar action and with the same nature of a human movement physical and psychological in a scene of Nature, here a man's silent sorrow listening to the roar of the ocean:

bē d'akeōn para thina poluphloisboio thalassēs
"Silent he walked by the shore of the many-rumoured ocean."

In mystic poetry also repetition is not objectionable; it is resorted to by many poets, sometimes with insistence. I may note as an example the constant repetition of the word Ritam, truth, sometimes eight or nine times in a short poem of nine or ten stanzas and often in the same line. This does not weaken the poem, it gives it a singular power and beauty. The repetition of the same key ideas, key images and symbols, key words or phrases, key epithets, sometimes key lines or half lines is a constant feature. They give an atmosphere, a significant structure, a sort of psychological frame, an architecture. The object here is not to amuse or entertain but the self-expression of an inner truth, a seeing of things and ideas not familiar to the common mind, a bringing out of inner experience. It is the true more than the new that the poet is after. He uses *āvṛtti*, repetition, as one of the most powerful means of carrying home what has been thought or seen and fixing it in the mind in an atmosphere of light and beauty. This kind of repetition I have used largely in *Savitri*. Moreover, the object is not only to present a secret truth in its true form and true vision but to drive it home by the finding of the true word, the true phrase, the *mot juste*, the true image or symbol, if possible the inevitable word; if that is there, nothing else, repetition included, matters much. This is natural when the repetition is intended, serves a purpose; but it can hold even when the repetition is not deliberate but comes in naturally in the stream of the inspiration. I see, therefore, no objection to the recurrence of the same or similar image such as sea and ocean, sky and heaven in one long passage provided each is the

right thing and rightly worded in its place. The same rule applies to words, epithets, ideas. It is only if the repetition is clumsy or awkward, too burdensomely insistent, at once unneeded and inexpressive or amounts to a disagreeable and meaningless echo that it must be rejected.

There is one place, perhaps two, where I am disposed to make some concession. The first is where the word "awake" occurs at the beginning of the poem, twice within six lines in the same prominent place at the end of a line.²² In neither line can the word be changed, for it is needed and to change would spoil; but some modification can be made by restoring the original order putting the lines about the unbodied Infinite first and pushing those about the fallen self afterwards. The other place was in the other long passage where the word "delight" occurs also twice at the end of a line but with a somewhat longer interval between;²³ here, however, I have not yet found any satisfying alternative.

I think there is none of your objections that did not occur to me as possible from a certain kind of criticism when I wrote or I re-read what I had written; but I brushed them aside as invalid or as irrelevant to the kind of poem I was writing. So you must not be surprised at my disregard of them as too slight and unimperative.

You have asked what is my positive opinion about your article. Well, it seems to me very fine both in style and substance, but as it is in high eulogy of my own writing, you must not expect me to say any more.

²² *It was the hour before the Gods awake. . . .*

[four lines]

A power of fallen boundless self, awake [cf. p. 1]

²³ *Her looks, her smile awoke celestial sense
Even in earth-stuff, and their intense delight
Poured a supernal beauty on men's lives. . . .
As to a sheltering bosom a stricken bird
Escapes with tired wings from a world of storms,
In a safe haven of soft and splendid rest
One could restore life's wounded happiness,
Recover the lost habit of delight, [cf. p. 15]*

P.S. I have just received your last letter of the 15th. I have maintained all the omissions²⁴ you had made except the new lines in the description of Savitri which we have agreed to insert. The critic has a right to include or omit as he likes in his quotations. I doubt whether I shall have the courage to throw out again the stricken and too explicit bird into the cold and storm outside;²⁵ at most I might change that one line, the first and make it stronger. I confess I fail to see what is so objectionable in its explicitness; usually, according to my idea, it is only things that are in themselves vague that have to be kept vague. There is plenty of room for the implicit and suggestive, but I do not see the necessity for that where one has to bring home a physical image. I have, of course, restored the original reading where you have made an alteration not approved by me, as in the substitution of the word "barely" for "hardly". On this point I may add that in certain contexts "barely" would be the right word, as for instance, "There is barely enough food left for two or three meals", where "hardly" would be adequate but much less forceful. It is the other way about in this line. I think I have answered everything else in the body of this letter.

19 March 1946

*

What you have written as the general theory of the matter seems to be correct and it does not differ substantially from what I wrote. But your phrase about unpurposive repetition might carry a suggestion which I would not be able to accept; it might seem to indicate that the poet must have a "purpose" in whatever he writes and must be able to give a logical account of it to the critical intellect. That is surely not the way in which the poet or at least the mystic poet has to do his work. He does not himself deliberately choose or arrange word and rhythm but only sees it

²⁴ Lines omitted when passages from Savitri were reproduced in the article "Sri Aurobindo — A New Age of Mystical Poetry", by K. D. Sethna (see above, page 290, footnote 3). — Ed.

²⁵ As to a sheltering bosom a stricken bird
Escapes with tired wings from a world of storms, [cf. p. 15]

as it comes in the very act of inspiration. If there is any purpose of any kind, it also comes by and in the process of inspiration. He can criticise himself and the work; he can see whether it was a wrong or an inferior movement, he does not set about correcting it by any intellectual method but waits for the true thing to come in its place. He cannot always account to the logical intellect for what he has done; he feels or intuits, and the reader or critic has to do the same.

Thus I cannot tell you for what purpose I admitted the repetition of the word "great" in the line about the "great unsatisfied godhead" [p. 15], I only felt that it was the one thing to write in that line as "her greatness" was the only right thing in a preceding line; I also felt that they did not and could not clash and that was enough for me. Again, it might be suggested that the "high" "warm" subtle ether of love was not only the right expression but that repetition of these epithets after they had been used in describing the atmosphere of Savitri's nature was justified and had a reason and purpose because it pointed and brought out the identity of the ether of love with Savitri's atmosphere. But as a matter of fact I have no such reason or purpose. It was the identity which brought spontaneously and inevitably the use of the same epithets and not any conscious intention which deliberately used the repetition for a purpose.

Your contention that in the lines which I found to be inferior to their original form and altered back to that form, the inferiority was due to a repetition is not valid. In the line, "And found in her a vastness like his own" [cf. p. 16], the word "wideness" which had accidentally replaced "vastness" would have been inferior even if there had been no "wide" or "wideness" anywhere within a hundred miles and I would still have altered it back to the original word. So too with "sealed depths" and so many others. These alterations were due to inadvertence and not intentional; repetition or non-repetition had nothing to do with the matter. It was the same with "Wisdom nursing Chance":²⁶ if "nursing" had been the right word and not a slip replacing the

²⁶ See page 313 above.—Ed.

original phrase I would have kept it in spite of the word "nurse" occurring immediately afterwards: only perhaps I would have taken care to so arrange that the repetition of the figure would simply have constituted a two-headed instead of a one-headed evil. Yes, I have changed in several places where you objected to repetitions but mostly for other reasons: I have kept many where there was a repetition and changed others where there was no repetition at all. I have indeed made modifications or changes where repetition came at a short distance at the end of a line; that was because the place made it too conspicuous. Of course where the repetition amounts to a mistake, I would have no hesitation in making a change; for a mistake must always be acknowledged and corrected.

26 April 1946

*

I am afraid I shall not be able to satisfy your demand for rejection and alteration of the lines about the Inconscious and the cloak any more than I could do it with regard to the line about the silence and strength of the gods. I looked at your suggestion about adding a line or two in the first case, but could get nothing that would either improve the passage or set your objection at rest. I am quite unable to agree that there is anything jargonish about the line any more than there is in the lines of Keats,

"Beauty is truth, truth beauty," — that is all
Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.

That amounts to a generalised philosophical statement or enunciation and the words "beauty" and "truth" are abstract metaphysical terms to which we give a concrete and emotional value because they are connected in our associations with true and beautiful things of which our senses or our minds are vividly aware. Men have not learnt yet to recognise the Inconscious on which the whole material world they see is built, or the Ignorance of which their whole nature including their knowledge is built; they think that these words are only abstract metaphysical jargon flung about by the philosophers in their clouds or laboured out in long and wearisome books like *The Life Divine*. But it

is not so with me and I take my stand on my own feeling and experience about them as Keats did about his own Truth and Beauty. My readers will have to do the same if they want to appreciate my poetry, which, of course, they are not bound to do.

Is it really a fact that even the ordinary reader would not be able to see any difference between the Inconscient and Ignorance unless the difference is expressly explained to him? This is not a matter of philosophical terminology but of common sense and the understood meaning of English words. One would say "even the inconscient stone" but one would not say, as one might of a child, "the ignorant stone". One must first be conscious before one can be ignorant. What is true is that the ordinary reader might not be familiar with the philosophical content of the word Inconscient and might not be familiar with the Vedantic idea of the Ignorance as the power behind the manifested world. But I don't see how I can acquaint him with these things in a single line, even with the most illuminating image or symbol. He might wonder, if he were Johnsonianly minded, how an Inconscient could be teased or how it could wake Ignorance. I am afraid, in the absence of a miracle of inspired poetical exegesis flashing through my mind, he will have to be left wondering. I am not set against adding a line if the miracle comes or if some vivid symbol occurs to me, but as yet none such is making its appearance.

In the other case also, about the cloak, I maintain my position. Here, however, while I was looking at the passage an additional line occurred to me and I may keep it:

The darkness failed and slipped like a falling cloak
From the reclining body of a god. [p. 3]

But this additional line does not obviate your objection and it was not put in with that aim. You have, by the way, made a curious misapplication of my image of the careful housewife²⁷; you attribute this line to her inspiration. A careful housewife is meticulously and methodically careful to arrange everything in a perfect order, to put every object in its place and see that there

²⁷ See page 311 above — Ed.

is no disharmony anywhere; but according to you she has thrust a wrong object into a wrong place, something discordant with the surroundings and inferior in beauty to all that is near it; if so, she is not a careful housewife but a slattern. The Muse has a careful housewife, — there is Pope's, perfect in the classical or pseudo-classical style or Tennyson's, in the romantic or semi-romantic manner, while as a contrast there is Browning's with her energetic and rough-and-tumble dash and clatter.

You ask why in these and similar cases I could not convince you while I did in others. Well, there are several possible explanations. It may be that your first reaction to these lines was very vivid and left the mark of a *samskara* which could not be obliterated. Or perhaps I was right in the other matters while your criticism may have been right in these, — my partiality for these lines may be due to an unjustified personal attachment founded on the vision which they gave me when I wrote them. Again, there are always differences of poetical appreciation due either to preconceived notions or to different temperamental reactions. Finally, it may well be that my vision was true but for some reason you are not able to share it. For instance, you may have seen in the line about the cloak only the objective image in a detailed picture of the dawn where I felt a subjective suggestion in the failure of the darkness and the slipping of the cloak, not an image but an experience. It must be the same with the line,

The strength, the silence of the gods were hers. [p. 16]

You perhaps felt it to be an ordinary line with a superficial significance; perhaps it conveyed to you not much more than the stock phrase about the "strong silent man" admired by biographers, while to me it meant very much and expressed with a bare but sufficient power what I always regarded as a great reality and a great experience.

1946

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I have seen your letter to Nolini and considered the points you raised. The reading of the mistyped line should run

His self-discovery's flaming witnesses; [p. 97]

the error was only of a single letter. I do not agree with you that the two lines you stigmatise are not poetic. The first, however, I had already thought of altering, because it did not fully express what ought to have been said; so please change it to

All he had been and all towards which he grew. [p. 307]

The second line, though good enough as poetry, might perhaps be improved upon and you may change it to

Grew near to him, his daily associates. [p. 96]

As to the repetitions, the second one, I think, must remain as it is. As to the repetition of "peace", I was of course aware of it, but I have left it as it was because I found nothing that would not spoil one or other of the lines, but perhaps it might be altered to

Passionless, wordless, absorbed in its fathomless hush [p. 308]

without altogether losing its force. In the other repetition passage I notice that in one line in the manuscript "nearness-self" has been written which is incorrect; in your letter you write it correctly "nearness' self".

15 October 1946

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In the two passages ending with the same word "alone"²⁸ I think that there is sufficient space between them and neither ear nor mind need be offended. The word "sole", I think, would flatten the line too much and the word "aloof" would here have no atmosphere and it would not express the idea. It is not distance and aloofness that has to be stressed but uncompanioned solitude.

²⁸ *There knowing herself by her own timeless self,
Wisdom supernal, wordless, absolute
Sat uncompanioned in the eternal Calm,
All-seeing, motionless, sovereign and alone.
[and, after 61 lines:]
The superconscious realms of motionless Peace
Where judgment ceases and the world is mute
And the Unconceived lies pathless and alone. [pp. 32, 33–34]*

The line you object to on account of forced rhythm “in a triumph of fire” has not been so arranged through negligence. It was very deliberately done and deliberately maintained. If it were altered the whole effect of rhythmic meaning and suggestion which I intended would be lost and the alterations you suggest would make a good line perhaps but with an ordinary and inexpressive rhythm. Obviously it is not a “natural” rhythm, but there is no objection to its being forced when it is a forcible and violent action that has to be suggested. The rhythm cannot be called artificial, for that would mean something not true and genuine or significant but only patched up and insincere: the rhythm here is a turn of art and not a manufacture. The scansion is iamb, reversed spondee, pyrrhic, trochee, iamb. By reversed spondee I mean a foot with the first syllable long and highly stressed and the second stressed but short or with a less heavy ictus. In the ordinary spondee the greater ictus is on the second syllable while there are equal spondees with two heavy stresses, e.g. “vast space” or in such a line as

He has seized life in his restless hands.²⁹

In the first part of the line the rhythm is appropriate to the violent breaking in of the truth while in the second half it expresses a high exultation and exaltation in the inrush. This is brought out by the two long and highly stressed vowels in the first syllable of “triumph” and in the word “fire” (which in the elocution of the line have to be given their full force), coming after a pyrrhic with two short syllables between them. If one slurs over the slightly weighted short syllable in “triumph” where the concluding consonants exercise a certain check and delay in the voice, one could turn this half line into a very clumsy double anapaest, the first a glide and the second a stumble; this would be bad elocution and contrary to the natural movement of the words.

I have wholly failed to feel the prosaic flatness of which you accuse the line

²⁹ *This line does not form part of the final version of Savitri. — Ed.*

All he had been and all that now he was. [cf. p. 307]

No doubt, the diction is extremely simple, direct and unadorned but that can be said of numberless good lines in poetry and even of some great lines. If there is style, if there is a balanced rhythm (rhyme is not necessary) and a balanced language and significance (for these two elements combined always create a good style), and if the line or the passage in which it occurs has some elevation or profundity or other poetic quality in the idea which it expresses, then there cannot be any flatness nor can any such line or passage be set aside as prosaic.

By the way, I think you said in a letter that in the line

Our prostrate soil bore the awakening light [cf. p. 5]

“soil” was an error for “soul”. But “soil” is correct; for I am describing the revealing light falling upon the lower levels of the earth, not on the soul. No doubt, the whole thing is symbolic, but the symbol has to be kept in front and the thing symbolised has to be concealed or only peep out from behind, it cannot come openly into the front and push aside the symbol.

As to the title of the three Cantos about the Yoga of the King,³⁰ I intended the repetition of the word “Yoga” to bring out and emphasise the fact that this part of Aswapati’s spiritual development consisted of two yogic movements, one a psycho-spiritual transformation and the other, a greater spiritual transformation with an ascent to a supreme power. The omission which you suggest would destroy this significance and leave only something more abstract. In the second of these three Cantos there is a pause between the two movements and a description of the secret knowledge to which he is led and of which the results are described in the last Canto, but there is no description of the Yoga itself or of the steps by which this knowledge came. That is only indicated, not narrated; so to bring in “The Yoga of the King” as the title of this Canto would not be very apposite.

³⁰ Book I. Canto 3: *The Yoga of the King: The Yoga of the Soul’s Release.*

Canto 4: The Secret Knowledge.

Canto 5: The Yoga of the King: The Yoga of the Spirit’s Freedom and Greatness.

Aswapati's Yoga falls into three parts. First, he is achieving his own spiritual self-fulfilment as an individual and this is described as the Yoga of the King. Next, he makes the ascent as a typical representative of the race to win the possibility of discovery and possession of all the planes of consciousness and this is described in the second book: but this too is as yet only an individual victory. Finally, he aspires no longer for himself but for all, for a universal realisation and new creation. That is described in the Book of the Divine Mother.

As to the Nirvana poem, I have said that the poem announces no metaphysical philosophy but is only the description of a spiritual experience. So how can any metaphysics be derived from it true or false—if you mean truly or falsely derived? If you want to ask whether the metaphysics you derived is in itself true or false, well, I don't remember what it was; so I would have to read your letter again before I could answer, and for that you may have to wait for some time.

As regards the other points you have drawn attention to, they have all been set right in the original version but your typescript seems to have been sent without making these changes. The "bird" passage has been changed thus:

As might a soul fly like a hunted bird,
Escaping with tired wings from a world of storms,
And a quiet reach like a remembered breast,
In a haven of safety and splendid soft repose
One could drink life back in streams of honey-fire,
Recover the lost habit of happiness,
Feel her bright nature's glorious ambience etc. etc. [p. 15]

29 October 1946

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I am not at all times impervious to criticism; I have accepted some of yours and changed my lines accordingly; I have also though not often accepted some adverse criticisms from outside and remoulded a line or a passage from here and there. But your criticisms are based upon an understanding appreciation of the

poem, its aim, meaning, method, the turn and quality of its language and verse technique. In your friend's judgments I find an entire absence of any such understanding and accordingly I find his criticisms to be irrelevant and invalid. What one does not understand or perceive its meaning and spirit, one cannot fruitfully criticise.

1947

Comments on Some Remarks by a Critic

You have asked me to comment on your friend Mendonça's comments on my poetry and especially on *Savitri*. But, first of all, it is not usual for a poet to criticise the criticisms of his critics though a few perhaps have done so; the poet writes for his own satisfaction, his own delight in poetical creation or to express himself and he leaves his work for the world, and rather for posterity than for the contemporary world, to recognise or to ignore, to judge and value according to its perception or its pleasure. As for the contemporary world he might be said rather to throw his poem in its face and leave it to resent this treatment as an unpleasant slap, as a contemporary world treated the early poems of Wordsworth and Keats, or to accept it as an abrupt but gratifying attention, which was ordinarily the good fortune of the great poets in ancient Athens and Rome and of poets like Shakespeare and Tennyson in modern times. Posterity does not always confirm the contemporary verdict, very often it reverses it, forgets or depreciates the writer enthroned by contemporary fame, or raises up to a great height work little appreciated or quite ignored in its own time. The only safety for the poet is to go his own way careless of the blows and caresses of the critics; it is not his business to answer them. Then you ask me to right the wrong turn your friend's critical mind has taken; but how is it to be determined what is the right and what is the wrong turn, since a critical judgment depends usually on a personal reaction determined by the critic's temperament or the aesthetic trend in him or by values, rules or canons which are settled for his intellect and agree with the viewpoint from which his mind receives whatever comes to him for judgment; it is that which is right for him though it may seem wrong to a different temperament, aesthetic intellectuality or mental viewpoint. Your friend's judgments, according to his own account of them, seem

to be determined by a sensitive temperament finely balanced in its own poise but limited in its appreciations, clear and open to some kinds of poetic creation, reserved towards others, against yet others closed and cold or excessively depreciative. This sufficiently explains his very different reactions to the two poems, *Descent* and *Flame-Wind*, which he unreservedly admires and to *Savitri*. However, since you have asked me, I will answer, as between ourselves, in some detail and put forward my own comments on his comments and my own judgments on his judgments. It may be rather long; for if such things are done, they may as well be clearly and thoroughly done. I may also have something to say about the nature and intention of my poem and the technique necessitated by the novelty of the intention and nature.

Let me deal first with some of the details he stresses so as to get them out of the way. His detailed intellectual reasons for his judgments seem to me to be often arbitrary and fastidious, sometimes based on a misunderstanding and therefore invalid or else valid perhaps in other fields but here inapplicable. Take, for instance, his attack upon my use of the prepositional phrase. Here, it seems to me, he has fallen victim to a grammatical obsession and lumped together under the head of the prepositional twist a number of different turns some of which do not belong to that category at all. In the line,

Lone on my summits of calm I have brooded with voices around me,
there is no such twist; for I did not mean at all "on my calm summits", but intended straightforwardly to convey the natural, simple meaning of the word. If I write "the fields of beauty" or "walking on the paths of truth", I do not expect to be supposed to mean "in beautiful fields" or "in truthful paths"; it is the same with "summits of calm", I mean "summits of calm" and nothing else; it is a phrase like "He rose to high peaks of vision" or "He took his station on the highest summits of knowledge". The calm is the calm of the highest spiritual consciousness to which the soul has ascended, making those summits its own and looking down from their highest heights on all below: in spiritual

experience, in the occult vision or feeling that accompanies it, this calm is not felt as an abstract quality or a mental condition but as something concrete and massive, a self-existent reality to which one reaches, so that the soul standing on its peak is rather a tangible fact of experience than a poetical image. Then there is the phrase "A face of rapturous calm": he seems to think it is a mere trick of language, a substitution of a prepositional phrase for an epithet, as if I had intended to say "a rapturously calm face" and I said instead "a face of rapturous calm" in order to get an illegitimate and meaningless rhetorical effect. I meant nothing of the kind, nothing so tame and poor and scanty in sense: I meant a face which was an expression or rather a living image of the rapturous calm of the supreme and infinite consciousness,—it is indeed so that it can well be "Infinity's centre". The face of the liberated Buddha as presented to us by Indian art is such an expression or image of the calm of Nirvana and could, I think, be quite legitimately described as a face of Nirvanic calm, and that would be an apt and live phrase and not an ugly artifice or twist of rhetoric. It should be remembered that the calm of Nirvana or the calm of the supreme Consciousness is to spiritual experience something self-existent, impersonal and eternal and not dependent on the person—or the face—which manifests it. In these two passages I take then the liberty to regard Mendonça's criticism as erroneous at its base and therefore invalid and inadmissible.

Then there are the lines from the *Songs of the Sea*:

The rains of deluge flee, a storm-tossed shade,
Over thy breast of gloom.

"Thy breast of gloom" is not used here as a mere rhetorical and meaningless variation of "thy gloomy breast"; it might have been more easily taken as that if it had been a human breast, though even then, it could have been entirely defensible in a fitting context; but it is the breast of the sea, an image for a vast expanse supporting and reflecting or subject to the moods or movements of the air and the sky. It is intended, in describing the passage of the rains of deluge over the breast of the sea,

to present a picture of a storm-tossed shade crossing a vast gloom: it is the gloom that has to be stressed and made the predominant idea and the breast or expanse is only its support and not the main thing: this could not have been suggested by merely writing "thy gloomy breast". A prepositional phrase need not be merely an artificial twist replacing an adjective; for instance, "a world of gloom and terror" means something more than "a gloomy and terrible world", it brings forward the gloom and terror as the very nature and constitution, the whole content of the world and not merely an attribute. So also if one wrote "Him too wilt thou throw to thy sword of sharpness" or "cast into thy pits of horror", would it merely mean "thy sharp sword" and "thy horrible pits"? and would not the sharpness and the horror rather indicate or represent formidable powers of which the sword is the instrument and the pits the habitation or lair? That would be rhetoric but it would be a rhetoric not meaningless but having in it meaning and power. Rhetoric is a word with which we can batter something we do not like; but rhetoric of one kind or another has been always a great part of the world's best literature; Demosthenes, Cicero, Bossuet and Burke are rhetoricians, but their work ranks with the greatest prose styles that have been left to us. In poetry the accusation of rhetoric might be brought against such lines as Keats'

Thou wast not born for death, immortal Bird!
No hungry generations tread thee down.

To conclude, there is the "swords of sheen" in the translation of *Bande Mataram*. That might be more open to the critic's stricture, for the expression can be used and perhaps has been used in verse as merely equivalent to "shining swords"; but for anyone with an alert imagination it can mean in certain contexts something more than that, swords that emit brilliance and seem to be made of light. Mendonça says that to use this turn in any other than an adjectival sense is unidiomatic, but he admits that there need be no objection provided that it creates a sense of beauty, but he finds no beauty in any of these passages. But the beauty can be perceived only if the other sense is seen, and even

then we come back to the question of personal reaction; you and other readers may feel beauty where he finds none. I do not myself share his sensitive abhorrence of this prepositional phrase; it may be of course because there are coarser rhetorical threads in my literary taste. I would not, for instance, shrink from a sentence like this in a sort of free verse, "Where is thy wall of safety? Where is thy arm of strength? Whither has fled thy vanished face of glory?" Rhetoric of course, but it has in it an element which can be attractive, and it seems to me to bring in a more vivid note and mean more than "thy strong arm" or "thy glorious face" or than "the strength of thy arm" and "the glory of thy face".

I come next to the critic's trenchant attack on that passage in my symbolic vision of Night and Dawn in which there is recorded the conscious adoration of Nature when it feels the passage of the omniscient Goddess of eternal Light. Trenchant, but with what seems to me a false edge; or else if it is a sword of Damascus that would cleave the strongest material mass of iron, he is using it to cut through subtle air, the air closes behind his passage and remains unsevered. He finds here only poor and false poetry, unoriginal in imagery and void of true wording and true vision, but that is again a matter of personal reaction and everyone has a right to his own, you to yours as he to his. I was not seeking for originality but for truth and the effective poetical expression of my vision. He finds no vision there, and that may be because I could not express myself with any power; but it may also be because of his temperamental failure to feel and see what I felt and saw. I can only answer to the intellectual reasonings and judgments which turned up in him when he tried to find the causes of his reaction. These seem to me to be either fastidious and unsound or founded on a mistake of comprehension and therefore invalid or else inapplicable to this kind of poetry. His main charge is that there is a violent and altogether illegitimate transference of epithet in the expression "the wide-winged hymn of a great priestly wind". A transference of epithet is not necessarily illegitimate, especially if it expresses something that is true or necessary to convey a sound feeling

and vision of things: for instance, if one writes in an Ovidian account of the *dénouement* of a lovers' quarrel

In spite of a reluctant sullen heart
My willing feet were driven to thy door,

it might be said that it was something in the mind that was willing and the ascription of an emotion or state of mind to the feet is an illegitimate transfer of epithet; but the lines express a conflict of the members, the mind reluctant, the body obeying the force of the desire that moves it and the use of the epithet is therefore perfectly true and legitimate. But here no such defence is necessary because there is no transfer of epithets. The critic thinks that I imagined the wind as having a winged body and then took away the wings from its shoulders and clapped them on to its voice or hymn which could have no body. But I did nothing of the kind; I am not bound to give wings to the wind. In an occult vision the breath, sound, movement by which we physically know of a wind is not its real being but only the physical manifestation of the wind-god or the spirit of the air, as in the Veda the sacrificial fire is only a physical birth, temporary body or manifestation of the god of Fire, Agni. The gods of the Air and other godheads in the Indian tradition have no wings, the Maruts or storm-gods ride through the skies in their galloping chariots with their flashing golden lances, the beings of the middle world in the Ajanta frescoes are seen moving through the air not with wings but with a gliding natural motion proper to ethereal bodies. The epithet "wide-winged" then does not belong to the wind and is not transferred from it, but is proper to the voice of the wind which takes the form of a conscious hymn of aspiration and rises ascending from the bosom of the great priest, as might a great-winged bird released into the sky and sinks and rises again, aspires and fails and aspires again on the "altar hills". One can surely speak of a voice or a chant of aspiration rising on wide wings and I do not see how this can be taxed as a false or unpoetic image. Then the critic objects to the expression "altar hills" on the ground that this is superfluous as the imagination of the reader can very well supply this detail

for itself from what has already been said: I do not think this is correct, a very alert reader might do so but most would not even think of it, and yet the detail is an essential and central feature of the thing seen and to omit it would be to leave a gap in the middle of the picture by dropping out something which is indispensable to its totality. Finally he finds that the line about the high boughs praying in the revealing sky does not help but attenuates, instead of more strongly etching the picture. I do not know why, unless he has failed to feel and to see. The picture is that of a conscious adoration offered by Nature and in that each element is conscious in its own way, the wind and its hymn, the hills, the trees. The wind is the great priest of this sacrifice of worship, his voice rises in a conscious hymn of aspiration, the hills offer themselves with the feeling of being an altar of the worship, the trees lift their high boughs towards heaven as the worshippers, silent figures of prayer, and the light of the sky into which their boughs rise reveals the Beyond towards which all aspires. At any rate this "picture" or rather this part of the vision is a complete rendering of what I saw in the light of the inspiration and the experience that came to me. I might indeed have elaborated more details, etched out at more length but that would have been superfluous and unnecessary; or I might have indulged in an ampler description but this would have been appropriate only if this part of the vision had been the whole. This last line is an expression of an experience which I often had whether in the mountains or on the plains of Gujarat or looking from my window in Pondicherry not only in the dawn but at other times and I am unable to find any feebleness either in the experience or in the words that express it. If the critic or any reader does not feel or see what I so often felt and saw, that may be my fault, but that is not sure, for you and others have felt very differently about it; it may be a mental or a temperamental failure on their part and it will be then my or perhaps even the critic's or reader's misfortune.

I may refer here to Mendonça's disparaging characterisation of my epithets. He finds that their only merit is that they are good prose epithets, not otiose but right words in their right place and

exactly descriptive but only descriptive without any suggestion of any poetic beauty or any kind of magic. Are there then prose epithets and poetic epithets and is the poet debarred from exact description using always the right word in the right place, the *mot juste*? I am under the impression that all poets, even the greatest, use as the bulk of their adjectives words that have that merit, and the difference from prose is that a certain turn in the use of them accompanied by the power of the rhythm in which they are carried lifts all to the poetic level. Take one of the passages I have quoted from Milton,

On evil days though fallen, and evil tongues . . .

or

Blind Thamyris, and blind Maeonides,
And Tiresias, and Phineus, prophets old,

here the epithets are the same that would be used in prose, the right word in the right place, exact in statement, but all lies in the turn which makes them convey a powerful and moving emotion and the rhythm which gives them an uplifting passion and penetrating insistence. In more ordinary passages such as the beginning of *Paradise Lost* the epithets "forbidden tree" and "mortal taste" are of the same kind, but can we say that they are merely prose epithets, good descriptive adjectives and have no other merit? If you take the lines about Nature's worship in *Savitri*, I do not see how they can be described as prose epithets; at any rate I would never have dreamt of using in prose unless I wanted to write poetic prose such expressions as "wide-winged hymn" or "a great priestly wind" or "altar hills" or "revealing sky"; these epithets belong in their very nature to poetry alone whatever may be their other value or want of value. He says they are obvious and could have been supplied by any imaginative reader; well, so are Milton's in the passages quoted and perhaps there too the very remarkable imaginative reader whom Mendonça repeatedly brings in might have supplied them by his own unfailing poetic verve. Whether they or any of them prick a hidden beauty out of the picture is for each reader to feel

or judge for himself; but perhaps he is thinking of such things as Keats' "magic casements" and "foam of perilous seas" and "fairy lands forlorn", but I do not think even in Keats the bulk of the epithets are of that unusual character.

I have said that his objections are sometimes inapplicable. I mean by this that they might have some force with regard to another kind of poetry but not to a poem like *Savitri*. He says, to start with, that if I had had a stronger imagination, I would have written a very different poem and a much shorter one. Obviously, and to say it is a truism; if I had had a different kind of imagination, whether stronger or weaker, I would have written a different poem and perhaps one more to his taste; but it would not have been *Savitri*. It would not have fulfilled the intention or had anything of the character, meaning, world-vision, description and expression of spiritual experience which was my object in writing this poem. Its length is an indispensable condition for carrying out its purpose and everywhere there is this length, critics may say an "unconscionable length" — I am quoting the *Times*' reviewer's description in his otherwise eulogistic criticism of *The Life Divine* — in every part, in every passage, in almost every canto or section of a canto. It has been planned not on the scale of *Lycidas* or *Comus* or some brief narrative poem, but of the longer epical narrative, almost a minor, though a very minor *Ramayana*; it aims not at a minimum but at an exhaustive exposition of its world-vision or world-interpretation. One artistic method is to select a limited subject and even on that to say only what is indispensable, what is centrally suggestive and leave the rest to the imagination or understanding of the reader. Another method which I hold to be equally artistic or, if you like, architectural is to give a large and even a vast, a complete interpretation, omitting nothing that is necessary, fundamental to the completeness: that is the method I have chosen in *Savitri*. But Mendonça has understood nothing of the significance or intention of the passages he is criticising, least of all, their inner sense — that is not his fault, but is partly due to the lack of the context and partly to his lack of equipment and you have there an unfair advantage over him which enables you to understand

and see the poetic intention. He sees only an outward form of words and some kind of surface sense which is to him vacant and merely ornamental or rhetorical or something pretentious without any true meaning or true vision in it: inevitably he finds the whole thing false and empty, unjustifiably ambitious and pompous without deep meaning or, as he expresses it, pseudo and phoney. His objection of *longueur* would be perfectly just if the description of the night and the dawn had been simply of physical night and physical dawn; but here the physical night and physical dawn are, as the title of the canto clearly suggests, a symbol, although what may be called a real symbol of an inner reality and the main purpose is to describe by suggestion the thing symbolised; here it is a relapse into Inconscience broken by a slow and difficult return of consciousness followed by a brief but splendid and prophetic outbreak of spiritual light leaving behind it the "day" of ordinary human consciousness in which the prophecy has to be worked out. The whole of *Savitri* is, according to the title of the poem, a legend that is a symbol and this opening canto is, it may be said, a key beginning and announcement. So understood there is nothing here otiose or unnecessary; all is needed to bring out by suggestion some aspect of the thing symbolised and so start adequately the working out of the significance of the whole poem. It will of course seem much too long to a reader who does not understand what is written or, understanding, takes no interest in the subject; but that is unavoidable.

To illustrate the inapplicability of some of his judgments one might take his objection to repetition of the cognates "sombre Vast", "unsounded Void", "opaque Inane", "vacant Vasts" and his clinching condemnation of the inartistic inelegance of their occurrence in the same place at the end of the line. I take leave to doubt his statement that in each place his alert imaginative reader, still less any reader without that equipment, could have supplied these descriptions and epithets from the context, but let that pass. What was important for me was to keep constantly before the view of the reader, not imaginative but attentive to seize the whole truth of the vision in its totality, the ever-present

sense of the Inconscience in which everything is occurring. It is the frame as well as the background without which all the details would either fall apart or stand out only as separate incidents. That necessity lasts until there is the full outburst of the dawn and then it disappears; each phrase gives a feature of this Inconscience proper to its place and context. It is the entrance of the "lonely splendour" into an otherwise inconscient obstructing and unreceptive world that has to be brought out and that cannot be done without the image of the "opaque Inane" of the Inconscience which is the scene and cause of the resistance. There is the same necessity for reminding the reader that the "tread" of the Divine Mother was an intrusion on the vacancy of the Inconscience and the herald of deliverance from it. The same reasoning applies to the other passages. As for the occurrence of the phrases in the same place each in its line, that is a rhythmic turn helpful, one might say necessary to bring out the intended effect, to emphasise this reiteration and make it not only understood but felt. It is not the result of negligence or an awkward and inartistic clumsiness, it is intentional and part of the technique. The structure of the pentameter blank verse in *Savitri* is of its own kind and different in plan from the blank verse that has come to be ordinarily used in English poetry. It dispenses with enjambement or uses it very sparingly and only when a special effect is intended; each line must be strong enough to stand by itself, while at the same time it fits harmoniously into the sentence or paragraph like stone added to stone; the sentence consists usually of one, two, three or four lines, more rarely five or six or seven: a strong close for the line and a strong close for the sentence are almost indispensable except when some kind of inconclusive cadence is desirable; there must be no laxity or diffusiveness in the rhythm or in the metrical flow anywhere,—there must be a flow but not a loose flux. This gives an added importance to what comes at the close of the line and this placing is used very often to give emphasis and prominence to a key phrase or a key idea, especially those which have to be often reiterated in the thought and vision of the poem so as to recall attention to things that are universal

or fundamental or otherwise of the first consequence — whether for the immediate subject or in the total plan. It is this use that is served here by the reiteration at the end of the line.

I have not anywhere in *Savitri* written anything for the sake of mere picturesqueness or merely to produce a rhetorical effect; what I am trying to do everywhere in the poem is to express exactly something seen, something felt or experienced; if, for instance, I indulge in the wealth-burdened line or passage, it is not merely for the pleasure of the indulgence, but because there is that burden, or at least what I conceive to be that, in the vision or the experience. When the expression has been found, I have to judge, not by the intellect or by any set poetical rule, but by an intuitive feeling, whether it is entirely the right expression and, if it is not, I have to change and go on changing until I have received the absolutely right inspiration and the right transcription of it and must never be satisfied with any *à peu près* or imperfect transcription even if that makes good poetry of one kind or another. This is what I have tried to do. The critic or reader will judge for himself whether I have succeeded or failed; but if he has seen nothing and understood nothing, it does not follow that his adverse judgment is sure to be the right and true one, there is at least a chance that he may so conclude, not because there is nothing to see and nothing to understand, only poor pseudo-stuff or a rhetorical emptiness but because he was not equipped for the vision or the understanding. *Savitri* is the record of a seeing, of an experience which is not of the common kind and is often very far from what the general human mind sees and experiences. You must not expect appreciation or understanding from the general public or even from many at the first touch; as I have pointed out, there must be a new extension of consciousness and aesthesis to appreciate a new kind of mystic poetry. Moreover if it is really new in kind, it may employ a new technique, not perhaps absolutely new, but new in some or many of its elements: in that case old rules and canons and standards may be quite inapplicable; evidently, you cannot justly apply to the poetry of Whitman the principles of technique which are proper to the old metrical verse or the established laws of the

old traditional poetry; so too when we deal with a modernist poet. We have to see whether what is essential to poetry is there and how far the new technique justifies itself by new beauty and perfection, and a certain freedom of mind from old conventions is necessary if our judgment is to be valid or rightly objective.

Your friend may say as he has said in another connection that all this is only special pleading or an apology rather than an apologia. But in that other connection he was mistaken and would be so here too, for in neither case have I the feeling that I had been guilty of some offence or some shortcoming and therefore there could be no place for an apology or special pleading such as is used to defend or cover up what one knows to be a false case. I have enough respect for truth not to try to cover up an imperfection; my endeavour would be rather to cure the recognised imperfection; if I have not poetical genius, at least I can claim a sufficient, if not an infinite capacity for painstaking: that I have sufficiently shown by my long labour on *Savitri*. Or rather, since it was not labour in the ordinary sense, not a labour of painstaking construction, I may describe it as an infinite capacity for waiting and listening for the true inspiration and rejecting all that fell short of it, however good it might seem from a lower standard until I got that which I felt to be absolutely right. Mendonça was evidently under a misconception with regard to my defence of the wealth-burdened line; he says that the principle enounced by me was sound but what mattered was my application of the principle, and he seems to think that I was trying to justify my application although I knew it to be bad and false by citing passages from Milton and Shakespeare as if my use of the wealth-burdened style were as good as theirs. But I was not defending the excellence of my practice, for the poetical value of my lines was not then in question; the question was whether it did not violate a valid law of a certain chaste economy by the use of too many epithets massed together: against this I was asserting the legitimacy of a massed richness, I was defending only its principle, not my use of the principle. Even a very small poet can cite in aid of his practice examples from greater poets without implying that his poetry is on a par

with theirs. But he further asserts that I showed small judgment in choosing my citations, because Milton's passage¹ is not at all an illustration of the principle and Shakespeare's² is inferior in poetic value, lax and rhetorical in its richness and belongs to an early and inferior Shakespearean style. He says that Milton's astounding effect is due only to the sound and not to the words. That does not seem to me quite true: the sound, the rhythmic resonance, the rhythmic significance is undoubtedly the predominant factor; it makes us hear and feel the crash and clamour and clangour of the downfall of the rebel angels: but that is not all, we do not merely hear as if one were listening to the roar of ruin of a collapsing bomb-shattered house, but saw nothing, we have the vision and the full psychological commotion of the "hideous" and flaming ruin of the downfall, and it is the tremendous force of the words that makes us see as well as hear. Mendonça's disparagement of the Shakespearean passage on "sleep" and the line on the sea considered by the greatest critics and not by myself only as ranking amongst the most admired and admirable things in Shakespeare is surprising and it seems to me to illustrate a serious limitation in his poetic perception and temperamental sympathies. Shakespeare's later terse and packed style with its more powerful dramatic effects can surely be admired without disparaging the beauty and opulence of his earlier style; if he had never written in that style, it would have been an unspeakable loss to the sum of the world's aesthetic possessions. The lines I have quoted are neither lax nor merely rhetorical, they have a terseness or at least a compactness of their own, different in character from the lines, let us say, in the scene of Antony's death or other memorable passages written in his great tragic style but none the less at every step packed with pregnant meanings and powerful significances which would not

¹ *With hideous ruin and combustion down
To bottomless perdition, there to dwell
In adamantine chains and penal fire,*

² *Wilt thou upon the high and giddy mast
Seal up the ship-boy's eyes, and rock his brains
In cradle of the rude imperious surge,*

be possible if it were merely a loose rhetoric. Anyone writing such lines would deserve to rank by them alone among the great and even the greatest poets.

That is enough for the detail of the criticism and we can come to the general effect and his pronounced opinion upon my poetry. Apart from his high appreciation of *Flame-Wind* and *Descent*, *Jivanmukta* and *Thought the Paraclete* and his general approval of the mystic poems published along with my essay on quantitative metre in English, it is sufficiently damning and discouraging and if I were to accept his verdict on my earlier and latest poetry, the first comparatively valueless and the last for the most part pseudo and phoney and for the rest offering only a few pleasant or pretty lines but not charged with the power and appeal of true or great poetry, I would have to withdraw the *Collected Poems* from circulation, throw *Savitri* into the waste-paper-basket and keep only the mystical poems,—but these also have been banned by some critics, so I have no refuge left to me. As Mendonça is not a negligible critic and his verdict agrees with that of the eulogist of my philosophy in *The Times Literary Supplement*, not to speak of others less authoritative like the communist reviewer of Iyengar's book who declared that it was not at all certain that I would live as a poet, it is perhaps incumbent on me to consider in all humility my dismal position and weigh whether it is really as bad as all that. There are some especial judgments in your friend's comments on the *Collected Poems* but these seem to concern only the translations. It is curious that he should complain of the lack of the impulse of self-expression in the *Songs of the Sea* as in this poem I was not busy with anything of the kind but was only rendering into English the self-expression of my friend and fellow-poet C. R. Das in his fine Bengali poem *Sagar Sangit*. I was not even self-moved to translate this work, however beautiful I found it; I might even be accused of having written the translation as a pot-boiler, for Das knowing my impecunious and precarious condition at Pondicherry offered me Rs. 1,000 for the work. Nevertheless I tried my best to give his beautiful Bengali lines as excellent a shape of English poetry as I could manage. The poet

and *littérateur* Chapman condemned my work because I had made it too English, written too much in a manner imitative of traditional English poetry and had failed to make it Bengali in its character so as to keep its native spirit and essential substance. He may have been right; Das himself was not satisfied as he appended a more literal translation in free verse but this latter version does not seem to have caught on while some at least still read and admire the English disguise. If Mendonça is right in finding an overflow of sentiment in the *Songs*, that must be my own importation of an early romantic sentimentalism, a contribution of my own "self-expression" replacing Das's. The sea to the Indian imagination is a symbol of life,—one speaks of the ocean of the *samsāra* and Indian Yoga sees in its occult visions life in the image of a sea or different planes of being as so many oceans. Das's poem expresses his communing with this ocean of universal life and psychic intimacies with the Cosmic Spirit behind it and these have a character of grave emotion and intense feeling, not of mere sentimentalism, but they come from a very Indian and even a very Bengali mentality and may seem in translation to a different mind a profuse display of fancy and sentiment. The *Songs* are now far away from me in a dim backward of memory and I will have to read them again to be sure, but for that I have no time.

Again, I am charged with modern nineteenth-century romanticism and a false imitation of the Elizabethan drama in my rendering of Kalidasa's *Vikramorvasie*; but Kalidasa's play is romantic in its whole tone and he might almost be described as an Elizabethan predating by a thousand years at least the Elizabethans; indeed most of the ancient Sanskrit dramas are of this kind, though the tragic note is missing, and the general spirit resembles that of Elizabethan romantic comedy. So I do not think I committed any fault in making the translation romantic and in trying to make it Elizabethan, even if I only achieved a "sapless pseudo-Elizabethan" style. One who knew the Sanskrit original and who, although an Indian, was recognised as a good critic in England as well as a poet, one too whose attitude towards myself and my work had been consistently adverse, yet

enthusiastically praised my version and said if Kalidasa could be translated at all, it was only so that he could be translated. This imprimatur of an expert may perhaps be weighed against the discouraging criticism of Mendonça. The comment on my translation of Bhartrihari is more to the point; but the fault is not Bhartrihari's whose epigrams are as concise and lapidary as the Greek, but in translating I indulged my tendency at the time which was predominantly romantic: the version presents faithfully enough the ideas of the Sanskrit poet but not the spirit and manner of his style. It is comforting, however, to find that it makes "attractive reading", — I must be content with small mercies in an adversely critical world. After all, these poems are translations and not original works and not many can hope to come within a hundred miles of the more famous achievements of this kind such as Fitzgerald's splendid misrepresentation of Omar Khayyam, or Chapman's and Pope's mistranslations of Homer which may be described as first-class original poems with a borrowed substance from a great voice of the past. Mendonça does not refer specifically to *Love and Death*, to which your enthusiasm first went out, to *Poems*, to *Urvasie* and to *Perseus the Deliverer* though this last he would class, I suppose, as sapless pseudo-Elizabethan drama; but that omission may be there because he only skimmed through them and afterwards could not get the first volume. But perhaps they may come under his general remark that this part of my work lacks the glow and concentration of true inspired poetry and his further judgment classing it with the works of Watson and Stephen Phillips and other writers belonging to the decline of romantic poetry. I know nothing about Watson's work except for one or two short pieces met by chance; if I were to judge from them, I would have to regard him as a genuine poet with a considerable elevation of language and metrical rhythm but somewhat thin in thought and substance; my poems may conceivably have some higher quality than his in this last respect since the reviewer in *The Times Literary Supplement* grants deep thought and technical excellence as the only merits of my uninspired poetry. It is otherwise with Stephen Phillips: I read *Marpessa* and *Christ in Hades*, the latter

in typescript, shortly before I left England and they aroused my admiration and made a considerable impression on me. I read recently a reference to Phillips as a forgotten poet, but if that includes these two poems I must consider the oblivion as a considerable loss to the generation which has forgotten them. His later poetry disappointed me, there was still some brilliance but nothing of that higher promise. The only other poet of that time who had some influence on me was Meredith, especially his *Modern Love* which may have helped in forming the turn of my earlier poetic expression. I have not read the other later poets of the decline. Of subsequent writers or others not belonging to this decline I know only A. E. and Yeats, something of Francis Thompson, especially the *Hound of Heaven* and the *Kingdom of God*, and a poem or two of Gerard Hopkins; but the last two I came across very late, Hopkins only quite recently, and none of them had any influence on me, although one English reviewer in India spoke of me in eulogistic terms as a sort of combination of Swinburne and Hopkins and some have supposed that I got my turn for compound epithets from the latter! The only romantic poets of the Victorian Age who could have had any influence on me, apart from Arnold whose effect on me was considerable, were Tennyson perhaps, subconsciously, and Swinburne of the earlier poems, for his later work I did not at all admire. Still it is possible that the general atmosphere of the later Victorian decline, if decline it was, may have helped to mould my work and undoubtedly it dates and carries the stamp of the time in which it was written. It is a misfortune of my poetry from the point of view of recognition that the earlier work forming the bulk of the *Collected Poems* belongs to the past and has little chance of recognition now that the aesthetic atmosphere has so violently changed, while the later mystical work and *Savitri* belong to the future and will possibly have to wait for recognition of any merit they have for another strong change. As for the mystical poems which your friend praises in such high terms, they are as much challenged by others as the rest of my work. Some reviewers have described them as lacking altogether in spiritual feeling and void of spiritual experience; they are,

it seems, mere mental work, full of intellectually constructed images and therefore without the genuine value of spiritual or mystic poetry.

Well, then, what is the upshot? What have I to decide as a result of my aesthetic examination of conscience? It is true that there are voices on the other side, not only from my disciples but from others who have no such connection with me. I have heard of individuals nameless or fameless in England who chanced to come across *Love and Death* and had the same spontaneous enthusiasm for it as yourself; others have even admired and discovered in my earlier work the beauty and the inspiration which Mendonça and the *Times* reviewer find to be badly lacking in it. It is true that they have differed in the poems they have chosen; Andrews cited particularly the *Rishi* and the epigram on Goethe as proof of his description of me as a great poet; an English critic, Richardson, singled out *Urvasio* and *Love and Death* and the more romantic poems, but thought that some of my later work was less inspired, too intellectual and philosophical, too much turned towards thought, while some work done in the middle he denounced altogether, complaining that after feeding my readers on nectar for so long I came later on to give them mere water. This critic made a distinction between great poets and good poets and said that I belonged to the second and not to the first category, but as he classed Shelley and others of the same calibre as examples of the good poets, his praise was sufficiently "nectarous" for anybody to swallow with pleasure! Krishnaprem, Moore and others have also had a contrary opinion to the adverse critics and these, both English and Indian, were men whose capacity for forming a true literary judgment is perhaps as good as any on the other side. Krishnaprem I mention, because his judgment forms a curious and violent contrast to Mendonça's: the latter finds no overtones in my poetry while Krishnaprem who similarly discourages Harin's poetry on the ground of a lack of overtones finds them abundant in mine. One begins to wonder what overtones really are, or are we to conclude that they have no objective existence but are only a term for some subjective personal reaction in the

reader? I meet the same absolute contradiction everywhere; one critic says about *Perseus* that there is some good poetry in it but it is not in the least dramatic except for one scene and that the story of the play is entirely lacking in interest, while another finds in it most of all a drama of action and the story thrilling and holding a breathless interest from beginning to end. Highest eulogy, extreme disparagement, faint praise, mixed laudation and censure—it is a see-saw on which the unfortunate poet who is incautious enough to attach any value to contemporary criticism is balanced without any possibility of escape. Or I may flatter myself with the idea that this lively variation of reaction from extreme eulogy to extreme damnation indicates that my work must have after all something in it that is real and alive. Or I might perhaps take refuge in the supposition that the lack of recognition is the consequence of an untimely and too belated publication, due to the egoistic habit of writing for my own self-satisfaction rather than any strong thirst for poetical glory and immortality and leaving most of my poetry in the drawer for much longer than, even for twice or thrice the time recommended by Horace who advised the poet to put by his work and read it again after ten years and then only, if he still found it of some value, to publish it. *Urvasio*, the second of the only two poems published early, was sent at first to Lionel Johnson, a poet and *littérateur* of some reputation who was the Reader of a big firm. He acknowledged some poetic merit, but said that it was a repetition of Matthew Arnold and so had no sufficient reason for existence. But Lionel Johnson, I was told, like the Vedantic sage who sees Brahman in all things, saw Arnold everywhere, and perhaps if I had persisted in sending it to other firms, some other Reader, not similarly obsessed, might have found the merit and, as romanticism was still the fashion, some of the critics and the public too might have shared your and Richardson's opinion of this and other work and, who knows, I might have ranked in however low a place among the poets of the romantic decline. Perhaps then I need not decide too hastily against any republication of the *Collected Poems* or could even cherish the hope that, when the fashion of anti-romanticism has passed, it

may find its proper place, whatever that may be, and survive.

As regards your friend's appraisal of the mystical poems, I need say little. I accept his reservation that there is much inequality as between the different poems: they were produced very rapidly — in the course of a week, I think — and they were not given the long reconsideration that I have usually given to my poetic work before publication; he has chosen the best, though there are others also that are good, though not so good; in others, the metre attempted and the idea and language have not been lifted to their highest possible value. I would like to say a word about his hesitation over some lines in *Thought the Paraclete* which describe the spiritual planes. I can understand this hesitation; for these lines have not the vivid and forceful precision of the opening and the close and are less pressed home, they are general in description and therefore to one who has not the mystic experience may seem too large and vague. But they are not padding; a precise and exact description of these planes of experience would have made the poem too long, so only some large lines are given, but the description is true, the epithets hit the reality and even the colours mentioned in the poem, "gold-red feet" and "crimson-white mooned oceans", are faithful to experience. Significant colour, supposed by intellectual criticism to be symbolic but there is more than that, is a frequent element in mystic vision; I may mention the powerful and vivid vision in which Ramakrishna went up into the higher planes and saw the mystic truth behind the birth of Vivekananda. At least, the fact that these poems have appealed so strongly to your friend's mind may perhaps be taken by me as a sufficient proof that in this field my effort at interpretation of spiritual things has not been altogether a failure.

But how then are we to account for the same critic's condemnation or small appreciation of *Savitri* which is also a mystic and symbolic poem although cast into a different form and raised to a different pitch, and what value am I to attach to his criticism? Partly, perhaps, it is this very difference of form and pitch which accounts for his attitude and, having regard to his aesthetic temperament and its limitations, it was inevitable.

He himself seems to suggest this reason when he compares this difference to the difference of his approach as between *Lycidas* and *Paradise Lost*. His temperamental turn is shown by his special appreciation of Francis Thompson and Coventry Patmore and his response to *Descent* and *Flame-Wind* and the fineness of his judgment when speaking of the *Hound of Heaven* and the *Kingdom of God*, its limitation by his approach towards *Paradise Lost*. I think he would be naturally inclined to regard any very high-pitched poetry as rhetorical and unsound and declamatory, wherever he did not see in it something finely and subtly true coexisting with the high-pitched expression,—the combination we find in Thompson's later poem and it is this he seems to have missed in *Savitri*. For *Savitri* does contain or at least I intended it to contain what you and others have felt in it but he has not been able to feel because it is something which is outside his own experience and to which he has no access. One who has had the kind of experience which *Savitri* sets out to express or who, not having it, is prepared by his temperament, his mental turn, his previous intellectual knowledge or psychic training, to have some kind of access to it, the feeling of it if not the full understanding, can enter into the spirit and sense of the poem and respond to its poetic appeal; but without that it is difficult for an unprepared reader to respond,—all the more if this is, as you contend, a new poetry with a new law of expression and technique.

Lycidas is one of the finest poems in any literature, one of the most consistently perfect among works of an equal length and one can apply to it the epithet "exquisite" and it is to the exquisite that your friend's aesthetic temperament seems specially to respond. It would be possible to a reader with a depreciatory turn to find flaws in it, such as the pseudo-pastoral setting, the too powerful intrusion of St. Peter and puritan theological controversy into that incongruous setting and the image of the hungry sheep which someone not in sympathy with Christian feeling and traditional imagery might find even ludicrous or at least odd in its identification of pseudo-pastoral sheep and theological human sheep: but these would be hypercritical

objections and are flooded out by the magnificence of the poetry. I am prepared to admit the very patent defects of *Paradise Lost*: Milton's heaven is indeed unconvincing and can be described as grotesque and so too is his gunpowder battle up there, and his God and angels are weak and unconvincing figures, even Adam and Eve, our first parents, do not effectively fill their part except in his outward description of them; and the later narrative falls far below the grandeur of the first four books but those four books stand for ever among the greatest things in the world's poetic literature. If *Lycidas* with its beauty and perfection had been the supreme thing done by Milton even with all the lyrical poetry and the sonnets added to it, Milton would still have been a great poet but he would not have ranked among the dozen greatest; it is *Paradise Lost* that gives him that place. There are deficiencies if not failures in almost all the great epics, the *Odyssey* and perhaps the *Divina Commedia* being the only exceptions, but still they are throughout in spite of them great epics. So too is *Paradise Lost*. The grandeur of his verse and language is constant and unsinking to the end and makes the presentation always sublime. We have to accept for the moment Milton's dry Puritan theology and his all too human picture of the celestial world and its denizens and then we can feel the full greatness of the epic. But the point is that this greatness in itself seems to have less appeal to Mendonça's aesthetic temperament; it is as if he felt less at home in its atmosphere, in an atmosphere of grandeur and sublimity than in the air of a less sublime but a fine and always perfect beauty. It is the difference between a magic hill-side woodland of wonder and a great soaring mountain climbing into a vast purple sky: to accept fully the greatness he needs to find in it a finer and subtler strain as in Thompson's *Kingdom of God*. On a lower scale this, his sentence about it seems to suggest, is the one fundamental reason for his complete pleasure in the mystical poems and his very different approach to *Savitri*. The pitch aimed at by *Savitri*, the greatness you attribute to it, would of itself have discouraged in him any abandonment to admiration and compelled from the beginning a cautious and dubious approach; that soon turned to lack of appreciation or a

lowered appreciation even of the best that may be there and to depreciation and censure of the rest.

But there is the other reason which is more effective. He sees and feels nothing of the spiritual meaning and the spiritual appeal which you find in *Savitri*; it is for him empty of anything but an outward significance and that seems to him poor, as is natural since the outward meaning is only a part and a surface and the rest is to his eyes invisible. If there had been what he hoped or might have hoped to find in my poetry, a spiritual vision such as that of the Vedantin, arriving beyond the world towards the Ineffable, then he might have felt at home as he does with Thompson's poetry or might at least have found it sufficiently accessible. But this is not what *Savitri* has to say or rather it is only a small part of it and, even so, bound up with a cosmic vision and an acceptance of the world which in its kind is unfamiliar to his mind and psychic sense and foreign to his experience. The two passages with which he deals do not and cannot give any full presentation of this way of seeing things since one is an unfamiliar symbol and the other an incidental and, taken by itself apart from its context, an isolated circumstance. But even if he had had other more explicit and clearly revealing passages at his disposal, I do not think he would have been satisfied or much illuminated; his eyes would still have been fixed on the surface and caught only some intellectual meaning or outer sense. That at least is what we may suppose to have been the cause of his failure, if we maintain that there is anything at all in the poem; or else we must fall back on the explanation of a fundamental personal incompatibility and the rule *de gustibus non est disputandum*, or to put it in the Sanskrit form *nānārucirhi lokah*. If you are right in maintaining that *Savitri* stands as a new mystical poetry with a new vision and expression of things, we should expect, at least at first, a widespread, perhaps, a general failure even in lovers of poetry to understand it or appreciate; even those who have some mystical turn or spiritual experience are likely to pass it by if it is a different turn from theirs or outside their range of experience. It took the world something like a hundred years to discover Blake; it would not be improbable that there

might be a greater time-lag here, though naturally we hope for better things. For in India at least some understanding or feeling and an audience few and fit may be possible. Perhaps by some miracle there may be before long a larger appreciative audience.

At any rate this is the only thing one can do, especially when one is attempting a new creation,—to go on with the work with such light and power as is given to one and leave the value of the work to be determined by the future. Contemporary judgments we know to be unreliable; there are only two judges whose joint verdict cannot easily be disputed, the World and Time. The Roman proverb says, *securus judicat orbis terrarum*; but the world's verdict is secure only when it is confirmed by Time. For it is not the opinion of the general mass of men that finally decides, the decision is really imposed by the judgment of a minority and élite which is finally accepted and settles down as the verdict of posterity; in Tagore's phrase it is the universal man, *viśva mānava*, or rather something universal using the general mind of man, we might say the Cosmic Self in the race that fixes the value of its own works. In regard to the great names in literature this final verdict seems to have in it something of the absolute,—so far as anything can be that in a temporal world of relativities in which the Absolute reserves itself hidden behind the veil of human ignorance. It is no use for some to contend that Virgil is a tame and elegant writer of a wearisome work in verse on agriculture and a tedious pseudo-epic written to imperial order and Lucretius the only really great poet in Latin literature or to deprecate Milton for his Latin English and inflated style and the largely uninteresting character of his two epics; the world either refuses to listen or there is a temporary effect, a brief fashion in literary criticism, but finally the world returns to its established verdict. Lesser reputations may fluctuate, but finally whatever has real value in its own kind settles itself and finds its just place in the durable judgment of the world. Work which was neglected and left aside like Blake's or at first admired with reservation and eclipsed like Donne's is singled out by a sudden glance of Time and its greatness recognised; or what seemed buried slowly emerges or re-emerges; all finally settles into its

place. What was held as sovereign in its own time is rudely dethroned but afterwards recovers not its sovereign throne but its due position in the world's esteem; Pope is an example and Byron, who at once burst into a supreme glory and was the one English poet, after Shakespeare, admired all over Europe but is now depreciated, may also recover his proper place. Encouraged by such examples, let us hope that these violently adverse judgments may not be final and absolute and decide that the waste-paper-basket is not the proper place for *Savitri*. There may still be a place for a poetry which seeks to enlarge the field of poetic creation and find for the inner spiritual life of man and his now occult or mystical knowledge and experience of the whole hidden range of his and the world's being, not a corner and a limited expression such as it had in the past, but a wide space and as manifold and integral an expression of the boundless and innumerable riches that lie hidden and unexplored as if kept apart under the direct gaze of the Infinite, as has been found in the past for man's surface and finite view and experience of himself and the material world in which he has lived striving to know himself and it as best he can with a limited mind and senses. The door that has been shut to all but a few may open; the kingdom of the Spirit may be established not only in man's inner being but in his life and his works. Poetry also may have its share in that revolution and become part of the spiritual empire.

I had intended as the main subject of this letter to say something about technique and the inner working of the intuitive method by which *Savitri* was and is being created and of the intention and plan of the poem. Mendonça's idea of its way of creation, an intellectual construction by a deliberate choice of words and imagery, badly chosen at that, is the very opposite of the real way in which it was done. That was to be the body of the letter and the rest only a preface. But the preface has become so long that it has crowded out the body. I shall have to postpone it to a later occasion when I have more time. 4 May 1947

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The Mendonça letter [of 4 May 1947] was to be, as I suggested, “between ourselves”; there is too much that is private and personal in it for publicity. It is something that can be shown to those who can appreciate and understand, but to an ordinary reader I might seem to be standing on my defence rather than attacking and demolishing a criticism which might damage the appreciation of it in readers who are not sure of their own critical standard and reliability of their taste and so might be shaken by well-phrased judgments and plausible reasonings such as Mendonça's: they might make the same confusion as Mendonça himself between an apology and an apologia. An idea might rise that I am not sure of the value of my own poetry especially the earlier poetry and accept his valuation of it. The humility you speak of is very largely a Socratic humility, the element of irony in it is considerable; but readers not accustomed to fineness of shades might take it literally and conclude wrongly that I accepted the strictures passed by an unfavourable criticism. A poet who puts no value or a very low value on his own writing has no business to write poetry or to publish it or keep it in publication; if I allowed the publication of the *Collected Poems* it is because I judged them worth publishing. Kishor Gandhi's objection has therefore some value. On the other hand in defending I may seem to be eulogising my own work, which is not a thing that can be done in public even if a poet's estimate of his achievement is as self-assured as that of Horace, *Exegi monumentum aere perennius*, or as magnificent as Victor Hugo's. Similarly, the reply was not meant for Mendonça himself and I do not think the whole can be shown to him without omissions or some editing, but if you wish and if you think that he will not resent any strictures I have made you can show to him the passages relevant to his criticisms.

7 July 1947

On the Publication of His Poetry

The Question of Publication

I do not attach much importance to the publication or non-publication of my poetry and never have done. Most of it (the published part) appeared five, ten, fifteen or even thirty or more years after they were written. The few recently published in magazines (not all of them new, e.g. the sonnets) owed their fate to Nolini's eagerness and not to my initiative. But the vast bulk of what I have written (long poems mostly) lies on shelf and in drawer, most of it for more than a decade, awaiting either dissolution or an interminable revision or total recasting which at the present rate may well retain them there a decade or two more. But that is my own idiosyncrasy—it cannot be a rule or example for others. However, for those that are "circulated" Nolini and Doraiswami have found a trick which—I hope—will prevent any farther push for premature publication in the future—i.e. printing them as they come and letting them pile up for private circulation hereafter.

8 January 1935

On an Early Publication Proposal

Here are my selections from your shorter poems. Dara wants me to send it to you so that you may judge whether I have selected rightly and whether it is what may be printed, as he suggests, by the Aligarh or Osmania University. But please tell me: is this Aligarh or Osmania University business a possible scheme? . . .

What about *Love and Death* and *Baji Prabhoo*? Are they to be printed *in toto* or in part?

I have not the least notion whether it is possible; I suppose that ordinarily no University in India would accept as text-book the (English) poems of a writer not yet consecrated (*qua* poet) by

European fame. It is Dara's idea; I don't know if the Osmania or Aligarh Universities are really so original and unconventional as to do such a thing. I thought however that a selection of the kind might prove useful, if not for this, for some other purpose, and it would not be a bad thing to have one ready; for Dara's idea of a selection is in itself a happy one. And I have often seen that circumstances arise and, because one is not ready with the materials, a chance is lost of getting something done.

Love and Death is too long for inclusion in a book of selections; passages would be sufficient. For *Baji Prabhoo* that holds still more, since it has not so much poetic value as *Love and Death*.

As to your selections, it *seems* to me that you have chosen with judgment and taste; but the comparative judgment of a poet on his own writings is so often at fault that outside voices are needed for confirmation—even though I fancy I have a sufficient attitude of detachment towards my past work. But perhaps detachment is not enough.

P.S. I have altered the passage about Paris in two or three places where the rhythm is clumsy. At that time I had not evolved the “perfect hexameter”.

22 July 1932

A Selection of Short Poems

- 1 Transformation
- 2 Bird of Fire ✓
- 3 Rose of God ✓
- 4 Who?
- 5 Revelation
- 6 To the Sea
- 7 God
- 8 Invitation
- 9 Epigram on Goethe
- 10 Renewal
- 11 Descent
- 12 Estelle (I find this is not a translation)

I think these may be sent for his own selection of six. No translation or extracts from dramas or long poems are included, only short poems and small lyrics.

The mark √ means that we think these two ought to be included in any selection made.

On Two Proposals to Publish *Love and Death* in England

By the way, the copy of your *Love and Death* is ready to go to England. I wonder how the critics will receive the poem.

You expect . . . *Love and Death* to make a sensation in England—I don't expect it in the least: I shall be agreeably surprised if it gets more than some qualified praise, and if it does not get even that, I shall be neither astonished nor discomfited. I know the limitations of the poem and its qualities and I know that the part about the descent into Hell can stand comparison with some of the best English poetry; but I don't expect my contemporaries to see it. If they do, it will be good luck or divine grace, that is all.

2 February 1932

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I am afraid you are under an illusion as to the success of *Love and Death* in England. *Love and Death* dates,—it belongs to the time when Meredith and Phillips were still writing and Yeats and A.E. were only in bud if not *in ovo*. Since then the wind has changed and even Yeats and A.E. are already a little high and dry on the sands of the past, while the form, manner, characteristics of *Love and Death* are just the things that are anathema to the post-war writers and literary critics. I fear it would be, if not altogether ignored which is most likely, regarded as a feeble and belated Indian imitation of an exploded literary model dead and buried long ago. I don't regard it in that light myself, but it is not my opinion that counts for success but that of the modern highbrows. If it had been published when it was written, it might have been a success—but now! Of course, I know that there are many people still in England, if it got into their hands, who

would read it with enthusiasm, but I don't think it would get into their hands at all. As for the other poems, they could not go with *Love and Death*. When the time comes for publication, the sonnets will have to be published in a separate book of Sonnets and the others in another separate book of (mainly) lyrical poems — so it cannot be now. That at least is my present idea. It is not that I am against publication for all time, but my idea was to wait for the proper time rather than do anything premature.

One thing however could be done. Prithwi Singh could send his friend *Love and Death* and perhaps the *Six Poems* and sound the publishers as to whether the publication, in their eyes, would be worthwhile from their point of view. That would at least give a clue.

24 October 1934

On Two Other Publication Proposals

I have seen the opinion of the publisher consulted by Amiya Chakrabarty: Dilip's friend, the novelist Thompson, has also written to him offering to get a small selection of my poems published. Both opinions agree that poetry has very little chance of success nowadays. Thompson says that poetry is out of fashion; the publisher also indicates that new and original poetry has very little chance with the public. I believe they are both right. I also agree that if anything is to be published in Europe, it should be something in prose rather than in poetry. But I do not feel inclined to be in any haste in either direction; when anything of the kind ought to happen — I mean "ought" from the inner truth of things, I suppose it will arrange itself. You will remember that when I consented to let your friend show my poems to some publishers there, it was more to know what they would say and how they would take such poetry of an entirely new kind (I speak of course of the six poems and the sonnets) and not with an idea of immediate publication. Neither mere selling nor having the books in good print and in a good and pleasing form seems to me a sufficient justification for the expenditure. If publication agrees with an inner truth and serves

a deeper purpose, then it will be worth while. I hope my decision will not disappoint you too much; it seems to me from my point of view the right one.

16 June 1935

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I wish a volume could be prepared containing either the complete poetical works of Sri Aurobindo or selections from his poetry. One or the other will certainly be very popular and invite an interest or bring things like the Nobel Prize etc.

You are mistaken. Nobody in England now reads poetry except for a very small circle of readers and in India poetry in English does not command a public. The time has not come.

Section Two
On Poets and Poetry

Great Poets of the World

The World's Greatest Poets

Goethe certainly goes much deeper than Shakespeare; he had an incomparably greater intellect than the English poet and sounded problems of life and thought Shakespeare had no means of approaching even. But he was certainly not a greater poet; I do not find myself very ready to admit either that he was Shakespeare's equal. He wrote out of a high poetic intelligence, but his style and movement nowhere come near the poetic power, the magic, the sovereign expression and profound or subtle rhythms of Shakespeare. Shakespeare was a supreme poet and, one might almost say, nothing else; Goethe was by far the greater man and the greater brain, but he was a poet by choice, his mind's choice among its many high and effulgent possibilities, rather than by the very necessity of his being. He wrote his poetry, as he did everything else, with a great skill and effective genius and an inspired subtlety of language, but it was only part of his genius and not the whole. There is too a touch mostly wanting in spite of his strength and excellence, —the touch of an absolute, an intensely inspired or revealing inevitability; few quite supreme poets have that in abundance, in others it comes only by occasional jets or flashes.

When I said there were no greater poets than Homer and Shakespeare, I was thinking of their essential poetic force and beauty — not of the scope of their work as a whole, for there are poets greater in their range. The Mahabharata is from that point of view a far greater creation than the Iliad, the Ramayana than the Odyssey, and either spreads its strength and its achievement over a larger field than the whole dramatic world of Shakespeare; both are built on an almost cosmic vastness of plan and take all human life (the Mahabharata all human thought as well) in

their scope and touch too on things which the Greek and Elizabethan poets could not even glimpse. But as poets — as masters of rhythm and language and the expression of poetic beauty — Vyasa and Valmiki are *not inferior*, but also not greater than the English or the Greek poet. We can leave aside for the moment the question whether the Mahabharata was not the creation of the mind of a people rather than of a single poet, for that doubt has been raised also with regard to Homer.

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You once spoke of Goethe as not being one of the world's absolutely supreme singers. Who are these, then? Homer, Dante, Shakespeare, Valmiki, Kalidasa? And what about Aeschylus, Virgil and Milton?

I suppose all the names you mention except Goethe can be included; or if you like you can put them all including Goethe in three rows — e.g.:

1st row Homer, Shakespeare, Valmiki
 2nd row Dante, Kalidasa, Aeschylus, Virgil, Milton
 3rd row Goethe

and there you are! To speak less flippantly, the first three have at once supreme imaginative originality, supreme poetic gift, widest scope and supreme creative genius. Each is a sort of poetic Demiurge who has created a world of his own. Dante's triple world beyond is more constructed by the poetic seeing mind than by this kind of elemental demiurgic power — otherwise he would rank by their side; the same with Kalidasa. Aeschylus is a seer and creator but on a much smaller scale. Virgil and Milton have a less spontaneous breath of creative genius; one or two typal figures excepted, they live rather by what they have said than by what they have made.

31 March 1932

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Is the omission of Vyasa deliberate?

It was you who omitted Vyasa, Sophocles and others — not I.

*

Yes, I plead guilty. But that, I hope, will be no reason why Vyasa and Sophocles should remain unclassified by you. And “the others”—they intrigue me even more. Who are these others? Saintsbury as good as declares that poetry is Shelley and Shelley poetry—Spenser alone, to his mind, can contest the right to that equation. (Shakespeare, of course, is admittedly *hors concours*.) Aldous Huxley abominates Spenser: the fellow has got nothing to say and says it with a consummately cloying melodiousness! Swinburne, as is well known, could never think of Victor Hugo without bursting into half a dozen alliterative superlatives, while Matthew Arnold it was, I believe, who pitied Hugo for imagining that poetry consisted in using “divinité”, “infinité” “éternité”, as lavishly as possible. And then there is Keats, whose *Hyperion* compelled even the sneering Byron to forget his usual condescending attitude towards “Johnny” and confess that nothing grander had been seen since Aeschylus. Racine, too, cannot be left out—can he? Voltaire adored him, Voltaire who called Shakespeare a drunken barbarian. Finally, what of Wordsworth, whose Immortality Ode was hailed by Mark Pattison as the *ne plus ultra* of English poetry since the days of *Lycidas*? Kindly shed the light of infallible *viveka* on this chaos of jostling opinions.

I am not prepared to classify all the poets in the universe—it was the front bench or benches you asked for. By others I meant poets like Lucretius, Euripides, Calderon, Corneille, Hugo. Euripides (*Medea*, *Bacchae* and other plays) is a greater poet than Racine whom you want to put in the first ranks. If you want only the very greatest, none of these can enter—only Vyasa and Sophocles. Vyasa could very well claim a place beside Valmiki, Sophocles beside Aeschylus. The rest, if you like, you can send into the third row with Goethe, but it is something of a promotion about which one can feel some qualms. Spenser too, if you like; it is difficult to draw a line.

Shelley, Keats and Wordsworth have not been brought into consideration although their best work is as fine poetry as any written, but they have written nothing on a larger scale which would place them among the greatest creators. If Keats had finished *Hyperion* (without spoiling it), if Shelley had lived, or

if Wordsworth had not petered out like a motor car with insufficient petrol, it might be different, but we have to take things as they are. As it is, all began magnificently, but none of them finished, and what work they did, except a few lyrics, sonnets, short pieces and narratives, is often flawed and unequal. If they had to be admitted, what about at least fifty others in Europe and Asia?

The critical opinions you quote are, many of them, flagrantly prejudiced and personal. The only thing that results from Aldous Huxley's opinion, shared by many but with less courage, is that Spenser's melodiousness cloyed upon Aldous Huxley and that perhaps points to a serious defect somewhere in Spenser's art or in his genius but this does not cancel the poetic value of Spenser. Swinburne and Arnold are equally unbalanced on either side of their see-saw about Hugo. He might be described as a great but imperfect genius who just missed the very first rank because his word sometimes exceeded his weight, because his height was at the best considerable, even magnificent, but his depth insufficient and especially because he was often too oratorical to be quite sincere. The remarks of Voltaire and Mark Pattison go into the same basket.

2 April 1932

Epic Greatness and Sublimity

How do you differentiate between epic power and the Aeschylean sublime? Into what category would the grandeur, at its best, of Marlowe and Victor Hugo fall?

I don't know how I differentiate. Victor Hugo in the *Légende des siècles* tries to be epic and often succeeds, perhaps even on the whole. Marlowe is sometimes great or sublime, but I would not call him epic. There is a greatness or sublimity that is epic, there is another that is not epic, but more of a romantic type. Shakespeare's line

In cradle of the rude imperious surge

is as sublime as anything in Homer or Milton, but it does not seem to me to have the epic ring, while a very simple line can have it, e.g. Homer's

Bē de kat' Oulumpio karēnōn chōomenos kēr
“He went down from the peaks of Olympus wroth at heart”

or Virgil's

Disce, puer, virtutem ex me verumque labore,
Fortunam ex aliis.

or Milton's

Fallen Cherub, to be weak is miserable.

What is there in these lines that is not in Shakespeare's and makes them epic (Shakespeare's of course has something else as valuable)? For the moment at least, I can't tell you, but it is there. A tone of the inner spirit perhaps, expressing itself in the rhythm and the turn of the language.

As regards epic and non-epic sublimity, it strikes me that the former has a more natural turn of imagination — that is to say, it is powerfully wide or deep or high without being outstandingly bold, it also displays less colour.

Dante has the epic spirit and tone, what he lacks perhaps is the epic élan and swiftness. The distinction you draw applies, no doubt, but I do not know whether it is the essence of the thing or only one result of a certain austerity in the epic Muse. I do not know whether one cannot be coloured provided one keeps that austerity which, be it understood, is not incompatible with a certain fineness and sweetness.

19 May 1937

Remarks on Individual Poets

The Author of the *Bhagavad Gita*

Sri Krishna is not supposed to have written anything. The Gita is part of the Mahabharata which is attributed to the sage Vyasa, the contemporary of Krishna. But in its present form the Mahabharata seems to be of later origin and many scholars say that the Gita was composed afterwards by someone and put into the Mahabharata.

In any case whoever wrote it was a great Yogi and certainly received his inspiration from Krishna.

Catullus and Horace

You prefer Catullus [*to Horace*] because he was a philosopher? You have certainly rolled Lucretius here into Catullus — Lucretius who wrote an epic about the “Nature of Things” and invested the Epicurean philosophy with a rudely Roman and most unepicurean majesty and grandeur. Catullus had no more philosophy in him than a red ant. He was an exquisite lyrist — much more spontaneous in his lyrism than the more sophisticated and well-balanced Horace, a poet of passionate and irregular love, and he got out of the Latin language a melody no man could persuade it to before him or after. But that was all. Horace on the other hand knew everything there was to be known about philosophy at that time and had indeed all the culture of the age at his fingers’ ends and carefully put in its place in his brain also — but he did not make the mistake of writing a philosophical treatise in verse. A man of great urbanity, a perfectly balanced mind, a vital man with a strong sociability, faithful and ardent in friendship, a *bon vivant* fond of good food and good wine, a lover of women but not ardently passionate

like Catullus, an Epicurean who took life gladly but not superficially — this was his character. As a poet he was the second among the great Augustan poets, a great master of phrase — the most quoted of all the Roman writers, — a dexterous metrist who fixed the chief lyric Greek metres in Latin in their definitive form, with a style and rhythm in which strength and grace were singularly united, a writer also of satire¹ and familiar epistolary verse as well as a master of the ode and the lyric — that sums up his work.

June or July 1933

Virgil

I don't think Virgil would be classed by you as a psychic poet, and yet what is the source of that "majestic sadness" and that word-magic and vision which make his verse, more than that of almost any other poet, fill one with what Belloc calls the sense of the Unknown Country?

I don't at all agree that Virgil's verse fills one with the sense of the unknown country — he is not in the least a mystic poet, he was too Latin and Roman for that. Majestic sadness, word-magic and vision need not have anything to do with the psychic; the first can come from the higher mind and the noble parts of the vital, the others from almost anywhere. I do not mean to say there was no psychic touch at all anywhere in Virgil. And what is this unknown country? There are plenty of unknown countries (other than the psychic worlds) to which many poets give us some kind of access or sense of their existence behind much more than Virgil. But if when you say verse you mean his rhythm, his surge of word music, that does no doubt come from somewhere else, much more than the thoughts or the words that are carried on the surge.

31 March 1932

¹ Yes, he wrote a series of satires in verse — he ranks among the greatest satirists, but without malice or violence, his satire is good-humoured but often pungent criticism of life and men.

Dante

Somehow Dante's verse as well as his life-story move me so much: it is I think mainly because of Beatrice — his conception of her gives him that excellence and that appeal. Will you please write also a few words on the real truth and significance of his devotion to her?

I am afraid I know very little about it.

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As regards Beatrice, I have never thought about the matter. Outwardly, it was an idealisation, probably due to a psychic connection of the past which could not fulfil itself in that life. But I do not see how his conception of her gives him his excellence — it was only one element in a very powerful and complex nature.

10 July 1932

Dante and Milton

Would it be correct to call Dante a mystic poet? And how would you compare the inspiration-sources of Dante and Milton? Both the poets have a metaphysical background and a strong religious fervour.

I don't think either can be called mystic poets — Milton not at all. A religious fervour or metaphysical background belongs to the mind and vital, not to a mystic consciousness. Dante writes from the poetic intelligence with a strong intuitive force behind it.

18 October 1936

Marlowe

To me he seems an experiment wherein the occult voices were conceiving an epic drama with the central conception bodied forth a little loosely in semi-dissolving scenes.

What about *Edward II*? Marlowe had already moved towards the well-built drama.

Shakespeare's Hamlet

Would you take, as many critics do, Hamlet as typically a mental being? How would you characterise his essential psychology?

Hamlet is a Mind, an intellectual, but like many intellectuals a mind that looks too much all round and sees too many sides to have an effective will for action. He plans ingeniously without coming to anything decisive. And when he does act, it is on a vital impulse. Shakespeare suggests but does not bring out the idealist in him, the man of bright illusions.

Donne

Donne is very much in the limelight these days. How far can we regard the present high estimate of him as justified?

It seems to me that Donne falls between two stools. The Elizabethan ingenuities pass because of the great verve of the life force that makes them attractive; Donne's ingenuities remain intellectual and do not get alive except at times, the vital fire or force is not there to justify them and make them alive and lively. On the other hand he keeps to an Elizabethan or semi-Elizabethan style, but the Elizabethan energy is no longer there—he does not launch himself as Milton did into a new style suitable for the predominant play of the poetic intelligence. Energy and force of a kind he has, but it is twisted, laboured, something that has not found itself. That is why he is not so great a poet as he might have been. He is admired today because the modern mind has become like his—it too is straining for energy and force without having the life-impulse necessary for a true vividness and verve nor that higher vision which would supply another kind of energy—its intellect too is twisted, laboured, not in possession of itself.

28 February 1935

Blake

Blake stands out among the mystic poets of Europe. His occasional obscurity,—he is more often in his best poems lucid and crystal clear,—is due to his writing of things that are not familiar to the physical mind and writing them with fidelity instead of accommodating them to the latter. In reading such writing the inner being has to feel first, then only the mind can catch what is behind.

27 July 1936

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You said that Blake put down with fidelity whatever came down.

I didn't mean that he never altered. I don't know about that. I meant he did not let his mind disfigure what came by trying to make it intellectual. He transcribed what he saw and heard.

29 July 1936

Wordsworth

I am rather astonished at your finding Wordsworth's realisation, however mental and incomplete, to be abstract and vague or dictated by emotional effervescence. Wordsworth's was hardly an emotional or effervescent character. As for an abstract realisation, it sounds like a round square; I have never had one myself and find it difficult to believe in it. But certainly a realisation in its beginning can be vague and nebulous or it can be less or more vivid. Still, Wordsworth's did not make that impression on me and to him it certainly came as something positive, wonderfully luminous, direct, powerful and determinative. He stayed there and went no farther, did not get to the source, because more was hardly possible in his time and surroundings, at least to a man of his mainly moral and intellectual temper.

In a more deep and spiritual sense a concrete realisation is that which makes the thing realised more real, dynamic, intimately present to the consciousness than any physical thing can be. Such a concrete spiritual realisation whether of the personal

Divine or of the impersonal Brahman or of the Self does not, except in rare cases, come at or anywhere near the beginning of a sadhana, in the first years or for many years: one has to go deep to get it and deeper to keep it. But a vivid and very personal sense of a spirit or infinite in Nature can very well come in a flash and remain strongly behind a man's outlook on the universe.

June 1934

Wordsworth and Keats

It is better to be as simple and direct as possible in one's writing.

One can't make rigid rules like that. Wordsworth is as simple and direct as possible (not always though). Keats aims at word-magic. One can't say Wordsworth is a greater poet than Keats. Whatever style is poetically successful, is admissible.

21 December 1935

Keats and Shelley

As regards Keats and Shelley why attach so much importance to fluency? Keats besides produced enough in his few years of productivity and enough besides of a high excellence to rank him among the greater English poets. What might he not have done if he had lived to fifty? But I don't believe he had any dramatic genius in him. None of these poets had. Shelley's *Cenci* is a remarkable feat of dramatic construction and poetic imagination, but it has no organic life like the work of the Elizabethans or the Greeks or like such dramas as the *Cid* or Racine's tragedies.

7 February 1935

*

With regard to Keats, is it not rather difficult to deny a great poet a possibility when his whole ambition is set towards acquiring it? If we didn't have *Hyperion*, would we have thought it possible for him to strike the epic note? None of the poets round him had the least epical gift.

It can easily be seen from Keats' earlier work. And with ripeness he could do great things in the narrative form. His dramatic attempt is rubbish. All these poets — Shelley, Wordsworth, Keats had the gift which if sublimated leads to epic power — none had the dramatic gift. The ambition to do a thing is not a proof that he can do it — now and here.

8 February 1935

Tennyson

I suppose you know that I have no great consideration for Tennyson. I read him much and admired him when I was young and raw, but even then his *In Memoriam* style seemed to me mediocre and his attempts at thinking insufferably second-rate and dull. These lines [“*An infant crying in the night . . .*”] are better than others, but they are still Tennyson.

12 September 1931

*

Crossing the Bar was considered when I was in England as the *ne plus ultra* of modern lyrical beauty; but that modern is now today's antiquated and out of date. It is so far off from me in memory that it is difficult to say how I would now estimate it. It should have a place, I suppose — but a really high place? Perhaps.

23 January 1935

Tennyson and Wilde

I could never swallow *In Memoriam* even in the days when I admired him — very early days! It has been well described as “sorrow in kid gloves”. I suppose he was sincere, but he failed to make his expression sincere. The thought is perfectly shallow and conventional for the most part and there is no depth or strength of feeling. As for Wilde, there was always a strain of insincerity somewhere, he posed even over his sufferings — but he was a marvellous artist of speech and his imagination and his colouring are superb. In spite of the touch of insincerity,

of overstress, [*De Profundis*] remains one of the greatest things [written in] English prose.²

Browning

My opinion of Browning has been expressed, I think, in *The Future Poetry*. I had a fervent passion for him when I was from seventeen to eighteen, after a previous *penchant* for Tennyson; but like most calf-love both these fancies were of short duration. While I had it, I must have gone through most of his writings (*Fifine at the Fair* and some others excepted) some half-dozen times at least. There is much stuff of thought in him, seldom of great depth, but sometimes unexpected and subtle, a vast range not so much of character as of dramatic human moods, and a considerable power and vigour of rough verse and rugged language. But there is very little of the pure light of poetry in him or of sheer poetic beauty or charm and magic; he gets the highest or finest inspiration only in a line or two here and there. His expression is often not only rough and hasty but inadequate; in his later work he becomes tiresome. He is not one of the greatest poets, but he is a great *creator*.

5 December 1931

Baudelaire

It is a pity that Baudelaire could not allow the Spirit in him to find tongue in the highest key possible to his consciousness.

But what on earth did you expect from Baudelaire beyond what he has written. Baudelaire had to be Baudelairean just as Homer had to be Homeric.

7 November 1934

*

Herbert said yesterday that though Baudelaire is a great poet, he is considered an immoral one.

That is not anything against his greatness — only against his

² One corner of the manuscript of this letter has been lost. The words printed within square brackets are conjectural reconstructions. — Ed.

morality. Plenty of great people have been “immoral”.

I had just a glance at Baudelaire's *Flowers of Evil* and I found this:

The moon more indolently dreams tonight
 Than a fair woman on her couch at rest,
 Caressing, with a hand distraught and light,
 Before she sleeps, the contour of her breast.

What a queer imagination, but vulgar or immoral?

What is there vulgar in it or immoral? It is as an indolent distraught gesture that he puts it. How does it offend against morality?

31 January 1937

*

Baudelaire was never vulgar — he was too refined and perfect an artist to be that. He chose the evil of life as his frequent subject and tried to extract poetic beauty out of it, as a painter may deal with a subject that to the ordinary eye may be ugly or repellent and extract artistic beauty from it. But that is not the only stuff of his poetry.

22 July 1936

Mallarmé

Blake is Europe's greatest mystic poet and Mallarmé turned the current of French poetry (one might almost say of all modernist poetry) into a channel of which his poems were the opening.

Mallarmé's works are, in one word, “unintelligible”.

Then why did they have so much influence on the finest French writers and why is modernist poetry trying to burrow into the subliminal in order to catch something even one quarter as fine as his language, images and mystic suggestions?

Is it really true that he wrote with a set determination to make his works unintelligible?

Certainly not. The French language was too clear and limited to express mystic truth, so he had to wrestle with it and turn it this way and that to arrive at a mystic speech. Besides he refused to be satisfied with anything that was a merely intellectual or even at all intellectual rendering of his vision. That is why the surface understanding finds it difficult to follow him. But he is so great that it has laboured to follow him all the same.

14 December 1936

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Please read pages 19–21 of this book.³ The editor speaks of Mallarmé as an acknowledged master and of his great influence on contemporary poetry.

He can't deny such an obvious fact, I suppose — but he would like to.

He says, "A purely intellectual artist, convinced that sentiment was an inferior element of art, Mallarmé never evokes emotion, but only thought about thought; and the thoughts called forth in his mind by the symbol are generally so subtle and elliptical that they find no echo in the mind of the ordinary mortal." [pp. 19–20] Do you agree?

Certainly not — this man is a mere pedant; his remarks are unintelligent, commonplace, often perfectly imbecile.

He continues: "Obscurity was part of his doctrine and he wrote for the select few only and exclusively . . ." [p. 20]

Rubbish! His doctrine is perfectly tenable and intelligible. It is true that the finest things in art and poetry are appreciated only by the few and he chose therefore not to sacrifice the truth of his mystic (impressionist, symbolist) expression in order to be easily understood by the multitude, including this professor.

³ L. E. Kastner, ed., *A Book of French Verse: From Marot to Mallarmé* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1936).

"Another cause of his obscurity is that he chose his words and phrases for their evocative value alone, and here again the verbal sonorities suggested by the tortuous trend of his mind make no appeal except to the initiated." [p. 20] (I suppose here he means what you meant about the limitedness of the French language?)

Not only that — his will to arrive at a true and deep, instead of a superficial and intellectual language. I gave two reasons for Mallarmé's unusual style and not this one of the limitedness of the French language only.

"His life-long endeavour to achieve an impossible ideal accounts for his sterility (he has left some sixty poems only, most of them quite short) and the darkness of his later work, though he did write, before he had fallen a victim to his own theories, a few poems of great beauty and perfectly intelligible." [p. 20]

60 poems if they have beauty are as good as 600. It is not the mass of the poet's work that determines his greatness. Gray and Catullus wrote little; we have only seven plays of Sophocles and seven of Aeschylus (though they wrote more), but these seven put them still in the front rank of poets.

He says that "Mallarmé's verse is acquired and intricate" i.e. a thing not of spontaneity, but of intellectualisation. Saying that Verlaine is an inspired poet, he seems to imply the contrary about Mallarmé.

If these two magnificent poems (the last two)⁴ are not inspired, then there is no such thing as inspiration. It is rubbish to say of a man who refused to limit himself by intellectual expression, that he was an intellectual artist. Symbolism, impressionism go beyond intellect to pure sight — and Mallarmé was the creator of symbolism.

⁴ "Le vierge, le vivace et le bel aujourd'hui" (see page 404 below), and *Les fleurs*. — Ed.

Nolini says that in poetry simplicity leads to beauty. Applied to Mallarmé, would this mean that due to his acrobatics with words, his poems are not beautiful.

Only Nolini can say what he meant, but to refuse beauty to Mallarmé's poetry would be itself an acrobacy of the intellect. For what then is beauty? Simplicity and beauty are not convertible terms, there can be a difficult beauty. What about Aeschylus then? or Blake?

"According to Mallarmé's own definition, the poet's mission is either 'to evoke gradually an object in order to suggest a mood, or, inversely, to choose an object as a symbol and disengage from it a mood by a series of decipherments'." [p. 19]

It is a very good description of the impressionist method in literature. Verlaine and others do the same, even if they do not hold the theory.

I do not understand what Mallarmé means here, but it seems different from what Housman says, that the poet's mission is to transfuse emotion — of which Mallarmé had none!

I do not know what you mean by emotion. If you mean the surface vital joy and grief of outer life, these poems of Mallarmé do not contain it. But if emotion can include also the deeper spiritual or inner feeling which does not weep or shout, then they are here in these two poems. The Swan [*in "Le vierge . . ."*] is to my understanding not merely the poet who has not sung in the higher spaces of the consciousness, which is already a fine idea, but the soul that has not risen there and found its higher expression, said poet being, if Mallarmé thought of that specially, only a signal instance of this spiritual frustration. There can be no more powerful, moving and formidable expression of this spiritual frustration, this chilled and sterile greatness, than the image of the frozen lake and the imprisoned Swan as developed by Mallarmé.

I do not say that the spiritual or the occult cannot be given an easier expression or that if one can arrive at that without

minimising the inner significance, it is not perhaps the greatest achievement. (That is, I suppose, Nolini's contention.) But there is room for more than one kind of spiritual or mystic poetry. One has to avoid mere mistiness or vagueness, one has to be true, vivid, profound in one's images; but, that given, I feel free to write either as in *Nirvana* or *Transformation*, giving a clear mental indication along with the image or I can suppress the mental indication and give the image only with the content suggested in the language but not expressed so that even those can superficially understand who are unable to read behind the mental idea — that is what I have done in *The Bird of Fire*. It seems to me that both methods are legitimate.

16 December 1936

Heredia and Swinburne

I don't think Heredia and Swinburne go very well together; one is a passionate and chaotic imperfection and the other is a passionless perfection, but it is a passion of the music of words only and a perfection of word and rhythm only; for they resemble each other only in one thing, an excess of the word over the substance.

19 August 1932

Michael Madhusudan Dutt

I had once the regret that the line of possibility opened out by Michael [Madhusudan Dutt] was not carried any farther in Bengali poetry; but after all it may turn out that nothing has been lost by the apparent interruption. Magnificent as are the power and swing of his language and rhythm, there was a default of richness and thought-matter, and a development in which subtlety, fineness and richness of thought and feeling could learn to find a consummate expression was very much needed. More mastery of colour, form and design was a necessity as well as more depth and wealth in the thought-substance — and this has now been achieved and, if added to the *ojas*, can fulfil what Madhusudan left only half done.

14 June 1932

Rabindranath Tagore

Of course Tagore's worshippers will go for Prabodh Sen, what did you expect? Literary nature (artistic generally, or at least very often) is human nature at its most susceptible — *genus irritabile vatum*. And besides where is the joy of literature if you cannot use your skill of words in pummelling some opposite faction's nose? Man is a reasoning animal (perhaps), but a belligerent reasoning animal and must fight with words if he cannot do it with fists, swords, guns, or poison gas. All the more, I applaud your decision not to pursue farther the ত্রৈরথ.

24 November 1932

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I am afraid his powers are very much on the wane, but let us not whisper it too loud. The setting of a great genius and one that, after all, created on a very high level for a very long time!

10 October 1933

*

Tagore, I think, is substantially right in dubbing his spiritual poems imaginative rather than spiritual.

Well, yes, he mentalises, aestheticises, sentimentalises the things of the spirit — but I can't say that I have ever found the expression of a concrete spiritual realisation in his poetry — though ideas, emotions, ideal dreamings in plenty. That is something, but —

23 March 1934

*

Tagore has been a wayfarer towards the same goal as ours in his own way — that is the main thing, the exact stage of advance and putting of the steps are minor matters. His exact position as a poet or a prophet or anything else will be assigned by posterity and we need not be in haste to anticipate the final verdict. The immediate verdict after his departure or soon after it may very well be a rough one, — for this is a generation that seems to take a delight in trampling with an almost Nazi rudeness on

the bodies of the Ancestors, especially the immediate ancestors. I have read with an interested surprise that Napoleon was only a bustling and self-important nincompoop all whose great achievements were done by others, that Shakespeare was "no great things" and that most other great men were by no means so great as the stupid respect and reverence of past ignorant ages made them out to be! What chance has then Tagore? But these injustices of the moment do not endure — in the end a wise and fair estimate is formed and survives the changes of time.

Tagore, of course, belonged to an age which had faith in its ideas and whose very denials were creative affirmations. That makes an immense difference. Your strictures on his later development may or may not be correct, but this mixture even was the note of the day and it expressed a tangible hope of a fusion into something new and true — therefore it could create. Now all that idealism has been smashed to pieces by the immense adverse Event and everybody is busy exposing its weakness, but nobody knows what to put in its place. A mixture of scepticism and slogans, "Heil-Hitler" and the Fascist salute and Five-Year Plan and the beating of everybody into one amorphous shape, a disabused denial of all ideals on one side and on the other a blind shut-my-eyes and shut-everybody's-eyes plunge into the bog in the hope of finding some firm foundation there, will not carry us very far. And what else is there? Until new spiritual values are discovered, no great enduring creation is possible.

24 March 1934

Comments on Some Examples of Western Poetry (up to 1900)

Catullus

Quaenam te mala mens, miselle Ravide,
agit praecipitem in meos iambos?
quis deus tibi non bene advocatus
vecordem parat excitare rixam?
an ut pervenias in ora vulgi?
quid vis? qualubet esse notus optas?
eris, quandoquidem meos amores
cum longa voluisti amare poena.

Unless *meos amores* is purposely vague, at least two objects of Catullus's affections must be in question? Would you say that this piece is in a vein of good-humoured banter?

I do not think *meos amores* necessarily alludes to more than one love affair. I think it is more than good-humoured banter; there seems to me to be a note of careless scorn in it, but no serious anger. I suppose with Catullus one cannot take either his self-depreciation or his self-assertion as a poet very seriously—like most poets of his power he must have been aware of his genius, but expressed it half humourously as one would expect from a well-bred man of the world. I don't know either about his scurrilous attacks—literary invective perhaps, but is there not a little more to it than that? He puts the lash with something more than a whimsical violence in many places—the verses he wrote after the rupture leave a terrible mark. 11 January 1937

*

Disertissime Romuli nepotum,
 quot sunt quotque fuere, Marce Tulli,
 quotque post aliis erunt in annis,
 gratias tibi maximas Catullus
 agit pessimus omnium poeta,
 tanto pessimus omnium poeta,
 quanto tu optimus omnium patronus.

Would you not say that Catullus was bound to have looked upon Cicero the man as a pompous ass, however sincerely he may have admired Cicero the man of letters?

I am not sure how his contemporaries regarded Cicero — were they not hypnotised by his eloquence, scholarship, literary versatility, conversational and epistolatory powers, overflowing vitality? One would think that men like Catullus and Caesar would see through him, though. There is certainly a note that sounds very like irony in the last three lines, but it is very subtle and others than Cicero may have regarded it as a graceful eulogy enhanced by the assumption of extreme humility (though only a courteous assumption) in the comparison between the *poeta* and the *patronus*.

Virgil, Shakespeare, Hugo

I think what Belloc meant in crediting Virgil with the power to give us a sense of the Unknown Country [see page 373] was that Virgil specialises in a kind of wistful vision of things across great distances in space or time, which renders them dream-like, gives them an air of ideality. He mentions as an instance the passage (perhaps in the sixth book of the Aeneid) where the swimmer sees all Italy from the top of a wave

prospexsi Italiam summa sublimis ab unda.

I dare say —

Sternitur infelix alieno volnere caelumque
 aspicit et dulcis moriens reminiscitur Argos

as well as

tendebantque manus ripae ulterioris amore.

belong to the same category. To an ordinary Roman Catholic mind like Belloc's, which is not conscious of the subtle hierarchy of unseen worlds, whatever is vaguely or remotely appealing—in short, beautifully misty—is mystical, and “revelatory” of the native land of the soul. Add to this that Virgil’s rhythm is exquisitely euphonious, and it is no wonder Belloc should feel as if the very harps of heaven were echoed by the Mantuan.

He couples Shakespeare with Virgil as a master of (to put it in a phrase of Arjava’s) “earth-transforming gramarye”. The quotations he gives from Shakespeare struck me as rather peculiar in the context: I don’t exactly remember them but something in the style of “Night’s tapers are burnt out and jocund day” etc. seems to give him a wonderful flash of the Unknown Country! He also alludes to the four magical lines of Keats about Ruth “amid the alien corn” and Victor Hugo’s at-least-for-once truly delicate, unrhetorical passage on the same theme in *La légende des siècles*. I wonder if you recollect the passage. Its last two stanzas are especially enchanting:

Tout reposait dans Ur et dans Jérimadeth;
Les astres émaillaient le ciel profond et sombre;
Le croissant fin et clair parmi ces fleurs de l’ombre
Brillait à l’occident, et Ruth se demandait,

Immobile, ouvrant l’oeil à moitié sous ses voiles,
Quel dieu, quel moissonneur de l’éternel été,
Avait, en s’en allant, négligemment jeté
Cette fauaille d’or dans le champ des étoiles.

What do you think of them?

If that is Belloc’s idea of the mystic, I can’t put much value on his Roman Catholic mind! Shakespeare’s line and Hugo’s also are good poetry and may be very enchanting, as you say, but there is nothing in the least deep or mystic about them. Night’s tapers are the usual poetic metaphor, Hugo’s *moissonneur* and *fauaille d’or* is an ingenious fancy—there is nothing true behind it, not the least shadow of a mystical experience. The lines quoted from Virgil are exceedingly moving and poetic, but it is pathos

of the life planes, not anything more — Virgil would have stared if he had been told that his *ripae ulterioris* was revelatory of the native land of the soul. These sentimental modern intellectuals are terrible: they will read anything into anything; that is because they have no touch on the Truth, so they make up for it by a gambolling fancy.

1 April 1932

Shakespeare

From what plane are the substance and rhythm of this from Shakespeare? —

the prophetic soul
Of the wide world, dreaming on things to come.
Are they really from his usual plane — the vital?

The origin of the inspiration may be from anywhere, but in Shakespeare it always comes through the vital and strongly coloured by it as in some others it comes through the poetic intelligence. What play or poem is this from? I don't remember it. It sounds almost overmental in origin. 19 February 1935

*

The phrase occurs in Sonnet CVII, beginning

Not mine own fears, nor the prophetic soul
Of the wide world, dreaming on things to come,
Can yet the lease of my true love control,
Supposed as forfeit to a confined doom.

What I should like to know is whether the *rhythm* of the words I have picked out is a fusion of the overmental and the vital; or is only the substance from the overmind?

There is something from the Above in the rhythm also, but it is rather covered up by the more ordinary rhythm of the first half line and the two lines that follow. It is curious that this line and a half should have come in as if by accident and have nothing really to do with the restricted subject of the rest. 19 February 1935

*

Is there something definitely in the rhythm or language of a line of poetry which would prove it to be from a certain plane? From what you wrote some days back [*see the previous page*] I gather that the quotation from Shakespeare I sent has an Overmind movement as well as substance coming strongly coloured by the vital. But where and in what lies the vital colour which makes it the highest Shakespearean and not, say, the highest Wordsworthian — the line inspired by Newton?

It is a question of feeling, not of intellectual understanding; to distinguish the vital or psychic or any other element one must have the feeling for its presence — an intellectual definition is of little value. Take these lines from Shakespeare —

Eternity was in our lips and eyes,
Bliss in our brows' bent; none our parts so poor
But was a race of heaven —

they are plainly vital in their excited thrill, for only the vital can speak with that thrill and pulse of passion — the rhythm also has the vital undulation and surge so common in Shakespeare.

I have given an instance elsewhere of Shakespeare's thought-utterance which is really vital, not intellectual —

Life is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing.

Here is a "thought", a judgment on life, and its origin would naturally be assigned to the intellect, but as a matter of fact it is a throw-up from Macbeth's vital being, an emotional or sensational, not an intellectual judgment and its whole turn and rhythm are strongly vital in their vibration and texture. But yet in this passage there is a greater power that has rushed down from above and taken up the vital surge into its movement — so much so that if it had been a spiritual experience of which the poet was speaking, we could at once have detected an action of the illumined spiritual Mind taking up the vital love and soaring into spiritual greatness.

Or take the quotation —

the prophetic soul
Of the wide world dreaming on things to come.

Here both style and language come ultimately from a higher above-mind level, but still it is quite different from Wordsworth's line on Newton which also has altogether an above-head vision and utterance — and the difference comes because the vision of the "dreaming soul" is felt through the vital mind and heart before it finds expression; in the lines of Wordsworth the vision of the lone voyager through strange seas of thought has not that peculiar thrill but rather remains in an exaltation of light between the mind and some vastness above it. It is this constant vitality, this magnificent vital surge in Shakespeare's language which makes it a sovereign expression, but of life and, so far as it is also a voice of mind or knowledge, not of pure intellectual thought but of life-mind and of life-knowledge.

27 February 1935

*

Our revels now are ended. These our actors,
As I foretold you, were all spirits, and
Are melted into air, into thin air:
And, like the baseless fabric of this vision,
The cloud-capp'd towers, the gorgeous palaces,
The solemn temples, the great globe itself,
Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve,
And, like this insubstantial pageant faded,
Leave not a rack behind. We are such stuff
As dreams are made on; and our little life
Is rounded with a sleep.

The meaning, on the surface, is that for each of us life will pass away as if it were a dream and what will remain is the sleep of death, an undetailed everlasting rest. . . . But from the fourth line onward the language and the rhythm serve to evoke by a certain large and deep suggestiveness an intuition of some transcendental God-self . . . We are reminded of the Upanishad's description of the mystic trance in which the whole world fades like an illusion and the individual soul enters the supreme

Spirit's unfeatured ecstasy of repose. Shakespeare's intuition is not pure Upanishad, the supreme Spirit is not clearly felt and whatever profundity is there is vague and unintentional; still, a looming mystic light does appear, stay a little, find a suggestive contour before receding and falling away to a music sublimely defunctive.

I don't think Shakespeare had any such idea in his mind. What he is dwelling on is the insubstantiality of the world and of human existence. "We are such stuff" does not point to any God-self. "Dream" and "sleep" would properly imply Somebody who dreams and sleeps, but the two words are merely metaphors. Shakespeare was not an intellectual or philosophic thinker nor a mystic one. All that you can say is that there comes out here an impression or intimation of the illusion of Maya, the dream-character of life but without any vision or intuition of what is behind the dream and the illusion. There is nothing in the passage that even hints vaguely the sense of something abiding — all is insubstantial, "into air, into thin air", "baseless fabric", "insubstantial pageant", "we are such stuff as dreams are made on". "Stuff" points to some inert material rather than a spirit dreamer or sleeper. Of course one can always read things into it for one's own pleasure, but —

8 March 1935

*

I admit that Shakespeare was not a philosophic or mystic thinker. . . . What, however, surprises me is your saying that there is not the vaguest hint of something abiding. In the magic performance which Prospero gave to Ferdinand and Miranda . . . Prospero reminded them of what he had said before — namely, that "these our actors . . . were all spirits". They melt into thin air but do not disappear from existence, from conscious being of some character however unearthly: they just become invisible and what disappears is the visible pageant produced by them, a seemingly material construction which yet was a mere phantom. From this seeming, Prospero catches the suggestion that all that looks material is like a phantom, a dream, which must vanish, leaving no trace. . . .

One can read anything into anything. But Shakespeare says nothing about the material world or there being a base somewhere else or of our being projected into a dream. He says "we *are* such stuff." The spirits vanish into air, into thin air, as Shakespeare emphasises by repetition, which means to any plain interpretation that they too are unreal, only dream-stuff; he does not say that they disappear from view but are there behind all the time. The whole stress is on the unreality and insubstantiality of existence, whether of the pageant or of the spirits or of ourselves — there is no stress anywhere, no mention or hint of an eternal spiritual existence. Shakespeare's idea here as everywhere is the expression of a mood of the vital mind, it is not a reasoned philosophical conclusion. However if you like to argue that, logically, this or that is the true philosophical consequence of what Shakespeare says and that therefore the Daemon who inspired him must have meant that, I have no objection. I was simply interpreting the passage as Shakespeare's transcribing mind has put it.

9 March 1934

*

Just a word more about that passage. If it is taken *in vacuo*, there is no internal justification for my idea which turns on the survival of the spirits after the pageant has faded. But almost immediately after the stage indication: ". . . to a strange, hollow and confused noise, they heavily vanish", occurs this aside on the part of Prospero: "(To the Spirits) Well done; avoid; no more." The quoted passage follows a little later. Then again Prospero says after Ferdinand and Miranda are gone: "Come with a thought:— I thank you:— Ariel, come." Thereupon Ariel enters:

ARIEL: Thy thoughts I cleave to. What's thy pleasure? PROSPERO:	Spirit, We must prepare to meet with Caliban.
--	--

What do you make of all this? And when Ariel reports how he has lured Prospero's enemies into a "foul lake", Prospero commands him:

This was well done, my bird.

Thy shape invisible retain thou still.

Still later, comes another stage-direction: “*A noise of hunters heard. Enter divers Spirits, in shape of dogs and hounds . . . ; Prospero and Ariel setting them on.*” Even if this is taken to refer to Spirits other than those who produce that masque, the previous quotations are sufficient to prove that only the visible shapes and formations vanished—the entities themselves remained behind all the time.

I don’t see what all that has to do with the meaning of the passage in question which plainly insists that nothing endures. Obviously Ariel had an invisible shape— invisible to human eyes, but the point of the passage is that all shapes and substances and beings disappear into nothingness. We are concerned with Prospero’s meaning, not with what actually happened to the spirits or for that matter to the pageant which we might conceive also of having an invisible source or material. He uses the total disappearance of the pageant and the spirits as a base for the idea that all existence is an illusion—it is the idea of the illusion that he enforces. If he had wanted to say, “we disappear, all disappears to view but the reality of us and of all things persists in a greater immaterial reality”, he would surely have said so or at least not left it to be inferred or reasoned out by you in the twentieth century. I repeat however that this is my view of Shakespeare’s meaning and does not affect any possibility of reading into it something that Shakespeare’s outer mind did not receive or else did not express.

10 March 1935

Milton

And they bowed down to the Gods of their wives . . . ¹

Burnt after them to the bottomless pit . . .

Certainly, Milton in the passages you quote had a rhythmical effect in mind; he was much too careful and conscientious a

¹ This is apparently a misquotation of Milton’s line: “And made him bow, to the gods of his wives”. —Ed.

metrist and much too consummate a master of rhythm to do anything carelessly or without good reason. If he found his inspiration stumbling or becoming slipshod in its rhythmical effects, he would have corrected it.

22 April 1947

Coleridge

May I say a word about the four lines of Coleridge which you bash in your essay? —

He prayeth best who loveth best,
All things both great and small:
For the dear God, who loveth us,
He made and loveth all.

The sentimentalism of the "dear God" is obviously extra childlike and sounds childish even. If it had been written by Coleridge as his own contribution to thought or his personal feeling described in its native language it would have ranked him very low. But Coleridge was a great metaphysician or at any rate an acute and wide-winged thinker, not a sentimental prattling poet of the third order. Mark that the idea in the lines is not essentially poor; otherwise expressed it could rank among great thoughts and stand as the basis of a philosophy and ethics founded on bhakti. There are one or two lines of the Gita which are based on a similar thought, though from the Vedantic, not the dualist point of view. But throughout the *Ancient Mariner* Coleridge is looking at things from the point of view and the state of mind of the most simple and childlike personality possible, the Ancient Mariner who feels and thinks only with the barest ideas and the most elementary and primitive emotions. The lines he writes here record the feeling which such a mind and heart would draw from what he had gone through. Are they not then perfectly in place and just in the right tone for such a purpose? You may say that it lowers the tone of the poem. I don't know — the tone of the poem is deliberately intended to be that of an unsophisticated ballad simplicity and ballad mentality — it is not the ideas but the extraordinary beauty of rhythm and vividness of vision and

fidelity to a certain mystic childlike key that makes it such a wonderful and perfect poem. This is of course only a point of view; but it came to me several times as an answer that could be made to your criticism, so I put it on paper. 4 February 1935

*

In Shelley's *Skylark* my heart does not easily melt towards one simile—

Like a high-born maiden
In a palace-tower,
Soothing her love-laden
Soul in secret hour
With music sweet as love, which overflows her bower.

Sometimes I am inclined even to feel this is an atrocity. Then I wonder whether the sentimental stuff shouldn't be cut out and replaced by something deeper although in Shelley's style as much as possible — something like:

Like a child who wanders
In an ancient wood
Where the strange glow squanders
All its secret mood
Upon her lilting soul lost in that solitude.

The attempt to rewrite Shelley better than Shelley himself is a rash and hopeless endeavour. Your proposed stanza is twentieth century mysticism quite out of place in the *Skylark* and has not the simple felicity and magic and music of Shelley's verse. I fail to see why the high-born maiden is an atrocity—it expresses the romantic attitude towards love which was sentimental and emotional, attempting to lift it out of the coarseness of life into a mental-vital idealism which was an attempt to resuscitate the attitude of chivalry and the troubadours. Romantic and unreal, if you like, but not atrocious. 8 November 1934

*

I objected to your criticisms and cutting up of the *Skylark*, because the whole of it seems to me to proceed from a wrong

starting point altogether. You seem to start with the assumption that the poem ought to be an intellectual whole with coherent parts, a logical structure. Your contention is that the main idea, consistent in other stanzas, is of a spiritual something, an incorporeal joy etc., and the stanzas you condemn as not consistent with the idea and tone of the rest come from an inferior less spiritual inspiration and lower the level of the poem. Accordingly you propose to cut out these excrescences and insert some manipulations which would make the amended whole the perfect poem the *Skylark* should be.

I do not deny that from that standpoint your deductions are logical. The poem arranged as you want it, without these too earthly verses, would be a single ethereal impalpable shining tissue. It would be more subtly ethereal (not more spiritual), far from the earth, winging between the rainbow and the lightnings and ignorant of anything less brilliant and unearthly. Only it would be Shelley with something of himself left out, the *Skylark* incomplete with part of its fullness of tone vanished and a big hole in the middle—a beautiful poem, but no longer so worthy of its place among the few supreme English lyrics. That at least is what I feel. One thing more—even if these stanzas are an imperfection, I do not think it wise to meddle with them either by elimination or re-doing. To interfere with the imperfections of the great poets of the past is a hazardous business—their imperfections as well as their perfections are part of themselves. Imagine a drama of Shakespeare with all the blots scratched out and all the scoriae done over and smoothed to a perfect polish! It would be Shakespeare no longer. And this is Shelley whose strange and sweet and luminous magic of lyrical rhythm and language, when he is at his best and here he is at his best, in the impugned stanzas as well as in the others, is his own secret and no other shall ever recover it. To meddle here is inevitably to mar. Things as great or greater in another kind may be done, but not with this unique and inimitable note. To omit, to change words or lines, to modify rhythms seems to me inadmissible.²

² The result is bound to be like Landor's rewriting of Milton—very good Landor but very bad Milton.

I do not altogether appreciate your references to Mrs. Shelley and the firefly and your cynical and sarcastic picture of the high-born maiden as she appears to you — all that has nothing to do with Shelley's poetic conception which is alone relevant to the matter. I could draw a realistic picture of the poet "singing hymns unbidden" and unwanted and asking occasionally as he wrote whether dinner was ready — with hopes, but also with fears that he might not get it, his butcher's bill being unpaid for a long time. Or I might cavil scientifically about the nature of sunsets and sunrise and rainbow drops and ask what was the use of all this romantic flummery when there are real things to write about. Or I might quote the critic — I don't remember who he was — who said that Shelley certainly did not believe that the skylark was a spirit and not a bird and so the whole conception of the poem is false, insincere, ethereal humbug and therefore not true poetry because poetry must be sincere. Such points of view are irrelevant. Shelley is not concerned with the real life of the high-born maiden or the poet any more than with the ornithology of the skylark or with other material things. His glow-worm is something more than a material glow-worm. He is concerned with the soul love-laden, with the dreams of the poet, with the soul of beauty behind the glow-worm's light and the colour and fragrance of the rose. It is that he is feeling and it is linked in his vision with the essential something he has felt behind the song of the skylark. And because he so felt it he was not only entitled but bound to make place for it in his inspired lyrical theme.

I may observe in passing that the ethereal and impalpable are not more spiritual than the tangible and the concrete — they may seem more easily subtle and ideal to the idealising and abstracting mind, but that is a different affair. One can feel the spiritual through the embodied and concrete as well as through its opposite. But Shelley was not a spiritual poet and the *Skylark* is not a spiritual lyric. Shelley looked, it is true, always towards a light, a beauty, a truth behind the appearance of things, but he never got through the idealising mind to the spiritual experience. What he did get was something of the purest emotional or aesthetic feeling or purest subtle mind-

touch of an essence behind the appearance, an essence of ideal light, truth or beauty. It is that he expresses with a strange aerial magic or a curious supersensuously sensuous intensity in his finest lyrics. It is that we must seek in the *Skylark* and, if we find it, we have no right to claim something else. It is there all through and in abundance — it is its perfection that creates the sustained perfection of the poem. There is not and there ought not to be an intellectual sequence, a linked argument, a logical structure. It is a sequence of feeling and of ideal perceptions with an occult logic of their own that sustains the lyric and makes it a faultless whole. In this sequence the verses you condemn have an indefeasible right of place. Shelley was not only a poet of other worlds, of *Epipsychedion* and of *The Witch of Atlas*; he was passionately interested in bringing the light, beauty and truth of the ideal super-world from which he came into the earth life — he tried to find it there wherever he could, he tried to infuse it wherever he missed it. The mental, the vital, the physical cannot be left out of the whole he saw in order to yield place only to the ethereal and impalpable. As he heard the skylark and felt the subtle essence of light and beauty in its song, he felt too the call of the same essence of light and beauty elsewhere and it is the things behind which he felt that he compares to the hymn of the skylark — the essence of ideal light and beauty behind things mental, the poet and his hymn, behind things vital, the soul of romantic love, behind things physical, the light of the glow-worm, the passionate intensity of the perfume of the rose. I cannot see an ordinary glow-worm in the lines of Shelley's stanza — it is a light from beyond finding expression in that glimmer and illuminating the dell of dew and the secrecy of flowers and grass, that is there. This illumination of the earthly mind, vital, physical with his super-world light is a main part of Shelley; excise that and the whole of Shelley is no longer there, there is only the ineffectual angel beating his wings in the void; excise it from the *Skylark* and the true whole of the *Skylark* is no longer there.

18 November 1934

Swinburne

I want to make a short series of notes according to some responses to great poetry — and what I am sending tonight is meant to be the opening section:

No better example, perhaps, of a certain style of great poetry can be produced than these lines from Swinburne:

Take thy limbs living, and new-mould with these
A lyre of many faultless agonies.

Considered thus separately, they have a suggestion richer than in their context, and convey on their passionate music a stimulus towards an idealistic discipline and high ascetic transport. . . .

Does it all sound a stale old story?

It is not new — but it is difficult to say anything new in these matters. It is well written. I don't know though that there is any "aching idealism" or "high ascetic transport" in these lines of Swinburne. An acceptance of suffering for oneself may have it — an infliction of suffering from one's own perversely passionate pleasure on another can hardly have it. 23 December 1934

*

I don't understand how it is possible to take objection to my reading, for the vision is certainly of the acceptance of the suffering inflicted.

I cannot accept this "certainly". I do not see that any acceptance of the suffering is implied, still less a rapturous acceptance. If I remember right, the supposed recipient of the pain is made to object that it is cruel — she is not supposed to reply "Oh how exquisite!" 24 December 1934

*

Don't you think the idea of the infliction of suffering must be kept apart from the point made by you in your first note that the infliction was for a perversely passionate pleasure — and also from the question whether in Swinburne's poetry it

is objected to by the recipient or not, since the lines are now
taken by themselves?

Why should the lines be taken by themselves as if they were not a part of Swinburne's poem? I cannot see any idealistic discipline or high ascetic transport in a sadistic desire however poetically expressed. An erotic perversity is neither ideal nor a discipline.

25 December 1934

*

If I took the lines *in vacuo* and stopped there, you might object, but I have not done that in my notes. What I have done, after saying that the lines are great poetry, is to catch their suggestion, first supposing one had come across them by themselves and did not know their original context, and, then, taking them in their proper context. If one saw them separately, would not one be inclined to read in them the suggestion I have submitted, owing to the image-word "lyre" and the adjective "faultless" applied to "agonies"? What harm can there be in using such an illustrative device?

I am unable to see what there is in the lines, whether taken separately or in the context or both that is anything more than what Swinburne meant to put it, a rhapsodic glorification and *enthusiasmos* of sadistic passion — just as the other passage³ is a magnificent outburst of the magnified ego. But one is no more ascetic or ideal or a discipline than the other — unless you mean the ideal of sadistic passion or the ideal of the magnified ego. The poetry is superb, but I do not see what the passion in them transfigures or into what it is transfigured — it is sublimated into its own extreme expression or figure, if you like — but that is all. To make somebody else's body into a "lyre"

³ *Yea, thou shalt be forgotten like spilt wine,
 Except these kisses of my lips on thine
 Brand them with immortality; . . .
 But in the light and laughter, in the moan
 And music, and in grasp of lip and hand
 And shudder of water that makes felt on land
 The immeasurable tremour of all the sea,
 Memories shall mix and metaphor of me.*

of agonies does not transfigure the fact itself, the erotic side on which it expresses. Or if it does, what is this something high of which it is a glimmer? When one meets one's own suffering with fortitude, there is an ascetic discipline, an ideal of self-mastery — but to meet somebody else's pain caused by oneself with an ecstasy of pleasure in it is not quite the same thing. Or if one can turn one's own pain into a sort of ecstasy of Ananda, not of perverse masochistic pleasure, so that pain disappears from one's existence, then that is some kind of transfiguration — but can the same be said of turning somebody else's agony into a subject for one's own rapture? It may be a transfiguration, but a very Asuric transfiguration.

26 December 1934

*

Your explanation has convinced me that the lines in their context had better be considered without any idealising ingenuity; so I shall recast that portion and send it to you.

It does not seem to me legitimate to turn the meaning of lines in a poem upside down like that by lopping the syntax and giving it a twist which turns into something else — *une autre histoire*. But even so, it only turns an acme of perverse sadism into an acme of perverse masochism. To make one's body a lyre of agonies, faultless (?) or not — I don't know quite what is meant by a faultless agony — is not an ascetic discipline or a spiritual sacrifice. One has to bear pain with fortitude when it comes, but to inflict it wantonly on oneself is not spiritual. I am aware of the austeries of the Tapaswis of old, but these, condemned by the Gita as Asuric tapasya, had at least for their motive a mastery over the physical consciousness and might therefore be called a discipline, but to torture oneself or allow oneself to be tortured either for the joy of it or the beauty of it was not their idea — be it either the victim's joy or the torturer's; for I don't quite know to whom is the fierce sacrifice here supposed to be dedicated. An extremity of pain has nothing in it that is ideal or spiritual.

27 December 1934

Mallarmé

Le vierge, le vivace et le bel aujourd’hui
 Va-t-il nous déchirer avec un coup d’aile ivre
 Ce lac dur oublié que hante sous le givre
 Le transparent glacier des vols qui n’ont pas fui!

Un cygne d’autrefois se souvient que c’est lui
 Magnifique mais qui sans espoir se délivre
 Pour n’avoir pas chanté la région où vivre
 Quand du stérile hiver a resplendi l’ennui.

Tout son col secouera cette blanche agonie
 Par l’espace infligé à l’oiseau qui le nie,
 Mais non l’horreur du sol où le plumage est pris.

Fantôme qu’à ce lieu son pur éclat assigne,
 Il s’immobilise au songe froid de mépris
 Que vêt parmi l’exil inutile le Cygne.

I tried to break this nut of Mallarmé’s . . . but, *pardi*, it was a hard nut. Really what a tortuous trend and how he has turned the images! “The transparent glacier of flights haunting the hard lake under the frost”! The frost or snow has become the glacier (icefield) and the icefield composes the lake — that’s what I imaged.

How does hoar-frost or rime become the glacier? “Givre” is not the same as “glace”—it is not ice, but a covering of hoar-frost such as you see on the trees etc., the congealed moisture of the air—that is the “blanche agonie” which has come down from the insulted Space on the swan and on the lake. He can shake off that but the glacier holds him; he can no more rise into the skies, caught in the frozen cold mass of the failures of the soul that refused to fly upward and escape.

What do you think of the sonnet?

One of the finest sonnets I have ever read.

Magnificent line, by the way, “*Le transparent glacier des vols qui n’ont pas fui!*” This idea of the denied flights (impris-

oned powers) of the soul that have frozen into a glacier seems to me as powerful as it is violent. Of course in French such expressions were quite new—in some other languages they were already possible. You will find lots of kindred things in the most modern poetry which specialises in violent revelatory (or at least would-be revelatory) images. You disapprove? Well, one may do so,—classical taste does; but I find myself obliged here to admire.

16 December 1936

Heredia

Comme un vol de gerfauts hors du charnier natal,
Fatigués de porter leurs misères hautaines,
De Palos de Moguer, routiers et capitaines
Partaient, ivres d'un rêve héroïque et brutal.

Ils allaient conquérir le fabuleux métal
Que Cipango mûrit dans ses mines lointaines,
Et les vents alizés inclinaient leurs antennes
Aux bords mystérieux du monde Occidental.

Chaque soir, espérant des lendemains épiques,
L'azur phosphorescent de la mer des Tropiques
Enchantait leur sommeil d'un mirage doré;

Ou penchés à l'avant des blanches caravelles,
Ils regardaient monter en un ciel ignoré
Du fond de l'Océan des étoiles nouvelles.

Many Frenchmen regard Heredia's "Les Conquérants" as the eighth wonder of the world. Flecker says of Heredia that he was "the most perfect poet that ever lived (Horace not in it)".

I cannot say that I find Heredia's sonnet to be either an eighth wonder or any wonder. Heredia was a careful workman in word and rhythm and from that point of view the sonnet is faultless. If that is all that is needed for perfection, it is perfect. But otherwise, except for the image in the first two lines and the vigour of the fourth, I find it empty: Horace, at least, was seldom that. These extravagant estimates of minor poets are only the self-

assertive challenge put forth by a personal preference they have.

24 June 1932

Samain and Flecker

I am sending you two poems — one is Albert Samain's famous *Pannyre aux talons d'or* and the other is Flecker's much-praised translation of it. I shall be very much interested in your comparison of the two. Here is Samain:

Dans la salle en rumeur un silence a passé...
 Pannyre aux talons d'or s'avance pour danser.
 Un voile aux mille plis la cache tout entière.
 D'un long trille d'argent la flûte la première,
 L'invite; elle s'élance, entre-croise ses pas,
 Et, du lent mouvement imprimé par ses bras,
 Donne un rythme bizarre à l'étoffe nombreuse,
 Qui s'élargit, ondule, et se gonfle et se creuse,
 Et se déploie enfin en large tourbillon...
 Et Pannyre devient fleur, flamme, papillon!
 Tous se taisent; les yeux la suivent en extase.
 Peu à peu la fureur de la danse l'embrace.
 Elle tourne toujours; vite! plus vite encor!
 La flamme éperdument vacille aux flambeaux d'or!...
 Puis, brusque, elle s'arrête au milieu de la salle;
 Et le voile qui tourne autour d'elle en spirale,
 Suspendu dans sa course, apaise ses longs plis,
 Et, se collant aux seins aigus, aux flancs polis,
 Comme au travers d'une eau soyeuse et continue,
 Dans un divin éclair, montre Pannyre nue.

Here is Flecker:

The revel pauses and the room is still:
 The silver flute invites her with a trill,
 And, buried in her great veils fold on fold,
 Rises to dance Pannyra, Heel of Gold.
 Her light steps cross; her subtle arm impels
 The clinging drapery; it shrinks and swells,
 Hollows and floats, and bursts into a whirl:

She is a flower, a moth, a flaming girl.
All lips are silent; eyes are all in trance:
She slowly wakes the madness of the dance,
Windy and wild the golden torches burn;
She turns, and swifter yet she tries to turn,
Then stops: a sudden marble stiff she stands.
The veil that round her coiled its spiral bands,
Checked in its course, brings all its folds to rest,
And clinging to bright limb and pointed breast
Shows, as beneath silk waters woven fine,
Pannyra naked in a flash divine!

"All here," says a critic, "is bright and sparkling as the jewels on the dancer's breast, but there is one ill-adjusted word—*pointed* breast—which is perhaps more physiological than poetic." Personally I don't somehow react very happily to the word "girl" in line 8.

Samain's poem is a fine piece of work, inspired and perfect; Flecker's is good only in substance, an adequate picture, one may say, but the expression and verse are admirable within their limits. The difference is that the French has vision and the inspired movement that comes with vision—all on the vital plane, of course,—but the English version has only physical sight, sometimes with a little glow in it, and the precision that comes with that sight. I do not know why your critical sense objects to "girl". This line ["*She is a flower, a moth, a flaming girl*"] and one other, "Windy and wild the golden torches burn" are the only two that rise above the plane of physical sight.

But both these poems have the distinction of being perfectly satisfying in their own kind. . . .

P.S. "Flaming girl" and "pointed breast" might be wrong in spirit as a translation of the French—but that is just what Flecker's poem is not, in spite of its apparent or outward fidelity, it is in spirit quite a different poem.

23 June 1932

Hopkins and Kipling

I should like to have a few words from you on the poetic style and technique of these two quotations. The first is an instance of Gerard Manley Hopkins' polyphony "at its most magnificent and intricate":

Earnest, earthless, equal, attuneable,¹ vaulty, voluminous,
 . . . stupendous
 Evening strains to be tíme's vást,¹ womb-of-all, home-of-all,
 hearse-of-all night.
 Her fond yellow hornlight wound to the west,¹ her wild
 hollow hoarlight hung to the height
 Waste; her earliest stars, earlstars,¹ stárs principal, overbend
 us,
 Fíre-féaturing heaven. For earth¹ her being has unbound;
 her dapple is at an end, as-
 tray or aswarm, all throughther, in throngs;¹ self ín self
 steepèd and páshed — quíte
 Disremembering, dísmémbering¹ áll now. Heart, you round
 me right
 With: Óur évening is over us; óur night¹ whélms, whélms,
 ánd will end us . . .

The next quotation illustrates Kipling's Tommy-Atkins-music at its most vivid and onomatopoeic — lines considered by Lascelles Abercrombie to be a masterly fusion of all the elements necessary in poetic technique:

'Less you want your toes trod off you'd better get back at
 once,
 For the bullocks are walking two by two,

My verdict on Kipling's lines would be that they are fit for the columns of *The Illustrated Weekly of India* and nowhere else. I refuse to accept this journalistic jingle as poetry. As for Abercrombie's comment,—unspeakable rubbish, unhappily spoken!

Hopkins is a different proposition; he is a poet, which Kipling never was nor could be. He has vision, power, originality; but his technique errs by excess; he piles on you his effects, repeats, exaggerates and in the end it is perhaps great in effort, but not great in success. Much material is there, many new suggestions, but not a work realised, not a harmoniously perfect whole.

30 December 1932

George Santayana

There we live o'er, amid angelic powers,
Our lives without remorse, as if not ours,
And others' lives with love, as if our own;
For we behold, from those eternal towers,
The deathless beauty of all wingèd hours,
And have our being in their truth alone.

. . . and I knew

The wings of sacred Eros as he flew
And left me to the love of things not seen.
'T is a sad love, like an eternal prayer,
And knows no keen delight, no faint surcease.
Yet from the seasons hath the earth increase,
And heaven shines as if the gods were there.

Had Dian passed there could no deeper peace
Embalm the purple stretches of the air.

George Santayana, the writer of these, is a Spaniard who has a post at Harvard—English is not his mother tongue. In spite of traditionalism and lack of any very individual or developed technique, is there not some arresting quality in the above extracts?

It [*the two extracts considered as a unit*] has a considerable beauty of thought and language in it. It is a great pity that it is so derivative in form as to sound like an echo. With so much mastery of language and ease of rhythm it should have been possible to find a form of his own and an original style. The poetic power and vision are there and he has done as much with it as could be done with a borrowed technique. If he had found his own, he might have ranked high as a poet.

Fiona Macleod

Would you please comment on the passages from Fiona Macleod?

- 1) There is a very distinct charm about it. I am not sure of the entire success.
- 2) I could not pronounce on this without seeing the poem as a whole or at least more of it. It depends on how it comes into the general scheme of the rhythm.
- 3) Very fine and original and authentic in rhythm, it is absolutely the native rhythm of what she expresses.
- 4) This I think magnificent.

Twentieth-Century Poetry

Georgian Poetry

The stanzas are not quite successful. [*Certain lines*] have too much a stamp of what I think was called Georgian poetry — though I suppose it would more properly be called late-Victorian-Edwardian-early-Georgian. The defect of that poetry is that it has a fullness of language which fails to go home — things that ought to be very fine, but miss being so; so much of the poetry of Rupert Brooke as I have seen, for instance, always gives me that impression. In our own language I might say that it is an inspiration which tries to come from the higher mind but only succeeds in inflating the voice of the poetic intelligence.

1 November 1936

Early Twentieth-Century English Poetry

About modern English poetry of the early part of this century Livingston Lowes, writing in 1918, remarks in his *Convention and Revolt in Poetry*: “That which does allure it in the East is an amazing tininess and finesse — the delicacy, that is to say, and the deftness, and the crystalline quality of the verse of China and Japan. . . .

The strange, the remote, in its larger, more broadly human aspects . . . — all this has been gradually losing its hold upon poetry. Instead, when we fly from the obsession of the familiar, it is growingly apt to be to the more recondite, or precious, or quintessential, or even perverse embodiments of the strange or far — to ‘the special, exquisite perfume’ of Oriental art, . . . to the exceptional and the esoteric, in a word, rather than to the perennial and universal.”

The remark of Livingston Lowes is no doubt correct. Even now and even where it is the external, everyday, obvious that is being

taken as theme, we see often enough that what the mind is trying to find is some recondite, precious or quintessential aspect of the everyday and obvious — something in it exceptional or esoteric. But while in the East, the way to do it is known, the West does not seem yet to have found it. Instead of going inside, getting intimate with what is behind, and writing of the outside also from that inside experience, they are still trying to stare through the surface into the inner depths with some X-ray of mental imagination or “intuition” and the result is not the quintessence itself, but a shadow-picture of the quintessence. That is perhaps why there is so much feeling of effort, artifice, “even perverse embodiment” in much of this poetry—and no very definitive success as yet. But, I suppose, the way itself, the endeavour to leave the obvious surfaces and get deeper is the only road left for poetry, otherwise it can but repeat itself in the old modes with slight alterations till exhaustion brings decadence. On the road that is being now followed there is also evident danger of decadence, through an excess of mere technique and artifice or through a straining towards the merely out-of-the-way or the perverse. But there seems to be no other door of progress than to make the endeavour.

10 October 1932

Housman, Watson, Hardy, Bridges

I hear from Nolini that you want two books (reviewed in the *New Statesman*) representing the achievement of the seventeenth-century “Metaphysicals”, in order to add something about them to your *Future Poetry*. . . . There is another gap also, perhaps as serious: there is nothing about Coventry Patmore, Francis Thompson and Alice Meynell. And one other name—not belonging to either group but verging on the mystical domain—is worth inclusion: Christina Rossetti. Perhaps something on Gerard Manly Hopkins wouldn’t be uninteresting, too. Among non-mystical poets there are some omissions also: Chapman, for instance—and in the recent group, William Watson, Thomas Hardy, A.E. Housman and Robert Bridges.

I did not deal with all these poets because it was not in the scope of my idea to review the whole literature, but to follow only the main lines. But the main difficulty was that at the time I had no books and could only write from memory. I have read nothing of Housman — what I had read of Watson or Hardy did not attract me and these are anyhow not central figures nor near the centre. Bridges was also a side figure at the time I wrote, it is only after his Laureateship that he came much forward. I had read only his *Eros and Psyche* and a few other things, and he did not give me the impression of being on one of the main lines. But I feel now that before the book can be published it has to be brought more up to date and the place of the poets who attempted spiritual poetry more fully indicated.

23 January 1934

Chesterton

I have not read Chesterton's poetry as a whole, but what I have seen of it does not attract me. Scott no longer ranks as a poet; Chesterton's verse struck me as a modernisation of Scott. I have told you I do not share contemporary enthusiasms. As for the "best war-scenes since Homer", that is exactly the phrase that was used for a long time about Scott.

1932

*

I am sending you the first pages of an essay on Chesterton.
I hope you will wait till you have finished the whole before
declaring that the case is not proven.

You have made good to a certain extent — but are these strikingnesses all that there is in Chesterton? Something more is needed to make a poet of rank.

I do not think the comparison with Coleridge can hold if it is intended to indicate anything like equality. Coleridge's poetry tells by its union of delicate and magical beauty with exquisite simplicity and直率. Chesterton never loses the rhetorician. Even in these passages there is something of the rhetorician's brazen clang, an excited violence, a forced note however striking. It rises into sheer poetry, so far as I can see,

only in three of the passages quoted, the Wessex dog simile,¹ that of the illumined manuscripts² and finally the description of the Dark Ages and the fall of Rome.³ The last in spite of haunting ghosts of Kipling and Macaulay pursuing it is fine in vision and expression and substance. Chesterton however exceeds his ghosts—he has something of the racer in him and not merely of the prancing cart-horses they were.

*

If Chesterton is noble, grand style, epic (Chapman also)—it becomes difficult to deny these epithets to many others also. Even Kipling and Macaulay can put in a claim. What then is the difference between them and Homer, Milton etc.? Only that Homer is polysyllabic (he is not really) and Chesterton monosyllabic?

31 January 1935

Yeats and the Occult

The perfection here of Yeats' poetic expression of things occult is due to this that at no point has the mere intellectual or thinking mind interfered—it is a piece of pure vision, a direct sense, almost sensation of the occult, a light not of earth flowing through without anything to stop it or to change it into a product of the terrestrial mind. When one writes from pure occult vision there is this perfection and direct sense though it may be of different kinds, for the occult world of one is not that of another. But when there is the intervention of the intellectual mind in a poem this intervention may produce good lines of another power, but

¹ *And Wessex lay in a patch of peace,
Like a dog in a patch of sun—*

² *It was wrought in the monk's slow manner,
From silver and sanguine shell,
Where the scenes are little and terrible
Keyholes of heaven and hell.*

³ *When Caesar's sun fell out of the sky
And whoso hearkened right
Could only hear the plunging
Of the nations in the night.*

they will not coincide in tone with what is before them or after — there is an alternation of the subtler occult and the heavier intellectual notes and the purity of vision becomes blurred by the intrusion of the earth-mind into a seeing which is beyond our earth-nature.

But these observations are valid only if the object is as in Yeats' lines to bring out a veridical and flawless transcript of the vision and atmosphere of faeryland. If the object is rather to create symbol-links between the seen and the unseen and convey the significance of the mediating figures, there is no obligation to avoid the aid of the intellectualising note. Only, a harmony and fusion has to be effected between the two elements, the light and beauty of the beyond and the less remote power and interpretative force of the intellectual thought-links. Yeats does that, too, very often, but he does it by bathing his thought also in the faery light; in the lines quoted [*from The Stolen Child and The Man Who Dreamed of Faeryland*], however, he does not do that, but leaves the images of the other world shimmering in their own native hue of mystery. There is not the same beauty and intense atmosphere when a poem is made up of alternating notes. The finest lines [*of these poems*] are those in which the other-light breaks out most fully — but there are others also which are very fine too in their quality and execution.

November 1934

Yeats and A. E.

I do not think I have been unduly enthusiastic over Yeats, but one must recognise his great artistry in language and verse in which he is far superior to A. E. — just as A. E. as a man and a seer was far superior to Yeats. Yeats never got beyond a beautiful mid-world of the vital *antarikṣa*, he has not penetrated beyond to spiritual-mental heights as A. E. did. But all the same, when one speaks of poetry, it is the poetical element to which one must give the most importance. What Yeats expressed, he expressed with great poetical beauty, perfection and power and he has, besides, a creative imagination. A. E. had an unequalled profundity of

vision and power and range in the spiritual and psychic field. A. E.'s thought and way of seeing and saying things is much more sympathetic to me than Yeats' who only touches a brilliant floating skirt-edge of the truth of things—but I cannot allow that to influence me when I have to judge of the poetic side of their respective achievements.

*

The depths of A. E. are greater than those of Yeats, assuredly. His suggestiveness must therefore be profounder. In this poem [*Sibyl*] which you have translated very beautifully, his power of expression, always penetrating, simple and direct, is at its best and his best can be miraculously perfect.

A. E.

The substance of A. E.'s poetry is always very good—he is one of the two or three whose poetry comes nearest to spiritual knowledge and experience. He has too a very fine and subtle perception of things—a little more vital élan (of which he seems to have had abundance in his *life* but not so much in his poetry) and he would have been not only a fine but a very great poet.

11 February 1932

Abercrombie

I have the Abercrombie extracts. I am sorry that I cannot participate in the general admiration for these great poets; I suppose it must be my fault, though at the request of an earlier [*disciple named*] Chandrasekhar I read some of Abercrombie's dramas and tried to give him the benefit of the doubt. I have had no time as yet to write anything about his blank verse. I shall make a last attempt at admiration when I am free.

Lawrence

To continue about Lawrence's poetry from where I stopped.⁴

The idea is to get rid of all over-expression, of language for the sake of language, of form for the sake of form, even of indulgence of poetic emotion for the sake of the emotion, because all that veils the thing in itself, dresses it up, prevents it from coming out in the seizing nudity of its truth, the power of its intrinsic appeal. There is a sort of mysticism here that wants to express the inexpressible, the concealed, the invisible — reduce expression to its barest barenness and you get nearer the inexpressible, suppress as much of the form as may be and you get nearer that behind which is invisible. It is the same impulse that pervaded recent endeavours in Art. Form hides, not expresses the reality; let us suppress the concealing form and express the reality by its appropriate geometrical figures — and you have cubism. Or since that is too much, suppress exactitude of form and replace it by more significant forms that indicate rather than conceal the truth — so you have "abstract" paintings. Or, what is within reveals itself in dreams, not in waking phenomena, let us have in poetry or painting the figures, visions, sequences, designs of dreams — and you have surrealist art and poetry. The idea of Lawrence is akin; let us get rid of rhyme, metre, artifices which please us for their own sake and draw us away from the thing in itself, the real behind the form. So suppressing these things let us have something bare, rocky, primally expressive. There is nothing to find fault with in the theory provided it does lead to a new creation which expresses the inner truth in things better and more vividly and directly than with rhyme and metre the old poetry, now condemned as artificial and rhetorical, succeeded in expressing it. But the results do not come up to expectation. Take the four lines of Lawrence⁵ — in what do they differ from the

⁴ Sri Aurobindo wrote this letter a day after one published on pages 561 under the heading "Lawrence's Letters" — Ed.

⁵ Just a few of the roses gathered by the Isar
Are fallen, and their bloodred petals on the cloth
Float like boats on a river, waiting
For a fairy wind to wake them from their sloth.

old poetry except in having a less sure rhythmical movement, a less seizing perfection of language? It is a fine image and Keats or Thompson would have made out of it something unforgettable. But after reading these lines one has a difficulty in recalling any clear outline of image, any seizing expression, any rhythmic cadence that goes on reverberating within and preserves the vision forever. What the modernist metreless verse does is to catch up the movements of prose and try to fit them into varying lengths and variously arranged lengths of verse. Sometimes something which has its own beauty or power is done — though nothing better or even equal to the best that was done before, but for the most there is either an easy or a strained ineffectiveness. No footsteps hitting the earth? Footsteps on earth can be a walk, can be prose; the beats of poetry can on the contrary be a beat of wings. As for the bird image, well, there is more lapsing than flying in this movement. But where is the bareness, the rocky directness — where is the something more real than any play of outer form can give? The attempt at colour, image, expression is just the same as in the old poetry — whatever is new and deep comes from Lawrence's peculiar vision, but could have been more powerfully expressed in a closer-knit language and metre.

Of course, it does not follow that new and freer forms are not to be attempted or that they cannot succeed at all. But if they succeed it will be by bringing the fundamental quality, power, movement of the old poetry — which is the eternal quality of all poetry — into new metrical or rhythmic discoveries and new secrets of poetic expression. It can't be done by reducing these to skeletal bareness or suppressing them by subdual and dilution in a vain attempt to unite the free looseness of prose with the gathered and intent paces of poetry.

29 June 1936

*

I have been glancing at odd times at *Pansies*. Flashes of genius, much defiant triviality of revolt-stuff, queer strainings after things not grasped, a gospel of "conscientious sensuality" rushing in at favourable opportunities — all in a formless deliberate disorder, that is the impression up till now — I shall wait to see

if there is something else.

9 February 1933

*

I am sending you *Pansies*. Before sending I opened it at random and found this —

I can't stand Willy Wet-leg,
can't stand him at any price.
He's resigned, and when you hit him
he lets you hit him twice.

Well, well, this the bare, rockily, direct poetry? God help us!

P.S. I think Dara could do the companion of that in his lighter moments! This is the sort of things to which theories lead even a man of genius.

2 July 1936

*

What I have written [*about modern poetry*] is too slight and passing and general a comment, such as one can hazard in a private letter; but for a criticism that has to see the light of day something more ample and sufficient would be necessary. Lawrence's poetry, whatever one may think of his theory or technique, has too much importance and significance to be lightly handled and the "modernism" of contemporary poetry is a *fait accompli*. One can refuse to recognise as legitimate the *fait accompli*, whether in Abyssinia or in the realms of literature, but it is too solid to be met with a mere condemnation in principle.

*

Please take a look at this — form *perfect* as against its *imperfect* model. The formal perfection justifies my faith in rhyme, rhythm, etc. as against Lawrence's free verse.

There can be no doubt of that. Lawrencists however would say that the question is not between imperfect and perfect metrical work, but between metrical rhythm in poetry and poetry stripped bare of metre and presented with a bare elemental energy of language, vision and movement. Theory for theory

it can stand, but in the practice and result the effects seem to me
to be against Lawrence's theory.

1936

*

What a pity that Lawrence did not give his poetry a rhythmic
form, that would have given it its full sound and sense-value and
made it sure of immortality.

The Poetry of the 1930s and 1940s

I admit I have not read as much of "modern" (contemporary)
poetry as I should have—but the little I have is mostly of the
same fundamental quality. It is very carefully written and versified,
often *recherché* in thought and expression; it lacks only two
things, the inspired phrase and inevitable word and the rhythm
that keeps a poem for ever alive. . . . Speech carefully studied
and made as perfect as it can be without reaching to inspiration,
verse as good as verse can be without rising to inspired rhythm
—there seem to be an extraordinary number of poets writing
like that in England just now. . . . It is not the irregular verses and
rhymes that matter, one can make perfection out of irregularity
—it is that they write their poetry from the cultured striving
mind, not from the elemental soul-power within. Not a principle
to accept or a method to imitate!

June 1931

*

The things you will see him [*a critic in the New Statesman*
and Nation] assuming . . . may be more widely prevalent, to
the exclusion of more catholic tastes and liberal views, than I
have hitherto believed. In which case there perhaps could be
no sort of public in England for poetry which is mystical or
spiritual.

I imagine it is only one dominant tendency of the day that is
represented by these autocrats; the other is precisely the "mystic"
tendency—and I don't think it will be so easily snuffed out as
that.

23 June 1932

*

It is probably modern (contemporary) English poetry of which your friend is thinking. Here I am no expert; but I understand that the turn there is to suppress emotion, rhetoric, colouring, sentiment and arrive at something very direct, vivid, expressive, recording either the thing exactly as it is or some intimate essential truth of the thing without wrapping it up in ideas and sentiments, superfluous images and epithets. It does not look as if all contemporary English poetry were like that, it is only one strong trend; but such as it is, it has not as yet produced anything very decisive, great or successful. Much of it seems to be mere flat objectivity or, what is worse, an exaggerated emphatic objectivity; emotion seems often to be replaced by an intensified vital-physical sensation of the object. You will perhaps understand what I mean if you read the poem quoted on pages 316–17 of the *Parichay* (also made much of in a book on English modernistic poetry sent to me by Arjava)—“red pieces of day—hills made of blue and green paper—Satanic and blasé—black goat lookingly wanders”, images expressing vividly an impression made on the nerves through the sight by the described objects. Admittedly it is—at least when pushed to such a degree,—a new way of looking at things in poetry, but not essentially superior to the impressions created on the heart or the mental imagination by the object. All the same there is behind, but still not successfully achieved, something real, an attempt to get away from ornate mental constructions about things to the expression of the intimate truth of the things themselves as directly seen by a deeper sight within us. Only it seems to me a mistake to theorise that only by this kind of technique and in this particular way the thing can be done. I have to form my idea more fully when I have finished Arjava's book, but this is what impresses me at present.

1 October 1932

*

The latest craze in England is either for intellectual quintessence or sensations (not emotions) of life, while any emotional and ideal element in poetry is considered as a deadly sin. But beautiful poetry remains beautiful poetry even if it is not in the current

style. And after all Yeats and A.E. are still there in spite of this new fashion of the last one or two decades. 8 October 1934

*

Please give me a few names of poets—especially modern poets, whom I should study.

I have very little familiarity with the names of modern poets subsequent to A.E. and Yeats and De la Mare, all of whom you know. There are about a hundred of them moderns, Spender + x + y + z + p² etc. Before that there were Hopkins and Flecker and others and before that Meredith and Hardy and Francis Thompson. You can tackle any of them you can lay your hands on in the library. Watson and Brooke and other Edwardians and Georgians would not be good for you. 16 October 1938

*

Originality is all right, but if you become so original that nobody can follow you and all fall behind gasping for breath, that is an excess of virtue. The modernist poets do that with the result that nobody has the least idea what they mean, not even themselves, and the farther result that, as it has been said “there are more people now who write poetry than read it”. 8 June 1938

*

Somebody once said of modernist poetry that it could be understood only by the writer himself and appreciated by a few friends who pretended to understand it. That is because the ideas, images, symbols do not follow the line of the intellect, its logic or its intuitive connections, but are pushed out on the mind from some obscure subliminal depth or mist-hung shallow; they have connections of their own which are not those of the surface intelligence. One has to read them not with the intellect but with the solar plexus, try not to understand but feel the meaning. The surrealist poetry is the extreme in this kind—you remember our surrealist Baron's question: “Why do you want poetry to have a meaning?” Of course, you can put an intellectual explanation on the thing, but then you destroy its poetical appeal. Very great

poetry can be written in that way from the subliminal depths, e.g. Mallarmé, but it needs a supreme power of expression, like Blake's or Mallarmé's, to make it truly powerful, convincing, and there must be sincerity of experience and significant rhythm.

2 August 1943

Surrealism

What the deuce is this Surrealism? I gather Baudelaire was its father, and Mallarmé his son.

Surrealism is a new phrase invented only the other day and I am not really sure what it conveys. According to some it is a dream poetry making a deeper truth, a deeper reality than the surface reality. I don't know if this is the whole theory or only one side or phase of the practice. Baudelaire as a surrealist is a novel idea, nobody ever called him that before. Mallarmé, Verlaine and others used to be classed as impressionist poets: sometimes as symbolists. But now the surrealists seem to claim descent from these poets.

12 February 1937

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I really can't tell you what surrealism is, because it is something — at least the word is — quite new and I have not read either the reliable theorists of the school nor much of their poetry. What I picked up on the way was through reviews and quotations, the upshot being that it is a poetry based on the dream consciousness, but I don't know if this is correct or merely an English critic's idea of it. The inclusion of Baudelaire and Valéry seems to indicate something wider than that. But the word is of quite recent origin and nobody spoke formerly of Baudelaire as a surrealist or even of Mallarmé. Mallarmé was supposed to be the founder of a new trend of poetry — impressionist and symbolist, followed in varying degrees and not by any means in the same way by Verlaine, Rimbaud, — both of them poets of great fame. Verlaine is certainly a great poet and people now say Rimbaud also, but I have never come across his poetry except in extracts — and developing in Valéry and other noted writers

of today. It seems that all these are now claimed as part of or the origin of the surrealist movement. But I cannot say what are the exact boundaries or who comes in where. I suppose if Baron communicates to you books on the subject or more precise information, we shall know more clearly now. In any case surrealism is part of an increasing attempt of the European mind to escape from the surface consciousness (in poetry as well as in painting and in thought) and grope after a deeper truth of things which is not on the surface. The Dream Consciousness as it is called — meaning not merely what we see in dreams, but the inner consciousness in which we get into contact with deeper worlds which underlie, influence and to some extent explain much in our lives, what the psychologists call the subliminal or the subconscious (the latter a very ambiguous phrase) offers the first road of escape and the surrealists seem to be trying to force it. My impression is that there is much fumbling and that more often it is certain obscure and not always very safe layers that are tapped. That accounts for the note of diabolism that comes in in Baudelaire, in Rimbaud also, I believe, and in certain ugly elements in English surrealist poetry and painting. But this is only an impression.

Nirod's poetry (what he writes now) is from the Dream Consciousness, no doubt about that. It has suddenly opened in him and he finds now a great joy of creation and abundance of inspiration which were and are quite absent when he tries to write laboriously in the mental way. This seems to indicate either that the poet in him has his real power there or that he has opened to the same Force that worked in poets like Mallarmé. My labelling him as surrealist is partly — though not altogether — a joke. How far it applies depends on what the real aim and theory of the surrealist school may be. Obscurity and unintelligibility are not the essence of any poetry and — except for unconscious or semi-conscious humorists like the Dadaists — cannot be its aim or principle. True dream-poetry (let us call it so for the nonce) has and must always have a meaning and a coherence. But it may very well be obscure or seem meaningless to those who take their stand on the surface or "waking" mind

and accept only its links and its logic. Dream poetry is usually full of images, visions, symbols, phrases that seek to strike at things too deep for the ordinary means of expression. Nirod does not deliberately make his poems obscure, he writes what comes through from the source he has tapped and does not interfere with its flow by his own mental volition. In many modernist poets there may be labour and a deliberate posturing, but it is not so in his case. I interpret his poems because he wants me to do it, but I have always told him that an intellectual rendering narrows the meaning — it has to be seen and felt, not thought out. Thinking it out may give a satisfaction and an appearance of mental logicality, but the deeper sense and sequence can only be apprehended by an inner sense. I myself do not try to find out the meaning of his poems, I try to feel what they mean in vision and experience and then render into mental terms. This is a special kind of poetry and has to be dealt with according to its kind and nature. There is a sequence, a logic, a design in them, but not one that can satisfy the more rigid law of the logical intelligence.

About Housman's theory; it is not merely the appeal to emotion that he posits as the test of pure poetry — he deliberately says that pure poetry does not bother about intellectual meaning at all — it is to the intellect nonsense. He says that the interpretations of Blake's famous poem rather spoil them — they appeal better without being dissected in that way. His theory is questionable but that is what it comes to; he is wrong in using the word "nonsense" and perhaps in speaking of pure and impure poetry. All the same, to Blake and to writers of the Dream Consciousness, his rejection of the intellectual standard is quite applicable.

12 February 1937

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About your points:

(1) If the surrealist dream-experiences are flat, pointless or ugly, it must be because they penetrate only as far as the "subconscious" physical and "subconscious" vital dream layers which are the strata nearest to the surface. Dream-consciousness is a vast world in which there are a multitude of provinces

and kingdoms, but ordinary dreamers for the most part penetrate consciously only to these first layers which belong to what may properly be called the subconscious belt. When they pass into deeper sleep regions, their recording surface dream-mind becomes unconscious and no longer gives any transcript of what is seen and experienced there; or else in coming back these experiences of the deeper strata fade away and are quite forgotten before one reaches the waking state. But when there is a stronger dream-capacity, or the dream-state becomes more conscious, then one is aware of these deeper experiences and can bring back a transcript which is sometimes a clear record, sometimes a hieroglyph, but in either case possessed of a considerable interest and significance.

(2) It is only the subconscious belt that is chaotic in its dream-sequences—for its transcriptions are fantastic and often mixed, combining a jumble of different elements; some play with impressions from the past, some translate outward touches pressing on the sleep-mind; most are fragments from successive dream-experiences that are not really part of one connected experience—as if a gramophone record were to be made up of snatches of different songs all jumbled together. The vital dreams, even in the subconscious range, are often coherent in themselves and only seem incoherent to the waking intelligence because the logic and law of their sequences is different from the logic and law which the physical reason imposes on the incoherences of physical life. But if one gets the guiding clue and if one has some dream-experience and dream-insight, then it is possible to seize the links of the sequences and make out the significance, often very profound or very striking, both of the detail and of the whole. Deeper in, we come to perfectly coherent dreams recording the experience of the inner vital and inner mental planes; there are also true psychic dreams—the latter usually are of a great beauty. Some of these mental or vital plane dream-experiences, however, are symbolic, very many in fact, and can only be understood if one is familiar with or gets the clue to the symbols.

(3) It depends on the nature of the dreams. If they are of the

right kind, they need no aid of imagination to be converted into poetry. If they are significant, imagination in the sense of a free use of mental invention might injure their truth and meaning — unless of course the imagination is of the nature of an inspired vision coming from the same plane and filling out or reconstructing the recorded experience so as to bring out the Truth held in it more fully than the dream transcript could do, — for a dream record is usually compressed and often hastily selective.

(4) The word psyche is used by most people to mean anything belonging to the inner mind, vital or physical, — though the true psyche is different from these things. Poetry does come from these sources or even from the superconscious sometimes; but it does not come usually through the form of dreams — it comes either through word-vision or through conscious vision and imagery whether in a fully waking or an inward-drawn state: the latter may go so far as to be a state of *samādhi* — *svapna samādhi*. In all these cases it is vision rather than dream that is the imaging power. Dreams also can be made a material for poetry; but everyone who dreams or has visions or has a flow of images cannot by that fact be a poet. To say that a predisposition and discipline are needed to bring them to light in the form of written words is merely a way of saying that it is not enough to be a dreamer, one must have the poetic faculty and some training — unless the surrealists mean by this statement something else than what the words naturally signify. What is possible, however, is that by going into the inner (what is usually called the subliminal) consciousness — this is not really subconscious but a veiled or occult consciousness — or getting somehow into contact with it, one not originally a poet can awake to poetic inspiration and power. No poetry can be written without access to some source of Inspiration. Mere recording of dreams or images or even visions could never be sufficient, unless it is a poetic inspiration that records them with the right use of words and rhythm bringing out their poetic substance. On the other hand, I am bound to admit that among the records of dream-experiences even from people unpractised in writing I have met with a good many that read like a brilliant and colourful poetry

which does hit — satisfying Housman's test — the solar plexus. So much I can concede to the surrealist theory; but if they say on that basis that all can with a little training turn themselves into poets — well, one needs a little more proof before one can accept so wide a statement.

13 February 1937

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Now I find that in spite of your long letters, I haven't yet grasped what this blessed surrealism is.

I wrote very clearly in my letter to Dilip [*published on pages 424–26*] that I did not know myself what Surrealism is since I have not studied either surrealistic theory or surrealistic literature. I gathered from what I have read — reviews, citations — that it was dream-consciousness of a lower type (therefore incoherent and often ugly). I also explained at great length in another letter that there was a Dream Consciousness of a higher type. Are these distinctions really so difficult to understand?

19 February 1937

Comments on Examples of Twentieth-Century Poetry

W. B. Yeats

DECTORA:

No. Take this sword
And cut the rope, for I go on with Forgael. . . .
The sword is in the rope —
The rope's in two — it falls into the sea,
It whirls into the foam. O ancient worm,
Dragon that loved the world and held us to it,
You are broken, you are broken. The world drifts away,
And I am left alone with my beloved,
Who cannot put me from his sight for ever.
We are alone for ever, and I laugh,
Forgael, because you cannot put me from you.
The mist has covered the heavens, and you and I
Shall be alone for ever. We two — this crown —
I half remember. It has been in my dreams.
Bend lower, O king, that I may crown you with it.
O flower of the branch, O bird among the leaves,
O silver fish that my two hands have taken
Out of the running stream, O morning star,
Trembling in the blue heavens like a white fawn
Upon the misty border of the wood,
Bend lower, that I may cover you with my hair,
For we will gaze upon this world no longer.

FORGAEL [*gathering Dectora's hair about him*]:

Beloved, having dragged the net about us,
And knitted mesh to mesh, we grow immortal;

And that old harp awakens of itself
To cry aloud to the grey birds, and dreams,
That have had dreams for father, live in us.

Forgael might be the Yogen in the act of the irrevocable and immediately effectual renunciation of a life in the world and entering into his kingdom, having found and been accepted by the individual divine within him.

It is certainly a very beautiful passage and has obviously a mystic significance; but I don't know whether we can put into it such precise meaning as you suggest. Yeats' contact, unlike A.E.'s, is not so much with the sheer spiritual Truth as with the hidden intermediate regions, from the faery worlds to certain worlds of larger mind and life. What he has seen there, he is able to clothe rather than embody in strangely beautiful and suggestive forms, dreams and symbols. I have read some of his poems which touch these behind-worlds with as much actuality as an ordinary poet would achieve in dealing with physical life — this is not surprising in a Celtic poet, for the race has the key to the occult worlds or some of them at least — but this strange force of suggestive mystic life is not accompanied by a mental precision which would enable us to say, it is this or that his figures symbolise. If we could say it, it might take away something of that glowing air in which his symbols stand out with such a strange unphysical reality. The perception, feeling, sight of Yeats in this kind of poetry are remarkable, but his mental conception often veils itself in a shimmering light — it has then shining vistas but no strong contours.

1 September 1932

Edward Shanks

I am sending you a sonnet by Edward Shanks, considered to be "one of our best younger poets":

O dearest, if the touch of common things
Can taint our love or wither, let it die.
The freest-hearted lark that soars and sings
Soon after dawn amid a dew-brushed sky

Takes song from love and knows well where love lies,
 Hid in the grass, the dear domestic nest,
 The secret, splendid, common paradise.
 The strangest joys are not the loveliest;

 Passion far-sought is dead when it is found,
 But love that's born of intimate common things
 Cries with a voice of splendour, with a sound
 That over stranger feeling shakes and rings.

 The best of love, the highest ecstasy
 Lies in the intimate touch of you and me.

I do not know whether you intended me to comment on the sonnet of Shanks—Phoebus, what a name!! I am not in love with it, though it is smoothly and musically rhythmed. The sentiment is rather namby-pamby, some of the lines weak, others too emphatic, e.g. the twelfth. It just misses being a really good poem, or is so, like the curate's egg, in parts. E.g. the two opening lines of the third verse are excellent, but they are immediately spoiled by two lines that shout and rattle. So too the last couplet promises well in its first line, but the last disappoints, it is too obvious a turn and there is no fusion of the idea with the emotion that ought to be there—and isn't. Still, the writer is evidently a poet and the sonnet very imperfect but by no means negligible.

12 June 1931

Richard Hughes

... The air stands still: the very roots
 Of all the trees lie still and cold:
 — What is it gallops in the dark?
 Gallops around that chapel old?

 "We are those limber horses
 That round your graveyard go:
 Can you hear our feet crackle,
 See our blue eyes glow?

 "We are those limber horses;

Our bending necks are steel,
Our mighty flanks swing all like bells,
Chiming together as we wheel . . .

By the way, I read the poem in that paper, *The Limber Horses*. It is evidently inspired from the vital world — from a certain part of it which seems to be breaking out in much of today's literature and art. All that comes from this source is full of a strange kind of force, but out of focus, misshaped in thought or vision or feeling, sometimes in the form too, ominous and perverse. For that matter, the adverse vital world is very much with us now, — the War was the sign of its descent on the earth and the After-war bears its impress. But from another point of view that is not a cause for alarm or discouragement — for it has always been predicted from occult sources that such a descent would be the precursor of the Divine Manifestation.

1931

W. H. Auden

I so often fail to detect the poetry in modern “poems” that the enclosed piece (by a quite young man), was a welcome exception — also it hints at an unusual warmth of interest in England. But neither grammar nor sense is plain to me in the opening line and elsewhere.

O Love, the interest itself in thoughtless Heaven
Make simpler daily the beating of man's heart; within
There in the ring where name and image meet

Inspire them with such a longing as will make his thought
Alive like patterns a murmuration of starlings
Rising in joy over wolds unwittingly weave;

Here too on our little reef display your power
This fortress perched on the edge of the Atlantic scarp
The mole between all Europe and the exile-crowded sea;

And make us as Newton was who in his garden watching
The apple falling towards England became aware
Between himself and her of an eternal tie.

It took me all these three days to overcome the obscurity of the phrasing and the uncouthness of some of the lines; even so I do not know whether I can give a very decided answer to your question. The poetical quality of much of the piece is undoubtedly, though very uneven; for some of the lines, as those about Newton, seem to me to be quite prosaic whether in expression or rhythm; at other places even where the expression is strong and poetic, the movement falls short of an equal excellence. All

the same, there is a rhythm and there is a power of thought and poetic speech, rising to a climax in the nine or ten lines of the close. What seems most to contribute is the skilful and happy vowelisation and consonantal assonances,—the rhythmic form of the lines is not always so happy,—and on the side of expression the concise power of much of the phrasing at once clear-cut in line and full in significance—in spirit though not in manner akin to the Dantesque turn of phrase. I mean such lines and expressions as

- (1) a murmuration of starlings
- (2) This fortress perched on the edge of the Atlantic scarp
 The mole between all Europe and the exile-crowded sea;
- (3) a life
 Grim as a tidal rock-pool's in its glove-shaped valleys,
- (4) gasping in the impossible air

(this is quite Dante; (3) also)

- (5) these intelligible dangerous marvels;
- (6) Far-sighted as falcons, they looked down another future,

(and the two lines that follow)

- (7) the years of the measured world
- (8) The barren spiritual marriage of stone and water.
- (9) Its military silence, its surgeon's idea of pain.
- (10) And called out of tideless peace by a living sun
- (11) And into the undared ocean swung north their prow
 Drives through the night and star-concealing dawn

(These two lines again very Dantesque)

It is a pity he did not take pains to raise the whole to the same or a similar equal level—and more still that he did not think it worth while to make the underlying meaning of the whole as clear and powerfully precise as are in themselves these phrases.

15 September 1932

Stephen Spender

Here is a poem by Stephen Spender, one of the most promising of the young modernist poets, in *The New Statesman and Nation* of November 4, 1933:

Perhaps

the explosion of a bomb
the submarine — a burst bubble filled with water —
the chancellor clutching his shot arm (and that was Perhaps
a put-up job for their own photographers)
the parliament their own side set afire
& then our party forbidden
& the mine flooded, an accident I hope . . .

In his skidding car he wonders
when watching landscape attack him
“is it rushing? (I cannot grasp it) or is it
at rest with its own silence I cannot touch?”

Was that final when they shot him? did that war
lop our dead branches? are my new leaves splendid?
is it leviathan, that revolution
hugely nosing at edge of antarctic?

only Perhaps. Can be that we grow smaller
donnish and bony shut in our racing prison:
headlines are walls that shake and close
the dry dice rattled in their wooden box.

Can be deception of things only changing. Out there
perhaps growth of humanity above the plain
hangs: not the timed explosion, oh but Time
monstrous with stillness like the himalayan range.

Aren’t the emotion and the rhythm all in a rather subdued
key — but that appears to be universal among up-to-date
poets?

It seems to me they are so subdued as hardly to be there except at
places. A certain subdued force of statement getting less subdued

and more evidently powerful at the close — this there is, but it is the only power there.

How did the poem impress you?

I am afraid it made no impression on me — no poetical impression. I cannot persuade myself that this kind of writing has any chance of survival once the mode is over.

On consideration I should say that whatever merits there are in *Perhaps* lie in the last four stanzas. The first three seem to me distinguishable from a strong prose only by the compression of the language and the stiffness of the movement — too stiff for prose, in quite another way too stiff for the fineness and plasticity there should be in poetic rhythm — especially needed, it seems to me, in free verse. From the fourth line of the fourth stanza I begin to find what seems to me the real poetic touch. The fifth and seventh have the substance and diction of very fine poetry — what I miss is the rhythm that would carry it home to the inner consciousness and leave it with its place permanently there. There seems to be in this technique an unwillingness to get too far away from the characteristic manner of prose rhythm, an unwillingness either to soar or run, as if either would be an unbecoming and too ostentatious action — in three or four lines only the poet is just about to let himself go. Or perhaps there is the same tendency as in some modern painting and architecture, a demand for geometric severity and precision? But the result is the same. It may be that this kind of writing cuts into the intellect — it touches only the surface of the vital, the life-spirit which after all has its rights in poetry, and does not get through into the soul. That at least is the final impression it leaves on me. 1933

W. J. Turner

The Word made Flesh?

How often does a man need to see a woman?

Once!

Once is enough, but a second time will confirm if it be she,

She who will be a fountain of everlasting mystery,
Whose glance escaping hither and thither
Returns to him who troubles her. . . .

No light travelling through space-time immeasurable
Has leapt so great a distance as their eyes;
Naked together their spirits commingling
Stir the seed in their genitals—
Like a babe never to be born that leaps up crying,
A voice crying in the wilderness. . . .

The head of Satan is curled
Close, crisp, like the Gorgon;
They are the serpents of the spirit
Curled like the hair of the chaste body,
Emblem of the God who is not creative,
Who has not made the heavens and the earth,
Nor from an Adam of dust
Took that white bone, woman. . . .

This it is to be excluded from the bliss
Of the angels of God,
And of the men and women that He made in His image;
The joy of making images in the image of his maker is not his,

But his are the children of the spirit:
Sweeter and fairer are they than the children of the flesh,
But they are born solitary
And agony is their making-kiss.

Is there any justification for my impression that this was a ghost of the nineties (the meretricious “diabolism”, cult of the bizarre etc.) that had gone to a Fancy Dress Ball in the clothes of 1934? There seemed to be a certain *slickness* in achieving the fashionable formula of today—and of course the inevitable sop to the anti-Victorian Cerberus, the introduction of something to offend the conventions of last century.

But I did not feel any inevitability behind it all. Some “modern” verse is perverse but powerful; these lines seemed just built up by an adroit mind that knows how to tickle the modern fancy.

I think your criticism is very much to the point. The writer is a very clever manipulator of words, but he is dressing up an idea so as to catch the surface mind — there is no sincerity and therefore no power or conviction or poetical suggestion. Such made-up stuff as

The head of Satan is curled

and the rest of it has no real significance and is therefore rhetorical, not poetic. The rest is no better — there is no single line that carries conviction, not an image or a phrase or a movement of rhythm that is inevitable.

There is room for sex poetry if it is felt as truth and rendered either with beauty or power, but this crude braggadocio of the flesh is not telling nor attractive. The diabolism and cult of the bizarre in the nineties had a certain meaning, — it was at least a revolt against false conventions and an attempt to escape from the furbished obviousness of much that had gone before. But now it has itself become the obvious and conventional — not it exactly in its old form but the things it attempted to release and these are now trying to escape from their own obviousness by excess, the grotesque, the perverse. The writer brings in or brings back Satan (for whom there is no longer any need) to give, I suppose, a diabolical thrill to that excess — but, as poetry at least, it is not successful. Satan and sexual realism (e.g. the “spirit stirring the genitals”) do not match together.

1934

Edwin Muir

Who curbed the lion long ago
And penned him in this towering field
And reared him wingless in the sky?
And quenched the dragon's burning eye,
Chaining him here to make a show,
The faithful guardian of the shield?

A fabulous wave far back in time
Flung these calm trophies to this shore

That looks out on a different sea.
These relics of a buried war,
Empty as shape and cold as rhyme,
Gaze now on fabulous wars to be.

So well the storm must have fulfilled
Its work of perfect overthrow
That this new world to them must seem
Irrecognizably the same,
And looking from the flag and shield
They see the selfsame road they know.

Here now heraldic watch them ride
This path far up the mountainside
And backward never cast a look;
Ignorant that the dragon died
Long since and that the mountain shook
When the great lion was crucified.

Very good indeed — admirable throughout. It is refreshing to read a poem with such a good form, build, depth of suggested meaning amidst so much that is so freakish and uncertain as to take away half the value of what is attempted. Here the writer has something to say and knows how to say it. 1934

Robert Frost, William Plomer, Roy Campbell

Something inspires the only cow of late
To make no more of a wall than an open gate,
And think no more of wall-builders than fools.
Her face is flecked with pomace and she drools
A cider syrup. Having tasted fruit
She scorns a pasture withering to the root.
She runs from tree to tree where lie and sweeten
The windfalls spiked with stubble and worm-eaten.
She leaves them bitten when she has to fly.
She bellows on a knoll against the sky.
Her udder shrivels and the milk goes dry.

— Robert Frost

Now the edge of the jungle rustles. In a hush
The crowd parts. Nothing happens. Then
The dancers totter adroitly out on stilts,
Weirdly advancing, twice as high as men.

Sure as fate, strange as the mantis, cruel
As vengeance in a dream, four bodies hung
In cloaks of rasping grasses, turning
Their tiny heads, the masks besmeared with dung;

Each mops and mows, uttering no sound,
Each stately, awkward, giant marionette,
Each printed shadow frightful on the ground
Moving in small distorted silhouette. . . .

— Williams Plomer

Through the mixed tunnels of whose angry brain
Creeps the slow scolopendra of the Train!

— Roy Campbell

Have you seen the “Golden Cowboy and Others” in the *New Statesman*? Gives a good idea of modernist poetry, I think. Frost is a rather elaborate frost. Plomer is a “terrible” contortionist, but Roy Campbell is really amusing—I like his “slow scolopendra” immensely. He has at least the courage of his images. Evidently poetry is following the same gallop into extravagance as painting. And yet there is an attempt behind it which looks like a seeking after the “Future Poetry” gone astray. 1937

Indian Poetry in English

Writing in a Learned Language

I was surprised last night how *les mots justes* sprang ready to the pen's call. Alas I can't say the same thing for my English poetry, where I always fumble so.

One cannot expect to seize in poetry the finer and more elusive tones, which are so important, in a learned language, however well-learnt, as in one's native or natural tongue. Unless of course one succeeds in making it natural, if not native.

5 December 1935

*

What do you think of Yeats' letter to Purohit Swami, in which he says: "Write in your mother tongues. Choose that smaller audience. You cannot have style and vigour in English. You did not learn it at your mother's knee. . . . It is not your fault that you are under a curse. It is the fault of wicked policy. Defeat this policy. Write and speak Marathi, Hindi, Bengali, Tamil. . . ."

All very well for those who can write in some language of India and don't know English intimately. But what of those who think and write naturally in English? Why didn't Yeats write in Gaelic?

17 September 1936

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It is not true in all cases that one can't write first-class things in a learned language. Both in French and English people to whom the language was not native have done remarkable work, although that is rare. What about Jawaharlal's autobiography? Many English critics think it first-class in its own kind; of course he was educated at an English public school, but I suppose he

was not born to the language. Some of Toru Dutt's poems, Sarojini's, Harin's have been highly placed by good English critics, and I don't think we need be more queasy than Englishmen themselves. Of course there were special circumstances, but in your case also there are special circumstances; I don't find that you handle the English language like a foreigner. If first-class excludes everything inferior to Shakespeare and Milton, that is another matter. I think, as time goes on, people will become more and more polyglot and these mental barriers will begin to disappear.

1 October 1943

Indo-English Poetry

I suppose our oriental way of expression, which is as luxuriant as oriental nature itself, is unappealing to Westerners.

What you say may be correct, but on the other hand it is possible that the mind of the future will be more international than it is now. In that case the expression of various temperaments in English poetry will have a chance.

If our aim is not success and personal fame, but to arrive at the expression of spiritual truth and experience of all kinds in poetry, the English tongue is the most widespread and is capable of profound turns of mystic expression which make it admirably fitted for the purpose; if it could be used for the highest spiritual expression, that is worth trying.

10 December 1935

*

As for Conrad, according to Thompson, he is a Westerner, and surely there is a greater difference in tradition, expression, feeling between an Easterner and an Englishman than between an Englishman and another European.

In other words, any Western tradition, expression, feeling—even Polish or Russian—can be legitimately expressed in English, however unEnglish it may be, but an Eastern spirit, tradition or temper cannot? He differs from Gosse who told Sarojini Naidu that she must write Indian poems in English

— poems with an Indian tradition, feeling, way of expression, not reproduce the English mind and turn, if she wanted to do something great and original as a poet in the English tongue.

I think that however much we try, we shan't be able to enter the subtleties of a foreign tongue.

Who is this we? Many Indians write better English than many educated Englishmen.

Is there any chance of our being able to express spirituality in English poetry?

I put forward four reasons why the experiment could be made. (1) The expression of spirituality in the English tongue is needed and no one can give the real stuff like Easterners and especially Indians. (2) We are entering an age when the stiff barriers of insular and national mentality are breaking down (Hitler notwithstanding), the nations are being drawn into a common universality with whatever differences, and in the new age there is no reason why the English should not admit the expression of other minds than the English in their tongue. (3) For ordinary minds it may be difficult to get over the barrier of a foreign tongue, but extraordinary minds (Conrad etc.) can do it. (4) In this case the experiment is to see whether what extraordinary minds can do, cannot be done by Yoga. *Sufficit* — or as Ramchandra eloquently puts it “Nuff said!”

28 February 1936

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The doctrine that no one who is not a born and bred Englishman, especially no Oriental, should try to write or can really write English poetry because the traditions, sentiments, expressions of the English language — or of any language — are so different from others and so peculiar to itself that a foreigner cannot acquire them, is no new discovery; it is a statement that has been often made. But it fails at one point — birth does not matter. A pure Italian by blood like Rossetti or his sister Christina, a Pole like Conrad, a Spaniard like Santayana (I am speaking of prose

also, however,) can do as well in English as born English writers. It is said however that this applies only to Europeans,— for their native tradition, sentiments, expressions are not entirely alien to those of the English tongue and by education or adaptation they can acquire, but the Indian mind is of too alien a character, too far off and cut away by a gulf from the English to be able to write in that language. It may be said also that an Indian may succeed in writing correct English, but can never write great English prose, still less perfect or enduring poetry. I doubt whether this is true—I remember having read some extracts from letters by Sarojini Naidu in her youth that seemed to be very perfect and beautiful English prose. But let us keep to poetry which has no doubt a special language or a special spirit and turn in its language and it is true of it that no one who cannot acquire that spirit and turn can succeed in writing English poetry. But in the first place I do not see why an Indian bred in England or an Indian to whom English has become his natural tongue should be any more disqualified [*incomplete*]¹

28 February 1936

On Some Indian Writers of English

I should very much value *your* assurance that, scant though my stock is, I need not feel inferior to the other Indian poets who have written in English—Manmohan Ghose and Harindranath and Sarojini.

I don't altogether appreciate your request for being declared by me “not inferior” to other “Indo-English” poets. What have you to do with what others have achieved? If you write poetry, it should be from the stand-point that you have something of your own which has not yet found full expression, a power within which you can place at the service of the Divine and which can help you to grow—you have to get rid of all in it that is merely mental or merely vital, to develop what is true and fine in it and leave the rest until you can write from a higher

¹ Sri Aurobindo wrote this passage on the back of a typed copy of the letter of 28 February 1936 printed above. It appears to be the draft of a letter that was not completed or sent.—Ed.

level of consciousness things that come from the deepest self and the highest spiritual levels. Your question is that of a *littérateur* and not in the right spirit. Besides, even from a mental point of view, such comparisons are quite idle. Sarojini Naidu has at best a strange power of brilliant colour and exquisite melody which you are not likely ever to have; on the other hand she is narrowly limited by her gift. Harindranath has an unfailing sense of beauty and rhythm (or had before he became a Bolshevik and Gandhist)—while your writing is very unequal—but I do not suppose he will ever do much better than he has done or produce anything that will put him in the first rank of poets, unless he changes greatly in the future. As for my brother, I do not know enough of his poetry to judge; I knew he had a better knowledge of technique than any of these poets, but my impression was that life and enduring quality were not there. How am I to compare you in these things with them? You have another turn and gift and you have in the resources of Yoga a chance of constant progression and growth and of throwing all imperfections behind you. Measure what you do by the standard of your own possible perfection; what is the use of measuring it by the achievement of others?

1931

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The idea that Indians cannot succeed in English poetry is very much in the air just now but it cannot be taken as absolutely valid. Toru Dutt and Romesh of the same ilk prove nothing; Toru Dutt was an accomplished verse-builder with a delicate talent and some outbreaks of genius and she wrote things that were attractive and sometimes something that had a strong energy of language and a rhythmic force. Romesh was a smart imitator of English poetry of the second or third rank. What he wrote, if written by an Englishman, might not have had even a temporary success. Sarojini is different. Her work has a real beauty, but it has for the most part only one highly lyrical note and a vein of riches that has been soon exhausted. Some of her lyrical work is likely, I think, to survive among the lasting things in English literature and by these, even if they are fine rather than great, she

may take her rank among the immortals. I know no other Indian poets who have published in English anything that is really alive and strong and original.² The test will be when something is done that is of real power and scope and gets its due chance. Tagore's *Gitanjali* is not in verse, but the place it has taken has some significance. For the obstacles from the other side are that the English mind is apt to look on poetry by an Indian as a curiosity, something exotic (whether it really is or not, the suggestion will be there), and to stress the distance at which the English temperament stands from the Indian temperament. But Tagore's *Gitanjali* is most un-English, yet it overcame this obstacle. For the poetry of spiritual experience, even if it has true poetic value, the difficulty might lie in the remoteness of the subject. But nowadays this difficulty is lessening with the increasing interest in the spiritual and the mystic. It is an age in which Donne, once condemned as a talented but fantastic weaver of extraordinary conceits, is being hailed as a great poet, and Blake lifted to a high eminence; even small poets with the mystic turn are being pulled out of their obscurity and held up to the light. At present many are turning to India for its sources of spirituality, but the eye has been directed only towards yoga and philosophy, not to the poetical expression of it. When the full day comes, however, it may well be that this too will be discovered, and then an Indian who is at once a mystic and a true poet and able to write in English as if in his mother-tongue (that is essential) would have his full chance. Many barriers are breaking; moreover both in French and English there are instances of foreigners who have taken their place whether as prose-writers or poets.

P.S. About decadence: a language becomes decadent when the race decays, when life and soul go out and only the dry intellect and the tired senses remain. Europe is in imminent peril of decadence and all its literatures are attacked by this malady, though it is only beginning and energy is still there which may

² This was written some years ago and does not apply to more recent work in English by Indian poets.

bring renewal. But the English language has still several strings to its bow and is not confined to an aged worn-out England. Moreover, there are two tendencies active in the modern mind, the over-intellectualised, over-sensualised decadent that makes for death, and the spiritual which may bring rebirth. At present the decadent tendency may be stronger, but the other is also there.

24 January 1935

Manmohan Ghose

I have not read much of my brother's poetry except what he wrote in England and in the early years in India before we ceased to meet. That was very cultured poetry and good in form, but it seemed to me to lack the inner force and elemental drive which makes for successful creation. I don't know whether his later work had it. My brother was very intimate with Oscar Wilde, but, if I remember right, none of the singing birds except Phillips and Binyon went very far. But I think Manmohan published very little in his lifetime — nothing ever came my way.

25 January 1935

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You write in your note to Harin [of 24 January 1935] about Toru Dutt and "Romesh of the same ilk" and Sarojini Naidu that you know of no other Indian than Sarojini to have published in English anything that is really alive and strong and original. I can understand your forgetting your own work, but how is it that you have omitted Harin himself? Surely he has published things that are bound to remain? Also, how was it that Oscar Wilde and Laurence Binyon could give praise to Manmohan Ghose? Has he done nothing that could touch Sarojini's level, though in another way?

I did not speak of Harin because that was a separate question altogether — besides, whether in criticising or in paying compliments, present company is always supposed to be excepted unless they are specially mentioned, and for this purpose Harin and myself are present company. About Manmohan I said that I knew very little of his later work. As for his earlier work

it had qualities which evoked the praise of Wilde. I do not know what Binyon has written, but he is a fine poet and an admirable critic, not likely to praise work that has not quality. (Wilde and Binyon were both intimate friends of my brother, — at a time Manmohan was almost Wilde's disciple. If I were inclined to be Wildely malicious I might say that even Oscar's worst enemies never accused him of sincerity of speech, so if he liked someone very much he would not scruple to overpraise his poetry; but I think he considered my brother's poems to carry in them a fine promise. Binyon and Manmohan had almost the relations of Wordsworth and Southey in the first days, strongly admiring and stimulating each other.) Let me say then that my opinion was a personal one, perhaps born of brotherly intimacy — for if familiarity breeds contempt, fraternity may easily breed criticism — and based on insufficient data. I liked Manmohan's poetry well enough, but I never thought it to be great. He was a conscientious artist of word and rhyme almost painfully careful about technique. Virgil wrote nine lines every day and spent the whole morning rewriting and rerewriting them out of all recognition. Manmohan did better. He would write five or six half lines and quarter lines and spend the week filling them up. I remember the sacred wonder with which I regarded this process — something like this:

The morn ... red ... sleepless eyes
.....lilacrest.

Perhaps I exaggerate, but it was very much like that! That seemed to me to indicate an inspiration not very much on fire or in flood. But I suppose he became more fluent afterwards and I am ready to change my opinion if I have materials for doing so. I made no comparison with Sarojini. The two poets are poles asunder in their inspiration and manner. Sarojini has a true originality whatever its limits; even if she does not live for ever, she deserves to live. My brother was perhaps a finer artist, but has Manmohan's poetry similarly an unique and original power?

26 January 1935

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I suppose you have read this poem of Manmohan's:

Augustest! dearest! whom no thought can trace,
 Name, murmuring out of birth's infinity,
 Mother! like heaven's great face is thy sweet face,
 Stupendous with the mystery of me.
 Eyes, elder than the light; cheek, that no flower
 Remembers; brow, at which my infant care
 Gazed weeping up and saw the skies enshower
 With tender rain of vast mysterious hair!
 Thou at whose breast the sunbeams sucked, whose arms
 Cradled the lisping ocean, art thou she,
 Goddess, at whose dim heart the world's deep charms,
 Tears, terrors, sobbing things, were yet to be?
 She, from whose tearing pangs in glory first
 I and the infinite wide heavens burst?

Each line is wonderfully inspired; but is there in the total effect a sense of construction rather than creation, a splendid confusion instead of a supreme luminosity?

The poem has a considerable elevation of thought, diction and rhythm. It is certainly a fine production and, if all had been equal to the first three lines which are pure and perfect in inspiration, the sonnet might have stood among the finest things in the English language. But somehow it fails as a whole. The reason is that the intellectual mind took up the work of transcription and a Miltonic rhetorical note comes in, all begins to be thought rather than seen or felt; the poet seems to be writing what he thinks he ought to write on such a subject and doing it very well — one admires, the mind is moved and the vital stirred, but the deeper satisfying spiritual thrill which the first lines set out to give is no longer there. Already in the fourth line there is the touch of poetic rhetoric. The original afflatus continues to persist behind, but can no longer speak itself out in its native language, there is a mental translation. It tries indeed to get back —

Eyes, elder than the light; cheek, that no flower
 Remembers —

then loses hold almost altogether — what follows is purely mental. Another effort brings the eighth line which is undoubtedly very fine and has sight behind it. Then there is a compromise; the spiritual seeing mind seems to say to the thinking poetic intellect, "All right, have it your own way — I will try at least to keep you up at your best", and we have the three lines that follow those two others that are forcible and vivid poetic (very poetic) rhetoric — finally a close that goes back to the level of the stupendous mystery. No, it is not a "splendid confusion" — the poem is well-constructed from the point of view of arrangement of the thought, so there can be no confusion. It is the work of a poet who got into touch with some high level of spiritual sight, a living vision of some spirit Truth, but, that not being his native domain, could not keep its perfect voice throughout and mixed his inspiration — that seems to me the true estimate. A very fine poem, all the same.

5 November 1935

Remarks on Minor Indian Writers

I don't remember [Jehangir] Vakil's poems very well, but they gave me the impression, I think, of much talent not amounting to genius, considerable achievement in language and rhythm but nothing that will stand out and endure. But how many can do more in a foreign language? Here the poem certainly attempts and almost achieves something fine — there are admirable lines and images — but the whole gives an impression of something constructed by the mind, a work built up by a very skilful and well-endowed intelligence.

12 September 1931

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The poetry of your friend is rather irritating, because it is always just missing what it ought to achieve, — one feels a considerable poetic possibility which does not produce work of some permanence because it is not scrupulous enough or has not a true technique. The reasons for the failure can be felt, but are not easy to analyse. Among them there is evidently the misfortune of having passed strongly under the influence of poets who are quite

out of date and learned a poetic style and language full of turns that smell of the schoolroom and the bookworm's closet. Such awful things as "unsoughten", "a-journeying", "a-knocking", "strayèd gift" and the constant abuse of the auxiliary verb "to do" would be enough to damn even the best poem. If he would rigorously modernise his language, one obstacle to real poetic success would perhaps disappear,—provided he does not, on the contrary, colloquialise it too much—e.g. "my dear", etc. But the other grave defect is that he is constantly composing out of his brain, while one feels that a pressure from a deeper source is there and might break through; if only he would let it. Of course, it is a foreign language he is writing and very few can do their poetic best in a learned medium; but still the defect is there.

22 June 1931

Poets of the Ashram

Some General Remarks

I fear I don't approve of any article on the "Ashram poets"—least of all a dithyramb of this too splendiferous kind. I shall give my reasons when I have had time to look at it again—at present I am slowly recovering from the electric shock it gave me.

11 September 1934

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Prithwi Singh was telling me that cultivation of literature here hasn't much sense, since none will be able to get first class, or outclass Tagore. He must always remain the only brilliant star in literature. Others won't even get a chance to shine by his side, not to speak of outshining him. Only Dilip can be somehow given a second class privilege, but that too for his prose, and not for poetry. He further asserts that Yoga has no power to bring any pursuit—literature, painting, etc. to a height of perfection.

I don't agree with Prithwi Singh. If a man has a capacity for poetry or anything else, it will certainly come out and rise to greater heights than it would have done elsewhere. Witness Dilip who was unable to write poetry till he came here though he had the instinct and the suppressed power in him, Nishikanta whose full flow came only here, Arjava, Punjalal whose recent poems in Gujarati seem to me to have an extraordinary beauty—though I admit that I am no expert there. Harin wrote beautifully before but the sovereign excellence of his recent poetry is new. There are others who are developing a power of writing they had not before. All that does not show that Yoga has no power to develop capacity. I myself have developed many capacities by Yoga. Formerly I could not have written a line of philosophy—

now people have started writing books about my philosophy to my great surprise. It is not a question of first class or second class. One has to produce one's best and develop — the "class" if class there must be will be decided by posterity. Tagore himself was once considered second class by any number of people and the nature of his poetry was fiercely questioned — until the Nobel prize and consequent fame ended their discussions. One has not to consider fame or the appreciation of others, but do whatever work one can do as an offering of one's capacity to the Divine.

11 November 1934

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I look at these things from a more impersonal or, if you like, a personal-impersonal point of view. There is on one side my effort at perfection, for myself and others and for the possibility of a greater perfection in a changed humanity: on the other side there is a play of forces some favouring it but more trying to prevent it. The challenge I speak of comes from these forces. On one side it is a pressure from the pro-forces saying "Your work is not good enough; learn to do better"; on the other it is a pressure from the contrary forces saying "Your work? It is a delusion and error, — a poor mediocre thing, and we will trample and break it to pieces." Part of the work was an attempt to inspire a poetry which would express first the aspiration and labour towards the spiritual or divine and afterwards its realisation and manifestation. There are many who write poetry in the Ashram under this impulse but in the languages which I know best (English perfectly — at least I hope so — Bengali a little), there were four here whose work seemed to me to contain already in a fairly ample way the ripe possibility of the thing I wanted — yourself [Dilip Kumar Roy], Arjava, Amal, Harin. (I do not speak of Nishikanta and others because they are new or emergent only). There are some Gujarati poets but I do not know the poetic language and technique in that tongue well enough to form an indubitable judgment. These four then I have encouraged and tried to push on towards a greater and richer expression: I have praised but there was nothing insincere in my

praise. For some time however I have received intimations from many quarters that my judgment was mistaken, ignorant, partial and perhaps not wholly sincere. It began with your poetry even at the time of *Anami* and the forces at play spoke through some literary coteries of Bengal and reached here through reviews, letters etc. There has been much inability to appreciate Arjava's poetry, Yeats observing that he had evidently something to say but struggled to say it with too much obscurity and roughness. Amal's work is less criticised, but A.E.'s attitude towards it was rather condescending as to an Indian who writes unexpectedly well in English. Finally, there is the ignoring or rejection of Harin's work by this array of authorities — there are as good authorities on the other side, but that is irrelevant. That makes the issue complete and clear. If I have made so big a mistake, then the whole thing is a hallucination — I am an incompetent critic of poetry, at least of contemporary poetry, and my pretension to inspire cannot stand for a moment. Personally that would not matter to me, for personally I have my own feeling of these things and what it may be in the eyes of others makes no difference — just as it makes no difference to me if my own poetry is really no poetry, as Anandashanker and so many others think and may from their own viewpoint — there are a million possible viewpoints in the world — be justified in thinking. But for my work it does matter. I recognise in it the challenge of the forces and, once I recognise that in whatever field, I never think myself entitled to ignore it. If it is a challenge to do better (from the favourable forces), I must see that and get it done. If it is a challenge from the other forces, I must see that too and know how far it is justifiable or else what can be put against it. That is what I have always done both in my own Yoga looking carefully to see what was imperfect in the instrumentation of my own consciousness as a vehicle of the manifestation and working to set it right or else maintaining what was right against all challenge. So I began to do it here. Instead of reading rapidly through Harin's poems every day, I began to weigh and consider looking to see what could be justly said from Krishnaprem's viewpoint and what could be fairly said

from mine. I took Krishnaprem's criticism because it is the only thing I have that is definite and, though his technical strictures are obviously mistaken, the general ones have to be weighed even though they are far from conclusive. But this is a work for my personal use, — its main object is not a weighing of Harin's work but of my own capacity and judgment and that is too personal in scope for me to lay before others. That is why I said I was not writing it to circulate.

I have written all this to explain to you that you have not pained or hurt or displeased me, nor has Krishnaprem either. It would be childish to be displeased with someone because his opinions on literature or a particular piece of literature are not identical with my own at every point. I may also say that I was not displeased with you for your letter. I was a little disappointed that you should have gone back to mental doubts or to vital feelings after you had started so well for something else. But these temporary reverns are too common on the path to the Divine for me to be displeased or discouraged. The work I have to do for myself or for the world or for you or others can only be achieved if I have love for all and faith for all and go firmly on till it is done. It is why I urge you to do the same, because I know that if one does not give up, one is sure to arrive. That is the attitude you had started to take, to go quietly on and give time for the right development however slow. I want you to return to that and keep to it.

By the way, what I have written about the poetry is just for yourself, because it is too personal to me to be made general.

December 1934

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It was not with any intention of bringing in personal matters that I mentioned names and examples in my letter. The personal merits or demerits of the external human instrument — the frail outer man — are irrelevant and have no importance when one considers the value or power of the Word. What matters is the truth of the Inspiration and the power of what it utters. I was not saying either that this poetry — I try to avoid names this

time — appeals to everybody; I was referring to those whom it did touch and especially to certain incidents within my personal observation and knowledge.

I am keeping Krishnaprem's letter. I don't know that it is very advisable for me to give my view: if I do so I will try to restrict myself to general considerations about poetry and literature. I will only say that my opinions about this poetry or yours or Amal's or Arjava's are personal to myself and nobody need attach any value to them if his own do not agree. As they are personal, what others think, however eminent they may be, cannot make any difference. I experience a certain beauty, power or charm, an expression of things I feel and know in the occult or spiritual province with what seems to me a great or a sufficient breath of poetry in it. I do not expect all or many to share my feeling and I do not need it. I can understand Krishnaprem's strictures or his reservations (without endorsing, refuting or qualifying them) but I have had the same view about very great poets like Shelley or Spenser at one time, so that does not seriously touch my feeling that this is poetry of beauty and value. Also I do not make comparisons — I take it by itself as a thing apart in its own province. I know of course that my old schoolfellow Binyon and others in England have spoken in this connection of Keats and Shelley; but I do not myself feel the need of that comparative valuation. After all one can only give one's own view of contemporary poetry, — we must leave it to Tagore's *viśva-mānava* (posterity?) to decide.

29 December 1934

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Amal is rather fond of high notes in his criticism, (an essay he sent long ago on the "Ashram poets" — what a phrase! — made me aghast with horror at its Pindaric — or rather Swinburnean — tone, it gave me an impression that Homer and Shakespeare and Valmiki had all been beaten into an insignificant jelly by our magnificent creations.) He is also sometimes too elaborately ingenious in his hunt for detail significances. But what he says is usually acute and interesting and, when he drives his pen instead of letting it gallop away with him, he can write exceedingly well.

His selection from your poems is not so surprising. Everyone reacts to poetry in his own way and except with regard to long-established favourites from the classics few would make the same choice. Give ten good critics the task of selecting the best lines of Shakespeare, avoiding stock passages, and the ten will each make a different list — and probably Shakespeare himself would disagree with all the ten. That must be still more the case with a “contemporary” poet where all is new stuff with no indications except one’s own personal reactions. I myself do not agree with your condemnation of these pieces to the W. P. B.

30 January 1935

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Take this Poetry business. It has always been rare for me to write any poetry without a heavy dose of mental exercise. I have not, except once or twice, felt some force coming down and delivering a poem out of me, even a worthless one, in a second. . . . You yourself had to concentrate for 4 or 5 hours a day for so many years, after which everything flowed in a river. But I am not Sri Aurobindo! I am not born with such a will and determination. . . . Since I can’t spend so much labour, I have to conclude that such big things are not for me.

As there are several lamentations today besieging me, I have very little time to deal with each separate Jeremiad. Do I understand rightly that your contention is this, “I can’t believe in the Divine doing everything for me because it is by my own mighty and often fruitless efforts that I write or do not write poetry and have made myself into a poet”? Well, that itself is *épatant*, magnificent, unheard of. It has always been supposed since the infancy of the human race that while a verse-maker can be made or self-made, a poet cannot. “*Poeta nascitur non fit*”, a poet is born not made, is the dictum that has come down through the centuries and millenniums and was thundered into my ears by the first pages of my Latin Grammar. The facts of literary history seem to justify this stern saying. But here in Pondicherry we have tried, not to manufacture poets, but to give them birth, a spiritual, not a physical birth into the body.

In a number of instances we are supposed to have succeeded—one of these is your noble self—or if I am to believe the man of sorrows in you, your abject, miserable, hopeless and ineffectual self. But how was it done? There are two theories, it seems—one that it was by the Force, the other that it was done by your own splashing, kicking, groaning Herculean efforts. Now, sir, if it is the latter, if you have done that unprecedented thing, made yourself by your own laborious strength into a poet (for your earlier efforts were only very decent literary exercises), then, sir, why the deuce are you so abject, self-deprecatory, miserable? Don't say that it is only a poet who can produce no more than a few poems in many months. Even to have done that, to have become a poet at all, a self-made poet is a miracle over which one can only say Sabash! Sabash! without ever stopping. If your effort could do that, what is there that it can't do? All miracles can be effected by it and a giant self-confident faith ought to be in you. On the other hand if, as I aver, it is the Force that has done it, what then can it not do? Here too faith, a giant faith is the only logical conclusion. So either way there is room only for Hallelujahs, none for Jeremiads. Q.E.D.

By the way what is this story about my four or five hours' concentration a day for several years before anything came down? Such a thing never happened, if by concentration you mean laborious meditation. What I did was four or five hours a day pranayam—which is quite another matter. And what flow do you speak of? The flow of poetry came down while I was doing pranayam, not some years afterwards. If it is the flow of experiences, that did come after some years, but after I had stopped the Pranayam for a long time and was doing nothing and did not know what to do or where to turn once all my efforts had failed. And it came as a result not of years of Pranayam or concentration, but in a ridiculously easy way, by the grace either of a temporary guru (but it wasn't that, for he was himself bewildered by it) or by the grace of the eternal Brahman and afterwards by the the grace of Mahakali and Krishna. So don't try to turn me into an argument against the Divine; that attempt will be perfectly ineffective.

I am obliged to stop—if I go on, there will be no Pranam till 12 o'clock. So send your Jeremiad back tonight and I will see what else to write. Have written this in a headlong hurry—I hope it is not full of *lapsus calami*.

I send you back the "Jeremiad", Sir. My observations are reserved.

To continue. The fact that you don't feel a force does not prove that it is not there. The steam-engine does not feel a force moving it, but the force is there. A man is not a steam-engine? He is very little better, for he is conscious only of some bubbling on the surface which he calls himself and is absolutely unconscious of all the subconscious, subliminal, superconscious forces moving him. (This is a fact which is being more and more established by modern psychology though it has got hold only of the lower forces and not the higher, so you need not turn up your rational nose at it.) He twitters intellectually (= foolishly) about the surface results and attributes them all to his "noble self", ignoring the fact that his noble self is hidden far away from his own vision behind the veil of his dimly sparkling intellect and the reeking fog of his vital feelings, emotions, impulses, sensations and impressions. So your argument is utterly absurd and futile. Our aim is to bring the secret forces out and unwalled into the open so that instead of getting some shadows or lightnings of themselves out through the veil or being wholly obstructed they may "pour down" and "flow in a river". But to expect that all at once is a presumptuous demand which shows an impatient ignorance and inexperience. If they begin to trickle at first, that is sufficient to justify the faith in a future downpour. You admit that you once or twice felt a "force coming down and delivering a poem out of me" (your opinion about its worth or worthlessness is not worth a cent, that is for others to pronounce). That is sufficient to blow the rest of your Jeremiad into smithereens; it proves that the force was and is there and at work and it is only your sweating Herculean labour that prevents you feeling it. Also it is the trickle that gives assurance of the possibility of the downpour. One has only to go on and by one's patience deserve

the downpour or else, without deserving, stick on till one gets it. In Yoga itself the experience that is a promise and foretaste but gets shut off till the nature is ready for the fulfilment is a phenomenon familiar to every Yогин when he looks back on his past experience. Such were the brief visitations of Ananda you had some time before. It does not matter if you have not a leechlike tenacity—leeches are not the only type of Yogins. If you can stick anyhow or get stuck that is sufficient. The fact that you are not Sri Aurobindo (who said you were?) is an inept irrelevance. One needs only to be oneself in a reasonable way and shake off the hump when it is there or allow it to be shaken off without clinging to it with a “leechlike tenacity” worthy of a better cause.

All the rest is dreary stuff of the tamasic ego. As there is a rajasic ego which shouts “What a magnificent powerful sublime divine individual I am, unique and peerless” (of course there are gradations in the pitch,) so there is a tamasic ego which squeaks “What an abject, hopeless, worthless, incapable, unluckily unendowed and uniquely impossible creature I am,—all, all are great, Aurobindos, Dilips, Anilkumars (great by an unequalled capacity of novel-reading and self-content, according to you), but I, oh I, oh I!” That’s your style. It is this tamasic ego (of course it expresses itself in various ways at various times, I am only rendering your present pitch) which is responsible for the Man of Sorrows getting in. It’s all bosh—stuff made up to excuse the luxury of laziness, melancholy and despair. You are in that bog just now because you have descended faithfully and completely into the inert stupidity and die-in-the-mudness of your physical consciousness which, I admit, is a specimen! But so after all is everybody’s, only there are different kinds of specimens. What to do? Dig yourself out if you can; if you can’t, call for ropes and wait till they come. If God knows what will happen when the Grace descends, that is enough, isn’t it? That you don’t know is a fact which may be baffling to your—well, your intelligence, but is not of great importance—any more than your supposed unfitness. Who ever was fit, for that matter—fitness and unfitness are only a way of speaking; man is unfit and a

misfit (so far as things spiritual are concerned) — in his outward nature. But within there is a soul and above there is Grace. "This is all you know or need to know" and, if you don't, well, even then you have at least somehow stumbled into the path and have got to remain there till you get haled along it far enough to wake up to the knowledge. Amen.

20–21 January 1936

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How is it that people find my poetry difficult? Dilip used to say that it usually passed a little over his head. I suspect that only Nolini and Arjava get the hang of it properly. Of course many appreciate when I have explained it to them — but otherwise they admire the beauty of individual phrases without grasping the many-sided whole the phrases form. This morning Prem-anand, Vijayrai and Nirod read my *Agni*. None of them caught the precise relevances, the significant connections of the words and phrases of the opening lines:

Not from the day but from the night he's born,
Night with her pang of dream — star on pale star
Winging strange rumour through a secret dawn.
For all the black uncanopied spaces mirror
The brooding distance of our plumbless mind.

In the rest of the poem too they generally failed to get the true point of felicity which constitutes poetic expression. My work is not surrealist: I put meaning into everything, not intellectualism but a coherent vision worked out suggestively in various detail. Is there some peculiarity in my turn of imagination or in my English, which baffles Indian readers especially?

It is precisely because what you put in is not intellectualism or a product of mental imagination that your poetry is difficult to those who are accustomed to a predominantly mental strain in poetry. One can grasp fully only if one has some clue to what you put in, either the clue of personal experience or the clue of a sympathetic insight. One who has had the concrete experience of the consciousness as a night with the stars coming out and the sense of the secret dawn can at once feel the force of these two lines, as one who has had experience of the mind as a wide

space or infinity or a thing of distances and expanses can fathom those that follow. Or even if he has had, not these experiences, but others of the same order, he can feel what you mean and enter into it by a kind of identification. Failing this experience, a sympathetic insight can bring the significance home; certainly, Nolini and Arjava who write poems of the inner vision and feeling must have that, moreover their minds are sufficiently subtle and plastic to enter into all kinds of poetic vision and expression. Premanand and Vijayrai have no such training; it is natural that they should find it difficult. Nirod ought to understand, but he would have to ponder and take some trouble before he got it; night with her labour of dream, the stars, the bird-winging, the bird-voices, the secret dawn are indeed familiar symbols in the poetry he is himself writing or with which he is familiar; but his mind seeks usually at first for precise allegories to fit the symbols and is less quick to see and feel by identification what is behind them—it is still intellectual and not concrete in its approach to these things, although his imagination has learned to make itself their transcribing medium. That is the difficulty, the crux of imaged spiritual poetry; it needs not only the fit writer but the fit audience—and that has yet to be made.

But what about Dilip? Arjava's poems simply frighten him but mine too he finds difficult. Everybody feels at home in Harin's poetry, though I am sure that often, if I catechised them, I would find the deepest felicities missed. Perhaps my tendency to pack too much meaning into my words becomes a difficulty in others, but would they have the same difficulty with Bengali poetry?

Dilip wrote to me in recent times expressing great admiration for Arjava's poems and wanting to get something of the same quality into his own poetic style. But in any case Dilip has not the mystic mind and vision—Harin also. In quite different ways they receive and express their vision or experience through the poetic mind and imagination—even so because it expressed something not usual, Dilip's poetry has had a difficulty in getting itself recognised except by people who were able to give the right

response. Harin's poetry deals very skilfully with spiritual ideas or feelings through the language of the emotion and the poetic imagination and intelligence — no difficulty there. As regards your poetry, it is indeed much more compressed and carefully packed with substance and that creates a difficulty except for those who are alive to the language or have become alive to subtle shades, implications, depths in the words. Even those who understand a foreign language well in the ordinary way, find it sometimes difficult to catch these in its poetry. Indications and suggestions easy to catch in one's own tongue are often missed there. So probably your last remark is founded.

14 March 1937

*

I hope people won't misunderstand what you have remarked about the mystic mind [*in the above letter*]. One's not having the mystic mind and vision does not reflect upon one's poetic excellence, even as a singer of the Spirit. As regards Harin, you had said long ago that he wrote from several planes [*see page 476*]. And surely his *Dark Well* poems come from a source beyond the poetic intelligence?

I used the word "mystic" in the sense of a certain kind of inner seeing and feeling of things, a way which to the intellect would seem occult and visionary — for this is something different from imagination and its work with which the intellect is familiar. It was in this sense that I said Dilip had not the mystic mind and vision. One can go far in the spiritual way, have plenty of spiritual experiences, spiritual knowledge, spiritual feelings, significant visions and dreams even without having this mystic mind and way of seeing things. So too one may write poetry from different planes or sources of inspiration and expressing spiritual feelings, knowledge, experiences and yet use the poetic intelligence as the thought medium which gives them shape in speech; such poems are not of the mystic type. One may be mystic in this sense without being spiritual — one may also be spiritual without being mystic; or one may be both spiritual and mystic in one. Poems ditto.

I had not in view the *Dark Well* poems when I wrote about Harin. I was thinking of his ordinary way of writing. If I remember right, the *Dark Well* poems came from the inner mind centre, some from the Higher Mind—other planes may have sent their message to his mind to put in poetic speech, but the main worker was the poetic intelligence which took what was given and turned it into something very vivid, coloured and beautiful,—but surely not mystic in the sense given above.

15 March 1937

On Bengali Poetry Written in the Ashram

I am not competent in respect to the technique of Bengali poetry. I can only follow my feeling, what I call the inner ear—so in this point I can say nothing beyond my own feeling. In your first poems written here I thought that your rhythmic movement departed sometimes from the norm—I suppose that is what they mean by অন্তর্ভুক্ত?—but on a second reading my impression was, more often than not, that there was a (rhythmic) justification for the departure. I do not know whether Buddhadeva is referring to these poems or to others written before the opening of your poetic faculty here, which were poor both in expression and in rhythm. In any case, there can surely be no exception taken to your rhythm now; your mastery seems to me complete. I suppose in this province Tagore's verdict can be taken as final.

4 January 1932

*

It is a great mystery to me. Comparing Jyotirmayi's original turn, expressions, speed with her past work—what a miraculously rapid development!

But, my dear sir, it often happens like that. I believe you were not here when Dilip's poetry blossomed; but it was quite as sudden. Remember Tagore's description of him as the cripple who suddenly threw away his crutches and began to run and his astonishment at the miracle. Nishikanta too came out in much

the same way, a sudden Brahmaputra of inspiration. The only peculiarity in Jyoti's case is the source she struck — the pure mystic source.

23 August 1936

Comments on the Work of Poets of the Ashram

Dilip Kumar Roy

...যে-বারিধার ভরে তড়গ-নদী হ্রদ,
তারেই ফিরায় বারিদ-কৃপে ধরাতল;
যে-রশ্মি বক্ষে ধরে কোকনদ
ফুটায় তারেই গন্ধরাপে সমুচ্ছল।

ধন্য হব প্রাণটি আজি ঢেলে তাই,
তোর-দেওয়া-দান তোর পদে সমর্পণে,
আর কিসে বল্ পূজতে পারি?—সর্বদাই
গঙ্গাপূজা গঙ্গাজলের তর্পণে।

It is again a beautiful poem that you have written,¹ but not better than the other. Why erect mental theories and suit your poetry to them whether your father's or Tagore's? I would suggest to you not to be bound by either, but to write as best suits your own inspiration and poetic genius. I imagine that each of them wrote in the way suited to his own inspiration and substance and, as is the habit of the human mind, put that way forward as a general rule for all. You have developed an original poetic turn of your own, quite unlike your father's and not by any means a reflection of Tagore's. Besides, there is now as a result of your sadhana a new quality in your work, a power of expressing with great felicity a subtle *psychic* delicacy and depth of thought and emotion which I have not seen elsewhere in modern Bengali verse. If you insist on being rigidly simple and direct as a mental rule, you might spoil something of the subtlety of the expression, even if the delicacy of the substance remained. Obscurity, artifice, rhetoric have to be avoided, but for the rest follow the inner movement. . . .

¹ Gangāpūjā Gangājale, a poem of twenty-one stanzas, the last two of which are reproduced above.—Ed.

I think I prefer the original form of your penultimate verse. I did not myself find it ambiguous and it has a native glow of colour in it which the second version misses—at least, so it seems to me on a comparative reading.²

*

I have just finished hearing the second act of your drama on Chaitanya;³ there is much fine poetry in it and the dramatic interest of the dialogue and of the presentation of character seems to me considerable. We have not had time yet to read the last act; we shall do that tomorrow and then I can write about your drama with more finality, but it is already turning into a fine play. As for the historical question, I do not consider that any objections which might be raised from that standpoint would have much value. Poetry, drama, fiction also are not bound to be historically accurate; they cannot indeed develop themselves successfully unless they deal freely with any historical material they may choose to include or take for their subject. One can be faithful to history if one likes but even then one has to expand and deal creatively with characters and events, otherwise the work will come to nothing or little. In many of his dramas Shakespeare takes names from history or local tradition, but uses them as he chooses; he places his characters in known countries and surroundings, but their stories are either his own inventions, or the idea only is borrowed from facts and the rest is of his own making: or else he indulges in pure fantasy and cares nothing even for geographical accuracy or historical possibility. It is true that sometimes he follows closely the authorities he had at his disposal, such as Holinshed or another and in plays like *Julius Caesar* he sticks to the main events and keeps many of the details, but not so as to fetter the play of his imagination. So I don't think you need worry at all about either historians or biographers, even if *Chaitanya Charitamrita* could be regarded as a

² These are the first and last paragraphs of a letter that was subsequently revised. The revised version is published on page 568.—Ed.

³ Dilip Kumar Roy, Sri Chaitanya: A Drama in Three Acts (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1950).

biography. That is all, I think, for the present. I shall write again after hearing the third act of your drama. 21 January 1950

*

We have finished reading your *Chaitanya*. The third act which is the most remarkable of the three confirms the impression already made by the other two of a very fine and successful play well-written and constructed with many outbursts of high poetry and outstanding in its dramatic interest and its thought substance. The third is original in its design and structure, especially its idea, admirably conceived and worked out, of a whole scene of action with many persons and much movement shown in the vision of a single character sitting alone in her room; it was difficult to work out but it has fitted in extremely well. It has also at the same time a remarkable combination of the three unities of the Greek drama into which this distant scene, though not too distant, manages to dovetail very well,—the unity of one place, sometimes one spot in the Greek play or a small restricted area, one time, one developing action completed in that one time and spot, an action rigorously developed and unified in its interest. Indeed, the play as a whole has this unity of action in a high degree.

Advocates of the old style drama might object to the great length of the discussions as detrimental to compactness and vividness of dramatic interest and dramatic action and they might object too that the action,—though this does not apply to the Jagai Madhai episode,—is more subjective and psychological than the external objective succession of happenings or interchanges represented on a stage would seem to demand; this was the objection made to Shaw's most characteristic and important play. But where the dramatic interest is itself of a subjective and psychological character involving more elaboration of thought and speech than of rapid or intensive happenings and activities, this kind of objection is obviously invalid; what matters is how the subjective interest, the play or development of ideas, or if high ideals are involved that call to the soul, is presented and made effective. Here it is great spiritual ideals and their action on the mind and lives of human beings that are put

before us and all that matters is how they are presented and made living in their appeal. Here there is, I think, full success and that entirely justifies the method of the drama.

For the rest I have only heard once rapidly read the play in three acts and it is not possible with that short reading to pass judgment on details of a purely literary character, so on that I can only give my general impression. A drama has to accommodate itself to different levels and intensities of expression proper to the circumstances and different characters, moods and events; but here too, I think, the handling is quite successful. I believe the verdict must be, from every point of view, an admirable *Chaitanya*.

23 January 1950

Harindranath Chattopadhyaya

I can understand very well what Suhrawardy objects to in Harin's poetry, though his expression of it is absurdly exaggerated ("trash"), and he may be right in thinking it an exotic in English literature; but I am under the impression that Harin will stand in spite of that, though he has still to write something so sovereign in its own kind as to put all doubt out of court; but, even as it is, the poetic quality of his work appears to me undeniable.

1 October 1932

*

Harin's new poems are a little difficult to follow sometimes because they render a special form of experience — but they are very powerful and genuine. He has the eye of one who can *see* in the occult sense.

3 September 1933

*

Do poets like Harin feel more than others or is it rather that they simply express themselves better?

It depends on the poet. Harin expresses what he sees through feeling, perception or actual vision — he was strongly impressed and he wrote. But it is quite possible that the word written may

bring a stronger feeling or more vivid and extended experience to some reader than anything the poet actually felt.

21 September 1933

*

The following lines from one of Harin's poems seem to indicate an overmind view of the worlds:

Whatever I contact I sum
Up in an instant as my own,—
All life around me I become:
A rarified immense Alone. . . .

And slowly in myself I seem
Infinitudes of worlds and men.

Yes, it is the overmind view — but it can be felt in any of the higher planes (intuition, illumined or higher mind); something of it can be thrown by reflection even into the liberated mind and vital—I mean when there comes into them the sense of the cosmic Self, the cosmic Mind and vital etc. and they are no longer shut up within individual limits.

9 July 1934

*

It appears that Thompson, the English Sannyasi, told Jaswant that Harin's poetry was all of the old kind and that now people in England were doing marvels and wonders which left all such old fashioned stuff in the shade. So far as I know this modern poetry in English, it is mostly second rate decadent stuff without form or true rhythm or else without greatness or emotion, seeking only to be new and not seeking to be great or true. There are exceptions but few in number.

17 July 1934

*

Harmony

. . . What ways shall baulk
These feet that have with Thee begun to walk
The only Way, the shining lonely Way
Leading out of the darkness and the clay

Into the sweet invulnerable bliss
 Of inevitable [*changed to irrevocable*] apotheosis?

The defect you point to in the last lines of *Harmony* was an obvious flaw and the change was necessary. In any case “irrevocable” is better than “inevitable” — it has more depth and power of significance. These poems mark a very distinct advance on the earlier ones in the “Rose of God”;⁴ those carried a slight sense of seeking and uncertainty, a new inspiration still feeling after its right diction, force of expression, rhythmic movement, finding them on the whole but not altogether. Here there is in all these respects an assured handling and full values. The new manner is very different from the “Bird of Fire”’s — in place of the rush and volume there is a subdued but very full richness of substance and subtlety of expression and a much more deliberately felicitous choice of word and phrase. This creates a quite different colour, tone and atmosphere.

18 January 1935

*

Reverie

... Then my heart within me cries

To the skies:

“Art thou jealous, God above!
 Of our love?

“Dost Thou grieve to see us stand
 Hand in hand,

“On the painted shore of life,
 Man and wife,

“Full of dreaming, full of fire
 And desire?”

Blossomed His immaculate voice:
 “I rejoice

⁴ The name of the series of poems in which *Harmony* occurs. This and an earlier series, “The Bird of Fire”, were named after poems written by Sri Aurobindo. Neither series was published. — Ed.

"In the sorrow of the sod,
I am God! . . .

Desert

Floated noontides of spirit-austerities nakedly
burning on every side
While I stand like a straight tall tree in the
centre of Time, a desert bare,
High up, suspended, the full sun seems an image of One
who is golden-eyed,
With shimmering beams for arrowy lashes which pierce
like liquid points through the air. . . .

I shall see about "The Jealous God" [*published as Reverie*]; I remember to have read some poems in which you "trifled with Divinity" with great poetic effect, but the suggestions were quite extreme enough to startle A.E. into remonstrance; I imagine the Divinity himself read them with much aesthetic pleasure and a gracious smile.

30 January 1935

*

I have seen the poems marked by you — they are certainly among the best you have written before you came here. I have looked carefully at the "Jealousy of God"; it has much poetic beauty throughout. The idea of the Divine jealousy is a very apt imagination and serves to carry the meaning of the poem beyond the earth-limits to the beyond — as such it is striking and legitimate. But it has to be taken as a God constructed out of universal appearances by the lover's mood — it is evidently not A. E.'s Divinity, so A. E. need not have been in pain for him — and as such any objections (I don't know precisely what they may be) are out of court. I should like to read *Forgiveness* again before I pronounce as between Binyon and Amal. There is no bathos in the *Desert*; it has not the sustained level of some other poems, but throughout there is much imagination and colour and many fine lines, not only at the close.

P.S. I have looked again at *Forgiveness* [text of poem not avail-

able],— both Binyon and Amal have some foundation for their opinions. It is an exceedingly fine poem and quite perfect in its expression of the underlying idea or rather psychic perception of an occult truth hidden from the surface mind. I don't see anything fanciful in it or discern what is according to Amal fancy and what genuine imagination—if you look at it with the surface intellect the whole thing is a mere fancy or else a fine imagination, but if you look at it with the psychic perception there is neither, only a truth of behind the veil. *But*—it is here that Amal is right, the two closing lines are a terrible anticlimax; they spoil the perfection altogether.

31 January 1935

*

Harin has sent me your remarks about his *Forgiveness* and *Reverie* . . . *Forgiveness* seems to suffer by an omission of a line or two which might give its psychic perception a force even in the domain of the outer mind. Harin perhaps tried to give this force in the “clod”—“God” conclusion, but the words there are not only bathetic but also insufficiently suggestive—they do not suggest however crudely that it is the *Divine* who is “forgiving” man *through* everything, or better still, that it is the *Divine* in everything who is forgiving man. What do you think?

I do not at all agree with what you say. For the truth of the poem it is not necessary to bring in the *Divine*—the two last lines are quite unnecessary—it is sufficient to know that there is a consciousness in things even the most material. There is no question of imagination—except in the reader who ought to have sufficient imagination to feel the profundities behind—it is a deep perception of an occult truth. I find the expression of it perfect.

Now *Reverie*. Is there any indication in the poem that the God spoken of is not the *sole* Divinity? . . . For the time being there is no God but the jealous God—all Godhead is seen as a jealousy directed against human love and happiness. It was this that drew from A.E. that remark: he could find nowhere in the poem the distinction you make between the time and essential Godhead and a construction out of universal appearances. . . .

Do you wish me to drop the sentence altogether?

If Harin had indicated that the God spoken of was not the sole Divinity, he would have spoiled the poem. For the purposes of the poem he has to be spoken of as the sole Divinity. Why must we take the poem as an exercise in philosophy? A poem is a poem, not a doctrine. It expresses something in the poet's mind or his feeling. If it agrees with the total truth or the highest truth of the Universe, so much the better, but we cannot demand that of every poet and every poem. I do not ask you to expunge the sentence, if it expresses your feeling with regard to the *Reverie*. Much is given from the purely aesthetic standpoint even if a poet were to assert a false doctrine such as a malevolent God creating a painful universe. That is, if it were a fine poem, I would enjoy and praise it — although it would be there too an appearance of the universe but approached by putting it forward as a doctrine.

1 February 1935

*

Look at Harin's poetry. We're so ecstatic over it here, but outside he hardly gets a good audience; not even Krishnaprem seems to like his poetry.

I don't think I can put as much value on Krishnaprem's literary judgments as on his comments on Yoga etc. Some of his criticisms astonished me. For instance he found fault with Harin for using rhymes which Shelley uses freely in his best poems.

You must remember also that Harin's poetry has been appreciated by some of the finest English writers like Binyon and De la Mare. But anyway all growing writers (unless they are very lucky) meet with depreciation and criticism at first until people get accustomed to it. Perhaps if Harin had published his poems under the name let us say of Harry Chatto he would have succeeded by this time and no one would have talked of Oriental ineptness.

10 December 1935

*

When he was here, Harin wrote things full of psychic perception, like

Infinitude in form!
Illimitable Power and Love conjoint!
Thy utter peace takes all the world by storm!

Now he has gone back to his old ways and seems to have forgotten the great visions he had. Do you think the poetry he wrote here was not really his, but was prepared by beings of a higher plane and Harin simply wrote it down?

Yes — that is, Harin was a medium, the poetry came in to him from a plane which he did not possess; also whatever visions or experiences he had were poured into him by the Mother. But his personal being remained without any radical uplifting or alteration.

29 October 1936

The Sources of Inspiration of Harin and of Arjava

We were wondering from what plane Harin gets his poetry. We should also like to know from what plane Arjava has his source of inspiration. And is it possible to tell us in brief what peculiarity of vision and style each of us has?

I doubt whether I can enter into all that just now or whether it would be useful — it would mean a critical appreciation of all of you for which I have no time (I have some poems to finish and some things to write on Yoga which are waiting for a long time, so I cannot deviate into anything like that). All I can say is that Arjava writes most often from the plane of inner thought and occult vision (the plane indicated in Yoga by the forehead centre). As for Harin, I can't say, he varies and most often writes from several planes at a time — so it is impossible to define.

2 December 1933

Arjava (J. A. Chadwick)

An Afternoon

Earth-fashioned hush, dream-woken trees becalmed
On fields entranced, on sea of frozen sound

Rimmed by faint watchers billowing haze-embalmed,
Whose legions vast our dream-like raft surround.
Nature looks strange. Strange that, e'en so, she's found
Closer to man. The dumb do voiceless meet,
Babel avoiding. See,—the very ground
Is silence-drenched — untrodden by earth's feet.
On such a stillness might leap forth the Word,
On such sink down to rest Creative Power:
All those six days through which the Work occurred
Revolved round Rest, enshrined a silent bower.
Earth's many melodies all are on Silence weaved.
Sleep foretells dawn's fanfare. And peace is toil achieved.

You have a beginning of power of poetic speech, but it is quite unfinished and the technique is not there.

There are three defects in your verses —

(1) Failure of rhythm. In this poem the rhythm is laboured and heavy; there are often too many ponderous syllables packed together — especially the last line, first half, — it is so heavy with packed long syllables that it can hardly move. What rhythm there is is too staccato, not varied enough or varied in the wrong way, sometimes a conventional ineffective way, sometimes by adopting an impossible metrical movement (this last more in the other poem than here).

(2) The style in this poem is too laboured, as if you had tried to pack the expression overmuch, and gives a slow heavy movement to the sense as well as to the verse. There is an occasional tendency to obscurity of expression (more in the other poem than here) due probably to the same reason or sometimes to a rather recondite allusiveness as if you expected the reader to understand the thoughts passing in you — without your either expressly stating them or else suggesting them by some perfectly significant word or sound.

(3) A certain habit of prose-structure in the form given to the thought comes up from time to time, e.g. in the fifth and eleventh lines of this poem, and sometimes in the choice of words e.g. "occurred" in the latter line.

At the same time there is not only the potency of speech at least in promise, but some promise also of a rhythmical faculty struggling to be born.

April 1931

*

Lift the Stone

Before the chronicles of time began
 Or sundering space her canopy unfurled,
 The uncreated Over-Thought had plan
 Itself to lose — self-offered, form a world.
 Smooth as untrodden snow the gleaming Host,
 Fraught with all history, ringed by opal pyx,
 Shone through eternity rays innermost
 'Pon⁵ all symbolic forms that intermix
 Silence of Heaven with lisping speech. God takes
 His very substance that from Beauty came;
 Then with world-urging power He freely breaks
 The bread that builds the fabric of His Name.

Seven great realms the fragments make; and we
 In meanest dust may touch Divinity.

You seem to me to have acquired already the three most important elements of poetic excellence.

(1) Mastery of the rhythmic form — at any rate of the right rhythm and building of the sonnet form you are using.

(2) A just felicity and firm construction of the thought architecture proper to the sonnet.

(3) A very considerable power of harmonious and effective poetic diction and suggestive image.

The last seven lines are truly very fine poetry — but the whole sonnet is remarkable in form and power. 6 May 1931

*

⁵ Why not "On"; it would be more euphonious.

The Valley of the Fleece

A windless eve in a quiet coomb;
Rock-rose yellow and golden broom.
Sandmartins wheel aloft
Watching day's goblet quaffed
By the priestess, Venus-adorned, rising from eastern tomb.

A dream-laden wind from the sky escorts
The starry ships of the Argonauts.
Sandmartin stirs in the hole;
Peeps out one guardian troll —
“Will they carry our golden fleece back to the day-break
ports?”

It is a very beautiful and exquisite lyric; I would not dream of spoiling it by suggesting any change.

*

Your scansion of the poem *The Valley of the Fleece* is on the whole correct, I think, although in one or two places—especially the two you select—there *might* be a difference of opinion. But it seems to me the classical short long — is not a sufficient notation for the intricate stress + quantity system of the English rhythm. There are several syllable values intermediate between the long and the short and these count very much in the management of a line or a series of lines. Much of the subtler effects in the beauty of rhythm of an English poem is due to a skilful though often not quite intellectually conscious handling of these intermediate values—it is often in the hands of a born harmonist more an instinctive or an inspired than a deliberately purposeful skill. But for a conscious handling I should like to see a system of weightage (to take a word from current politics) allowed for syllables that are not pure longs and shorts or are not used as such in the line. One could possibly invent three additional signs ~, ˘, ˙, the first for longer, the second for shorter intermediates, the third for pure shorts weighted by a meeting of several consonants after them. To give some examples from your poem—*rōckrōse* and *wheel ā(loft)*, present two

different cases, both trochees, equal in *metrical*, but not equal in *rhythmic* value. Again *sāndmartin* has the same metrical but a different rhythmical value from *back to the* (day-break); the second is a pure dactyl, the first I would call an impure, mixed or weighted dactyl. Again *eastern* marked by you as a trochee, I would almost mark as a spondee — certainly even, if I had to use it in one of my hexameters; but we can compromise the difference by marking it in my proposed notation as an impure or weighted trochee. The most striking example however is in the line,

Watching day's | goblet | quaffed, |

so marked by me, not to complicate too much, but it could also be notated:

Watching [∞] day's | goblet [∞] | quaffed. |

Here most people would take the first foot as a dactyl and I did so myself when I read it, assuming it to be identical in metrical, though not in rhythmic value with the preceding line. But your scansion also is defensible and legitimate; it depends upon the intonation one gives to the line. For that is another (very useful and valuable) complication of English rhythm, the part intonation plays in varying lines with an identical metre or even modifying the metre. All these differences (and the multiple possibilities that go with them) arise from the play of the language with these weighted syllables which can be made long or short according to the distribution of the voice — this foot being at will a dactyl or anapaest but a very impure dactyl or a very impure anapaest. I don't know if I have made myself clear, — perhaps more examples would be needed to justify my system, — but I lay stress on it because I have found the recognition of these weighted syllables and their importance for rhythmic variation, an indispensable aid (not the notation but the mental feeling of them) in evolving in my later (unpublished) poetry a new distinct individuality in blank verse and the very possibility of a successful English hexameter. It is their non-recognition and the clumsy use or misuse of weighted dactyls and false spondees

that seems to me to have been at the root of the failure to evolve a sound English hexameter; all that has been achieved is a make-believe or a clumsy makeshift.

To return to your poems—I may say that *The Valley* is a very remarkable poem from the rhythmical point of view, quite apart from the exact scansion one gives to it, by the free and always felicitous use of the many elements of variation possible in the language, metrical variation, intonation, weightage, with others more unnameable and subtle. I find that in lyrical poems your *inner* ear which determines these things, seems to be—at least has been in the poems you have yet written—most felicitously infallible. It is only in the less lyrical metres that you have a less inborn gift and made mistakes at the beginning. Even if you do not find models, I imagine that this inner ear in you will find its way if you go on experimenting under its guidance.

Incidentally, I quite approve of your first suggestion about “a dream-laden wind.” I have often thought, why not make some more liberal use of classical feet like the cretic, dochmiac combination etc. (I have tried to do so occasionally to vary my latest type of blank verse.) Here to speak of the first foot as a spondee is to force things a little. To treat it as a dochmiac movement at once puts it on the true footing—or so it seems to me.

I have written nothing about the other poem yet, because I was perplexed a little by the choice between two systems of scansion. In the old style metrics it would be:

Red la|dybird, | black la|dybird,
Ladybird | sable and | gold,
Lowly you | swing, | flutter your | wing,
And | fare to the | fete on the | wold.

Yours is more new and in consonance with the modern way of looking at lyrical movement. But whichever way you take it, the melody is exquisite—and the language and substance also.

17 December 1931

*

New-Risen Moon's Eclipse

Harsh like the shorn head high of a gaunt grey-hooded friar
Who fears the beauty and use of sculptured limbs
(Branding the sculptor-archetype a liar),
O moon but lately risen from the foam where the seamew
skims—
Form that a wan light cassocks, grace that a tonsure dims.
Joy that the leaden curse is rolled away to leave the golden
Tresses of earth-transforming gramarye
Whereby our wildered flesh-fret is enfolden—
O fair as the foam-fashioned goddess that awoke from the
wondering sea,
Love with the earth-shroud lifted, star from the shade set free!

The poem is, on the contrary, a very good one. The one thing that can be said against it is that you need to go through it twice or thrice before the full beauty of the thought, rhythm and imagery comes to the surface,— but is that a demerit? Poems that are too easily read, as a French critic puts it, are not always the best. I myself doubted a little at first reading about the rhythm of the three first lines of the second verse, but that was because I was listening with the outer ear, my attention having been dulled by much dealing with miscellaneous correspondence before I turned to the poem; but as soon as it got inside to the inner ear, I felt the subtlety and rareness of the movement. There is a great beauty and significant force in the imagery and a remarkably successful fusion of the supporting object (physical symbol) into the revealing or transmuting image and the image into the object, which is part of the highest art of symbolic or mystic poetry. Heard before? If you refer to elements of the rhythm, words or phrases here and there, or images used before though not in the same way, where is the poetry in so old and rich a literature as the English that altogether escapes this suspicion of “heard before”? Absolute originality in that sense is rare, almost non-existent; we are all those who went before us with something new added that is ourselves, and it is this something new added that transfigures and is the real originality. In this sense there is a

great impression of original power in the beauty of the first verse and hardly less in the second. It seems to me very successful, and “triviality” is the description that can be least applied to it while it could lack interest only to those who have no mind for poetry of this character.

March 1932

*

Does not a compound like “flesh-fret” recall such typically Hopkinsian compounds as “bugle-blue”, “cuckoo-call”, “fast-flying” or “dapple-dawn-drawn”?

Surely, one cannot be accused of being Hopkinsian, merely because of a successfully copious alliteration and an alliterative compound? These things have happened before Hopkins and will go on happening after him even if he is no longer read. It may be that these turns came to Arjava because of the influence of Hopkins,—to that only he can plead Yes or No. What I say is that the way he uses them is *not* Hopkinsian, not Swinburnian, but Arjavan. “Flesh-fret” has not the least resemblance to “bugle-blue” or “cuckoo-call” or “fast-flying”, still less to “dapple-dawn-drawn” except the mere external fact of the alliterative structure; its spiritual quality is quite different. To take an idea or a formation or anything else from a former poet—as Molière took his “bien” wherever he found it,—is common to every maker of verse; we don’t write on a blank slate virgin of the past. Indian sculpture or architecture may have taken this form from the Greeks or that form from the Persians; but neither is in the least degree Achaemenian or Hellenistic.

1 April 1932

*

Twilight Hush

A forest | of shadows | gliding fast,
Magnetwise, | as drawn on | by the sun
For wester|ly converḡing | sunset-goal—
Zenith past, | how eeri|ly they run!

On paths that meander | 'cross the sky,
 Cloudy-maned | the centaurs | bend afar
 Moon-bow that | is aiming, | silver-taut,
 Arrows made | of silence | at a star.

This seems to me successful. The last stanza especially is very beautiful in idea and expression and rhythm. 19 October 1933

*

The second stanza has “that” repeated in the first and third lines in the same metrical place; is this not a defect?

It is a slight defect, but it is a defect.

Though *in practice* I am still a long way from your subtly balanced rhythm, I think I see *in theory* one at least of the secrets. There must be very little partition of *words* between two feet — and still less of feet between two successive *rhythmic phrases*; that is to say, the pauses between successive rhythmic phrases must mark the ending of a complete foot, and in almost all cases the foot must end with the syllable at the end of a word.

Yes, you have seen the main principle.

Does the modulation in the second foot of line 3 (a third paeon in place of an amphibrach) interfere with the metrical movement I am in quest of?

It depends on the character of the rhythm you want to embody. If it is the purely lyrical as in the *Trance*, then it interferes — if it is a graver and slower movement, then not.

The whole difficulty of transferring classical metres or the classical quantitative system into English seems to me to hinge on this great difference that quantities and quantitative feet in Greek and Latin are clear-cut settled unmistakable things — while in English quantity is loose, uncertain, plastic. How to

solve the problem? If we try to follow the same unmistakably exact quantitative system in English (which means a coincidence of feet and rhythmic phrases), will not monotony be inevitable? On the other hand if we allow plasticity, free modulations, etc., will not there be a metrical chaos and the absence of all clear character in the rhythm? It is the problem that has to be solved — how to get through between Scylla and Charybdis. My own line of approach is to try and reproduce the classical metres as exactly as possible in English *first* and then see what plasticity, what modulations, what devices to avoid monotony can be discovered — and how far they can be used without destroying the fundamental character of the metre. In *Trance* I avoided all experiments, using the pure form only — and the sole device used to prevent the effect of an unrelieved monotone was the use of rhyme. I tried even to accept the monotone and make it a part of the charm of the rhythm, by suiting it to the treatment of the subject — a single tone thrice repeated. This involved a purely lyrical treatment — the brevity was also essential. I not only observed the principle of equating the rhythmic phrases with the feet, but I was careful to use unmistakably short quantities for the classic shorts. Thus my closing anapaest was a true unmistakable anapaest in all the six lines where it came. In your last attempt (*Twilight Hush*) you have done the first and third lines perfectly and the effect is very good, but in the second line of the second stanza your “bend afar” does not give the effect of an anapaest because it comes after an unaccented syllable and one inevitably reads it as a cretic. There were many of these doubtful feet — doubtful on the classic principle — in your first two attempts. I state simply what has happened — and the problem underlying it. How to solve the problem completely I shall yet have to see. It can only come by experiment and observation — *ambulando*.

*

Across triumphant acres of the night
Slow-swung pinions of the unborn dream
To the hidden daybreak pursue primeval flight.

Chartless unfrontiered aeons of the dark,
On their lonely silence breaks no morning theme,—
Our dreams have held the Promethean spark.

But half desried, the dawn-lit peaks of joy,—
There, living hues shall blend in a rainbow stream,
And there no sundering thought can enter or destroy.

I feel rather oppressed by the contrast between the genuineness and depth and strength of the feeling in my experience, and the surely very inadequate means of conveying any of it to the reader. Words like “triumphant . . . night”, “hidden daybreak”, “lonely silence”, “sundering thought” are surely being entrusted with a task which can never be carried out with a reader who does not go out far more than half way to meet the emotional significance?

It is always the difficulty of expression that words can only suggest these deeper things though they can suggest them with a certain force—even a creative force—but there must be the receptivity in the reader also. Your phrases “triumphant acres of the night” etc. have a considerable power in them; all the lines indeed are such that the significance could hardly be better conveyed, but still the full significance (the suggestion not merely of the idea, but of the experience behind it) can only be got if the reader listens not only with the mind, but with the inner sense and feeling.

8 January 1935

*

Totalitarian

Night was closing on the traveller
When he came
To the empty eerie courtyard
With no name.
Loud he called; no echo answered;
Nothing stirred:
But a crescent moon swung wanly,
White as curd.
When he flashed his single sword-blade

Through the gloom,
None resisted — till he frantic,
 Filled with doom,
Hurled his weapon through the gloaming.
 Took no aim;
Saw his likenesses around him
 Do the same:
Viewed a thousand swordless figures
 Like his own —
Then first knew in that cold starlight
 Hell, alone.

Exceedingly original and vivid — the description with its economy and felicity of phrase is very telling. 11 October 1936

*

My appreciation of the effect of Arjava's poem, especially its first eight lines, was a little staled by the memory of De la Mare's *Listeners*.

De la Mare's poem has a delicate beauty throughout and a sort of daintily fanciful suggestion of the occult world. I do not know if there is anything more. The weakness of it is that it reads like a thing imagined — the images and details are those that might be written of a haunted house on earth which has got possessed by some occult presences. Arjava must no doubt have taken his starting point from a reminiscence of this poem, but there is nothing else in common with De la Mare — his poem is an extraordinarily energetic and powerful vision of an occult world and every phrase is intimately evocative of the beyond as a thing vividly seen and strongly lived — it is not on earth, this courtyard and this crescent moon, we are at once in an unearthly world and in a place somewhere in the soul of man and all the details, sparing, with a powerful economy of phrase and image and brevity of movement but revelatory in each touch as opposed to the dim moonlight suggestiveness supported by a profusion of detail and long elaborating development in De la Mare — of course that has its value also — make us entirely feel ourselves

there. I therefore maintain my description “original” not only for the latter part of the poem but for the opening also. It is not an echo, it is an independent creation. Indeed the difference of the two poems comes out most strongly in these very lines.

are a description of things on earth made occult only by the presence of the phantom listeners. But

... the empty eerie courtyard
With no name

or

. . . the crescent moon swung wanly,
White as curd

are not earthly, they belong to a terrible elsewhere, while the later part of the poem carries this elsewhere into a province of the soul. That is the distinction and makes the perfect successfulness of Arjava's poem.

13 October 1936

The Flower of Light

This whiteness has no withering;
When petals fall,
Miraculous swan's-down through the air,
A hundred petals build the crowning flower
Still, nor all
Dissevering gusts can make that stateliness less fair.
The bee can settle in its heart of light —
O wingèd soul;
But we with fettered feet and soiled with clay
Gaze through bewildered tears
At that quintessenced goal,
Craving one prized petal-touch may light on our dismay.

I have been long an admirer of Nolini's poems in free verse. Does this experiment of mine fall between two stools, creating expectations of regularity which it then disappoints—and sounding more like a metrical medley or "salad" than one piece of rhythmic movement?

Well, it is not free verse as people understand it. But it is verse which the usual thing is not and at the same time it is free. I find it fascinating—the rhythm is subtle, delicate and faultless. I don't know enough of modern (contemporary) poetry to be sure that it is a new form you have found, but at any rate it is one well worth following out. It enables one to vary the length and movement, form and distribution of rhymes as the thought and feeling need without falling into the formlessness of a prose movement—it has, that is to say, the quality of metrical poetry without its fetters. As for the poem itself, it is magnificently beautiful; it has that psychic quality—here the expression of a psychic sorrow—which is so rare and the language is luminous and felicitous all through.

1 November 1936

*

The High-flashing Fountains of Song

Subdued the light at the gray evenhush,
As the shadowy helmets of night's vague host
Make dim the East and the North and the South.
Spendthrift day keeps but a dwindling heap of gold
Low on the westward margins of the sky.
Spirit with wings of light and darkness
Sail through the fast-closing gates of the West
And bear me out of the world;
The world that is frozen music (but the performers were
faulty).

Haply the high-flashing fountains of song
Play still in Supernal Eden
And the air is a diamond undimmed by Time's
misadventures.
The unchanging light of the One, enmeshed in the
murmuring spray,

Builds all the colours of the soul.
 And the speechless telling of mysteries
 Leaves them in the song-hidden heart of Light.

I find this superb — in every line. The thought and language and imagery are very beautiful, but most I find that its rhythmic achievement solves entirely for the first time (it was partly done in some former poems) the problem of free verse. The object of free verse is to find a rhythm in which one can dispense with rhyme and the limitations of a fixed metre and yet have a poetic rhythm, not either a flat or an elevated prose rhythm cut up into lengths. I think this poem shows how it can be done. There is a true poetic rhythm, even a metrical beat, but without any fixity, pleasant and verging with the curve or sweep of the thought and carrying admirably its perfect poetic expression. It may not be the only way in which the problem can be solved, but it is one and a very beautiful way.

27 February 1937

Jyotirmayi

কোন	গোপন মায়ায়	তিমির-ছায়ায়
	গ্রহ শশী নীড় বাঁধে —	
নিশি	আলো-ফুল	মালা গাঁথে!
ঘন	যামিনীর কোলে	সূর-সম দোলে
	কোটি তারা —	ঘিরি' চাঁদে!
ওগো	স্বপন-তরির	গীতি-দীপালির
	যে পথে পরাণ খোলে,	
কেন	প্রথর দিবসে	গণন-সরসে
	আঁথি সেই পথ ভোলে!	
কেন	কমলা লুকায়ে	ব্যথা-বীথিছায়ে
	অলকা বাণিজী সাধে!	
বুঝি	উজল প্রহরে —	সে সুধা শিহরে,
		কেমুদী-হিয়া কাঁদে!

I find no difficulty in the last stanza of Jyotirmayi's poem nor any in connecting it with the two former stanzas. It is a single

feeling and subjective idea or vision expressing itself in three facets. In the full night of the spirit there is a luminosity from above in the very heart of the darkness — imaged by the moon and stars in the bosom of the Night. (The night-sky with the moon (spiritual light) and the stars is a well-known symbol and it is seen frequently by sadhaks even when they do not know its meaning.) In that night of the spirit is the Dream to which or through which a path is found that in the ordinary light of waking day one forgets or misses. In the night of the spirit are shadowy avenues of pain, but even in that shadow the Power of Beauty and Beatitude sings secretly and unseen the strains of Paradise. But in the light of day the mystic heart of moonlight sorrowfully weeps, suppressed, for, even though the nectar of it is there behind, it falters away from this garish light — because it is itself a subtle thing of dream, not of conscious waking mind-nature. That is how I understand or rather try mentally to express it. In this kind of poetry it is a mistake to fix a very intellectual or a very abstract sense on what should be kept vague in outline but vivid in feeling — by mentalising one puts at once too much and too little in it.

10 June 1936

Nirodbaran

What do you say to today's poem?

দিনান্তে কল্পনাময়ী কনকদুহিতা
একাকী বসিয়া ওই বিটপী-তলায়,
সমৃঢ়িত স্বরূপের সরসী দোলায়,
চেয়ে থাকে নির্নিমেষ; অতল-প্রোথিত
নিরবিগী-বিদ্যুতের বিলাপ-কাহিনী
—ধর্মনী-শোণিতে যেন শুভ্রিত বিষাদ—
ঢালে আলোকঠ হ'তে সে অভিসম্পাত |
গন্ধহারা পবনের তরঙ্গবাহিনী
নিয়ে যায় তারি মন্ত্রবাঞ্চির ভূষণ
নিশ্চদ উষার নীল স্বয়ন্ত্ৰ সাগরে;
নিহিত রাবিৰ লিখা অসাম স্পন্দন
সৃষ্টি করে ইন্দ্ৰজাল-মন্ত্ৰিত অন্তরে

অলোক রহস্য-ছবি; সে প্রোজ্জ্বল হাসি
বিধাতার মর্মঘরা স্বণাক্ষিত বাঁশি।

Very fine, this time.

Well, let us put it in English — without trying to be too literal, turning the phrases to suit the English language. If there are any mistakes of rendering they can be adjusted.

Now, I don't know whether that was what you meant, but it is the meaning I find there. Very likely it has no head or tail, but it has a body and a very beautiful body—and I ask with Baron, why do you want to understand? why do you want to cut it up into the dry mathematical figures of the Intellect? Hang it all, sir! In spite of myself you are making me a convert to the Housman theory and Surrealism. No, Sir—feel, instead, overstand, interstand, but don't try to understand the creations of a supra-intellectual Beauty.

It is enough to feel and grasp without trying to "understand" the creations of a supra-intellectual Beauty. 17 February 1937

*

The growing A glowing heart of day⁶
Is lily white⁷ Woke diamond-white,
Rising out of the From its prison-bed of clay⁸
Clothed with the night.

Silent and slow and dim
~~Are its hidden~~ Its infant beat:
~~On its~~ But in the invisible rim
~~Various Worlds on worlds meet~~ ⁹met

And flowed upon a high
Current of thought
To an unknown ~~destiny~~ ecstasy
Transparence-shot wrought.

Behind ~~an~~ the emptiness
Of light and shade
~~Dreams of a heaven-~~ Heaven's intimate caress
~~Are secretly laid~~ Secretly played

And ~~the~~ luminous ~~wings~~ eyes of stars
~~Come out of~~ Looked from the deep
And its Engulfing darkness bars¹⁰
With its Of passion-sleep,

Then And voices ~~can~~ could be heard
Across the sky,
~~Falling like a~~ Calling the white sun-word
~~From~~ Of infinity.

They are the Transient voices of time
Fading away
~~Beyond~~ Around the mystic chime
Of the heart of day.

⁶ Here and in several other places in this section, the poem as submitted to Sri Aurobindo is printed in roman type, words cancelled by him are printed in ~~strike-out~~ mode, and words added by him are printed in bold type.—Ed.

⁷ Not only cheap but gratis.

⁸ It doesn't usually.

⁹ Terribly prosaic.

¹⁰ I don't think bars ever engulf, but as it is surrealistically appropriate—

This again is a riddle! I absolutely surrendered. To whom?
Can you tell me and solve the mystery?

Not very cogent, whether realistically or surrealistically. But see how with a few alterations I have coged it. (Excuse the word, it is surrealistic). I don't put double lines as I don't want to pay too many compliments to myself. I don't say that the new version has any more meaning than the first. But significance, sir, significance! Fathomless!

As for the inspiration it was a very remarkable source you tapped—super-Blakish, but your transcription is faulty, e.g. lily-white, rising out of the clay, that horrible “various”, and constant mistakes in the last four stanzas. Only the third came out altogether right—subject to the change you yourself made of “destiny” to “ecstasy” and “shot” to “wrought”. But obviously the past tense is needed instead of the present so as to give the sense of something that has been seen.

7 July 1938

*

I have seen how your little touches have “coged” the poem.
Does it then show that if my transcription becomes perfect
some day, the whole thing will drop perfectly O.K.?

Of course. At present the mind still interferes too much, catching at an expression which will somehow approximate to the thing meant instead of waiting for the one true word. This catching is of course involuntary and the mind does it passively without knowing what it is doing—a sort of instinctive haste to get the thing down. In so doing it gets an inferior layer of inspiration to comb for the words even when the substance is from a higher one.

I didn't get the time to revise it. But even if I had revised it, do you think I could have made it better?

Not necessarily.

When a thing is not at all comprehended, how to correct? By inner feeling?

No; by getting into touch with the real source. The defects come from a non-contact or an interception by some inferior source as explained above.

Wherever alternatives came, I put them and in two places they stuck. If I try to understand the thing every bit seems ridiculous.

Because you are trying to find a mental meaning and your mind is not familiar with the images, symbols, experiences that are peculiar to this realm. Each realm of experience has its own figures, its own language, its own vision and the physical mind not catching the link finds it all absurd. At the same time the main idea in yesterday's is quite clear. The heart of day evolving from clay and night is obviously the upward luminous movement of the awakened spiritual consciousness covering the intermediate worlds (vital, mental, psychic) in its passage to the supreme Ananda (unknown ecstasy, transparency-wrought, the transparency being that well-known-to-mystics experience of the pure spiritual consciousness and existence). In the light of the main idea the last four stanzas should surely be clear — the stars and the sun being well-known symbols.

What "remarkable source", please? Inner or over?

Can't specify — as these things have no name. Inner — over also in imagery, but not what I call the overhead planes. These belong to the inner mind or inner vital or to the intuitive mind or anywhere else that is mystic.

8 July 1938

*

The breath of life is a flaming flame-mystery!,
It That circles round towards a hidden altitude,
Each A spark, a movement being a spark of eternity
And every its occult seed a veiled God-hood.

Creation is a shadow child of God-delight;
Born from the illimitable hush seas of sound

And gains It turns to its primal state tranquil source in the
 Infinite
 Like a wave freed from time's monotonous round.
 Escaping from the monotone of Time's round.

The mystic hues Light that shines in every heart
 || Climbs towards the an unknown solitary Sun
 Where they are joined to their And joins its own immortal
 counterpart
 And grows into a Accomplished in that timeless union.

~~Everything~~ Thus all things born passes into a divine
 Nothingness and begins to bear reach that single Bliss again
 ||| Whence they sprang like stars out of on a nebulous sky-line,
 |||| A fathomless beauty within a sphere of pain.

This is really disappointing! Oh, the time it took! I am sure
 you will find plenty of hurdles.

There are indeed very difficult hurdles but I have leaped them all
 — only in the process the poem has got considerably reshaped.
 So, I don't put lines except for the few that have remained almost
 as they were. The last line is magnificent — the others mostly
 needed a revision which they don't seem to have got.

Day by day things are getting difficult, more than yoga, sir!
 My head will break one day! Be prepared, please!

Well, well, when the head is broken, a passage for a superior
 light is often created — so either way you gain, a safe head or
 an illumined one.

31 August 1938

*

In yesterday's poem you hurdled very well indeed. Your com-
 ment about the last line has comforted me very much. When I
 wrote it, it came like a shot; but I didn't feel its magnificence.
 The rhythm, word-music, etc. are not that striking. Perhaps
 you find some inner truth behind these things that magnifies
 them to you?

Well, have you become a disciple of Baron and the surrealists? You seem to suggest that significance does not matter and need not enter into the account in judging or feeling poetry! Rhythm and word music are indispensable, but are not the whole of poetry. For instance lines like these

In the human heart of Heligoland
A hunger wakes for the silver sea;
For waving the might of his magical wand
God sits on his throne in eternity,

has plenty of rhythm and word music — a surrealist might pass it, but I certainly would not. Your suggestion that my seeing the inner truth behind a line magnifies it to me, i.e. gives it a false value to me which it does not really have as poetry, may or may not be correct. But, certainly, the significance and feeling suggested and borne home by the words and rhythm are in my view a capital part of the value of poetry. Shakespeare's lines "Absent thee from felicity awhile And in this harsh world draw thy breath in pain" have a skilful and consummate rhythm and word combination, but this gets its full value as the perfect embodiment of a profound and moving significance, the expression in a few words of a whole range of human world-experience. It is for a similar quality that I have marked this line. Coming after the striking and significant image of the stars on the skyline and the single Bliss that is the source of all, it expresses with a great force of poetic vision and emotion the sense of the original Delight contrasted with the world of sorrow born from it and yet the deep presence of that Delight in an unseizable beauty of things. But even isolated and taken by itself there is a profound and moving beauty in the thought, expression and rhythm of the line and it is surprising to me that anyone can miss it. It expresses it not intellectually but through vision and emotion. As for rhythm and word music, it is certainly not striking in the sense of being out of the way or unheard of, but it is perfect — technically in the variation of vowels and the weaving of the consonants and the distribution of longs and shorts, more deeply in the modulated rhythmic movement and

the calling in of overtones. I don't know what more you want

1 September 1938

Amal Kiran (K. D. Sethna)

Out of the Unknown

[*Sri Aurobindo wrote the paragraphs published, in revised form, on pages 5 to 7 above, and continued:*]

Your present effort is slightly improved, but most of it comes from or through the outer intelligence. Only in the closing passage are there five lines from your highest source, and the rest is reasonably like what the creative intelligence in you wanted to transmit. But the “red” veil with its splash of pseudo-colour comes from the brain, not from the true source. All the opening part is an attempt of the outer intelligence to put into its own language something it did not catch in its pure form. It is in a quite different tone and speech from the close; for that is either grave and deep or of a high elevation and illumined power, but this opening is all imitative intellect stuff—romantic pseudo-colour, Shelley-Byronic, fairly well done in its own kind of stuff, but not the thing at all. I have suggested some alterations—supposing you want to give to this opening too the same tone or nearly the same—grave and deep—as the major part of the close. The alterations may seem slight to you, but in all writing, prose or poetry, indeed in all art, a few slight alterations, a touch here and a touch there can alter the whole tone and quality of a work or a passage. My alterations are meant either to set right verbal poverty or awkwardnesses or to wipe out false vital colour and give instead the gravity of the higher poetic source.

2 June 1931

*

This sonnet was more or less suggested by one written by Edward Shanks [see pages 431–32]. I should like to ascertain whether the seed fell on really fruitful soil or not. The form, I must admit, is not perfect, because while the sestet is Italian the octet does not correspond to the necessary abba abba.

Not only with the voice of mighty things,
Exultant rain or swift importunate sea,
But even on the unnoticeable wings
Of nameless birdsong I shall quest for Thee.
No fragmentary passion I aspire
To consecrate, howe'er magnificent:
But one glad life of mingling hours intent
Upon thy beauty, touched with self-same fire.

For, what avail great moments if their flight
 Leave the familiar day a soulless din;
 Nor give their glory a true antiphonal note
 Each wandering wind-lark; nor the common night
 Find the inward eye a placid mere wherein
 Worship holds argently the heavens afloat?

(1) This can hardly be called a sonnet; fantasy of form is inconsistent with the severe building of a sonnet. If you want a new form and wish to make it by combining the Shakespearean rhyme sequence in the octet with the Miltonic in the sestet, you *can* make that venture, but in that case you will have to transpose the fifth and sixth lines

To consecrate, howe'er magnificent,—
 No fragmentary passion I aspire,
 But one glad life of mingling hours intent
 Upon thy beauty, touched with self-same fire.

That would, to my mind, be an improvement in expression as well as in form. But the present *khichadi* is impossible.

(2) “Nor give their glory a true antiphonal note”

with its double anapaest is too jerky a movement. Anapaests and dactyls can be thrown into a modern pentameter, but they must be managed more skilfully than that. I would suggest

Nor give their glory's true antiphonal note
 Each wanderer wind-lark

(3) “Find the inward eye” is again rhythmically clumsy; especially amid so many lines of a smooth liquid movement it brings one up with a jerk like the sudden jolt of a smoothly running car.

Find the soul's gaze a placid mere wherein
 or something like that would do much better.

(4) Why semi-colons after “din” and “wind-lark” instead of the expected commas?

Apart from these defects of detail, the poem is a good one; once they are mended, it becomes a fine work. 12 June 1931

*

Is this poem nearer perfection now?

“O thou who wast enamoured of earth’s bloom
And intimate fragrance and charmed throbbing voice
Of mutable pleasure now disdained by Thee —
Far-visaged wanderer, dost thou rejoice
Straining towards the empty-hearted gloom
To kiss the cold lips of Eternity?”

“Fruitless and drear has proved each carnal prize
When he who strove could bring no face of flame,
And¹¹ wild magnificence of youth’s caress....
Not with sage calm, but thrilled vast hands, I claim
The unfathomed dark which round my spirit lies —
And touch undying, rapturous Loveliness!”

The second verse is slightly better, but it is not at all equal to the first. Poetry that arrives at its aim gives the reader a sense of satisfying finality in the expression (even when the substance is insignificant); it is like an arrow that hits the target in the centre. Poetry that passes by the target or hits only the outside of it, either fails or gets a partial success, but in any case it does not carry that sense of satisfying finality. This is the difference between the two verses. 10 July 1931

*

This errant life is dear although it dies;
And human lips are sweet though they but sing
Of stars estranged from us; and youth’s emprise
Is wondrous yet, although an unsure thing.

Cloud-lucent Bliss untouched by earthiness!
I fear to soar lest tender bonds grow less

¹¹ Better repeat the “No”; it will strengthen a little these two lines, which are rather weak compared with the rest.

Beyond the waving verdure of our sighs.¹²
 If Thou desirest my weak self to outgrow
 Its mortal longings, lean down from above,
 Temper the unborn light no thought can trace,
 Suffuse my mood with a familiar glow!
 For 'tis with mouth of clay I supplicate;
 Speak to me heart to heart words intimate,
 And all Thy formless glory turn to love
 And mould Thy love into a human face!

But for this one unfortunate line a beautiful poem, one of the very best you have written. The last six lines, one may say even the last eight, are absolutely perfect. If you could always write like that, you would take your place among English poets and no low place either.¹³

July 1931

*

I was wondering whether a second such burst of quintessential romantic poetry as Coleridge's *Kubla Khan* was not possible. The day before yesterday I got some kind of inspiration and wrote the first draft of these lines that form a fragment on the same theme as that of Coleridge. But can it come anywhere near that gem?

Kubla Khan

“For thy unforgettable sake
 See my royal passion wake
 Marmoreal sleep to towering dreamery,
 In wide felicitous splendour hazed,
 With echoes magic, numberless, that throng
 Through blossoming vales, an ever-vigilant song
 Of naked waters tremulously embraced
 By shadows of my shining ecstasy! . . .

“ . . . The moon enkindles in the eyes
 A lonely virginal surprise —

¹² This line is terribly fanciful in expression. Green sighs? Sighs with branches?

¹³ For Sri Aurobindo's opinion of the final version of this poem, see pp. 203–04. — Ed.

O hasten while the warm blood runs,
To odorous gardens born for thy delight!
What memories that oppose the charm of night
Allure towards unseen magnificence
The inaccessible beauty of thy face?
Must Kubla ever in thy silence trace
The strange voice of the sacred river flowing
Beyond the lustrous hours of Xanadu
And the sweet foison of their passionate sowing,
Down to cold caverns hidden from his view,
In search of some unpathed phantasmal sea's
Remote profundities?"

I fear your inspiration has played you false — far from the quintessence, I do not find even the essence of romantic poetry here. It is not inspiring either. I do not know why this fancy has seized on you to follow in the trace of others, improving on Abercrombie, "rivalling" Coleridge, — and if to improve on Abercrombie is easy (though why anyone should try it, I don't know), to rival Coleridge is not such an easy job, I can assure you. In any case, no good work is likely to come out of such a second-hand motive.

Let me add that this poem of Coleridge is a masterpiece, not because it is the quintessence of romantic poetry, but because it is a genuine supraphysical experience caught and rendered in a rare hour of exaltation with an absolute accuracy of vision and authenticity of rhythm. Farther, romantic poetry could be genuine in the early nineteenth century, but the attempt to walk back into it in the year of grace 1931 is not likely to be a success, it can only result in an artificial literary exercise. You have a genuine vein of poetic inspiration somewhere above your intellect which comes through sometimes when the said intellect can be induced to be quiet and the lower vital does not meddle. If I were you, I should try to find that always and make the access to it free and the transcriptions from it pure (for then your writing becomes marvellously good); that would be a truer line of progress than these exercises.

21 August 1931

*

Do you think my poem *Kubla Khan* will be much improved if I give it a conclusion improvised from an early, unequal, effort of mine, so that it ends:

That longing of mysterious tears
From infinite to infinite?

I write "mysterious" because Kubla, though not quite innocent of spiritual things, would not exactly agree to calling the "tears" ecstatic and thus weaken his appeal.

There is nothing more dangerous—I was going to say criminal—than to alter a perfect line or passage of poetry, especially when it is done from a mere intellectual motive. If Kubla cannot have a longing of ecstatic tears, let him go to the devil where he belongs, his limitations are no reason for spoiling a perfect thing. With "ecstatic" these two lines are authentic, inspired, inevitable—suggestive of a deep spiritual experience,—with "mysterious" they become falsely romantic and commonplace, with nothing true or genuine behind the pretentiousness of the words.

21 August 1931

*

O Grace that flowest from the Master's Will,
How fondly Thou dost mitigate the power
Of utter summit for our valleyed sake,^{1*}
That like a wondrous yet familiar hour
Eternity may claim soul's countryside!² . . .
On heights Thou hast Thy ancient dwelling, still
From the majestic altitudes to us
Thou com'st with gifts a beauty riverine,³
Of all Thy aerial secrets rumourous,
So we may find the glimmering crests that make
Signal of ultimate destiny, not chill,—
Nor godhead Thou hast planned to make us quest,
A dizzy strangeness,—we who now wind rest,
From mortal coils, with the white rapturous wine

* The numbers 1–6 refer to the corresponding numbers on the next page.—Ed.

Of Thy prophetic cadence, and inhale
The mountain coolness in Thy streaming hair!⁴ . . .
Beauteous, divine, whose mercies never fail,⁵
O Ganga of the in-world! From life's care
Freed by Thy love, our hearts are fortified
To seek the stainless fountain of Thy tide
And contemplate the illimitable form
Of Shiva silent like a frozen storm.⁶

1. “for our valleyed sake” is a locution that offers fascinating possibilities but fails to sound English. One might risk “Let fall some tears for my unhappy sake” in defiance of grammar or, humourously, “Oh, shed some sweat-drops for my corpulent sake”, but “valleyed sake” carries the principle of the “*Arṣa prayog*” (Rishi’s license) beyond the boundaries of the possible.

2. When an image comes out from the mind not properly transmuted in the inner vision or delivered by the alchemy of language, it betrays itself as coin of the fancy or the contriving intellect and is then called a conceit. These two lines sound very much like a conceit; transmuted it might have been a fine image.

3. I first missed this adjective in a search in Chambers, but now I find it. Even so I cannot reconcile myself to it — it sounds Vanagramic (to invent an adjective not found in Chambers!).

4. I am obliged to say that I cannot make anything very lucid or coherent or effective out of these seven lines; I fail possibly to follow the turns of your thought — or its connections. Or is it the images that are thrust into each other rather than fused into a whole?

5. [In answer to the question: “should I say ‘superb’ instead? Or something else?”] “Beauteous, divine” is terribly flat and commonplace; but superb would make bad worse.

6. These last lines could be very fine if they were recast under a more powerful and magic-working inspiration.

As a whole, this poem is one of those that can have a *succès d'estime* by reason of its ideas and a certain talent in the form and the language, but seems to be rather strongly constructed than inspired. The transmutation, the alchemy of language I

have already spoken of are missing. Certain turns of the style in this poem suggest an (perhaps subconscious) imitation of the liberties (not in correction, but bold or contracted terms) which Arjava occasionally takes with the English language, but Arjava's audacities are saved and justified by the abounding poetic energy of his diction and rhythm. I do not think you can afford to follow in that line—for that energy is not yours (otherwise you would write better blank verse than you do); your possibility rather lies in a combination of refined elevation and subtle elegance, the Virgilian not the Aeschylean manner, with which an attempt at over-terse compactness of thought does not agree.

26 August 1931

*

The Temple-Girl of Mo-Hen-Jo-Daro

Behold her face: unto that glorious smile
 All sorrow was an ecstasy of gloom
 Fragrant with an invisible flame of flowers.
 And never but with startling loveliness
 Like the white shiver of breeze on moonlit water
 Flew the chill thought of death across her dream...

A far cry fades along her kindled curves
 To beauty ineffable: shameless and pure,
 The rhythm of adoration her sole vesture,
 Upon the wayward heart of time she dawns—
 A passion wedded to some glowing hush
 Beyond the world, in tense eternity!

Your poem has colour and grace and vision in it, but its rhythm is a colourless monotone. Each line is a good blank verse line by itself—except

Like the white shiver of breeze on moonlit water
 which has no rhythm at all,—but together they are flat and ineffective. In blank verse of this type, with few enjambements and even these hardly seem to *enjamber* at all, it is essential to see to two things.

(1) each line must be a thing of force by itself—it is the Marlowesque type and, although you cannot always command a mighty line, either an armoured strength or a clear-cut beauty must be the form of each decasyllable;

(2) each line must be different from the other in its metrical build so as to give the utmost variety possible—otherwise monotony is inevitable.

It is possible to use either of these methods by itself, but the two together are more effective.

I suppose I ought to give an illustration of what I mean and I can do it best by altering slightly your lines to make them conform to the first rule. I am not suggesting substitutes for them, for these would not be in your style; I only want to make my meaning clear.

Behold her face; unto that glorious smile
All sorrow was an ecstasy of gloom,¹⁴
A rapturous devastating flame of flowers.
Seldom with a rare startling loveliness,
A white shiver of breeze in moonlit waters,
Death flew chill winds of thought across her dream.

A far cry fades along those kindled curves
Into ineffable beauty; shameless-pure,
A rhythm of adoration her sole vesture,
She dances on the wayward heart of time,
And is passion-wedded to some glowing hush,
And is the world caught by eternity.

You will see that the movement of each line is differentiated from that of almost every other and yet there is a sufficient kinship in the whole.

I have done it of course in my own way; yours tends to a more harmonious and coloured beauty and you achieved what was necessary in your *Shakuntala's Farewell*, where each line was a cut gem by itself and there was sufficient variation of movement or at least of rhythmic tone; but here the materials of

¹⁴ These two lines satisfy the rule, so I don't change them.

a good poem are there but the effect fails, the chief fault lying in the defect of rhythm which denies the poetry the value to which it has a right.

8 July 1933

*

Men dreamed of her strange hair; ~~and they~~ saw it fall
 A cataract of nectar through their sleep,
 Crushing the soul with sweetness; + ~~and they~~ woke ~~a~~ from dread,¹⁵
~~In~~ With all their limbs a speechless heaven of pain!

Her voice ~~reached~~ soared¹⁶ to Creation's highest peak,
 And ~~though a music~~ that most delicate its music with its rapture
 Swepting through the seven worlds ~~and~~ found out the gods
 Helpless like flames swaying in a huge wind!

A ~~terror~~ beautiful ~~were~~ terror were those dark conscious eddies,
 Her fathomless pure vague-glimmering pure and fathomless eyes,
~~Wherin~~ Therein the spirits that rashly plunged their love
 Fell ~~whirled~~ through a lifetimes of bewildering bliss!

But all in vain, her voice and gaze and hair
 Before the snowy calm -pale and immutable calm
 Of Shiva's meditation, a frozen fire
 Of lone omnipotence alone with its locked in self-splendour light!

His far face glowed ~~like~~ an immortal death: ~~his far face glowed~~ —¹⁷
 The inaudible disclosure of some white
 Eternity, some ~~of~~¹⁸ unperturbed dream-vast,
 Behind It slew the colour and passion of time's heart-beat!

It looks as if you were facing the problem of blank verse by attempting it under conditions of the maximum difficulty. Not content with choosing a form which is based on the single-line¹⁹ blank verse (as opposed to the flowing and freely enjambmed variety) you try to unite flow-lines and single-line and farther

¹⁵ "A-dread" seems to me rather feeble.

¹⁶ "Reached" is very weak.

¹⁷ Why this inversion? It spoils the power and directness of the line.

¹⁸ The double "of" is very awkward and spoils both force and flow.

¹⁹ I mean, of course, each line a clear-cut entity by itself.

undertake a form of blank verse quatrains! I have myself tried the blank verse quatrain; even, when I attempted the single-line blank verse base on a large scale in *Savitri*, I found myself falling involuntarily into a series of four-line movement. But even though I was careful in the building, I found it led to a stiff monotony and had to make a principle of variation — one line, two line, three line, four line or longer passages (paragraphs as it were) alternating with each other; otherwise the system would be a failure.

In attempting the blank verse quatrain one has to avoid like poison all flatness of movement — a flat movement immediately creates a sense of void and sets the ear asking for the absent rhyme. The last line of each verse especially must be a powerful line acting as a strong satisfying close so that the rhyming close-cadence is missed no more. And, secondly, there must be a very careful building of the structure. A mixture of sculpture and architecture is indicated — there should be plenty of clear-cut single lines but they must be built into a quatrain that is itself a perfect structural whole. In your lines it is these qualities that are lacking, so that the poetic substance fails in its effect owing to rhythmic insufficiency. One closing line of yours will absolutely not do — that of the fourth stanza — its feminine ending is enough to damn it; you may have feminine endings but not in the last line of the quatrain, and its whole movement is an unfixed movement. The others would do, but they lose half their force by being continuations of clauses which look back to the previous line for their sense. They can do that sometimes, but only on condition of their still having a clear-cut wholeness in themselves and coming in with a decisive force. In the structure you have attempted to combine the flow of the lyrical quatrain with the force of a single-line blank verse system. I suppose it can be done, but here the single-line has interfered with the flow and the flow has interfered with the single-line force.

In my version I have made only minor changes for the most part, but many of them, — in order to secure what I feel to be the missing elements. I have indicated, in the places where my reasons for change were of another kind, what those reasons

were; the rest are dictated by the two considerations of rhythmic efficiency and quatrain structure. In the first verse this structure is secured by putting two pauses in the middle of lines, each clause taking up the sense from there and enlarging into amplitude and then bringing to a forceful close. In the second verse and in the fourth I have attempted a sweeping continuous quatrain movement, but taken care to separate them by a different structure so as to avoid monotony. The third is made of two blank verse couplets, each complementary in sense to the other; the fifth is based on a one-line monumental phrase worked out in sense by a three-line development with a culminating close-line. The whole thing is not perhaps as perfect as it needs to be, but it is in the nature of a demonstration, to show on what principles the blank verse quatrain can be built, if it has to be done at all — I have founded it on the rule of full but well-sculptured single lines and an architectural quatrain structure: others are possible, but I think would be more difficult to execute.

I had half a mind to illustrate my thesis by quotations from *Savitri*, but I resist the temptation, worried by the scowling forehead of Time — this will do.

P.S. I don't consider the proximity of the closing words "light" and "white" in the last stanzas an objection since the quatrains stand as separate entities — so I did not alter; of course in continuous blank verse an objection would be called for.

18 July 1933

*

Would you describe the following poem of mine as "coin of the fancy"? What is the peculiarity of poetic effect, if any, here?

Night

No more the press and play of light release
 Thrilling bird-news between high columned trees.
 Upon the earth a blank of slumber drops:
 Only cicadas toil in grassy shops —
 But all their labours seem to cry "Peace, peace."
 Nought travels down the roadway save the breeze;

And though beyond our gloom — throb after throb —
Gathers the great heart of a silver mob,
There is no haste in heaven, no frailty mars
The very quiet business of the stars.

It is very successful — the last two lines are very fine and the rest have their perfection. I should call it a mixture of inspiration and cleverness — or perhaps ingenious discovery would be a better phrase. I am referring to such images as “thrilling bird-news”, “grassy shops”, “silver mob”. Essentially they are conceits but saved by the note of inspiration running through the poem — while in the last line the conceit “quiet business” is lifted beyond itself and out of conceitedness by the higher tone at which the inspiration arrives there.

20 August 1936

*

Pharphar

Where is the glassy gold of Pharphar,—
Or its echoing silver-gray
When the magic ethers of evening
Wash one the various day?

I have travelled the whole earth over,
Yet never found
The beautiful body of Pharphar
Or its soul of secret sound.

But all my dreams are an answer
To Pharphar's blind career;
And the songs that I sing are an image
Of quiets I long to hear.

For, only this beauty unreached
No time shall mar —
This river of infinite distance,
Pharphar.

Very beautiful indeed, subtle and gleaming and delicate. The sound-suggestions are perfect. I suppose it comes from some

plane of intuitive inspiration.

15 October 1936

*

I wonder whether you would indicate the resemblances and differences between De la Mare's *Arabia* — a charming poem — and this one written by myself [*Pharpar*] which was partially influenced by his.

It is indeed charming — De la Mare seems to have an unfailing beauty of language and rhythm and an inspired loveliness of fancy that is captivating. But still it is fancy, the mind playing with its delicate imaginations. A hint of something deeper tries to get through sometimes, but it does not go beyond a hint. That is the difference between his poem and the one it inspired from you. There is some kinship though no sameness in the rhythm and the tone of delicate remoteness it brings with it. But in your poem that something deeper is not hinted, it is caught — throughout — in all the expression, but especially in such lines as

When the magic ethers of evening
Wash one the various day

or

The beautiful body of Pharpar
Or its soul of secret sound

or

This river of infinite distance,
Pharpar.

These expressions give a sort of body to the occult without taking from it its strangeness and do not leave it in mist or in shadowy image or luminous silhouette. That is what a fully successful spiritual or occult poetry has to do, to make the occult and the spiritual real to the vision of the consciousness, the feeling. The occult is most often materialised as by Scott and Shakespeare or else pictured in mists, the spiritual mentalised as in many attempts at spiritual poetry — a reflection in the mind is

not enough. For success in the former Arjava's *Totalitarian* with the stark occult reality of its vision is a good example; for the latter there are lines both in his poems and yours that I could instance, but I cannot recall them accurately just now,— but have you not somewhere a line

The mute unshadowed spaces of her mind?

That would be an instance of the concrete convincing reality of which I am speaking—a spiritual state not hinted at or abstractly put as the metaphysical poets most often do it but presented with a tangible accuracy which one who has lived in the silent wideness of his spiritualised mind can at once recognise as the embodiment in word of his experience.

I do not mean for a moment to deny the value of the exquisite texture of dream in De la Mare's representation, but still this completer embodiment achieves more. 16 October 1936

*

Why this relapse on my part? Will this gift of expression be always so treacherously fluctuating?

It is not a relapse, but an oscillation which one finds in almost every poet. Each has a general level, a highest level and a lower range in which some defects of his poetical faculty come out. You have three manners: (1) a sort of decorative romantic manner that survives from your early days,— this at a lower pitch turns to too much dressiness of an ornamental kind, at a higher to post-Victorian, Edwardian or Georgian rhetoric with a frequent saving touch of Yeats; (2) a level at which all is fused into a fine intuitive authenticity and beauty, there is seldom anything to change; (3) a higher level of grander movement and language in which you pull down or reach the influences of the Higher Mind, Illumined Mind, Overmind Intuition. This last you have not yet fully mastered so as to write with an absolute certainty and faultlessness except by lines and stanzas or else as a whole in rare moments of total inspiration, but you are moving towards mastery in it. Sometimes these inspirations get mixed up together. It is this straining towards greater height that creates

the difficulty, yet it is indispensable for the evolution of your genius. It is not surprising therefore that inspiration comes with difficulty often, or that there are dormant periods or returns of the decorative inspiration. All that is part of the day's work and dejection is quite out of place.

20 April 1937

*

Seated Above

Seated above in a measureless trance of truth —
A thunder wearing the lightning's streak of smile,
A lonely monolith of frozen fire,
Sole pyramid piercing to the vast of the One —
Waits Shiva throned on an all-supporting void.
Wing after wing smites to the cosmic sky.
Gathering flame-speed out of their own wild heart —
That tunnel of dream through the body's swoon of rock —
They find their home in this sweet silent Face
With the terrible brain that bursts to a hammer of heaven
And deluges hell with mercies without end.
The abysmal night opens its secret smile
And all the world cries out it is the dawn!

Seated Above is a striking poem but its violent connections and disconnections — I am not condemning them — have somehow awakened the Johnsonian critic in me and I give voice to his objections here without supporting them. His first objection is to "streak of smile" and he wants to know how thunder can wear a smile, because thunder is a sound, not a visible object. The next three lines are very fine, he admits though he wriggles a little at the frozen fire. He would like to know how a wing can have a heart and wants also to know whether it is the heart that is a tunnel of dream and whether it is the tunnel that finds a home and what can be meant by the home of a tunnel. He is startled by the deluge from Shiva's brain and his own brain is ready to burst at the idea that Shiva's brain is being knocked out of his head by the hammer of heaven. The last two lines elicit his first unquestioning approval; that, he says, is the right union

of poetry and common-sense expression.

I don't ask you to take these Johnsonianisms seriously; I have only been taking a little exercise in a field foreign to me; but I am not sure this is not how some critics will grumble and groan under this particular hammer of heaven.

12 November 1948

A. E. on Amal Kiran—Sri Aurobindo on A. E.

A. E. has made some interesting remarks about some of my poems—remarks curious in some places, while finely critical in others. He is puzzled by an unrhythymical line—due really to a typographical error.

To the inexhaustible vastness that lure.

It occurs in the poem which you thought could rank with *This errant life*. Of course it should be “vastnesses”. In “A madrigal to enchant her” only the phrase “the song-impetuous mind” seems to have struck his fancy. About *This Errant Life*, which pleased you so much, he has nothing to say. Isn't it strange? What do you think is the reason? Is it that his poetic criterion differs absolutely from yours?

Not strange at all. Simply, there was nothing in him that answered to the emotion and vision of the lines.

*

Your letter suggested a more critical attitude on A. E.'s part than his actual appreciation warrants. His appreciation is, on the contrary, sufficiently warm; “a genuine poetic quality” and “many fine lines”—he could not be expected to say more. The two quotations he makes²⁰ certainly deserve the praise he gives them, and they are moreover of the kind A. E. and Yeats also, I think, would naturally like. But the poem I selected for especial praise had no striking expressions like these standing out from

²⁰ *The song-impetuous mind . . .*
The Eternal Glory is a wanderer
Hungry for lips of clay

the rest, just as in a Greek statue there would be no single feature standing out in a special beauty (eyes, lips, head or hands), but the whole has a perfectly modelled grace of equal perfection everywhere, like, let us say, the perfect charm of a statue by Praxiteles. This apart from the idea and feeling, which goes psychically and emotionally much deeper than the ideas in the lines quoted by A.E. which are poetically striking but have not the same strong spiritual appeal; they touch the mind and vital strongly, but the other goes home into the soul.

It is strange that A.E. should say that the line about “inexhaustible vastnesses” could not scan; of course, “as it stands”, there is no possibility of scanning it; but he says “even so”, even supposing it is only a typographical error. Perhaps, he is not inclined to tolerate the two anapaests or rather the initial tribrach and medial anapaest in the line? But that would be strange — for it is precisely this kind of freedom that the poetry of today is supposed to effect even in the pentameter. So at least I understood from a review in the *Nation* and from the example of poets like Abercrombie and others. Besides an opening tribrach (one could justify it as an iamb by the elision of the *e* in “the”) and a medial anapaest of this kind are, it seems to me, permissible even in fairly regular pentameters. And what of Shakespeare’s freedoms in blank verse or Swinburne’s or Webster’s famous line

Cover|her face; | my eyes daz|zle; she | died young. |

I only read A.E.’s poetry once and had no time to form a reliable impression; but I seem to remember a too regular and obvious rhythm, not sufficiently plastic, which did not carry the remarkable vision and thought-substance of the poet entirely home. That, however, may be a mistaken memory, and the rest is speculation. I cannot make out why he should say “it is not a verse rhythm”. It is a strong rather than a melodious rhythm, but it is as good a verse rhythm as the others. 5 February 1932

*

I don’t think I can consent to sending the letter [of 5 February 1932] to A.E. — unasked-for criticism is the last thing I would

dream of sending to someone personally unknown to me—especially to a man of A.E.'s standing and value. Besides, I can express casual *dicta* of that kind to you or Dilip or Arjava, because our minds are in sufficiently close communication to throw out an isolated point without balancing it by the other things that would have to be said if I were writing for a distant mind or for the public. My remarks, even about his rhythm, are quite incomplete and based on an uncertain remembrance—I read his poems hastily in a volume brought from a library and kept only for a short time—and it was at least seven or eight years ago—more, for I must have been writing *The Future Poetry* at the time. For that reason, too, I would rather like to have a more leisurely glance at your selections [*from A.E.'s poetry*], if you can spare them for some time. 6 February 1932

Nishikanta

বহিধারা

তুমি মোর সঙ্গেপন-উৎস হ'তে
ডুচলিয়া দিলে বহিধারা;
ফুটে ওঠে বিহঙ্গের গোলাপের গভীর প্রবাল;
চন্দ্ৰ-লোভী বাসনার মৰ্ম-পথে
দেখা দেয় অগ্নদৃত-তারা,
দীর্ঘ করি' অঙ্কুরের জলদ-জঙ্গল | . . .
ছিনককরে তিমিৰ-গৃস্থিলা;
স্বপনের তীরে তীরে তৱণীর স্পৰ্শমণি লাগে | . . .
মাতঙ্গের শুভ্র শির বহি' আনে
বৃন্তহীন বৈদুর্য-কমল;
তুরস্ক যে দেয় দিশা উৎরপানে . . .
পূর্ণশশী আদিত্যের আসঙ্গ-সন্ধায় |

The separate images are very usual symbols of the inner experience, but they have been combined together here in a rather difficult way. The fire of course is the psychic fire which wells up from the veiled psychic source. The bird is the soul and the flower is the rose of love and surrender. The moon is the symbol of spirituality. As the star is within it is described as

piercing through the knots of the inner darkness and worsting the vital growths that are like clouds enwrapping it. The boat also is a usual symbol in the inner visions. The elephant is the spiritual strength that removes obstacles and the horse the force of tapasya that gallops to the summits of the spiritual realisation. The sun is the symbol of the higher Truth. The lotus is the symbol of the inner consciousness.

February 1937

*

স্বশিশু

... রহস্যময় মাঠে	হঠাৎ পড়ল বা'রে	চাঁদের রাপোর বল ...
একটা গাছের তলের	ছুটতে ছুটতে এলো	সোনার বরণ ছেলে ...
আমি তখন ছুটে...	সবুজ কালো জলের	চাঁদটি হল হারা।
অমনি সে-জল থেকে	ভোবার মধ্যে দুরে	দুবল সোনার ছেলে
স্বচ্ছ দীপ্তি তোয়া-	ডুকরে কেঁদে উঠে	স্বর্ণ-কেশেররাজি ...
সোনার শিশুর তনুর	ধরেছি সেই শিশুর	উজল উৎসখানি ...
তখন দেখি ছেলের	ওঠে বিপুল বেগে	উৎসে হল ধোয়া
আমায় শুধুই বলে	সাতটি স্বচ্ছ-ধারার	কাজল জলের কালো
বলেই দোলায় পাখা	দুই কাঁধে দুই ডানা।	দুই কাঁধে দুই ডানা।
	“যাবো যাবো যাবো”...	“যাবো যাবো যাবো”...
	যায় সে উড়ে উড়ে	মায়ের কাছেই যাবো।
		যেন সোনার স্পন।

I suppose the golden child is the Truth-Soul which follows after the silver light of the spiritual. When it plunges into the black waters of the subconscious, it releases from it the spiritual light and the sevenfold streams of the Divine Energy and, clearing itself of the stains of the subconscious, it prepares its flight towards the supreme Divine (the Mother). It is a very beautiful and significant poem.

Philosophers, Intellectuals, Novelists and Musicians

Western Notions of the History of Philosophy

It is very strange that in books on philosophy by European writers, even in standard textbooks like Alfred Weber's *History of Philosophy*,¹ there is no mention of any of the Indian philosophies. To the Western writer philosophy means only European philosophy — they begin with the Greek Thales and Anaximander, as if human thinking began with them.

That is the old style European mind. It used to be the same in Art and other matters. Now Chinese and Japanese art is recognised and to a less degree the art of India, Persia and the former Indian colonies in the Far-East, but in philosophy the old ideas still reign. “From Thales to Bergson” is their idea of the History of Philosophy.

2 May 1936

Plato

Plato says [*according to Weber, p. 86*]: “The world of sense is the copy of the world of Ideas, and conversely, the world of ideas resembles its image; it forms a hierarchy. . . . In our visible world there is a gradation of beings. . . . The same holds true of the intelligible realm or the pattern of the world; the Ideas are joined together by means of other Ideas of a higher order; . . . the Ideas constantly increase in generality and force, until we reach the top, the last, the highest, the most powerful Idea or the Good, which comprehends, contains or summarizes the entire system.” I think he is nearly on the verge of a mental understanding of the Overmind.

He was trying to express in a mental way the One containing the

¹ Alfred Weber, *History of Philosophy* (London: Longmans, Green, 1904).

multiplicity which is brought out (created) from the One—that is the Overmind realisation. Plato had these ideas not as realisations but as intuitions which he expressed in his own mental form.

There are many such thoughts in Plato's philosophy. Did he get them from Indian books?

Not from Indian books—something of the philosophy of India got through by means of Pythagoras and others. But I think Plato got most of these things from intuition. 8 October 1933

*

Paul Brunton in his book *A Search in Secret Egypt* repeatedly speaks of Atlantis. I always thought that belief in Atlantis was only an imagination of the Theosophists. Is there any truth in the belief?

Atlantis is not an imagination. Plato heard of this submerged continent from Egyptian sources and geologists are also agreed that such a submersion was one of the great facts of earth history.

22 June 1936

*

In his book *Plato*, Taylor says that “the standing Academic definition of ‘man’” is “Soul *using* a body” and that “the soul *is* the man”.² But it is not clear whether the soul is the mental being or something which uses the mind also.

The European mind, for the most part, has never been able to go beyond the formula of soul + body—usually including mind in soul and everything except body in mind. Some occultists make a distinction between spirit, soul and body. At the same time there must be some vague feeling that soul and mind are not quite the same thing, for there is the phrase “this man has no soul”, or “he is a soul” meaning he has something in him beyond

² A.E. Taylor, *Plato, The Man and His Work* (London: Methuen, 1926), p. 27. Taylor bases his discussion on passages from Plato's *Alcibiades I* and *Euthydemus*.—Ed.

a mere mind and body. But all that is very vague. There is no clear distinction between mind and soul and none between mind and vital and often the vital is taken for the soul. 30 June 1936

*

Taylor [*Plato*, p. 27] writes: "The first condition of enjoying real good and making a real success of life is that a man's soul should be in a good or healthy state", that is, his soul should have the wisdom or knowledge "which ensures that a man shall make the right use of his body and of everything else which is his". This clearly indicates that by "soul" he means the vital and the mental being. Otherwise how can the soul be not "in good or healthy state"? Can we even say that the mental Purusha is or is not "in good or healthy state"?

Of course not. It is obvious that they are thinking of the mental and vital Prakriti or that part of the being which is involved in Prakriti, not of the Purusha.

The idea that the soul has to get "knowledge" at all would seem to us to be without meaning unless we take it in the sense that one has to develop the intuition as an instrumental faculty.

Yes, all these phrases are loose. At most one could say that the soul must bring out or develop the inner knowledge—that which is already there within or that the lower nature must receive the higher knowledge,—but not that the soul must get knowledge. I believe Plato himself held that all knowledge already was there within,—so even from that point of view this expression would be inaccurate. 2 July 1936

*

Plato's book *The Banquet* is said to be about Love and Beauty.
Is it a kind of philosophy?

Not much philosophy there, more poetry.

Shelley has translated *The Banquet* into English. Could I read it?

If you want to read it as a piece of literature, it is all right.

2 January 1937

*

I did not find so much poetry in the book. Perhaps you have read it in the original Greek?

Even in a good translation the poetry ought to come out to some extent. Plato was a great writer as well as a philosopher — no more perfect prose has been written by any man. In some of his books his prose carries in it the qualities of poetry and his thought has poetic vision. That is what I meant when I said it was poetry.

3 January 1937

*

How do you find Plato's ideas about philosophy, about Nature, existence of the soul, etc.?

I don't know what are his ideas about philosophy or Nature. He believes in the soul and immortality and that is of course true.

4 January 1937

Aristotle

I tried to read Aristotle but found him dry and abstract.

I always found him exceedingly dry. It is a purely mental philosophy, unlike Plato's.

9 October 1933

Plotinus

I find Plotinus very interesting.

Yes. Plotinus was not a mere philosopher, — his philosophy was founded on yogic experience and realisation.

11 October 1933

*

Plotinus says [*according to Weber, p. 171*]: "Intelligence is the first divine emanation. . . . Creation is a fall, a progressive degeneration of the divine. In the intelligence, the absolute

unity of God splits up into intelligence proper . . . and the intelligible world." Does he mean the separation that begins to take place at Overmind or the Para and Apara Prakriti?

He was speaking of the cosmic mind, I suppose. In these philosophies there is no distinction made between different grades of mind or between intellect and the consciousness beyond the intellectual.

Plotinus says [*according to Weber, p. 173*]: "The intelligence, too, is creative. . . . Its emanation or radiation is the soul. . . . The soul is not, like the intellect, endowed with immediate and complete intuition: it is restricted to the discursive thought, or analysis. . . .

"It is subordinate to the intellect. . . . There is, at the bottom of all individual souls, but one single soul manifesting itself infinitely in different forms: the soul of the world." What does Plotinus mean by soul and intelligence in this passage?

I think simply Plotinus in speaking of soul has made a jumble of vital (*prāna*), *manas* and soul (*ψυχή*) — while by intelligence he means *buddhi* (cosmic), but endows the *buddhi* with the qualities proper to the Intuition and Overmind.

12 October 1933

Shankaracharya on the *Bhagavad Gita*

On this shloka in the second chapter of the *Gita*:

एषा ब्राह्मी स्थितिः पार्थ नैनं प्राप्य विमुद्यति ।
स्थित्वाऽस्यामन्तकालेऽपि ब्रह्मनिर्वाणमृच्छति॥

Shankara says:

सैषा ज्ञाननिष्ठा स्तूयते । यथोक्ता . . . ब्राह्मी स्थितिः सर्वं कर्म
संन्यस्य ब्रह्मरूपेणवावस्थानमिति . . .

Where is there even in the preceding shlokas the idea of
सर्वं कर्म संन्यस्य?

But the final stroke comes here:

अन्ते वयस्यपि . . . मोक्षमृच्छति . . . किमु वक्तव्यं ब्रह्मचर्यादेव
संन्यस्य यावज्जीवं . . . ब्रह्मण्येवावतिष्ठते स ब्रह्मनिर्वाणमृच्छति॥

This is pure insinuation. Nowhere in the whole of the Gita can there be found the idea of ब्रह्मचर्यदेव संन्यस्य!

How can a commentator do without insinuation? He has to make the Gita (or the Upanishads) mean what he teaches; if it doesn't actually say what he teaches, he has to explain that it meant that all the same. If the Gita doesn't teach what he teaches, it would be teaching something that is not the Truth, and how can the Gita teach untruth?

In Krishna's time were there any Sannyasis at all? Rishis there were, but few, and not the sort to promote ब्रह्मचर्यादेव संन्यस्य.

Perhaps at the time of Krishna there were no Sannyasis; but the Gita speaks of Sannyasa and Sannyasis, it even speaks of कर्म सन्न्यस्य but it says मयि कर्मणि संन्यस्य and declares फलत्याग to be the true Sannyasa. Arjuna is supposed to remain in the ब्रह्मी स्थिति and fight, so that would be hardly consistent with the other kind of Sannyasa — not to speak of enjoying राज्यं समृद्धम् also.

25 March 1936

*

In Shankara's Bhashya on the Gita it seems he takes any opportunity to thrust in the ideas of कर्मसन्यास and ज्ञाननिष्ठा. For example, in the famous shloka कर्मण्येवाधिकारस्ते, the Bhashya speaks of ज्ञाननिष्ठा though it seems quite irrelevant.

Of course. There is nothing about ज्ञाननिष्ठा in the text, only in Shankara's thrust.

Shankara considers all *karma* useful only as preparation for *jñāna*. According to him even the object of the Gita is परं निःश्रेयसं संसारस्य अत्यन्तोपरमलक्षणम्.

The object of the Gita was to make Arjuna act, i.e. fight and it is only when he consented to do so that Krishna stopped the discourse. If it had been as Shankara says he would not have stopped until he had got Arjuna well-started for a cave in the

Himalayas far away from the noise of the battle.

26 March 1936

Intellectual Capacity of Mystics

A great scientist has written that mystics and spiritual men the world over have in general always been men of very average intelligence, a handful of rare instances excepted.

As for your great scientist I wonder who he had in mind as spiritual men — so far as I know history both in the East and the West there have been any number of spiritual men and mystics who have had a great or fine intellectual capacity or were endowed with a great administrative and organising ability implying a keen knowledge of men and much expenditure of brain-power. With a little looking up of the records of the past I think one could collect some hundreds of names — which would not include of course the still greater number not recorded in history or the transmitted memory of the past.

Augustus Caesar and Leonardo da Vinci

Augustus Caesar organised the life of the Roman Empire and it was this that made the framework of the first transmission of the Graeco-Roman civilisation to Europe — he came for that work and the writings of Virgil and Horace and others helped greatly towards the success of his mission. After the interlude of the Middle Ages, this civilisation was reborn in a new mould in what is called the Renaissance, not in its life-aspects but in its intellectual aspects. It was therefore a supreme intellectual, Leonardo da Vinci, who took up again the work and summarised in himself the seeds of modern Europe.

29 July 1937

Leonardo and Einstein

I do not know if by chance Einstein's theory of relativity may also be found in one of the yet undeciphered books of Leonardo.

Not likely. The age of art and science which Leonardo set in motion was that which closed with the nineteenth century. Relativity belongs to a new movement of knowledge.

11 December 1935

René Descartes

I have three letters of yours before me and all three require some elucidation. I think and think but can't get anywhere. Perhaps you will say, "Make the mind silent"! But Descartes says, "Je pense, donc je suis."

Descartes was talking nonsense. There are plenty of things that don't think but still are — from the stone to the Yogi in samadhi. If he had simply meant that the fact of his thinking showed that he wasn't dead, that of course would have been quite right and scientific.

9 September 1935

William James

James' book [*on psychology*] is certainly a very interesting one. I read it a long time ago and do not remember it very well except that it was very interesting and not at all an ordinary book in its kind, but full of valuable suggestions.

1 July 1933

Henri Bergson

Bergson writes that the progress of Life is marked by tensions succeeded by flowerings. What do you think of that, since the great philosopher too agrees with our way of marching to Beatitude through struggles and sufferings?

Humph! Such a method is all very well, but one has so much of it in life and in this Ashram that I rather yearn for some other unBergsonian evolution. Even if the Lord God and Bergson planned it together, I move an amendment.

11 December 1935

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In his latest book, *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*,

Bergson says that the imagelessness or blankness of mind is a pure myth and an impossibility. As a Vedantist, I have always cherished the imagelessness of mind as the highest ideal. But I must admit that I have not made any appreciable advance in this direction, even after many years' practice.

European scientists and thinkers have no authority in the matter, as they are perfectly ignorant of even the rudiments of these things. It is certainly impossible for any man to have experience of such a condition without practice of Yoga, or alternatively, a state of Grace. But among Yogis it is a well-known state; they can attain to this state and keep it at will or if they allow any external activity, it does not touch the inner silence and they can always have the complete silence at will. You [Sri Aurobindo's secretary] can refer him to the *Bases of Yoga*, but also say that it is best to prepare oneself first. Usually it does not come except after a long discipline of self-purification etc.—it can be called down, but that is not always safe, if the outer nature is not yet ready.

6 March 1938

Sigmund Freud

You had once written that things rejected from the conscious parts go down into the subconscious physical. Is Freud's theory of suppression somewhat similar to this?

Freud has observed the fact, but he has built on it a number of theories that are either unsound or exaggerated.

2 August 1933

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It seems Freud's discovery centres round this idea: ". . . underlying the closeness of the bond between mother and child, there exists in infancy on the part of the child . . . a wish . . . for re-entrance into the comfort and security of the mother's womb", and this persists in maturity and adolescence till death.³ How does he know the wish of the child?

³ John M. Thorburn, *Art and the Unconscious* (London: Kegan Paul & Co., 1925), p. 50.

God knows. It seems a wild idea. For a psychologist to talk about the child remembering his stay in the womb — surely, it is an extravagance.

How does he know that there *was* comfort and security in the womb?

I have not the least idea. Perhaps it is his own “complex” from which he generalises.

Why, then, does man not seek only comfort and security in life — why does he make much attempt for other things?

He says he does seek. The wish to get back into that wonderful womb, he says, “persists in maturity and adolescence till death”. I suppose he would say that when man is attempting other things, he is really though without quite knowing it trying to get back into his mother’s womb, e.g. Mussolini getting into Abyssinia, it was a straight drive for his mother’s womb.

The extreme of ridiculousness is reached when Freud analyses Leonardo da Vinci to show how he was pathological, how he failed disastrously in his adaptation to life, how his artistic imagination was an aberration and a maladaptation. All poets, all imaginative people, all geniuses, all religious people were to Freud the result of aberration and maladaptation.

Well, his own theory is very clearly that, the result of aberration and maladaptation.

1 June 1936

Carl Gustav Jung

Jung [*according to Thorburn, pp. 58–59*] accepts Freud’s view, and considers religion as something to be escaped from. “The primal desire for re-entrance to the womb, never expressing itself nakedly, but veiling itself as Freud had supposed under all kinds of symbolism, gives us in this very symbolism what history has called religion.” This is what I should call “mental aberration and encephalitis” as a result of biological psychology.

It is part of the general “aberration” that has beset the modern world owing to the descent of the vital world into the physical—cubist and surrealist painting, modernist poetry, Nazi politics, psycho-analysis—the more extravagant the thing, the greater its reputation and success.

1 June 1936

*

What is it that makes the intellectual world believe without scrutinising ideas such as Freud's? Is it a force which acts as a sort of “prestidigitation” on the brains even of great men like Jung? There would be several objections to Freud's idea about the child's wish to re-enter the mother's womb, yet Jung accepts it as a premise and builds upon it his theories of religion and God and gods. According to Jung [*as presented by Thorburn*, p. 59] : “The idea of God . . . or of the gods, is such a bondage in so far as it is supposed that God exists or that there are gods.” It would, thus, be very ignominious to believe that God or the gods exist—much more ignominious than believing a hypothesis (and an absurdity) which has no historical or biological basis—whereas the fact of God existing can be found in all the literature of the past and the present! It seems it is less the correctness of an idea than the novelty and extravagance that appeals to the modern mind.

At present in the European world it is novelty and extravagance in ideas that are run after.

I don't know anything first-hand about Jung but the two extracts from him you have given do not encourage me to make acquaintance.⁴ Why on earth should the idea of God or gods be a bondage? I suppose it is the Semitic idea (common in Europe) of God as a terrible gentleman upstairs, emperor, law-maker, judge and policeman who sends you to Hell at his pleasure. To the Indian mind the gods are friends and helpers. 2 June 1936

⁴ The correspondent did not make it clear that the extracts he quoted were from Thorburn's book and not from the works of Jung and Freud.—Ed.

Lowes Dickinson

What would you say on the contrast between Lowes Dickinson's *Modern Symposium* (1905) and his post-war dialogue, *On the Discovery of Good*?

The pre-war and the post-war Dickinson are indeed a contrast. This appreciation of human life is not without the force of a half-truth, but it is just the other half that he misses when he sweeps idealism out of the field. Man's utopias may be the projection of his hopes and desires, but he has to go on building them on pain of death, decline or collapse. As for the gospel of pleasure, it has been tried before and always failed—Life and Nature after a time weary of it and reject it, as if after a surfeit of cheap sweets. Man has to rush from his pursuit of pleasure, with all its accompaniment of petrifying shallowness, cynicism, hardness, frayed nerves, *ennui*, dissatisfaction and fatigue, to a new idealism or else sink towards a dull or catastrophic decadence. Even if the Absolute Good were a high spiritual or ideal chimera, the pursuit of it is rooted in the very make of humanity and it is one of the main sources of the perennial life of the race. And that it is so would seem to indicate that it is not a chimera—something still beyond man, no doubt, but into which or towards which he is called by Nature to grow.

Bertrand Russell

About Russell—I have never disputed his abilities or his character,—I am concerned only with his opinions and there too only with those opinions which touch upon my own province—that of spiritual Truth. In all religions, the most narrow and stupid even, and in all non-religions also there are great minds, great men, fine characters. I know little about Russell, but I never dreamed of disputing the greatness of Lenin, for instance, merely because he was an atheist—nobody would unless he was an imbecile. But the greatness of Lenin does not debar me from refusing assent to the credal dogmas of Bolshevism, and the beauty of character of an atheist does not prove that spirituality

is a lie of the imagination and that there is no Divine. I may add that if you can find the utterances of famous Yogis childish when they talk about marriage or on other mental matters, I cannot be blamed for finding the ideas of Russell about spiritual experience, of which he knows nothing, very much wanting in light and substance. You have not named the Yogis in question, and till you do, I am afraid I shall cherish a suspicion about either the height or the breadth of their spiritual experience.

1932

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I have not yet found a moment's time to go through Russell's book [*Why I Am Not a Christian*]; as soon as I can do so I will let you know if I have anything to say about him. I have already said that I have no objection to anybody admiring Russell or Lowes Dickinson or any other atheist. Genius or fine qualities are always admirable in whomever they are found; all that has nothing to do with the turn of a man's opinions or the truth or untruth of atheism or of spiritual experience. Neither for that matter is the fact that there are people who believe out of fear or desire a valid argument against the existence of the Divine. I will read the book as soon as I can, but I do not expect to find anything very much in it, as I am perfectly familiar with European atheism and it is for the most part a shallow and rather childish reaction against a shallow and childish religionism—that of orthodox exoteric Christianity as it was believed and practised in Europe. Not much food on either side of the controversy either for the intellect or the spirit!

18 October 1932

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I seized a few moments to run through Russell [*Why I Am Not a Christian*]; a few moments were enough. It is just as I expected it to be. I have no doubt that Russell is a competent philosophic thinker, but this might have been written by an ordinary tract-writer of the Rationalists Publications Society (I don't remember the proper name any longer). The arguments of

the ordinary Christian apologists to prove the existence of God are futile drivel and Russell in answering them has descended to their level. He was appealing to the mass mind, I suppose, but that is enough to deprive the book of any real thought-value. And yet the questions raised are interesting enough if treated with true philosophic insight or from the standpoint of true spiritual experience. It is queer that the European mind, capable enough in other directions, should sink to so much puerility when it begins to deal with religion and spiritual experience. All the same I shall see if there is anything that can be said in the matter.

1932

Russell, Eddington, Jeans

I don't understand why Amal expects me to bow to the criticism of Bertrand Russell.⁵

(1.) Russell's opinions are as much determined by his upbringing, temperament etc. as those of Jeans or Eddington. He was born in the heyday of the most uncompromising materialism; he is unwilling to change the ideas which have got embedded in his nature. It is this that determines his view of the result of the recent developments of science, it is not a clear infallible logic; logic can serve any turn proposed to it by the mind's preferences. Nor is it a dispassionate impersonal view of facts dictated by unbiassed reason as opposed to Eddington's personal outlook, imaginative fancies and idealistic prejudices. This idea of pure mental impersonality in the human reason is an exploded superstition of the rationalist mind; psychology in its recent inquiries has shown that this supposed impersonal observation of pure objective facts and impartial conclusion from them, an automatic writing of truth on the blank paper of the pure mind is a myth; it has shown that the personal factor is inevitable; we think according to what we are.

(2.) Russell is not, I believe, a great scientist or preeminent in any field of science. Eddington is, I am told, one of the finest

⁵ This is an incomplete draft of a letter that was never sent. — Ed.

authorities in astrophysics. Jeans and Eddington, though not great discoverers, are otherwise in the front rank. Russell ranks as a great mathematician, but there too Eddington has one superiority over him; he is supposed to be the only one, so say some, one of the only five, say others, who have a complete understanding of Einstein's mathematical formulation; Russell is not counted among them and that perhaps disables him from understanding the full consequences of Relativity. Russell, however, is an eminent philosopher, though not one of the great ones. I would count him rather as a strong and acute thinker on philosophy and science. Here he has an advantage, for Jeans and Eddington are only amateur philosophers with a few general ideas for their stock in trade.

(3.) As for their general intellectual standing Russell is a clear and strong materialistic intellect with a wide and general play of its own kind and range; the others are strong in their own field, trained in scientific knowledge and judgment, outside that they do not count: Eddington's mind is more intuitive and original in its limits but often shooting beyond the mark. Russell, when he goes outside his limits, can flounder and blunder. Well, then where is there any foundation for exalting the authority of Russell at the expense of the other two? I disagree with the conclusions of all three; I am neither a mentalist nor a vitalist nor a materialist. Why then throw Russell at me? I am not likely to change my decision in the matter in deference to his materialistic bias. And to what does his judgment or his argument amount to? He admits as against Amal that there has been a "revolution" in science; he admits that the old materialistic philosophy has no longer even half a rotten leg to stand upon; its dogmatic theory of Matter has been kicked out God knows where. But still, says Russell, Matter is there and everything in this world obeys the laws of physical science. This is merely a personal opinion on a now very doubtful matter: he is fighting a rearguard action against what he feels to be the advanced forces of the future; his gallant but tremulous asseveration is a defensive parade not an aggressive blow; it lacks altogether the old assured self-confidence.

As for Russell's logic, a dry and strong or even austere logic is not a key to Truth; an enthusiastic vision often reaches it more quickly. The business of logic is to give order to a thinker's ideas, to establish firm relations between them and firm distinctions from other people's ideas, but when that is done, we are no nearer to indisputable truth than we were before. It is vision that sees Truth, not logic—the outer vision that sees facts but not their inner sense, the inner vision that sees inner facts and can see the inner sense of them, the total vision (not belonging to mind) that sees the whole. A strong and clear and powerful intellect, Russell, but nothing more—not certainly an infallible authority whether in science or anything else. Jeans and Eddington have their own logical reasoning; I do not accept it any more than I accept Russell's.⁶

Let us, however, leave the flinging of authorities, often the same authority for opposing conclusions, Russell quoted against Russell and Darwin against Darwin, and let us come to the point [*incomplete*]

Shaw

I do not think Harris' attack on Shaw as you describe it can be taken very seriously any more than can Wells' jest about his pronunciation of English being the sole astonishing thing about him. Wells, Chesterton, Shaw and others joust at each other like the *kabiwālās* of old Calcutta, though with more refined weapons, and you cannot take their humorous sparrings as considered appreciations; if you do, you turn exquisite jests into solemn nonsense. Mark that their method in these sparrings, the turn of phrase, the style of their wit is borrowed from Shaw himself with personal modifications; for this kind of humour, light as air and sharp as a razor-blade, epigrammatic, paradoxical, often flavoured with burlesque seriousness and urbane hyperbole, good-humoured and cutting at once, is not English in origin; it was brought in by two Irishmen, Shaw and Wilde. Harris'

⁶ This paragraph was written separately. It has been inserted here by the editors.

stroke about the Rodin bust and Wells' sally are entirely in the Shavian turn and manner; they are showing their cleverness by spiking their guru in swordsmanship with his own rapier. Harris' attack on Shaw's literary reputation may have been serious, there was a sombre and violent brutality about him which makes it possible; but his main motive was to prolong his own notoriety by a clever and vigorous assault on the mammoth of the hour. Shaw himself supplied materials for his critic, knowing well what he would write, and edited this damaging assault on his own fame,⁷ a typical Irish act at once of chivalry, shrewd calculation of effect and whimsical humour. I should not think Harris had much understanding of Shaw the man as apart from the writer; the Anglo-Saxon is not usually capable of understanding either Irish character or Irish humour, it is so different from his own. And Shaw was Irish through and through; there was nothing English about him except the language he wrote and even that he changed into the Irish ease, flow, edge and clarity — though not bringing into it, as Wilde did, Irish poetry and colour.

Shaw's seriousness and his humour, real seriousness and mock seriousness, run into each other in a baffling inextricable *mélange*, thoroughly Irish in its character — for it is the native Irish turn to speak lightly when in deadly earnest and to utter the most extravagant jests with a profound air of seriousness, — and it so puzzled the British public that they could not for a long time make up their mind how to take him. At first they took him for a jester dancing with cap and bells, then for a new kind of mocking Hebrew prophet or Puritan reformer! Needless to say, both judgments were entirely out of focus. The Irishman is, on one side of him, the vital side, a *passioné*, imaginative and romantic, intensely emotional, violently impulsive, easily impelled to poetry or rhetoric, moved by indignation and suffering to a mixture of aggressive militancy, wistful dreaming and sardonic extravagant humour: on another side he is keen in intellect, positive, downright, hating all loose foggy sentimentalism and

⁷ Harris's biography of Shaw, edited and published by Shaw himself after Harris's death. — Ed.

solemn pretence and prone, in order to avoid the appearance of them in himself, to cover himself with a jest at every step; it is at once his mask and his defence. At bottom he has the possibility in him of a modern Curtius leaping into the yawning pit for a cause, an Utopist or a Don Quixote,—according to occasion a fighter for dreams, an idealistic pugilist, a knight-errant, a pugnacious rebel or a brilliant sharp-minded realist or a reckless but often shrewd and successful adventurer. Shaw has all that in him, but with it is a cool intellectual clearness, also Irish, which dominates it all and tones it down, subdues it into measure and balance, gives an even harmonising colour. There is as a result a brilliant tempered edge of flame, lambent, lighting up what it attacks and destroys, and destroying it by the light it throws upon it, not fiercely but trenchantly—though with a trenchant playfulness—aggressive and corrosive. An ostentation of humour and parade covers up the attack and puts the opponent off his defence. That is why the English mind never understood Shaw and yet allowed itself to be captured by him, and its old established ideas, “moral” positions, impenetrable armour of commercialised Puritanism and self-righteous Victorian assurance to be ravaged and burned out of existence by Shaw and his allies. Anyone who knew Victorian England and sees the difference now cannot but be struck by it and Shaw's part in it, at least in preparing and making it possible, is undeniable. That is why I call him devastating,—not in any ostentatiously catastrophic sense, for there is a quietly trenchant type of devastatingness,—because he has helped to lay low all these things with his scythe of sarcastic mockery and lightly, humorously penetrating seriousness—effective, as you call it, but too deadly in its effects to be called merely effective.

That is Shaw as I have seen him and I don't believe there is anything seriously wrong in my estimate. I don't think we can complain of his seriousness about pacifism, Socialism and the rest of it; it was simply the form in which he put his dream, the dream he needed to fight for, needed by his Irish nature. Shaw's bugbear was unreason and disorder, his dream was a humanity delivered from vital illusions and deceptions, organising the life-

force in obedience to reason, casting out waste and folly as much as possible. It is not likely to happen in the way he hoped; the reason has its own illusions and, though he strove against imprisonment in his own rationalistic ideals, trying to escape from them by the issue of his mocking critical humour, he could not help being their prisoner. As for his pose of self-praise,—no doubt he valued himself,—the public fighter like the man of action needs to do so in order to act or to fight. Most, though not all, try to veil it under an affectation of modesty; Shaw on the contrary took the course of raising it to a humorous pitch of burlesque and extravagance. It was at once part of his strategy in commanding attention and a means of mocking at himself—I was not speaking of analytical self-mockery, but of the whimsical Irish kind—so as to keep himself straight and at the same time mocking his audience. It is a peculiarly Irish kind of humour to say extravagant things with a calm convinced tone as if announcing a perfectly serious proposition—the Irish exaggeration of the humour called by the French *pince-sans-rire*; his hyperboles of self-praise actually reek with this humorous savour. If his extravagant comparison of himself with Shakespeare had to be taken in dull earnest without any smile in it, he would be either a witless ass or a giant of humourless arrogance,—and Bernard Shaw could be neither.

As to his position in literature, I have given my opinion; but, more precisely, I imagine that he will take some place but not a very large place, once the drums have ceased beating and the fighting is over. He has given too much to the battles of the hour, perhaps, to claim a large share of the future. I suppose some of his plays will survive for their wit and humour and cleverness more than for any higher dramatic quality, like those of three other Irishmen, Goldsmith, Sheridan, Wilde. His prefaces *may* be saved by their style and force, but it is not sure. At any rate, as a personality he is not likely to be forgotten, even if his writings fade. To compare him with [Anatole] France is futile—they were minds too different and moving in too different domains for comparison to be possible.

3 February 1932

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I would be obliged if you would tell me your opinion of the apostrophe of Caesar to the Sphinx in Shaw's *Caesar and Cleopatra*. I find it very fine, but Dilip says he is not thrilled by it.

I am not thrilled by the speech either; it is a creation of the intellect, eloquent and on the surface. I do not see how you are going to manufacture a mystic out of Shaw with these scanty materials: he has a very clear and incisive intelligence, independent and unconventional rather than original and creative, but beyond the intellect he does not go. The speculative imaginations of which you speak and the feelings in the aesthetic vital which accompany them sometimes are common enough in men with some reach of mind, but they do not constitute either a mystic feeling or a mystic experience.

6 May 1932

Was Shaw a Mystic?

It is, of course, difficult to manufacture a mystic out of Shaw in the Yogic sense of the word, but in the philosophic sense I think it can be said that his conception of the universal life-force and his vision of man's future are prompted by a keen sense of the infinite, divine potencies of the human consciousness and of the secret urge towards godhead which is the motive power behind all evolution. . . . What Shaw claims to be is an artist-philosopher — that is to say, a man with a constructive as well as critical vision of life, who is able to express that vision in a spirited and cogently attractive form by means of his literary gift. So the real question is whether his vision is great enough, inspired enough, and he brings a sufficient power of interpretation to render his insight compellingly intelligible and valuable.

Your reasoning seems to proceed by abolishing the necessary distinctions and running different things into each other.

1st equation. Philosopher (artist kind) = a man with a constructive as well as a critical vision of life = Shaw. I may add = all poets, if Matthew Arnold's equation about poetry and criticism of life is correct. Hundreds of others also can at this rate be called philosophers.

2nd equation. Mystic = mystic philosopher = philosopher who has notions about supraphysical entities or forces, e.g. Life-Force = Shaw. But a mystic is currently supposed to be one who has mystic experience, and a mystic philosopher is one who has such experience and has formed a view of life in harmony with his experience. Merely to have metaphysical notions about the Infinite and Godhead and underlying or overshadowing forces does not make a man a mystic. One would never think of applying such a term to Spinoza, Kant or Hegel: even Plato does not fit into the term though Pythagoras has a good claim to it. Hegel and other transcendental or idealistic philosophers were great intellects, not mystics. Shaw is a keen and forceful intellect (I cannot call him a great thinker⁸) but his ideas about the Life-Force certainly do not make him a mystic. And do you really call that a constructive vision of life—a vague notion about a Life-Force pushing towards an evolutionary manifestation and a brilliant *jeu d'esprit* about long life and people born out of eggs and certain extraordinary operations of mind and body in these semi-immortals who seem to have been very much at a loss what to do with their immortality? I do not deny that there are keen and brilliant ideas and views everywhere (that is Shaw's wealthy stock-in-trade), even an occasional profound perception; but that does not make a man either a mystic or a philosopher or a great thought-creator. Shaw has a sufficiently high place in his own kind—why try to make him out more than he is? Shakespeare is a great poet and dramatist, but to try to make him out a great philosopher also would not increase but rather imperil his high repute.

May 1932

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I admit that in the real, experiential sense Shaw is not a mystic, though definitely religious at the core—in an unconventional way of his own. Nor does he belong to the company of the

⁸ An admirable many-sided intelligence and an acute critic discussing penetratingly or discoursing acutely or constructively on many problems or presenting with force or point many aspects of life, he is not a creator or disseminator of the great illuminating ideas that leave their mark on the centuries.

giant abstractionists. He is a philosopher only in as much as his outlook on basic realities is, unlike as in poets, sufficiently argued and interpreted by him in relation to general issues of philosophy and life, and a mystic philosopher only from the western view-point.

At that rate anybody is a mystic or a philosopher and these two words have no longer any value. I do not admit that Shaw has a reasoned theory about basic realities; the only realities he or his characters have argued about are the things of the surface; even his Life-Force is only a thing of the surface or, at the most, just under the surface.

The right of Plato [*to be considered a mystic*] is regarded as beyond question; Spinoza with his “*amor intellectualis Dei*” is, outside the Catholic Church, also hailed as such; and even Kant I have found looked upon in the same light. In our own day it is common, I believe, to refer to Bergson or Bradley as mystical.

Regarded, looked upon by whom? It was not so in my time at least in Europe. Plato was never called a mystic then; Hegel was regarded as a transcendentalist but no mystic; if you had called Kant or Spinoza mystics people would have stared. To believe in the Absolute or something metaphysical or supraphysical does not make one a mystic philosopher, nor does belief in the *élan vital* or a dry and geometric *amor intellectualis Dei*. The Neo-Platonists and the Neo-Hegelians stand on the border. If all these are the Western view-point packed in one mystic box, it is a very new Western view-point, a new language of confusion in this age of confusion, I suppose. It must be like the idea of spirituality in the minds of many people in the West in which mind and spirit are the same thing and to have a fine feeling or an idealistic thought is the very height of spirituality.

I should like to know whether, in your opinion, Shaw comes off badly in comparison with Wells or Chesterton or Russell as a thinker. And do you mind expatiating on Shaw as a dramatist and a writer of prose?

I refuse to accept the men you name, with the exception of Russell, as serious thinkers. Wells is a super-journalist, super-pamphleteer and story-teller. I imagine that within a generation of his death his speculations will cease to be read or remembered; his stories may endure longer. Chesterton is a brilliant essayist who has written verse too of an appreciable brilliance and managed some good stories. Unlike Wells he has some gift of style and he has caught the trick of wit and constant paradox which gives a fictitious semblance of enhanced value to his ideas. These are men of contemporary fame; Shaw has more chance of lasting, but there is no certain certitude, because he has no atom of constructive power. He has constructed nothing large, but he has criticised most things. At every page he shows the dissolvent critical mind and it is a dissolvent of great power; beyond that, he has popularised the ideas of Fabian Socialism and other constructive view-points caught up by him from the surrounding atmosphere, but with temperamental qualifications and variations, for the inordinately critical character of his mind prevents him from entirely agreeing with anybody. Criticism is also a great power and there are some purely critical minds that have become immortals, Voltaire for instance; Shaw on his own level may survive — only his thinking is more of a personal type and not classic and typical of a fundamental current of the human intellect like Voltaire. His personality may help him, as Johnson was helped by his personality to live.

Shaw is not a dramatist; I don't think he ever wrote a drama; *Candida* is perhaps the nearest he came to one. He is a first-class play-writer, — a brilliant conversationalist in stage dialogue and a manufacturer of speaking intellectualised puppets made to develop and represent by their talk and carefully wire-pulled movements his ideas about men, life and things. He gives his characters minds of various quality and they are expressing their minds all the time; sometimes he paints on them some striking vital colour, but with a few exceptions they are not living beings like those of the great or even of the lesser dramatists. There are, however, a few exceptions, such as the three characters in *Candida*, and as a supremely clever playwright with a strong

intellectual force and some genius he may very well survive. He has a very striking and cogent and incisive style admirably fitted for its work, and he sometimes tries his hand at eloquence, but "heights of passionate eloquence" is a very unreal phrase. I never found that in Shaw anywhere; whatever mental ardours he may have, his mind as a whole is too cool, balanced, incisive to let itself go in that manner.

May 1932

Shaw's Personality and Place in Literature

The Shavian assertiveness is not offensive (as the Hugo-esque tends to be) because it is full also of a smiling self-mockery, an irony that out of a form of deliberate self-praise cuts at itself and the world in one lump. It is curious that so many people seem to miss this character of Shaw's self-assertiveness and self-praise, its essential humour.

28 August 1932

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I do not agree that Wells and others are more serious than Shaw — if by seriousness is meant earnestness of belief in one's ideals and sincerity in the intelligence. These can exist very well behind a triple breast-plate of satire and humour. Shaw's merits are surely greater than you seem disposed to admit in your letter. The tide is turning against him after being strongly for him — under compulsion from his own power and will, but nothing can alter the fact that he was one of the keenest and most powerful minds of the age with an originality in his way of looking at things which no one else could equal. If what was original in him has become the common stock of contemporary thought, it was his power and forcefulness that made it so — it is no more to be counted against him than the deplorable fact that *Hamlet* is only "a string of quotations" is damaging to Shakespeare! I do not share your exasperation against Shavianism — I find in it a delightful note and am thankful to Shaw for being so refreshingly different from other men that to read even an ordinary interview with him in a newspaper is always an intellectual pleasure. As for his being one of the most orginal personalities of the age, there

can be no doubt of that. All that I deny to him is a constructive and creative mind—but his critical force, in certain fields at least, as a critic of man and life was very great and in that field he can in a sense be called creative—in the sense that he created a singularly effective and living form for his criticism of life. It is not great tragic or comic drama, but it is something original and strong and altogether of its own kind—so, up to that limit, I qualify my statement that Shaw was no creator.

As to the other writers about whom you ask for my judgment, I do not feel inclined to be drawn at present; I would have to say too much, if I started saying anything at all. Galsworthy I have not read—all I can say of the rest is that I do not share the contemporary idea about them—so far as I have read their work. Contemporary fame, contemporary opinion are creations of the hour and can die with the hour. I fail to see in many of these much-praised writers of the time either the power of style or the power of critical mind or creative imagination that ensures survival. There is plenty of effective writing or skilful workmanship, but that is not enough to make literary immortals.

8 September 1932

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Why do you want Shaw to be tied to some intellectual dogma and square all his acts, views and sullies to it? He is too penetrating and sincere a mind to be a stiff partisan—when he sees something which qualifies the “ism”—even that on whose side he is standing—he says so; that need not weaken the ideal behind, it is likely to make it more plastic and practicable. However, enough of Shaw; I have to answer Amal’s question and that ought to finish with him. I will only add that whatever his manner, it does not appear to me that he writes merely to shock but to expose in a vivid way the stupidity of the human mind in taking established things and ideas for granted. If he does it in a striking and amusing way, why so much the livelier and the better!

9 September 1932

Kipling

No use of success unless it is deserved. Can't forget that Kipling for whose poetry I have a Noble contempt (his prose has value, at least the *Jungle Book* and some short stories) was illegitimately Nobelised by this confounded prize. Contemporary "success" of fame is a deceit and a snare.

12 September 1938

Lawrence

I have not read anything of Lawrence, but I have recently seen indications about him from many quarters; the impression given was that of a man of gifts who failed for want of vital balance — like so many others. The prose you have turned into verse — very well, as usual, — has certainly quality, though there is not enough to form a definite judgment. A seeker who missed the issue, I should imagine — misled by the vitalistic stress to which the mind of today is a very harassed captive.

16 June 1932

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As far as the photograph of which you speak can be taken as showing the man — it is that of a nature of which the chief character is intensity, but in a very narrow range. There is here no wide range of ideas or feelings; a few ruling ideas, a few persistent and keenly acute feelings. The face of a man whose vital is also intense, but without strength and therefore oversensitive. There may well be a strong idealistic tendency — but there is not likely to be much power to carry out the ideals. This is the character; as for the genius, if there is any, it will depend on other things which may not find positive expression in the outward appearance; for the external man is often the medium of a Power that is beyond him.

I shall keep the book for a few days — if you don't need it, — just to glance through it; it is too big to read in detail. I know nothing of Lawrence; I shall see if I can pick up something from here.

25 September 1932

*

I must read Huxley's preface [to The Letters of D. H. Lawrence] and glance at some letters before venturing on any comments — like the reviewers who frisk about, a page here and a page there, and then write an ample or devastating review. Anyhow it seems to me Lawrence must have been a difficult man to live with, even for him it must have been difficult to live with himself. His photograph confirms that view. But a man at war with himself can write excellent poetry—if he is a poet; often better poetry than another, just as Shakespeare wrote his best tragedies when he was in a state of chaotic upheaval; at least so his interpreters say. But one needs a higher and more calm and poised inspiration to write poems of harmony and divine balance than any Lawrence ever had. I stick to my idea of the evil influence of theories on a man of genius. If he had been contented to write things of beauty instead of bare rockies and dry deserts, he might have done splendidly and ranked among the great poets.

3 July 1936

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All great personalities have a strong ego of one kind or another — for that matter it does not need to be a big personality to be ego-centred; ego-centricity is the very nature of life in the Ignorance,— even the sattvic man, the philanthropist, the altruist live for and round their ego. Society imposes an effort to restrain and when one cannot restrain at least to disguise it. Morality's highest business is to control or widen, refine or sublimate it so that it shall be able to exceed itself or use itself in the service of things bigger than its own primary egoism. But none of these things enables one to escape from it. It is only by finding something deep within or above ourselves and making *laya* (dissolution) of the ego in that that it is possible. It is what Lawrence saw and it was his effort to do it that made him “other” than those who associated with him — but he could not find out the way. It was a strange mistake to seek it in sexuality; it was also a great mistake to seek it at the wrong end of the nature.

What you say about the discovery of the defects of human nature is no doubt true. Human nature is full of defects and can-

not be otherwise, but there are other elements and possibilities in it which, although never quite unmixed, have to be seen to get a whole view. But the discovery of the truth about human beings need not lead to cynicism; it may lead to a calm aloofness and irony which has nothing disappointed or bitter in it; or it may lead to a large psychic charity which recognises the truth but makes all allowances and is ready to love and to help in spite of all. In the spiritual consciousness one is blind to nothing, but sees also that which is within behind these coverings, the divine element not yet released, and is neither deceived nor repelled and discouraged. That inner greater thing that was in Lawrence and which he sought for is in everybody: he may not have found it and his defects of nature may have prevented its release, but it is there.

I do not know about the loveliness; what you say is partly true, but loveliness may exist in spite of ego and all kinds of defects and people may feel it.

3 July 1936

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Lawrence had the psychic push inside towards the Unseen and Beyond at the same time as a push towards the vital life which came in its way. He was trying to find his way between the two and mixed them up together till at the end he got his mental liberation from the tangle though not yet any clear knowledge of the way — for that I suppose he will have to be born nearer the East or in any case in surroundings which will enable him to get at the Light.

9 July 1936

Sri Aurobindo and Criticism of Fiction

It is true I read through Aldous Huxley's monster, but it took me several months to finish it. This is not because I object to "light" literature, but because I had only an occasional quarter of an hour in three or four days to glance at it. If Sarat Chatterji does not mind my treating his book to the same tortoise dharma, I will undertake to read it; but I can make no promise as to time etc. Possibly it will take less time than the Round Table

Conference. As to giving him a new turn, that, I fear, is beyond me; besides, in this field I was once a voracious reader, but never a critic or creator.

8 June 1931

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As to the novel, perhaps I simply meant that I was unwilling to exercise my critic's scalpel on a living master of the art. In poetry it is different because I am there both a critic and a creator.

22 June 1931

Great Novelists

The great novelists like the great dramatists have been usually men who lived widely or intensely and brought a world out of the combination of their inner and their outer observation, vision, experience. Of course if you have a world in yourself, that is another matter.

22 September 1936

Bankim Chandra Chatterji

Depreciation of Bankim is absurd; he is and will always rank as one of the great creators and his prose stands among the ten or twelve best prose-styles in the world's literature.

December 1932

Great Prose Stylists

I stand rather aghast at your summons to stand and deliver the names of the ten or twelve best prose styles in the world's literature. I had no names in mind and I used the inadvertent phrase only to indicate the high place I thought Bankim held among the great masters of language. To rank the poets on different grades of the Hill of Poetry is a pastime which may be a little frivolous and unnecessary, but possible if not altogether permissible. I would not venture to try the same game with the prose-writers who are multitudinous and do not present the same marked and unmistakable differences of level and power.

The prose field is a field, it is not a mountain. It has eminences, but its high tops are not so high, the drops not so low as in poetical literature.

Then again there are great writers in prose and great prose-writers and the two are by no means the same thing. Dickens and Balzac are great novelists, but their style or their frequent absence of style had better not be described; Scott attempts a style, but it is neither blameless nor has distinguishing merit. Other novelists have an adequate style and a good one but their prose is not quoted as a model and they are remembered not for that but as creators. You speak of Meredith, and if Meredith had always written with as pure a mastery as he did in *Richard Feverel* he might have figured as a pre-eminent master of language, but the creator and the thinker played many tricks on the stylist in the bulk of his work. I was writing of prose styles and what was in my mind was those achievements in which language reached its acme of perfection in one manner or other so that whatever the writer touched became a thing of beauty — no matter what its substance — or a perfect form and memorable. Bankim seemed to me to have achieved that in his own way as Plato in his or Cicero or Tacitus in theirs or in French literature, Voltaire, Flaubert or Anatole France. I could name others, especially in French which is the greatest store-house of fine prose among the world's languages — there is no other to match it. Matthew Arnold once wrote a line something like this:

France great in all great arts, in none supreme,

to which someone very aptly replied, "And what then of the art of prose-writing? Is it not a great art and who can approach France there? All prose of other languages seems beside its perfection, lucidity, measure almost clumsy."

There are many remarkable prose-writers in English, but that perfection which is almost like a second nature to the French writers is not so common. The great prose-writers in English seem to seize by the personality they express in their styles, rather than by its perfection as an instrument — it is true at least of the earliest and I think too of the later writers. Lamb

whom you mention is a signal example of a writer who erected his personality into a style and lives by that achievement — Pater and Wilde are other examples.

As for Bengali we have had Bankim and have still Tagore and Sarat Chatterji. That is sufficient achievement for a single century.

I have not answered your question — but I have explained my phrase and I think that is all you can expect from me.

15 September 1933

Saratchandra Chatterji

What is stamped on Saratchandra's work everywhere is a large intelligence, an acute and accurate observation of men and things and a heart full of sympathy for sorrow and suffering. Too sensitive to be quite at ease with the world and also perhaps too clear-sighted. Much fineness of mind and refinement of the vital nature.

March 1935

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Novels deal with the vital life of men, so necessarily they bring that atmosphere. Saratchandra is a highly emotional writer with a great power of presenting the feelings and movements of the human vital.

13 March 1936

Alexander Dumas

Dumas' "history" is all slap and dash adventure — amusing, rather than solidly interesting. But it is all the history known to many people in France — just as many in England gather their history from Shakespeare's plays.

2 December 1934

Victor Hugo

When I said to Pavitra that *Les Misérables* was one of the great works of art he replied "Faugh! What a shallow thing." But I believe I heard from Amrita that you used to regard it as one of the world's great novels.

It is not one of the masterpieces of "art", but I regard it as the work of a powerful genius and certainly one of the great novels. It is certainly not philosophically or psychologically deep, but it is exceedingly vivid and powerful.

25 April 1937

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People have different tastes — some regard Hugo as a childish writer, a rhetorician without depth — others regard him as a great poet and novelist. One has to form one's own judgment and leave others to hold theirs.

26 April 1937

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I should like to know whether, in criticising novels, one has a right to depreciate a work because it is not very deep.

That is again a matter of opinion. There is the position that plot and character-presentation are sufficient and for the rest a large or great theme — one of the well-recognised human situations or a picture of life largely dealt with — and no more is necessary. Most famous English novels of the past are like that. There is another position that subtle psychology, deep and true presentation (not merely imaginative or idealistic) of the profounder problems or secrets of life and nature are needed. Hugo's characters and situations are thought by many to be melodramatic or superficial and untrue. His novels like his dramas are "romantic" and the present trend is against the romantic treatment of life as superficial, childishly over-coloured and false. The disparagement of what was formerly considered great is common on that ground.
"Faugh!" expresses the feeling.

27 April 1937

Dickens and Balzac

For literary creation and effective expression, who will deny that style has a great force?

Of course; without style there is no literature — except in fiction, where a man with bad style like Dickens or Balzac can make up by vigour and the power of his substance.

29 October 1933

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Charles Dickens says, that is, makes a character speak (seriously): "My eyes stood staring above his head"!

Dickens is the most slipshod of all English writers — his English style is not worth a cuss. This sentence is the proof. The character's "eyes stood above somebody else's head staring" no doubt at their own position in astonishment at his English.

His merit lies in his stories and characters (some of them) not in his language which is bad. The same may be said of Balzac who is the greatest of French novelists but the worst of French writers.

13 June 1938

Romain Rolland

Somnath was drawn to the spiritual life through reading novels like *Jean Christophe*.

I have not read *Jean Christophe*, but Rolland is an idealist who takes interest in spiritual mysticism — not himself a man of spiritual experience. It is quite natural that such a man's writings should produce an effect on an intellectual man more easily than a religious or spiritual work. Somnath was not religious-minded, so a religious work would not move him because it would be too far from his own way of thinking and turn of seeing. A spiritual book would not reach him, for he would not understand or feel the spiritual experiences or knowledge contained in it, they being quite foreign to his then consciousness. On the other hand a book by an intellectual idealist with an intellectual turn towards spirituality would suit his own temperament and outlook and draw his thoughts that way.

26 October 1935

French "Psychic" Romances

If and when chemistry advances and enters the supraphysical regions it will try to bring down peace in a vacuum bottle and analyse and synthetise it in some way.

If you read the French romances about "psychic" matters you will find that their highest imagination is machinery, — machines

for registering peoples' thoughts, machines for storing up the psychic energy of "a living Buddha" (a Buddha, by the way, with some hundred concubines) into which he puts his will-force so that when it is turned on millions of soldiers will march in a hypnotised trance to battle performing manoeuvres according to silent orders from the machine, etc. etc. So your suppositions are not unlikely. One of the reasons why many Americans want Yoga is that it may make them successful in all they undertake, professors, businessmen etc.

29 April 1935

Contemporary Detective Stories

The detective stories of today are much better than those of the Sherlock Holmes time. This kind of writing has been taken up by men with imagination and literary talent who would not have touched it before.

30 September 1935

On Some Musicians

As to Sahana's question, I am unable to say much—I have no special competence in this sphere of music and do not know on what aesthetic ground she stands in this matter. These things are mysterious in their origin and so it is said "*De gustibus non est disputandum*" — "There can be no disputing about tastes." Some connoisseurs of music exalt Wagner as a god or a Titan, others speak of him with depreciation and celebrate the godhead of Verdi who is disclaimed by their opponents. Yet I suppose the genius of neither can be disputed. So far as I can make out from her statement, Sahana does not dispute your genius or the aesthetic quality of your music, but something in her does not respond—if so, it is either a matter of temperament or it is that she is looking for something else, some other vibration than that given by your music. If it is only conservatism and an unwillingness to admit new forms or new laws of creation, that is obviously a mental limitation and can disappear only with more plasticity of mind or a change of the angle of vision—I don't know that I can say anything more—or more definite.

As for Sahana's singing, she seems to succeed when she can forget herself in her singing and to fail when she has to think of her audience or of success and failure. That would mean that she is in a certain stage of inner development where the inner state makes all the difference. I would hazard the conclusion that her future as a singer on the old psychological lines hardly exists, but she has to find fully her soul, her inner self and with it the inner singer.

8 September 1937

Beethoven

There can be no doubt that Beethoven's music was often from another world; so it is quite possible for it to give the key to an inwardly sensitive hearer or to one who is seeking or ready for the connection to be made. But I think it is very few who get beyond being aesthetically moved by a sense of greater things; to lay the hand on the key and use it is rare.

Bhatkhande

Yes, I have read your article on Bhatkhande. Very interesting; the character came home to me as a sublimation of a type I was very familiar with when in Baroda. Very amusing his encounters with the pundits — especially the Socratic way of self-depreciation heightened almost to the Japanese pitch. His photograph you sent me shows a keen and powerful face full of genius and character.

February 1937

Comments on Some Passages of Prose

Anatole France's Irony

I so much enjoyed Anatole France's joke about God in the mouth of the arch-scoffer Brotteaux in his book *Les dieux ont soif* that I must ask you to read it.

Ou Dieu veut empêcher le mal et ne le peut, ou il ne peut et ne le veut, ou il ne le peut ni ne le veut, ou il le veut et le peut. S'il le veut et ne le peut, il est impuissant; s'il le peut et ne le veut, il est pervers; s'il ne le peut ni ne le veut, il est impuissant et pervers; s'il le peut et le veut, que ne le fait-il, mon Père?¹

I wonder what God might answer to it, supposing he should ever feel inclined to?

Anatole France is always amusing whether he is ironising about God and Christianity or about that rational animal, man or Humanity (with a big H), and the follies of his reason and his conduct. But I presume you never heard of God's explanation of his non-interference to Anatole France when they met in some Heaven of Irony, I suppose — it can't have been in the heaven of Karl Marx, in spite of France's conversion before his death. God is reported to have strolled up to him and said, "I say, Anatole, you know that was a good joke of yours; but there was a good cause too for my non-interference... Reason came along and told me, 'Look here, why do you pretend to exist? you know you don't exist and never existed or, if you do, you have made such a mess of your creation that we can't tolerate you any longer. Once we have got you out of the way, all will be right upon earth, tip-top, A-1: my daughter Science and I have

¹ *Anatole France*, *Les dieux ont soif* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1965), p. 146. — Ed.

arranged that between us. Man will raise his noble brow, the head of creation, dignified, free, equal, fraternal, democratic, depending upon nothing but himself, with nothing greater than himself anywhere in existence. There will be no God, no gods, no churches, no priesthood, no religion, no kings, no oppression, no poverty, no war or discord anywhere. Industry will fill the earth with abundance, Commerce will spread her golden reconciling wings everywhere. Universal education will stamp out ignorance and leave no room for folly or unreason in any human brain; man will become cultured, disciplined, rational, scientific, well-informed, arriving always at the right conclusion upon full and sufficient data. The voice of the scientist and the expert will be loud in the land and guide mankind to the earthly paradise. A perfected society; health universalised by a developed medical science and sound hygiene; everything rationalised; science evolved, infallible, omnipotent, omniscient; the riddle of existence solved; the Parliament of Man, the Federation of the world; evolution, of which man, magnificent man, is the last term, completed in the noble white race, a humanitarian kindness and uplifting for our backward brown, yellow and black brothers; peace, peace, peace, reason, order, unity everywhere.' There was a lot more like that, Anatole, and I was so much impressed by the beauty of the picture and its convenience, for I would have nothing to do or to supervise, that I at once retired from business, —for, you know that I was always of a retiring disposition and inclined to keep myself behind the veil or in the background at the best of times. But what is this I hear? — it does not seem to me from reports that Reason even with the help of Science has kept her promise. And if not, why not? Is it because she would not or because she could not? or is it because she both would not and could not, or because she would and could, but somehow did not? And I say, Anatole, these children of theirs, the State, Industrialism, Capitalism, Communism and the rest have a queer look — they seem very much like Titanic monsters. Armed too with all the power of Intellect and all the weapons and organisation of Science. And it does look as if mankind were no freer under them than under the Kings and the Churches. What has happened —

or is it possible that Reason is *not* supreme and infallible, even that she has made a greater mess of it than I could have done myself?" Here the report of the conversation ends; I give it for what it is worth, for I am not acquainted with this God and have to take him on trust from Anatole France.

1 August 1932

Croce's Aesthetics

"Knowledge has two forms: it is either *intuitive* knowledge or *logical* knowledge; knowledge obtained through the imagination or knowledge obtained through the intellect; knowledge of the individual or knowledge of the universal; of individual things or of the relations between them; it is the production either of images or of concepts." [B. Croce, *Esthetic*, 1902, p. 1.] The origin of art, therefore, lies in the power of forming images. "Art is ruled uniquely by the imagination. Images are its only wealth. It does not classify objects, it does not pronounce them real or imaginary, does not qualify them, does not define them; it feels and presents them — nothing more." [In Carr, *The Philosophy of Benedetto Croce*, London, 1917, p. 35.] Because imagination precedes thought, and is necessary to it, the artistic, or image-forming, activity of the mind is prior to the logical, concept-forming, activity. Man is an artist as soon as he imagines, and long before he reasons.

The great artists understood the matter so. "One paints not with the hands but with the brain," said Michelangelo; and Leonardo wrote: "The minds of men of lofty genius are most active in invention when they are doing the least external work." Everybody knows the story told of da Vinci, that when he was painting the "Last Supper", he sorely displeased the Abbot who had ordered the work, by sitting motionless for days before an untouched canvas; and revenged himself for the impertunate Abbot's persistent query — When would he begin to work? — by using the gentleman as an unconscious model for the figure of Judas.

The essence of the esthetic activity lies in this motionless effort of the artist to conceive the perfect image that

shall express the subject he has in mind; it lies in a form of intuition that involves no mystic insight, but perfect sight, complete perception, and adequate imagination. The miracle of art lies not in the externalization but in the conception of the idea; externalization is a matter of mechanical technique and manual skill.

“When we have mastered the internal word, when we have vividly and clearly conceived a figure or a statue, when we have found a musical theme, expression is born and is complete, nothing more is needed. If, then, we open our mouth, and speak or sing, . . . what we do is to say aloud what we have already said within, to sing aloud what we have already sung within. If our hands strike the keyboard of the pianoforte, if we take up pencil or chisel, such actions are willed” (they belong to the practical, not to the aesthetic, activity), “and what we are then doing is executing in great movements what we have already executed briefly and rapidly within.” [*Esthetic*, p. 50.]

— Will Durant, presenting the aesthetics of Benedetto Croce in *The Story of Philosophy*

I have not read Croce but it seems to me that Durant must have taken something of their depth out of them in his presentation. At any rate, I cannot accept the proposition that there are only two forms of knowledge, imaginative and intellectual, — still less if these two are made to coincide with the division between knowledge of the individual and that of the universal and again with image-production and concepts. Art can be conceptual as well as imaginative — it may embody ideas and not merely produce images. I do not see the relevancy of the Da Vinci story — one can sit motionless to summon up concepts as well as images or a concept and image together. Moreover what is this intuition which is perfect sight and adequate imagination, i.e., production of an image: is it empty of all “idea”, of all conception? Evidently not, — for immediately it is said that the miracle of art lies in the conception of an idea. What then becomes of the division between the production of images and the production of concepts; and how can it be said that Art is ruled only by the image-producing power and images are its only

wealth? All this seems to be very contradictory and confusing. You cannot cut up the human mind in that way—the attempt is that of the analysing intellect which is always putting things as trenchantly divided and opposite. If it had been said that in art the synthetic action of the idea is more prominent than the analytic idea which we find most prominent in logic and science and philosophical reasoning, then one could understand the statement. The integrating or direct integral conception and the image-making faculty are the two leading powers of art with intuition as the driving force behind it—that too would be a statement that is intelligible.

Still more strange is the statement that the externalisation is outside the miracle of art and is not needed; beauty, he says, is adequate expression, but how can there be expression, an expressive image without externalisation? The inner image may be the thing to be expressed, it may itself be expressive of some truth, but unless it is externalised how can the spectator contemplating beauty contemplate it at all or get into unity of vision with the artist who creates it? The difference between Shakespeare and ourselves lies only in the power of inwardly forming an image, not in the power of externalising it? But there are many people who have the power of a rich inner imaging of things, but are quite unable to put them down on paper or utter them in speech or transfer them to canvas or into clay or bronze or stone. They are then as great creative artists as Shakespeare or Michael Angelo? I should have thought that Shakespeare's power of the word and Michael Angelo's of translating his image into visible form is at least an indispensable part of the art of expression, creation or image-making. I cannot conceive of a Shakespeare or Michael Angelo without that power—the one would be a mute inglorious Shakespeare and the other a rather helpless and ineffective Angelo.

P.S. This is of course a comment on the statement as presented—I would have to read Croce myself in order to form a conception of what is behind his philosophy of Aesthetics.

19 December 1936

Russell's Introvert

We are all prone to the malady of the introvert, who, with the manifold spectacle of the world spread out before him, turns away and gazes only upon the emptiness within.²

I have not forgotten Russell, but I have neglected him, first, for want of time, second because for the moment I have mislaid your letter, third because of lack of understanding on my part. What is the meaning of taking interest in external things for their own sake? And what is an introvert? Both these problems baffle me.

The word introvert has come into existence only recently and sounds like a companion of pervert. Literally, it means one who is turned inwards. The Upanishad speaks of the doors of the senses that are turned outwards absorbing man in external things (for their own sake, I suppose) and of the rare man among a million who turns his vision inwards and sees the Self. Is that man an introvert? And is Russell's ideal man, interested in externals for their own sake, Cheloo the day-labourer, for instance, or Joseph the chauffeur, *homo externalis Russellius*, an extrovert? Or is an introvert one who has an inner life stronger, more brilliant, more creative than his external life, — the poet, the musician, the artist? Was Beethoven in his deafness bringing out music from within him an introvert? Or does it mean one who measures external things by an inner standard and is interested in them not for their own sake but for their value to the soul's self-development, its psychic, religious, ethical or other self-expression? Are Tolstoy and Gandhi examples of introverts? Or in another field Goethe? Or does it mean one who cares for external things only as they touch his own mind or else concern his own ego? But that I suppose would include 999,999 men out of every million.

What are external things? Russell is a mathematician. Are mathematical formulae external things — even though they exist here only in the World-Mind and the mind of Man? If not, is

² Bertrand Russell, *The Conquest of Happiness* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1943), p. 160.

Russell as mathematician an introvert? Again, Yajnavalkya says that one loves the wife not for the sake of the wife, but for the self's sake and so with other objects of interest or desire — whether the self be the inner self or the ego.³ Who desires external things for their own sake and not for some value to the conscious being? Even Cheloo is not interested in a two-anna piece for its own sake, but for some vital satisfaction it can bring him; even with the hoarding miser it is the same. It is his vital being's passion for possession that he satisfies and that is something not external but internal, part of his inner make-up, the unseen personality that moves inside behind the veil of the body. What then is meant by Russell's for their own sake? If you will enlighten me on these points, I may still make an effort to comment on the *mahāvākyā* of your former guru.

More important is his wonderful phrase about the emptiness within — on that at least I hope to make a comment one day or another.

27 December 1930

Lawrence's Letters

I write to let you know what is occupying me — Yoga meditation alternating with Lawrence's engrossing letters,⁴ of which I give you some lines that I liked very much.

Why are you so sad about your life? Only let go all this will to have things in your own control. We must all submit to be helpless and obliterated, quite obliterated, destroyed, cast away into nothingness. There is something will rise out of it, something new, that now is not. This which we are must cease to be, that we may come to pass in another being. Do not struggle, with your will, to dominate your conscious life — do not do it. Only drift, and let go — let go, entirely, and become dark, quite dark — like winter which mows away all the leaves and flowers, and lets only the dark underground roots remain. . . .

³ In Yoga it is the valuing of external things in the terms of the desire of the ego that is discouraged — their only value is their value in the manifestation of the Divine.

⁴ Aldous Huxley, ed., *The Letters of D. H. Lawrence* (London: William Heinemann, 1934).

I tell this to you, I tell it to myself—to let go, to release from my will everything that my will would hold, to lapse back into darkness and unknowing. There must be deep winter before there can be spring. [pp. 285–86]

I suppose Lawrence was a Yogi who had missed his way and come into a European body to work out his difficulties. “To lapse back into darkness and unknowing” sounds like the Christian mystic’s passing into the “night of God”, but I think Lawrence thought of a new efflorescence from the subconscious while the mystic’s night of God was a stage between ordinary consciousness and the Superconscious Light.

26 June 1936

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The passage you have quoted certainly shows that Lawrence had an idea of the new spiritual birth. What he has written there could be a very accurate indication of the process of the change, the putting away of the old mind, vital, physical consciousness and the emergence of a new consciousness from the now invisible Within, not an illusory periphery like the present mental, vital, physical ignorance but a truth-becoming from the true being within us. He speaks of the transition as a darkness created by the rejection of the outer mental light, a darkness intervening before the true light from the Invisible can come. Certain Christian mystics have said the same thing and the Upanishad also speaks of the luminous Being beyond the darkness. But in India the rejection of the mental light, the vital stir, the physical hard narrow concreteness leads more often, not to a darkness, but to a wide emptiness and silence which begins afterwards to fill with the light of a deeper greater truer consciousness, a consciousness full of peace, harmony, joy and freedom. I think Lawrence was held back from realising because he was seeking for the new birth in the subconscious vital and taking that for the Invisible Within—he mistook Life for Spirit; whereas Life can only be an expression of the Spirit. That too perhaps was the reason for his preoccupation with a vain and baffled sexuality.

Did you like the Ajanta frescos? I *loved* them: the pure

fulfilment — the pure simplicity — the complete, almost perfect relations between the men and the women — the most perfect things I have *ever* seen. Botticelli is vulgar beside them. They are the zenith of a very lovely civilisation, the crest of a very perfect wave of human development. . . . [pp. 299–300]

His appreciation of the Ajanta paintings must have been due to the same drive that made him seek for a new poetry as well as a new truth from within. He wanted to get rid of the outward forms that for him hide the Invisible and arrive at something that would express with bare simplicity and directness some reality within. It is what made people begin to prefer the primitives to the developed art of the Renaissance. That is why he deprecates Botticelli as not giving the real thing, but only an outward grace and beauty which he considers vulgar in comparison with the less formal art of old that was satisfied with bringing out the pure emotion from within and nothing else.

It is the same thing which makes him want a stark bare rocky directness for modern poetry.⁵ 28 June 1936

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In one of his letters, Lawrence says: "You see one can only write creative stuff when it comes — otherwise it's not much good." [p. 89]

All statements are subject to qualification. What Lawrence states is true in principle, but in practice most poets have to sustain the inspiration by industry. Milton in his later days used to write every day fifty lines; Virgil nine which he corrected and recorrected till it was within half way of what he wanted. In other words he used to write under any other conditions and pull at his inspiration till it came.

To go by my own experience, the first part of the statement doesn't seem always to be true. But perhaps the best creations

⁵ A letter of 29 June 1936 containing Sri Aurobindo's comments on Lawrence's poetry is published on pages 418–19 above.—Ed.

are those which come in that way.

Yes. Usually the best lines, passages etc. come like that.

10 November 1936

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Every time I complain of great difficulty, no inspiration, you quote the names of Virgil, Milton, etc. Same in Yoga — you say 10 years, 12 years — pooh!

I thought you were honestly asking for the truth about inspiration according to Lawrence and effort; and I answered to that. I did not know that it was connected purely with your personal reactions. You did not put it like that. You asked whether Lawrence's ideas were correct and I was obliged to point out that they were subject to qualification since both great and second class and all kinds of poets have not waited for a fitful inspiration but tried to regularise it.

13 November 1936

Section Three

Practical Guidance for Aspiring Writers

Guidance in Writing Poetry

Three Essentials for Writing Poetry

I have gone through your poems. For poetry three things are necessary. First, there must be emotional sincerity and poetical feeling and this your poems show that you possess. Next, a mastery over language and a faculty of rhythm perfected by a knowledge of the technique of poetic and rhythmic expression; here the technique is imperfect, some faculty is there but in the rough and there is not yet an original and native style. Finally, there must be the power of inspiration, the creative energy, and that makes the whole difference between the poet and the good verse-writer. In your poems this is still very uncertain, — in some passages it almost comes out, but in the rest it is not evident.

I would suggest to you not to turn your energies in this direction at present. Allow your consciousness to grow. If when the consciousness develops, a greater energy of inspiration comes, not out of the ordinary but out of the Yogic consciousness, then you can write and, if it is found that the energy not only comes from the true source but is able to mould for itself the true transcription in rhythm and language, can continue.

6 June 1932

Suggestions for Indians Writing English Poetry

If you want to write English poetry which can stand, I would suggest three rules for you to observe:

1. Avoid rhetorical turns and artifices and the rhetorical tone generally. An English poet can use these things at will because he has the intimate sense of his language and can keep the right proportion and measure. An Indian using them kills his poetry and produces a scholastic exercise.

2. Write modern English. Avoid frequent inversions or turns of language that belong to the past poetic styles. Modern English poetry uses a straightforward order and a natural style, not different in vocabulary, syntax, etc., from that of prose. An inversion can be used sometimes, but it must be done deliberately and for a distinct and particular effect.

3. For poetic effect rely wholly on the power of your substance, the magic of rhythm and the sincerity of your expression — if you can add subtlety so much the better, but not at the cost of sincerity and straightforwardness. Do not construct your poetry with the brain-mind, the mere intellect — that is not the source of true inspiration; write always from the inner heart of emotion and vision.

17 November 1930

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Why erect mental theories and suit your poetry to them?¹ I would suggest to you not to be bound by either [*of two models*], but to write as best suits your own inspiration and poetic genius. I imagine that each poet should write in the way suited to his own inspiration and substance; it is only a habit of the human mind fond of erecting rules and rigidities that would like to put one way forward as a general law for all. If you insist on being rigidly simple and direct as a mental rule, you might spoil something of the subtlety of the expression you now have, even if the delicacy of substance remained with you. Obscurity, artifice, rhetoric have to be avoided, but for the rest follow the inner movement.

I do not remember the precise words I used in laying down the rule to which you refer, — I think I advised sincerity and straightforwardness as opposed to rhetoric and artifice. In any case it was far from my intention to impose any strict rule of bare simplicity and directness as a general law of poetic style. I was speaking of "twentieth century" English poetry and of what was necessary for an Indian writing in the English tongue.²

¹ This is the revised version of a letter that is printed in its unrevised form (with the omission of one paragraph) on pages 467–68. — Ed.

² Sri Aurobindo is referring here to the advice he gave in the letter of 17 November 1930 published on pages 567–68. — Ed.

English poetry in former times used inversions freely and had a law of its own—at that time natural and right, but the same thing nowadays sounds artificial and false. English has now acquired a richness and flexibility and power of many-sided suggestion which makes it unnecessary for poetry to depart from the ordinary style and form of the language. But there are other languages in which this is not yet true. Bengali is in its youth, in full process of growth and has many things not yet done, many powers and values it has still to acquire. It is necessary that its poets should keep a full and entire freedom to turn in whichever way the genius leads, to find new forms and movements; if they like to adhere to the ordinary norm of the language to which prose has to keep and do what they can in it, they should be free to do so; but also they should be free to depart from it, if it is by doing so that they can best liberate their souls in speech. At present it is this that most matters.

8 December 1930

Help to Young Poets

Yes, of course, I have been helping Jyotirmayi. Always when somebody really wants to develop the literary power, I put some force to help him or her. If there is faculty and application, however latent the faculty, it always grows under the pressure and can even be turned in this or that direction. Naturally, some are more favourable *ādhāras* than others and grow more decisively and quickly. Others drop off, not having the necessary power of application. But on the whole it is easy enough to make this faculty grow, for there is cooperation on the part of the recipient and only the tamas of the *apravṛtti* and *aprakāśa* in the human instrument to overcome which are not such serious obstacles in the things of the mind as a vital resistance or non-cooperation of the will or idea which confronts one when there is a pressure for change or progress in other directions.

10 June 1935

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[X's] poems are only attempts—good attempts for his age—so I encourage him by telling him that they are good attempts. It

is his English poems I correct, as he has talent, but his mastery of the language is still naturally very imperfect. The other three are masters of language and [Y] is a poet of a very high order. I give my general opinion only when they want it. I never make suggestions. It is in English poetry that I give my opinions or correct or make suggestions.

22 November 1933

Criticism of Bengali Poetry

I do not know that I can suggest any detailed criticisms of Bengali poetry, as I have to rely more on what I feel than on any expert knowledge of language and metre.

Sri Aurobindo's Force and the Writing of Poetry

You give me Force for English poetry — some lines come all right, others are jumbled, wrong, etc., and these things you correct by outer guidance, i.e. by correcting, checking, etc. till I become sufficiently receptive and then only a few changes will be necessary.

I do so in your English poetry because I am an expert in English poetry. In Bengali poetry I don't do it. I only select among alternatives offered by yourself. Mark that for Amal I nowadays avoid correcting or changing as far as possible — that is in order to encourage the inspiration to act in himself. Sometimes I see what he should have written but do not tell it to him, leaving him to get it or not from my silence.

10 April 1937

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I can understand your yogic success in Dilip's Bengali poetry, because the field was ready, but the opening of his channel in English has staggered me. I can't understand whether it is your success or his.

What do you mean by Yoga? There is a Force here in the atmosphere which will give itself to anyone open to it. Naturally it will work best when the native tongue is used — but it can do big things through English if the channel used is a poetic

one and if that channel offers itself. Two things are necessary — no personal resistance and some willingness to take trouble about understanding the elementary technique at least so that the transcription may not meet with too many obstacles. Nishikanta has a fine channel and with a very poetic turn in it — he offers no resistance to the flow of the force, no interference of his mental ego, only the convenience of his mental individuality. Whether he takes the trouble for the technique is another matter.

I had written to you that Nishikanta bows in front of your photograph before he sits down to write, and that I am ready to bow a hundred times, if that is the trick. You answered that it depends on how one bows. Methinks it does not depend on that. Even if it did I don't think Nishikanta knows it. Or was it in his past life that he knew it?

Well, there is a certain faculty of effacing oneself and letting the Universal Force run through you — that is the way of bowing. It can be acquired by various means, but also one may have the capacity for doing it in certain directions by nature.

10 December 1935

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We feel that your Force gives us the necessary inspiration for poetry, but I often wonder if you send it in a continuous current.

Of course not. Why should I? It is not necessary. I put my Force from time to time and let it work out what has to be worked out. It is true that with some I have to put it often to prevent too long stretches of unproductivity, but even there I don't put a continuous current. I have not time for such things.

If it were so, we would not write 15 to 20 lines at a stretch and then go on for days together producing only 3 or 4 lines.

That depends on the mental instruments. Some people write freely — others do so only when in a special condition.

Had your special Force been constantly acting, why should we have this difficulty? We should be able to feel the inspiration as soon as we sit down with pen and paper, shouldn't we?

No. At least I myself don't have continuous inspiration at command like that in poetry.

I don't think a latent faculty brought out by Yogic Force would achieve such a height of perfection as a faculty which manifests in the natural way.

Of course, not so long as it is latent or not fully emerged. But once it is manifested and settled, there is no reason why it should not achieve an equal perfection. All depends on the quality of the inspiration that comes and the response of the instrument.

12 June 1935

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When the current of inspiration comes to a stop, I think sometimes that perhaps you have forgotten me in your busy moments.

It does not depend on that at all. It depends on a certain state of receptivity—an opening of the channel between the inner plane where the inspiration comes and the outer through which it has to pass.

27 March 1934

*

As regards the "opening of the channel", can it be done sooner by more concentration, meditation, etc., disregarding the literary side for the time being?

One can get the power of receptivity to inspiration by concentration and meditation making the inner being stronger and the outer less gross, tamasic and insistent.

29 March 1934

*

I tried to write a poem, but failed in spite of prayer and call. Then I wrote to you to send me some Force. Before the letter had reached you, lo, the miracle was done! Can you explain

the process? Was it simply the writing that helped establish the contact with the Grace?

The call for the Force is very often sufficient, not absolutely necessary that it should reach my physical mind first. Many get as soon as they write — or, (if they are outside), when the letter reaches the atmosphere.

Yes, it is the success in establishing the contact that is important. It is a sort of hitching on or getting hold of the invisible button or whatever you like to call it.

When you send the Force, is there a time limit for its functioning or does it work itself out in the long run or get washed off after a while, finding the *ādhāra* unreceptive?

There is no time limit. I have known cases in which I put a Force for getting a thing done and it seemed to fail damably at the moment; but after two years everything carried itself out in exact detail and order just as I had arranged it, although I was thinking no more at all of the matter. You ought to know but I suppose you don't that "Psychic" Research in Europe has proved that all so-called "psychic" communications can sink into the consciousness without being noticed and turn up long afterwards. It is like that with the communication of Force also.

21 May 1936

Opening to the Force

All I can say is that opening is a mysterious business!

Who says it is not? Some people have the trick of always opening to a Force (e.g. Dilip, Nishikanta for creative literary activity), some have it sometimes, don't have it sometimes (you, Arjava, myself). Why make it a case of kicks and despair?

19 September 1936

Sending Inspiration

But what precisely do you mean by sending the inspiration?

The inspiration comes from above,—through your inner being who, very evidently, is not only a Yogin and a bhakta but a poet of Yoga and bhakti. The Yoga-force which woke up the power in you came from me. It was when you were translating my poems that you got into touch and the power woke in you because you came inwardly into my Light. Since then I have been acting on you to develop this poetic power, and as there is a large opening there it has been an easy matter. As for the Power itself that works, that gives you words and rhythms, you ought to know or at least your inner being knows very well that all divine powers are the powers of the Mother. But the way in which these things work is the occult and not the physical (not the crudely mediumistic) way, and it works in each according to his nature and the material and capacities, actual or latent, it finds there.

8 September 1931

*

Please send me some inspiration to complete my *Triumph of Dante*. What is the best way of receiving it? I'll be thankful if you'll teach me how to be able to fill up those gaps.

Good Lord! it is not a thing that can be taught. As for the best way—well, silence of the mind, relative silence if one can't get the absolute.

6 November 1936

*

You give inspiration only for supramental poetry? Startling news, Sir!

Where have I said that I give inspiration for supramental poetry either only or at all? You said that your inspirer for this or for any other poem of yours was my supramental self. I simply said that it can't be, because a supramental self would produce or inspire supramental poetry—and yours is not that, nor, I may add, is Jyoti's or Dilip's or my own or anybody's.

We fondly believe that you give inspiration, set apart a time for it, and now you say that you are not the Inspirer?

I say that my supramental Self is not the inspirer — which is a very different matter.

Pray explain the mystery to me. Why shirk the responsibility now, because a surrealist poem has come out? You are responsible for it, I think.

Excuse me, no. As the Gita says, the Lord takes not on himself the good or the evil deeds (or writings) of any. I may send a force of inspiration, but I am not responsible for the results.

19 January 1937

The Necessity and Nature of Inspiration

I hope to be able to write not only good but very good and very fine poems as a part of Yoga.

To write such poetry, one must first be open to a high or strong or beautiful source of inspiration and secondly one must not be too facile — one must be careful of the quality. 30 May 1934

*

I am doubting if there is even one drop of poetical faculty in me.

There is evidence of literary talent in your poems — what has not yet come is the inspiration that vivifies the writing. It may come hereafter. 20 September 1934

*

As for the “urge”, if you resist the inspiration, the chances are that you will lose both the urge and your meditation. So it is better to let the flood have its way — especially in this case, of course, for there is no harm in *this* kind of urge.

7 February 1931

*

But that happens to everybody who is in the habit of writing. The suggesting forces write in the mind without regard to outward

opportunity and it is also quite usual for a line to come without any sequel.

3 April 1936

*

Would you suggest a way to increase thought-power in poetry?

There is no device for that. You have to open from within to a deeper or higher source of inspiration or grow from within into a deeper or higher consciousness — there is no other way for it.

4 May 1934

*

Today another poem by Jyoti. I'm staggered by her speed in writing. She says lines, *chanda*, simply drop down, and she jots them down. She feels as if somebody is writing through her.

But that is how inspiration always comes when the way is clear and the mind sufficiently passive. Something drops or pours down; somebody writes through you.

I don't know that by one's mind one can write such things.
What do you say?

Not possible. There would be something artificial or made up in them if it were the mind that did it.

How has she opened to the mystic plane? Something akin to her nature or one just opens?

It may be either.

Even when a thing drops down, isn't it rather risky to accept it as it comes, specially the *chanda* part of it?

If anything is defective, it can be only by a mistake in the transcription.

Does the *chanda* also come down with inspiration or has one to change it afterwards?

Yes, it comes and is usually faultless — if the mind is passive and the source a high, deep or true one. Of course metre as the Supraphysicals understand it!

I shall illustrate my point. Jyoti says she sometimes rejects lines because she doesn't understand their meaning. But since they repeatedly throw themselves on her, she accepts them. When the poem is completed the meaning becomes clear.

The mind ought to be quiet till all is written. Afterwards one can look and see if there is anything to be altered. 27 July 1936

*

Isn't it a fact that the best poetry almost always comes down without any resistance at all?

Usually the best poetry a poet writes, the things that make him immortal, come like that. 28 July 1936

*

After reading Jyoti's whole poem, I realised it would have been impossible to write it simply from facility. It is an inspiration-poem.

Of course it is impossible. There must be inspiration. The value of the poem does not rise from the labour or difficulty felt in writing it. Shakespeare, it is said, wrote at full speed and never erased a line. 29 July 1936

Inspiration and Understanding

Everything depends on the inspiration. But then I can't change any line or word since I don't understand what I am writing.

From your explanations you seem to understand all right. The question is about the inspiration itself. It is sometimes more successful, sometimes less — for various reasons. What one has to see is whether what has come through is quite satisfactory in language, image, harmonious building, poetic force. If not, one

can call a farther inspiration to emend what is deficient. At first one allows the inspiration to come through without interference, to establish the habit of free flow. But that does not mean one must not afterwards alter or improve — only it should be done not by the mind but by a fresh and better inspiration. If in the course of writing itself, a correcting inspiration comes, that can be accepted — otherwise one does the perfecting afterwards.

23 February 1937

*

The poet herself says that, as far as she can tell, the sestet has no relationship to the previous lines.

What does that matter? Is she the intellectual creator of these poems or is she the medium of their transmission? If the latter it does not matter a penny damn that she does not intellectually understand her poem — provided she transmits it correctly.

7 December 1936

*

Does it help a writer to know the particular source of inspiration from where he or she writes?

Not at all necessary.

18 July 1936

*

Some poems that come are unintelligible to the mind. Why?
Is it because they come from higher planes?

Yes, the mind is used as a medium: it may be an understanding — transcribing agent or it may be only a passive channel. If an agent, it transcribes what comes from above, understands but does not pass its opinion — only transmits. If it is only a channel, then it sees the words and passes them but knows no more.

If one could understand it when it comes, would that not help to improve the poem?

Not to improve — for that would mean the mind interfering, refusing to be a medium and trying to do better in its own active

account. But to understand is desirable. If the mind is watchful and awake to the symbols being used or the images it can acquire the habit or knack of understanding.

27 January 1937

*

But seriously, how can I write this surrealist sort of stuff better?
What is the trick?

The trick is to put your demand on the source for what you want. If you want to fathom (not understand) what you are writing, ask for the vision of the thing to come along with the word, a vision bringing an inner comprehension. If you want something mystic but convincing to the non-mystic reader, ask for that till you get it.

17 February 1937

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So you are getting plenty of surrealist poets, eh? Happy at the prospect?

Not at all. Look here, sir, two are enough in all conscience, with an occasional Nishikantian outburst thrown in. If others cut in I will have to strike. I can't spend all my life from set to dawn explaining the inexplicable.

Inspiration and Effort

I have ceased even to aspire, believing that you will give me inspiration. I refuse to make even a mental effort.

Mental effort is one thing and aspiring and holding yourself in readiness is another.

10 May 1934

*

If I have discovered some lines I must not think of the next lines, but try instead to keep absolutely silent so that with a leap I find that the Greater Mind has simply dropped the necessary rhymed lines, like a good fellow, and I finish off excellently without a drop of black sweat on my wide forehead?

That is the ideal way; but usually there is always an activity of the

mind jumping up and trying to catch the inspiration. Sometimes the inspiration, the right one, comes in the midst of this futile jumping, sometimes it sweeps it aside and brings in the right thing, sometimes it inserts itself between two blunders, sometimes it waits till the noise quiets down. But even this jumping need not be a mental effort — it is often only a series of suggestions, the mind of itself seizing on one or eliminating another, not by laborious thinking and choice, but by a quiet series of perceptions. This is method no. 2. No. 3 is your Herculean way, quite the slowest and worst.

31 March 1936

*

Inspiration leaves one sometimes and one goes on beating
and beating, hammering and hammering, but it comes not!
Inspiration failing to descend, perhaps.

Exactly. When any real effect is produced, it is not because of the beating and the hammering, but because an inspiration slips down between the raising of the hammer and the falling and gets in under cover of the beastly noise. It is when there is no need of effort that the best comes. Effort is all right, but only as an excuse for inducing the Inspiration to come. If it wants to come, it comes — if it doesn't, it doesn't and one is obliged to give up after producing nothing or an inferior mind-made something. I have had that experience often enough myself. I have also seen Amal after producing something good but not perfect, beating the air and hammering it with proposed versions each as bad as the other, — for it is only a new inspiration that can really improve a defect in the transcription of the first one. Still one makes efforts, but it is not the effort that produces the result, but the inspiration that comes in answer to it. You knock at the door to make the fellow inside answer. He may or he mayn't — if he lies mum, you have only to walk off swearing. That's effort and inspiration.

You proclaim the force and inspiration from the house-top,
but fail to see that one has to work hour after hour to get it.
What would you call this labour?

Hammering, making a beastly noise so that Inspiration may get excited and exasperated and fling something through the window, muttering "I hope that will keep this insufferable tinsmith quiet."

6 March 1936

Mentalisation of Inspiration

You have spoken of the original inspiration becoming "mentalised". Could you tell me how it gets mentalised?

This mentalisation is a subtle process which takes place unobserved. The inspiration, as soon as it strikes the mental layer (where it first becomes visible) is met by a less intense receptivity of the mind which passes the inspired substance through but substitutes its own expression, an expression stressed by the force of inspiration into a special felicity but not reproducing or transmitting the inspired beat itself.

6 April 1938

Capturing Lines and Expressions

As regards poetry, I am invaded by hazy ideas for two or three compositions and many lines seem to peep out.

What is the meaning of this "seem"? Do they peep or do they not peep?

But they seem more bent on tantalising me than meaning anything serious, because as soon as I sit down to transcribe them, they evaporate like ether or camphor.

What do you mean? Why should you sit down to transcribe them? Keep hold of the lines and expressions by the nose as soon as they peep out, jump on a piece of paper and dash them down for prospective immortality.

It appears so easy to catch all these amorphous beauties and put them into morphological Grecian statues! . . .

Why amorphous, if they are lines and expressions — lines and

expressions are either morphous or they don't exist. Explain yourself, please.

5 December 1935

*

You ask why "amorphous"? The lines, expressions, words that I feel swarming all around me, but I cannot put into form, what else shall I call them?

If you simply feel things swarming without a shape, then you can't call that lines and expressions—it is only the chaotic potentiality of them.

One begins with the morphous lines hoping that the amorphous chaos will sweep in ecstatically and help me build a splendidly original cosmos, and what do I find? Either they elude me or what comes is something commonplace.

That's another matter. It's like dreams in which one gets splendid lines that put Shakespeare into the shade and one wakes up and enthusiastically jots them down, it turns out to be "O you damned goose, where are you going While the river is flowing, flowing, flowing" and things like that.

Do you mean that I should scribble down all these expressions as soon as they hop in? Good Lord! there will be parts and pieces only. How shall I make a whole poem out of them?

Many poets do that—jot down something that comes isolated in the hope that some day it will be utilisable. Tennyson did it, I believe. You don't want to be like Tennyson? Of course it is always permissible for you to pick and choose among these divine fragments and throw away those that are only semi-divine.

Already words and lines of four or five poems in halves and quarters are lying in a comatose condition, without any hope of resurrection.

Well, well—all that shows you are a poet in the making with hundreds of poems in you also in the making, very much so. The mountains in labour, you know—what? 6 December 1935

Inspiration during Sleep

Of late my poetic inspiration has shifted from the waking to the sleep state. I often compose poetry in sleep but cannot remember exactly what I write.

Concentrate in the will to remember before going to sleep—when you wake remain quiet a little before moving and try to remember (not struggling to do it but leaving your mind open with a will that it should come back). You say sometimes a line remains. Of what kind? any good? Sometimes these subliminal compositions are pure rubbish. If so, it is not worthwhile making an effort to remember.

3 October 1933

*

This morning a little before 5.30 I got a poem which seemed to me grave and rich at the same time. Suddenly my eyes opened and the poem faded. But I had a very strong sense that it was really good. Is there any way to make good the loss?

These things do not come back. The feeling that it was very good is not reliable. Unless you remember the thing, it cannot be decided. I have more than once woken up with a line which seemed splendid to the subconscious, but which my waking mind found to be very flat. Of course it depends from what source it came.

October 1933

Variations in Inspiration

It is queer that one writes a few lines in no time and the rest perhaps at no time!

This is too cryptic for me. I may say however that inspiration for poetry is always an uncertain thing (except for a phenomenon like Harin). Sometimes it comes in a rush, sometimes one has to labour for days to get a poem right, sometimes it does not come at all. Besides each poet is treated by the Muse in a different way.

24 August 1935

*

You wrote that today's poem is only "good". Where is the progress?

No writer of poetry can count on keeping the same level of inspiration in all his poems. The results are sometimes good, sometimes better, sometimes at his best. There can be failures also so long as one is not perfectly mature in capacity.

11 July 1936

Writing and Concentration

Which of these two methods is better: to go on writing till one comes in contact with the original source of inspiration, or to concentrate first and get the contact?

Dhyana is perhaps the best way—for if you can get into the consciousness which makes all poetry which proceeds from it original, that is the best, even if it means postponement of the actual writing of poetry. The habit of writing no doubt increases the skill and mastery of verse, but then it might only be verse such as all good *littérateurs* can write. A higher inspiration is necessary. As for translation I don't know—if one has the translator's gift like Dilip or Nishikanta, then it is all right—but otherwise translation is more difficult than original writing.

*

I cannot come in touch with poetry or its source. My mind is full of the most ordinary things.

You must put aside these things when you write. Every writer has to do that, to put aside his ordinary self and its preoccupations and concentrate on his overhead inspiration. 18 July 1936

Receptivity and Silence

My mind does not know precisely how to silence itself. The same is true of Dilip. How then does he manage to receive from Above?

The difference is that as his mind has opened to the Above, the

Above can turn its activity into an activity of the Inspiration — its quickness, energy, activity enable it to transcribe quickly, actively, energetically what comes into it from the Above. Of course if one day it becomes silent also, it may probably become the channel of a still higher Inspiration.

Is silencing the mind to be done only at the time of writing or at other times too?

Silencing the mind at the time of writing should be sufficient — even not silencing it, but its falling quiet to receive.

31 March 1936

Difficulty and Ease of Production

The sentence “the reason is rather the seeking for new inspiration which has not yet come” in your letter to Jyoti is rather enigmatic or cryptic to us.

If one wants a new inspiration or development there may very well be during the period of transition or attempted transition a period of difficulty or suspension because the old feels itself no longer called for or not so much, while the new is not yet there. That is all I meant.

3 January 1937

*

The sense of difficulty made me feel an unwillingness and somehow I dread it even now.

If the inspiration comes, the sense of difficulty is not likely to remain and the poem will take the form and tone which is the right one for the subject.

26 January 1937

*

The same difficulty of transmission appears to hinder the proper finish. Will you tell me where the defect lies — insufficient mastery over language and style, or insufficient inspiration?

All writers have the difficulty — it is the tamas of the physical

mind which finds it difficult to transcribe the inspiration.

29 August 1933

Mind Fatigue

Jyoti wants to know why or how the mind-fag has come in and by what attitude or process it can quickly pass off.

There is nothing serious in it. Very often when the mind has been doing something for a long time (I mean of course the physical mind), something which demands intensity of work or action, not what can be done as a routine, it finds itself unable to do it well any longer. That means that it is strained, needs rest so that the force may gather again. Rest or a variation. A little rest given to it or a variation of work should set it right again.

I thought that one or two hours' work without undue effort might perhaps keep the channel open and at the same time produce no fatigue.

It is not a question of ordinary fatigue by overwork—but of a temporary inability to go on doing the same thing over and over any longer. That is what I mean by the mind-fag. It is not the mere writing of poetry of any kind but the intensity to bring down that kind of poetry that is in question. The channel in fact is not working because of the fag—it can work again only after rest, by not forcing oneself.

17 August 1936

The Poetic Influence and the Physical Consciousness

Sometimes *chandas* are at the tip of my tongue but I'm unable to express myself in verse. Is there no way for me to learn?

Any necessary power may come with the sadhana—but many get the poetic impulse from within, but are not able to transcribe it in really good poetic form—it depends on how it comes out through the physical consciousness.

22 December 1933

Aspiration

Jyoti says formerly she used to aspire for beautiful things, etc. instead of letting herself go. Now she remains passive — and this poem is the result. Any answer?

There is no incompatibility between aspiring and letting the thing come through. The aspiration gives the necessary intensity so that what comes has a better chance of being a true transcription. In this case probably the pain she felt in the neck etc. was a proof of some fatigue in the physical parts which spoiled the transmission.

30 July 1936

*

Dilip had to work in spite of your Grace. My aspiration for your Grace in this mental occupation is as great as for spiritual progress.

Aspire for the opening to the right plane of inspiration. You forget that Dilip got his opening by grace and never lost it — all his work only helps him to utilise and develop what is already there.

22 May 1934

Passivity of Mind

If I don't surrender more or less passively, all is spoilt, I cannot produce anything real. Yet the mind struggles and I feel depressed and heavy in the head.

Why should the mind struggle? In all these things the mind has to remain passive and only a witness consciousness behind watching what is passing. It can be seen afterwards if anything has to be altered, but the mind interfering can only hamper the inspiration or pervert it.

27 July 1936

*

I seem to force and hurry myself rather than surrender to the Force above. The result is annoyance, mental labour, headaches and nervous irritation. Also, the desire to write this and that, this way or that way.

The remedy is to draw back and let the inspiration flow, keeping the attitude of the instrument and witness not involved in the work.

19 December 1936

The Joy of Creation

I had a unique experience in the realm of poetry.

Last night the inspiration came and as I sat down to write the whole thing dropped, so to say. I simply let myself be led to see how and where it would end. Never before have I written a whole poem in this way. I was very joyous and recovered all lost hope.

Why is it that people get so much joy out of writing a poem?

It is the joy of creation partly, partly the joy or "*enthousiasmos*", the sense of exaltation and Ananda which always comes when one is freely and powerfully used by a greater Force.

Does this spontaneous, automatic inpouring depend on some inner state?

It does not depend on any inner spiritual state, but on an opening to some supraphysical plane of inspiration. 21 April 1934

*

I will put in any amount of labour and that should be enough for things to pour down.

Labour is not enough for the things to pour down. What is done with labour only, is done with difficulty, not with a downpour. The joy in the labour must be there for a free outflow. You have very queer psychological ideas, I must say. 14 December 1936

Rapture and Application

Would you advise me to cease trying to write poetry for some time? The one or two recent failures (what you call "a good poem" falls for me more or less in the same category) perhaps shows that I am pumping when the well is dry? The poetry

I really want to write — miraculous and perfect — seems so impossible at present. I wonder and wonder whether I shall ever be able to offer you the rapture and the glory I dream of.

I don't see why you object to writing good poems or why you call them failures. The rapture and the glory are all right, but how are you to arrive at them if you don't write? 6 October 1934

Practice, Cultivation, Regularity

Dilip and others say I should practise writing, but can one write by practice?

Writing improves with practice — there comes a greater mastery over language, provided one has the faculty and you seem to have it. 5 February 1933

*

Am I a "writer by nature" and should I cultivate writing like Dilip?

Dilip got the power of writing poetry through the inspiration awaking, otherwise he might have laboured all his life and never produced anything of any value. It was the grace of a sudden opening of power that he got, it was not the fruit of cultivation.

Nirod writes as well or even better than I do, why then do you say he is not a writer by nature? Has he not the faculty?

I said that to Nirod because he wanted to do these things as part of his development in sadhana. Apart from that one can by cultivation learn to write well in an ordinary way, but inspiration and the power to write things worth writing do not come in that way.

As a help in the beginning Dilip suggests that I should write long letters to friends, translate others' poems and writings, read a lot of books etc. And Amal says I should write essays and criticism of poems and of others' writings. Please tell me if these are the right ways to begin.

Of course you can do all that. If you can really do it it will at least be a lesson in work and application and patience, if nothing else.

27 August 1933

*

What should I do in order to make everything perfect? Should I work hard and go on writing or rather sit and wait for the inclination to write?

There is no rule about these things—it acts differently with different people. Some acquire the capacity of writing regularly — others can only do it when the push comes. 31 March 1934

Silence and Creative Activity

It would be a mistake to silence the poetic flow on principle. Creative activity is a tonic to the vital and keeps it in good condition, and a strong and widening vital is helpful as a support to the practice of sadhana. There is no real incompatibility between the creative power and silence; for the real silence is something inward and it does not or at least need not cease when a strong activity or expression rises to the surface. 14 June 1932

Periods of Incubation

Do you think it better for me to stop writing for four or five days in order to be quiet?

You may stop for a few days. It is sometimes well to do so at times. 11 August 1936

*

My ballad seems to have fallen between two stools—it's neither true ballad nor pure poem. Has it no saving grace at all? What do you advise me to do with it? Limbo?

As to the sentence on your poem, I told you I could not pronounce even a definitive verdict. There was a recommendation by Horace or some other impossibly wise critic that when you

have written a poem the safest rule is to put it in your desk, leave it there for ten years and then only take it out and read and see whether it is worth anything. Perhaps with a mitigation of the segregation period, the rule could be applied here. 1932

*

What about my poem? I hope it is mentally quite clear.

Very fine indeed, very. You have suddenly reached a remarkable maturity of the poetic power. Which seems to suggest that the periods of sterility were not so sterile after all or were rather an incubation period, a work of opening going on in the inner being behind the veil before it manifested in the outer. Let us hope the same is going on in the direct sadhana. 7 August 1936

Labour and the Appearance of Ease

I can't, for the life of me, get new expressions or thoughts. What can be done? I break my head over them but they remain damn hard and unprofitable as the Divine! I am paying the penalty of trying to become an English poet and of facing a hard task-master.

What the deuce are you complaining about? You are writing very beautiful poetry with apparent ease and one a day of this kind is a feat. If the apparent ease covers a lot of labour, that is the lot of the poet and artist except when he is a damned phenomenon of fluency. "It is the highest art to conceal art" "The long and conscientious labour of the artist giving in the result an appearance of divine and perfect ease"—console yourself with these titbits. As for repetitions, they are almost inevitable when you are writing a poem a day. You are gaining command of your medium and that is the main thing. An inexhaustible original fecundity is a thing you have to wait for—when you are more spiritually experienced and mature.

7 September 1938

Dissatisfaction and Persistence

If one could express the Divine through poetry, it would have some value. Otherwise why should one bother?

There is a general tendency in the vital to get dissatisfied with everything. It is a restlessness that should not be encouraged. If one could be concentrated always on the Divine, then there would be no need of any admonitions, one would naturally do so. But until then it is no use dropping something that has opened in you.

If the poems do not turn out to be of the highest grade, should I write daily?

If one gives up writing whenever the writing is not always of the highest grade — it would not be possible for anybody to develop his poetical power.

30 July 1936

Writing and Self-criticism

I concentrate or meditate for some time before writing. Even then I have to pause after every expression.

Pause to do what? Think? You have to cultivate the power of feeling instinctively the value of what you write — either while writing or immediately you go over it when it is completed.

23 February 1937

*

Nirod says my rhythm is sometimes not very smooth and spontaneous, and that I should read the poem aloud when it is finished. I prefer to read it silently. What is the right way: aloud or silently?

It is better always to read it aloud once so as to make sure of the rhythmic sound.

15 October 1933

*

I have scratched the whole poem out of existence! And yet

when I completed it, I was so happy thinking it was something great! Fool!

Every poet is such a fool. His work is done in an exalting excitement of the vital mind — judgment and criticism can only come when he has cooled down.

6 April 1937

Using Criticism from Others

I do not like to show my poems to others; I'm afraid their criticism will take away all impulse to write.

If you do not show them and face criticism how will you improve?

12 October 1933

Contact with Other Writers

I notice some queer things happening in the realm of poetry between Nishikanta and myself. I wrote a line:

চলছে ভেসে চাঁদের তরী ওই সুনীলের সাগরে³

and did not follow it up. Two days later I find Nishikanta writing a poem wherein occurs the line

কে ভাসালে চাঁদের তরী⁴

Some time back a similar thing happened. These are about expressions; similar things are happening about *chanda* also. Strange, isn't it?

Nothing queer about that. You dropped the inspiration and did not work it out; so it went off and prodded N who let it through. That often happens.

31 July 1936

*

I thought I have so far avoided taking any beautiful expressions used by others.

³ "The moon-boat is sailing on the ocean of the blue sky." — Ed.

⁴ "Who made it sail, the moon-boat?" — Ed.

As a rule it is better to avoid taking over special expressions used by others.

15 February 1937

Sameness and Variety

Harin has suns and moons in plenty in his poetry. A friend of Amal's has remarked that stars come in almost every one of his poems. This seems to be one point against spiritual poetry. Another is that spiritual poetry is bound to be limited in scope and lack *rasa vaicitrya*, to use Tagore's expression.

Ordinary poems (and novels) always write about love and similar things. Is it one point against ordinary (non-spiritual) poetry? If there is sameness of expression in spiritual poems, it is due either to the poet's binding himself by the tradition of a fixed set of symbols (e.g. Vaishnava poets, Vedic poets) or to his having only a limited field of expression or imagination or to his deliberately limiting himself to certain experiences or emotions that are clear to him. To readers who feel these things it does not appear monotonous. Those who listen to Mirabai's songs, don't get tired of them, nor do I get tired of reading the Upanishads. The Greeks did not tire of reading Anacreon's poems though he always wrote of wine and beautiful boys (one example of sameness in unspiritual poetry). The Vedic and Vaishnava poets remain immortal in spite of their sameness which is in another way like that of the poetry of the troubadours in mediaeval Europe, deliberately chosen. *Rasa vaicitrya* is all very well, but it is the power of the poetry that really matters. After all every poet writes always in the same style, repeats the same vision of things in "different garbs".

When Sahana sent some of her poems to Tagore, he replied that the poet's mind should not be confined to a single *preranā*, however vast it might be.

But Tagore's poetry is all from one প্রেরণা. He may write of different things, but it is always Tagore and his *preranā* repeating themselves interminably. Every poet does that.

He hints that a poet's creation should not be confined to spiritual inspiration dealing with things spiritual and mystic.

Well, and if a poet is a spiritual seeker what does Tagore want him to write about? Dancing girls? Amal has done that. Wine and women? Hafiz has done that. But he can only use them as symbols as a rule. Must he write about politics,—communism, for instance, like modernist poets? Why should he describe the outer aspects of world nature, বিশ্ব প্রকৃতি, for their own sake, when his vision is of something else within বিশ্ব প্রকৃতি or even apart from her? Merely for the sake of variety? He then becomes a mere *littérateur*. Of course if a man simply writes to get poetic fame and a lot of readers, if he is only a poet, Tagore's advice may be good for him.

15 May 1938

*

What the deuce is Yogic poetry, not to speak of too Yogic? Poetry is poetry, whatever the subject. If one can't appreciate the subject one can at least appreciate its poetical expression. One may not love wine-drinking yet appreciate the beauty of Anacreon's lyrics and one may be a pacifist and yet appreciate the poetic power of your father's war-song. However, perhaps since there is a conversion in other things, there may be an eleventh hour repentance here also.

Repetition

Words or phrases may be reiterated provided they acquire by their content a new colour each time. The word white has been fairly common of late in my work though perhaps the line in which it occurs, "A white word breaks the eternal quietude", is not so stale as the other.

Obviously, it is desirable not to repeat oneself or if one has to it is desirable to repeat in another language and in a new light. Still even that cannot be overdone. The difficulty about most writers of spiritual poetry is that they have either a limited field of experience or are tacked on to a limited inspiration though

an intense one. How to get out of it? The only recipe I know is to widen oneself (or one's receptivity) always. Or else perhaps wait in the eternal quietude for a new white word to break it—if it does not come, telephone.

30 August 1937

*

But why should not one repeat oneself sometimes—provided it is done with a difference? It is better, unless there is imperative need for change or unless a very striking improvement offers itself, not to make any small alterations in a thing that has come out well—for then the better one tries after tends to spoil the good that has already been achieved.

*

It is not possible always to say something quite new. If one has a subject old or new worth treating and treats it with originality, that is all that is essential.

18 August 1936

Spontaneity

All poetry is not necessarily spontaneous, and if all poetry that is not spontaneous were to be put aside, the stock of the world's poetic literature would be much reduced; so let the sonnet stand.

25 October 1934

Originality

It is a good poem; its rhythm and expression are sufficiently chaste and strong to convey an effect of restrained power and give a poetic body to the thought—and the thought itself is on a high level and has the emotion and truth of what comes from the higher mind. Judged independently, the one defect is that the style has not the note of perfect originality, the intensity of discovery in it; I find too much echo of my own poetry in *Ahana*. But this derivativeness is inevitable when one is learning how to write—it is only when you have got a certain mastery of the medium that you can express in your own way.

6 December 1932

*

Once you wrote to me that the occasional failure of inspiration I experience is due to my mind having learned too much and being too ingenious [*see page 12*]. Has that characteristic given a subtly *réchauffé* turn to all my style? Do you find it at its best an inspired pastiche? I should be grateful to realise what particular influences I ought specially to outgrow. I sometimes doubt if I am not, except of course in the insight kindled by you, almost wholly derivative, full of traditional mannerisms.

No. I find no pastiche in your poems and I could not lay my hand on any special influence to be outgrown. What I meant was that the contriving mind (intellectual and ingenious) was too busy and blocked the way of the poetic intuitive inspiration too often. I did not mean at all that it was wholly derivative or full of traditional mannerisms.

10 September 1933

*

I feel Jyoti's poem is an exceedingly fine piece and some expressions are remarkably original, aren't they?

Yes, quite so. It is the freedom from the intellectual limitations which bring in these original expressions—as in many English poets. Ordinarily in French, or in Bengali, (French before Mallarmé and the Symbolists) there is too much lucidity and rationality to let these things get through.

29 October 1936

Poetry Writing and Fiction

Can I, without losing the force needed for fiction or poetry, carry on *both* at the same time?

There is no rule for these things. You must see for yourself, for with each person it is different. There is no general or necessary incompatibility between fiction and poetry.

28 March 1936

*

If a writer devoted part of the day to stories and part to poems, would the two sorts of writing come in each other's way?

One cannot say what will be the immediate effect. But it is not

likely that the poetic consciousness once opened will stop—
though it may be suspended if the concentration is strongly to
something else.

7 January 1937

Poetic Inspiration and Prose-Work

I am at present too much caught in the prose-work. No wonder
poetry is impossible. I suppose the prose has to run its course
before the poetic inspiration gets a chance to return?

Why the deuce should your poetic inspiration wait for the results
of the prose canter? The ground being still cumbered ought to
be no obstacle to an aerial flight.

16 March 1935

Literary Ambition and Aspiration

If a poem does not come up to expectation, all is dark.

That is a weakness that ought to be overcome.

I want to write in many ways and many forms; to write long
poems as well as short ones; to write expressing many and
various ideas; in the future to write books even—and so to
prepare myself for this now by doing shorter works.

But surely you do not expect to do all that all at once? One has
to grow in consciousness and ability before these things can be
done. Because all that is not yet done, is not a ground for being
dissatisfied with the present work done.

I hold before myself the example of Sri Aurobindo, Tagore,
Kalidasa, Shakespeare—of all the great poets. I am afraid this
is all ambition.

Ambition has to be outgrown, if one wants to succeed in sad-
hana. The will to use the energies for the best, not for ego but
as a work for the Divine must replace it.

Something within wants to shake off this bondage to the old habits and old ways of writing, wants to soar higher, bring in newer, deeper, truer and more beautiful things: but I feel bound and full of despair.

There is no harm in such an aspiration, but despair is not the way to it. You have to aspire and grow into these new things—already there is a distinct progress, a new writing of a stronger kind.

A peculiar hopelessness now and then will not let me concentrate; how shall I be able to break into a newer region of inspiration by myself and my own aspiration and concentration?

You can't do it by hopelessness and the consequent inability to concentrate. It is precisely by aspiration and concentration that it can be done. Nor are you called upon to do it "by yourself".

I don't want to write poetry in the same forms and metres. But I cannot help myself; there seems to be a canal cut and things come in that way, that form, and no other.

One can try new forms and metres and they will come, but it is to be observed that the greatest poets have written in a few forms and metres — e.g. Shakespeare, dramatic blank verse, sonnet, short lyric. In narrative he was a failure. Milton, blank verse, narrative, sonnet, long meditative lyric, ode. His drama form is not dramatic. Kalidas, narrative epic, drama, one elegiac poem, one poem of nature description — not an inexhaustible variation of metres. Valmiki, Vyasa epic only — *anuṣṭubh* and *triṣṭubh* metres. Dante, *terza rima* metre — little variation of kind in his poetic writing.

I am rejecting the impulse to do other literary work — stories, novels etc. — simply for the sake of producing maturer work in poetry, though novel-writing would have been easier.

I do not know that there is any reason why you should not

write other things. You have now a great mastery of poetry in its constituent parts of language, rhythm, building — it is only the variation that is needed. Perhaps by doing other work that variation might be assisted.

Lastly, I want to have your guidance, as when you told Nirod what were his drawbacks.

In your case I do not find any drawbacks of importance — except the one fact that you are bound within one channel or stream of poetry with always the same images and ideas as the base of your work. The construction in that base varies and is always fine. But the base and the kind are always the same.

Neither Arjava nor Amal are guided by anybody except you.
Why should not that be the right thing for me?

Arjava and Amal write in English and I can guide or suggest things to them in detail as well as in general. I can't do that with Bengali poetry; I can only pass judgment on points put before me.

Consultation with Nolini might be useful — he has a different mind from Nirod's and can see things from another angle. Nirod's help is, I think, indispensable. As for Nishikanta, I do not think it advisable — he has a strong individuality of his own as a poet and at the same time a great assimilative power. With the first he would make suggestions which would be good poetry but not kin to your individuality; with the other he would absorb your poetry and produce Nishikantisations of that — I don't think you would like such drawings upon you. 20 March 1937

Ambition and the Desire for Fame

I cannot deny that along with my urge for acquiring a fine style etc., there is hiding some desire for fame as a good writer which, however, one can reject, at least one can hope to.

Better not force the inspiration. You have some literary gift and

can let it grow — but no desire for fame, if you please.

4 October 1933

*

There should be no “desire” to be a “great” writer. If there is a genuine inspiration or coming of a power to write, then it can be done but to use it as a means of service to the Divine is the proper spirit.

14 May 1934

*

Every artist almost (there can be rare exceptions) has got something of the public man in him in his vital-physical parts, which makes him crave for the stimulus of an audience, social applause, satisfied vanity, appreciation, fame. That must go absolutely if you want to be a yogi; your art must be a service not of your own ego, nor of anyone or anything else, but solely of the Divine.

14 September 1929

*

It is your aim to write from the Divine and for the Divine — you should then try to make all equally a pure transcription from the inner source and where the inspiration fails return upon your work so as to make the whole worthy of its origin and its object. All work done for the Divine, from poetry and art and music to carpentry or baking or sweeping a room, should be made perfect even in its smallest external detail, as well as in the spirit in which it is done; for only then is it an altogether fit offering.

11 November 1931

Public Exposure

With Dilip as a patron, the “poetess” will no longer remain unknown and unheard of.

Do you want fame? If one succeeds, it means much meaningless and insincere adulation on one side, on the other hatred, jealousy, backbiting, adverse criticism, attack and unjust depreciation. Are you ready for all that?

18 March 1937

Public Reception

I don't know how many people will understand Jyoti's poems. If they were published, I am sure people will howl at her. It will only be a century later that she will be appreciated, as in the case of Blake.

What you predict is extremely probable—unless she writes hereafter something they can understand. Then they will say these were her mystic amusements by the way. A great poetess, but with a queer side to her.

27 October 1936

Reading Things in Manuscript and in Print

It is curious but true that one can often get a more final judgment of a thing written when one surveys it in print or even typescript than in manuscript. Perhaps in the latter what is active but irrelevant in the personality of the writer comes in and evokes the personal response of the reader and so prevents detachment?

1932

Prefaces and Reviews

Is it good to have a preface, introduction or *bhūmikā* to one's book? I would prefer any appreciation to be published separately as a review or criticism.

It is not a question of principle but of feeling and circumstances. One can do either way. To do without anything of the kind (which seems like a recommendation or advertisement) seems the finer way—letting one's creation stand on its own merits. But the other is the fashion nowadays and I suppose there is something to be said for it.

28 October 1935

Some Metrical Matters

It is very necessary to learn metre and to arrange your thoughts—not have them pell-mell, as you yourself describe them—otherwise no amount of poetic substance or imagination will

make your poetry effective.

9 July 1935

*

After scanning this poem I showed it to Nolini. He has scanned some lines differently, I am quoting only three lines because I want to know which scansion is right:

My scansion: Flame of | a time|less Sun

Nolini's: Flame | of a time|less Sun

Mine: Recoil | from the | least spark

Nolini's: Recoil | from the least | spark

Mine: Of her | great lu|minous Bliss

Nolini: Of her great | lumi|nous Bliss

As the poem is intended to be in the orthodox iambic metre, your scensions are quite correct. At the present time there are many who write in less even metres and to this kind of writing Nolini's scansion would apply. But it is better for you to learn the regular scansion and metre first so as to have a firm base.

14 April 1936

*

It is absolutely necessary in order to learn the trochaic rhythm to write at first strictly regular trochaic metres with equal lines. There can be irregularities in the verse, but this type of metre least of all can bear a free licence—variations must be occasional, not altered about with a free hand. Such variations are an additional syllable at the beginning, an occasional dactyl—but these must be occasional only. . . . A word like glorious can be scanned either as a dactyl or a trochee, the two vowels in the latter case being run into each other as if *i* were *y*.

*

I understand that trochees are to be avoided in an iambic-anapaestic poem. But I may be wrong. I find in a metre-book

that the trochee is a common modulation for the iamb, especially in the first line.

Trochees are perfectly admissible in an iambic line as a modulation—especially in the first *foot* (not first line), but also occasionally in the middle. In the last foot a trochee is *not* admissible. Also these trochees must not be so arranged as to turn an iambic into a trochaic line.

In one of my poems you changed the line “Crystals at her feet” to “Is a crystal at her feet”, saying that “Crystals | at her | feet”, with two trochees, could not come in an iambic anapaestic poem. Does this mean then that in an iamb-anapaest poem every line must have at least one iambic-anapaest foot?

My dear sir, this is an instance of importing one's own inferences instead of confining oneself to the plain meaning of the statement. First of all the rules concerning a mixed iambic anapaestic cannot be the same as those that govern a pure iambic. Secondly what I objected to was the trochaic run of the line. Two trochees followed by a long syllable, not a single iamb or anapaest in the whole! How can there be an iambic line or an iambic anapaestic without a single iamb or anapaest in it? The line as written could only scan either as a trochaic, therefore not iambic line, or thus —|—|—|, that is a trochee followed by an anapaest. Here of course there is an anapaest, but the combination is impossible rhythmically because it involves three short syllables one after another in an unreadable collocation—one is obliged to put a minor stress on the “at” and that at once makes the trochaic line. In the iambic anapaestic line a trochee followed by an iamb can be allowed in the first foot; elsewhere it has to be admitted with caution so as not to disturb the rhythm.

22 December 1935

*

You have not got the metrical movement or the rhythm right. In English poetry one has to be careful about that—merely ideas or good writing will not make it poetry. The free verse was better.

1 October 1933

*

This is my first attempt to write a poem from imagination. I tried to give a vivid picture of Spring. I feel that the rhyme and metre is lacking.

It is true there is no rhyme and no metre. If you want rhyme and metre you must put them there — they don't come of themselves.

5 May 1933

*

Nishikanta wants to know how to get the right rhythm and the right poetic style. I said by reading English poetry.

Yes, reading and listening with the inner ear to the modulation of the lines.

12 December 1935

Comments on Some Experiments in Metre

I think you failed [*in an experiment to write in a classical metre*] not for any of the reasons you suggest but because you had no unwritten rhythm behind your mind when you started writing and none came through by accident — or what seems one — as sometimes happens. There is an inspiration of language and there is an inspiration of rhythm and the two must fuse together for poetic perfection to come. As it is, you set out to manufacture your rhythm and piece together its parts — that must be the cause of this result. Your failure does not predestine you to eventual failure. Most people fail at first when they try this kind of departure from the established norms — this rejuvenation of the old in the new. I do not remember my own previous attempts in the classical metres, but I feel sure they were failures of the kind I stigmatise. If I succeed now, it will be by the Grace of God, in other words the established Yoga consciousness, for in that consciousness things come through from behind the veil with ease, — so long as a veil exists at all. Of course with genius too in its moments of inspiration — surer than the layman imagines; but genius also is a kind of accidental Yoga, a contact, an opening into an occult Power.

25 November 1933

*

This liability to be read as an iambic pentameter is the pitfall of this metre [*quantitative trimeter*] — everything else is easy, this is the critical point in the movement. All the same, it seems to me that it is only the standing convention which imposes the iambic movement here. The reason why it can do so at all, is that in both the lines you keep up what one accustomed to the ordinary rhythms would take to be three successive trochees and would be irresistibly tempted to go on on the same lines. In order to get the right pace, the reader in dealing with these transplanted classic metres must be prepared to make the most of quantities and stresses (true ones) and then, if the verse is well executed, there should be no difficulty. One can help him sometimes by a crowding of stresses in the first part of the line and a refusal of all but the lightest sounds in the close with of course a strong stress at the end.

22 October 1933

Writing Poetry in French

If you want to write French poetry, the first thing you have to do is to learn the principles and rules of French prosody. Good verse is the first requisite and good rhythm.

10 July 1933

*

The point is that in French you must express yourself straightforwardly and clearly so that your meaning is at once apparent to the reader.

Some Questions of Diction

The diction of my poems is childish, too simple.

Good poetry can be written in a very simple style. Yours are quite good for a beginner.

Please do not forget to say something about why I do not succeed in poetry: also if I should devote my time more to the stories etc.

That is a matter for yourself to decide. It is always easier to succeed in one's own tongue than in a foreign language.

25 March 1936

*

These last two stanzas [*of a poem submitted by the correspondent*] have a very poor diction with commonplace and overworn expressions; it sounds like an imitation of Scott, Moore and other poets who have no style.

I would like to have your comments on the poetic quality of these poems.

There is an improvement, but the recurring fault is a diction that seems to be caught from the second-rate poets and made still more common and conventional in imitation — it becomes what anybody trying his hand at verse might write. When you escape this snare, your images and turns of language are very good, though not often quite perfect.

I am not intimate with the English tongue. What should I do in order to acquire the required delicacy of language?

Study the more subtle and delicate writers — their language, their rhythm; don't imitate, but draw into your mind their influence.

19 October 1933

*

I am reading what you wrote and shall send [it back] in a few days — it has merit, but the style needs chastening. English style cannot bear too much crowding of images as it creates a coloured mist and blurs the outline of the thought, the line of the thought has to be kept strong and clear, neither draped in too much diffuse wording nor blurred by excess of images. There are also some errors in the use of the language, but these are of less importance. If you read the best writers, observe their way of writing and absorb their influence, that might help you.

10 January 1936

*

The one stumbling block in the way of perfect poetic expression for you now is the difficulty in combining clear directness and lucidity with your turn for a richly packed and imaged thought. There is a tendency sometimes to put too many images together, shooting them into each other in a way which is not always easy to carry off — even the greatest masters of poetic style have sometimes stumbled in this kind of effort. And generally there is a tendency to pack the thought and clip the expression to the utmost and sometimes this goes to an excess of compression which makes it a little difficult to seize at once the significance. When you do combine the lucidity with the pressed thought, the result is often very fine.

20 May 1931

Rhetoric and Eloquence

The style of these two prayers is too rhetorical — the meditations — addresses to the mind — were better in this respect.

A rhetorical style fails to convey the impression of sincerity in the thoughts and feelings: it gives the opposite impression that phrases are being turned only for the sake of good writing. This should be avoided.

9 July 1932

*

I want to produce something Upanishadic. But I get no glimmering at all of the sovereignly spiritual-poetic. The poem, *Yoga*, which I am sending you, almost tells me what I should do to solve my difficulty; but the manner in which it tells seems to drive home the fact of my being so far from what I want — the sheer stupendous *mantra*.

I fear it is only eloquence — a long way from the *mantra*. From the point of view of a poetic eloquence there are some forceful lines and the rest is well done, but — there is too much play of the mind, not the hushed intense receptivity of the seer which is necessary for the *mantra*.

11 April 1933

*

This fineness in details is an imperative need for your poetry; you

have too often a false note (rhetorical) or a just adequate expression—every turn, all the minutiae must be fine if the whole is to be exquisite. Otherwise even a fine poem can miss its effect by the inequality of its movement—as a fine dance can be spoilt by even two or three false steps or stumbles. A few changes here and there in a poem, slight in themselves, can make all the difference between a tolerable and a perfect whole—as a touch or two with the brush can transform a picture.

4 September 1931

The Right Words in the Right Places

How I struggled with the line, and you, Sir, by just a touch
here and there fixed it up! I wish I could do that.

It is a question of getting the right words in the right places instead of allowing them to wander haphazard. Naturally it depends on inspiration, not on any clever piecing together. One sits still (mentally), looks at the words and somebody flashes the thing through you.

24 May 1937

*

How can “anything” be used in a poem? A slight change makes all the difference between something forceful and a mere literary expression that misses its mark.

27 May 1936

*

I am sending you another weak poem. Please correct and tell me what you think of it.

The lines have poetic substance, but are imperfect in expression. A very slight refinement in these respects is enough to bring out the poetic substance. The exact word or turn, the exact rhythmic movement needed is all-important in poetry and a slight change makes a big difference.

*

In the poem I've sent you today, the first line of the third stanza should run:

With tones of fathomless joy we instil
instead of
Our tones of fathomless joy instil.

If you alter in that way, the whole beauty is gone. When a perfect inspiration comes, to alter it is a crime and usually carries its own punishment. The alteration you propose makes a deep and solemn psychic truth turn at once into an intellectual statement.

Some Questions of Word-Use

Is there any advantage in changing the phrase —
as though a press
Of benediction lay on me unseen —
to
as though the press
Of a benediction lay on me unseen?

No, no. The first was immeasurably better. “A press of benediction” is striking and effective; “the press of a benediction” is flat and means nothing. Besides it is not good English. You can say “a press of affairs”, “a press of matter”; you can say “the pressure of this affair”, but you cannot say “the press of an affair”. 1931

*

Here is a sonnet for your judgment. It deals with the massive spiritual light descending into the brain like an inverted pyramid. The final phrase has a historical allusion:

a conscious hill
Down-kindled by some Cheops of the skies
To monument his lordship over death.

You must have heard of Cheops, the Egyptian King who built the Great Pyramid at Gizeh?

Of course I have heard of Cheops, but did not expect to hear of him again in this context. Don't you think the limiting proper

name brings in an excessive touch of intellectual ingenuity, almost as if the poem were built for the sake of this metaphor and not for its subject? I would myself prefer a general term so as to prevent any drop from sublimity, e.g.

Down-sloped by some King-Builder of the skies.

But it is a good sonnet and there is certainly both vision and poetry in it.
25 September 1933

*

“Revealed her mateless beauty the (or their) true paradise” is not permissible in prose, but it is one of those contracted expressions which are allowed in poetry and it is quite intelligible. The other form “revealed their mateless love as their true paradise” seems to me rather tame and prosaic.
8 October 1934

*

And if great music rolled from his far mouth,

This doesn’t sound right. Either “rolled” must be changed or it should be something like “A mighty music rolled”: that is to say, rolled is too sonant unless what precedes it is sonant also.

16 April 1937

*

Your remark about my fifth line [“And if great music . . . ”] is liable to seem hypercritical but really there is a subtle truth in it. However, it is not possible to begin the line with an “A”—for then the connection with the rest of the stanza is not so direct nor will the balance between the two quatrains be very clear.

I do not agree about the hypercriticism—the reason I gave is of course a mental account, but the main test is the fall and feel of the words either on the “solar plexus” or on the receptive intuition and here a slight alteration makes all the difference. “a great music rolled” is obviously unconvincing whether as expression or rhythm. I had thought of “when” in view of the

intellectual construction of the lines, but dropped it because it lowered the rhythm and impressiveness of the line. If "when" however is to be there, I don't know whether "mighty" is any longer the right word though better than "great". For inevitability (of whatever height) everything depends on the combination of words and the suggestive sound rhythm.

17 April 1937

On Writing Sonnets

A sonnet is a poem of fourteen iambic pentameter lines arranged either in an octet and sestet with a particular arrangement of the rhyme-structure — two-rhymed octet (of eight lines) abba abba and the sestet (of six lines) three rhymed, the arrangement according to choice, except that a closing couplet is avoided — or else in three quatrains with alternate rhymes and a closing couplet. The building of the thought in the sonnet must be very carefully worked out. A thought is built up or prepared in the octet and its culmination or outcome expressed in the sestet — . Or else it is worked up in the three quatrains and the climax or culminating point reached in the closing couplet. The first is the Miltonic, the second the Shakespearean form of the sonnet. Other forms can be made but these are the two classic sonnet structures in English literature.

Shakespeare, Milton, Wordsworth, Keats are the greatest sonnet writers in English. You can find the best sonnets in the *Golden Treasury*. There are others also who have written sonnets of the highest quality e.g. Sidney, Shelley — you will find there these also.

17 April 1936

*

Has it struck you that these sonnets are rather simple as regards their rhythm? Should not there be variations in pauses and overflows, different rhymes, etc.?

It is the Shakespearean model, three quatrains each with alternate rhymes and a couplet. Pauses and overflows are not usual in this type. Variations — depends on what variations.

For example, the rhymes in the sestet could be CDE, CDE.

It would no longer be the Shakespearean model. In the Miltonic form the sestet is rhymed anyhow, the one you prefer being only one sequence, provided there are three rhymes and no couplet; but then the octet has to follow a fixed system of two rhymes only ABBA ABBA. Nowadays however people throw the sonnet into all sorts of irregular forms, I believe. 20 December 1936

The Ode

What is meant by an ode? Is it another name for an invocation?

No. It is a lyrical poem of some length on a single subject e.g. the Skylark (Shelley), Autumn (Keats), the Nativity (Birth of Christ) (Milton) working out a description or central idea on the subject. 14 June 1937

Lyric, Narrative, Epic

I am having much difficulty with the *akṣara-vṛtta* (*yāugika* as it is now called). I can manage *svara-vṛtta* and *mātra-vṛtta*, but not the other.

It is a question of the inspiration adopting the form proposed. At first there may be a little difficulty as it is the more lyric movements in which it has been accustomed to flow.

11 August 1936

*

It is quite natural that the narrative should flow less than the lyrical — it is a work that demands more strenuous qualities and a well-built preparation. But it is by overcoming the difficulties that the poetic capacity grows. If one is satisfied with the lyrical vein it is all right — but if one wants to do great work in more difficult forms, one must face the difficulties. 24 July 1937

*

Narratives then can be made or written very poetically, not like a mere fact-to-fact storytelling?

But what do you mean by poetically? A fact-to-fact storytelling can be very poetic. Poetry is poetic whether it is put in simple language or freely adorned with images and rich phrases. The latter kind is not the only "poetic" poetry nor is necessarily the best. Homer is very direct and simple, Virgil less so but still restrained in his diction; Keats tends always to richness; but one cannot say that Keats is poetic and Homer and Virgil are not. The rich style has this danger that it may drown the narration so that its outlines are no longer clear. This is what has happened with Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis* and *Lucrece*; so that Shakespeare cannot be called a great narrative poet.

13 July 1937

*

As narrative poetry and epic are not the same, why should the former give me a training in the latter?

It is necessary to be able to work out a subject at length in a clear well-built way—epic is usually of a narrative build—so narrative poetry is the best training for that. The narrative writers you speak of did not aspire to be epic poets.

6 June 1937

*

How may I learn the epic style of blank verse?

I suppose it is best done by reading the epic writers until you get the epic rush or sweep.

Is it too early for me to learn it?

Epic writing needs a sustained energy of rhythm and word which is not easy to get or maintain. I am not sure whether you can get it now. I think you would first have to practise maintaining the level of the more energetic among the lines you have been writing.

3 May 1937

*

Is your *Love and Death* an epic, and *Urvaside* and *Baji Prabhous*?

Love and Death is epic in long passages. *Urvaside* is written on the epic model. *Baji Prabhous* is not epic in style or rhythm.

Are your twelve recent poems too in the epic style?

No, they are lyrical, though sometimes there may come in an epic elevation.

Will reading *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained* help?

Paradise Lost, yes. In the other Milton's fire had dimmed.

Kindly mention all the epic writers in all the languages — it is good to know, at least.

In English *Paradise Lost* and Keats' *Hyperion* (unfinished) are the two chief epics. In Sanskrit Mahabharata, Ramayana, Kalidasa's Kumarsambhava, Bharavi's Kiratarjuniya. In Bengali Meghnadbadh. In Italian Dante's Divine Comedy and Tasso's (I have forgotten the name for the moment) are in the epic cast. In Greek of course Homer, in Latin Virgil. There are other poems which attempt the epic style, but are not among the masterpieces. There are also primitive epics in German and Finnish (*Nibelungenlied*, *Kalevala*) —

4 May 1937

*

This afternoon, in a kind of sleep, I read a whole passage of an epic in English. All fled like vapour on waking up. I caught only this:

Need we | our mor|tal blood. . . .

This is only part of a line, three feet — the blank verse line is five feet. As far as it goes, it is quite correct. Full lines could be something like this:

Need we | our mor|tal blood | to sprink|le earth

That man | may grow | by the | red sac|rifice|.

A foot in the pentameter blank verse is of two syllables; normally the accent is on the second syllable of the foot, but for variety's sake it can fall on the first. e.g. Need we|. Or there can be a foot without stress e.g. by the| followed sometimes by a foot of double stress as red sac|rifice. Sometimes an anapaest, very light, can be put in in place of the 2 syllable foot, e.g. In the sud|den fall|and tra|gic end |of things|. Other variations there can be, but they are more rare.

5 May 1937

*

Is there a difference between blank verse and poetry which is quite epic and blank verse and poetry which is written only in the epic style, model or manner?

I don't quite understand the point of the question. Poetry is epic or it is not. There may be differences of elevation in the epic style, but this seems to be a distinction without a difference.

Surely there must be some difference between an epic, true and genuine throughout and a poem which is only in the epic style or has the epic tone?

An epic is a long poem usually narrative on a great subject written in a style and rhythm that is of a high nobility or sublime. But short poems, a sonnet for instance can be in the epic style or tone, e.g. some of Milton's or Meredith's sonnet on Lucifer or, as far as I can remember it, Shelley's on Ozymandias.

What are the qualities or characteristics that tell one "This is an epic"?

I think the formula I have given is the only possible definition. Apart from that, each epic poet has his own qualities and characteristics that differ widely from the others. For the rest one can feel what is the epic nobility or sublimity, one can't very well analyse it.

In Sanskrit epics, e.g. *Kumarsambhav*, what has made up the rhythm? And how does it sound so grave, lofty, wide and deep?

It is a characteristic that comes natural to Sanskrit written in the classical style.

How can one have all these qualities together?

Why not? they are not incompatible qualities.

English seems to have the necessary tone more easily, but is it possible in Bengali?

I don't know why it shouldn't be. Madhu Sudan's style is a lofty epic style; it is not really grave and deep because his mind was not grave or deep—but that was the defect of the poet, not necessarily an incapacity of the language.

11 May 1937

*

I would like my present poems to come in a few lines, but the epic tone to be more and more perfect every day.

The epic movement is something that flows; it may not be good to try to shut it into a few lines. There might be a danger of making something too compact. If that can be avoided, then of course it is better to write a few lines with a heightened epic tone than many with the lesser tone.

13 May 1937

*

One day after reading something you wrote about epics and epic poetry, a flaming aspiration entered my heart that one day I must write an epic. [*Details of the proposed epic given.*] Please tell me what an epic should consist of.

There must be a great subject—the one you propose is obviously a very big one; there must be what is called an architecture of the poem, each part of it clearly planned and in its right place so as to create a perfect harmony, like the noble or magnificent mass

and detail of a great building; there must be a perfect working out of the subject.

Will the study of the structure and characteristics of the great epics help me to learn about the building and technique?

It is not necessary to read all the epics — two or three if properly appreciated, i.e. if you see and feel the right things in it to learn from would be sufficient.

I shall wait till I hear from you whether you approve of the aspiration at all.

The idea you have given is a very vast one, but if the epic faculty develops in you there is no reason why you should not carry it out. Only there must be no impatience. Milton waited twenty years before he started the epic he had dreamt of. Also from the point of view and kind of style in which you want to write it, you will have not only to get the access to the inspiration of the overhead poetry but to be quite open to the flow of that consciousness — otherwise you would only do small poems in it like Amal's, such a vast work would be impossible. At present go on with your development — you have the epic flow but not as yet the epic building, that must come in small things before you can do it in large ones. It will come in time, but time is necessary.

21 May 1937

*

Please tell me why I often jump back to the sonnet source instead of steadily keeping to the epic source. The more I try to be "fine" the more I lose the epic source.

It is a matter of habit. Also the attempt to be "fine" is not good for epic writing. None of the great epic poets wrote "finely" — nobility or power or a clear and great strength of style and substance and spirit is their characteristic.

What shall I do in order to get access to the inspiration of overhead poetry? And more especially, "to be quite open to

the flow of that consciousness" [see letter of 21 May 1937, p. 618]? What is this over-consciousness? Will it come to me so early? Or were you speaking only with regard to the future?

I spoke of the future. This is a thing that can only be done by growth of consciousness through sadhana.

Why did Milton wait so long? To prepare himself?

If he had written it when he first conceived the idea, he would have written a beautiful and noble romance, but not an epic. He felt he was not ready. For a long time afterwards he was engaged in politics and wrote only a few sonnets. 27 May 1937

*

Were all the epic poets quite advanced in age when they began their work? Has age anything to do with one's best work?

At a more advanced age the mind is more mature and capable of a large and great subject. The greatest works in literature have usually been done at such an age. 14 June 1937

*

Must I wait till I am 48 or 50? By doing sadhana, may I not be ready between 35 and 38? Forty or after is too far.

There is no fixed age, but most work (great work) of that kind has been done at 40 or 50 or after. Sadhana is another matter, but as I have said sadhana cannot be done with the sole object of writing an epic. 29 June 1937

An Epic Line

Do you think the blank verse here [*in the poem Agni Jatavedas*] has any epical ring?

No — there are sometimes epic or almost epic lines, but the whole or most of it has not the epic ring. There is one epic line

An infinite rapture veiled by infinite pain.

Perhaps the first three lines are near the epic — there may be one or two others.

19 May 1937

The Line and the Poem

In English poetry it will not do only to string beautiful lines together — the subject must be thought out to the end — there is necessary a harmonious building, idea structure or feeling structure or vision structure. It is necessary to learn this also for the epic poetry.

29 May 1937

*

The first line [*in a poem sent for approval*] is one I have used before, but it didn't stir you so much, perhaps because the necklace of which it was one jewel was not harmoniously beautiful.

Naturally — poetry is not a matter of separate lines — a poem is beautiful as a whole — when it is perfect each line has its own beauty but also the beauty of the whole.

4 November 1938

Sri Aurobindo's Critical Comments on Poetry Written in the Ashram

You seem to demand a very rigid and academic fixity of meaning from my hastily penned comments on the poetry sent to me. I have no unvarying aesthetic standard or fixed qualitative criterion, — not only so but I hold any such thing to be impossible with regard to so subtle and unintellectual an essence as poetry. It is only physical things that can be subjected to fixed measures and unvarying criteria. Appreciation of poetry is a question of feeling, of intuitive perception, of a certain aesthetic sense, it is not the result of an intellectual judgment.

My judgment does differ with different writers and also with different kinds of writing. If I put "very good" on a poem of Shailen's, it does *not* mean that it is on a par with Harin's or Arjava's or yours. It means that it is very good Shailen, but

not that it is very good Harin or very good Arjava. "If 'very good' was *won* by them all," you write! But, good heavens, you write that as if I were a master giving marks in a class. I may write "good" or "very good" on the work of a novice if I see that it has succeeded in being poetry and not mere verse however correct or well rhymed—but if Harin or if Arjava or you were to produce work like that, I would not say "very good" at all. There are poems of yours which I have slashed and pronounced unsatisfactory, but if certain others were to send me that, I would say, "Well, you have been remarkably successful this time." I am not giving comparative marks according to a fixed scale. I am using words flexibly according to the occasion and the individual. It would be the same with different kinds of writing. If I write "very good" or "excellent" on some verses of Dara about his chair, I am not giving it a certificate of equality with some poem of yours similarly appreciated—I am only saying that as humorous easy verse in the lightest vein it is very successful, an entertaining piece of work. Applied to your poem it would mean something different altogether.

Coming from your huge P.S. to the tiny body of your letter, what do you mean by "a perfect success"? I meant that pitched in a certain key and style it [*a certain poem*] had worked itself out very well in that key and style in a very satisfying way from the point of view of thought, expression and rhythm. From that standpoint it is a perfect success. If you ask whether it is at your highest possible pitch of inspiration, I would say no, but it is nowhere weak or inadequate and it says something poetically well worth saying and says it well. One cannot always be writing at the highest pitch of one's possibility, but that is no reason why work of very good quality in itself should be rejected.

15 November 1934

*

I see no earthly use in producing something that is just "all right" when I am obsessed with an intuition of some hitherto unrevealed miraculous poetic creation existing on a plane I absolutely despair of reaching. . . . I beg to be excused, again,

for this much ado about nothing but I am awfully disgusted with myself.

You should get rid of the disgust. The sonnet in its amended form is fine enough — if I do not shoot up into enthusiasm about it, it is for two reasons — 1st because I am becoming cautious about the use of superlatives nowadays, not for poetical or critical but for other reasons and secondly because I expect you to do much better than your present best and if I use high expressions, what the devil shall I do when you rise to yet unexpected summits. So you need not be damped by my “all rights” etc. — on the contrary you should give full value to both the *all* and the *right*.

1 May 1934

*

Could you just mark for me the nuances of “very good”, “very fine” and “very beautiful”? Sometimes you write: “exceedingly fine and beautiful”.

But these remarks of mine are not intended to summarise a considered and measured criticism — they simply express the impression made on me at the time of reading. I shall be very badly embarrassed if you insist on my explaining the nuances of such very summary expressions. “Exceedingly” for instance does not convey that the poem was “inevitable”, it simply means that I was exceedingly pleased with it for some reason or another. If I wanted to pronounce a measured criticism or appreciation, I should do it in more precise language and at greater length than that.

17 September 1934

*

If I could be told what exactly to change in order that my recent lines might achieve full success and become “very fine”, I would be thankful.

I have told you once that I have become more subdued in my appreciations of poetry — so “fine” may very well be changed to “very fine”. The poem you wrote was without a flaw positive or negative — to alter it would be to spoil it. 11 October 1934

*

The word "fine" means not, of course, "full of flaws" but there is something, somehow, somewhere wrong — for the following reason. "Good" means some imperfection, some flaw. Now, when I asked you whether the terms "very good", "very fine", "very beautiful" indicated different levels of excellence or merely different kinds on the same level, you said different kinds rather than levels. This means, analogically, that "good" and "fine" indicate also the same level. Ergo, "fine" means, too, some imperfection, some *flaw*.

What an extraordinarily sinuous and fantastic knowledge! My language would indeed be peculiar if the words I use mean just their opposites — i.e. good = bad, fine = flawed, beautiful = ugly. A poem may be good poetry without being a complete success, but if it is very good then it is a complete success. Fine cannot possibly mean something that is not fine, as it always implies a high excellence. Naturally the kind of fineness may vary and the degree also. There is no new unprecedented superior shade or transvaluation of values. I mean just the same thing as when I speak of fine lines — i.e. lines reaching a high level of excellence. These words are only summary words giving the general impression.

11 October 1934

*

Originally you said [of a certain poem], "it is a fine poem" but when I asked whether that meant any inferiority to those you had designated as "very fine" or "very good" etc., you answered "No." Does that imply that I might add "very" here also?

Really, I *don't* measure my appreciations or rather my impressions in the dreadfully professorial way you suggest. What is wrong with "fine"? A fine poem is not worth keeping?

11 May 1936

*

Now if one poem you have considered "very fine" and another only "fine", is it illogical of me to suppose that there is some difference of quality between the two? Even if I keep the poem I cannot feel that I have done my best — but the situation

becomes strange if by "fine" and "very fine" you mean the same thing sometimes. Does it really amount to asking you to be "dreadfully professorial" if I beg you to let this distinction, created by "very" or some such expression, be clear?

But, again, what is wrong with fine? How is fineness a failure? — It is professorial because, when you insist on the curious distinction between very fine and "only" fine, it seems to be like an examiner giving marks, alpha class, beta class, gamma, delta class etc. Poetry can't be marked in that way, that's why I objected. If any of your poems is unsatisfactory, I generally say so and sharply enough too.

May 1936

*

Jyotirmayi confided to me that when you call any of her poems "very successful" she feels quite depressed for not being able to write something "very fine" or "very beautiful". I told her that as soon as she saw "very" anywhere she must shoot straight up to the seventh heaven of joy. But surely, surely, if that blessed word is pointedly omitted, even a pachyderm like me might feel a little pricked!

What an importance to give to an adverb! Fine by itself is quite equal to "very good" — shall I start other categories e.g. "very very" and "very very very"?

2 August 1936

*

It is a fact that "very good" doesn't appeal as much as "very beautiful", "very fine".

There is some difference of course but the words must not be taken as exact weight measures. They simply record an impression.

6 August 1936

*

You've said that the poem now is "very fine", but why is it so?

Why is a poem fine? By its power of expression and rhythm, I suppose, and its force of substance and image. As all these are there, I call it a fine poem.

5 December 1936

*

You all attach too much importance to the exact letter of my remarks of the kind as if it were a giving of marks. I have been obliged to renounce the use of the word "good" or even "very good" because it depressed Nirod—though I would be very much satisfied myself if I could always write poetry certified to be very good. I write "very fine" against work which is not improvable, so why ask me for suggestions for improving the unimprovable? As for rising superior to yourself that is another matter—one always hopes to do better than one has yet done, but that means not an avoidance of defects—I always point out ruthlessly anything defective in your work—but to rise higher, wider, deeper etc., etc. in the consciousness. Incidentally, even if my remarks are taken to be of mark-giving value, what shall I do in future if I have exhausted all adverbs? How shall I mark your self-exceeding if I have already certified your work as exceeding? I shall have to fall back on roars "Oh, damned fine, damned damned damned fine!"

15 May 1937

**Sri Aurobindo's Comments on Poetry
Written Outside the Ashram**

As to Suhrawardy, you can if you like send the complimentary portion of my remarks with perhaps a hint that I found his writing rather unequal, so that it may not be all sugar. But the phrases about "album poetry" and chaotic technique are too vivid—being meant only for private consumption—to be transmitted to the writer of the poems criticised; I would for that have expressed the same view in less drastic language. As I have already said once, I do not like to write anything disparaging or discouraging for those whom I cannot help to do better. I received much poetry from Indian writers for review in the *Arya*, but I always refrained because I would have had to be very severe. I wrote only about Harindranath because there I could sincerely, and I think justly, write unqualified praise.

25 May 1931

*

I hope Dilip is not sending Kshitish Sen my adverse criticism of

his translation — it was not meant for him. I do not like to discourage people uselessly, — that is to say, where I cannot show them how to do better; where I cannot encourage, I prefer to say nothing. For the rest (omitting the sentence about rhetorical flatness) he can do as he likes.

19 November 1930

*

I don't want to say anything [*about a certain book*], because when I cannot positively encourage a young and new writer, I prefer to remain mum. . . . Each writer must be left to develop in his own way.

31 May 1943

Guidance in Writing Prose

Suggestions for Writing Good English

I wonder what to do in order to bring my essay up to the mark. Could you please make some suggestions?

I am afraid I can't make suggestions. Just now I am too busy with other and more strenuous things to be very fit for literary suggestions. I can only say generally avoid over-writing; let all your sentences be the vehicle of something worth saying and say it with a vivid precision neither defective nor excessive. Don't let either thought or speech trail or drag or circumvolute. Don't let the language be more abundant than the sense. Don't indulge in mere clever ingenuities without a living truth behind them. I think that is all.

14 June 1935

*

Your English is already correct as a rule. If you want style and expression, that is another matter. The usual outward means is to read good styles and impregnate oneself with them; it has of itself an influence on the writing.

27 May 1934

*

This book, returned herewith, is not in my opinion suitable for the purpose. The author wanted to make it look like a translation of a romance in Sanskrit and he has therefore made the spirit and even partly the form of the language more Indian than English. It is not therefore useful for getting into the spirit of the English language. Indians have naturally in writing English a tendency to be too coloured, sometimes flowery, sometimes rhetorical and a book like this would increase the tendency. One ought to have in writing English a style which is at its base capable of going to the point, saying with a simple and energetic straightforwardness

what one means to say, so that one can add grace of language without disturbing this basis. Arnold is a very good model for this purpose. Emerson less, but his book will also do.

It is surely better to write your own thoughts. The exercise of writing in your own words what another has said or written is a good exercise or test for accuracy, clear understanding of ideas, an observant intelligence; but your object is, I suppose, to be able to understand English and express *yourself* in good English.

16 May 1932

Poetry and Novel

No need to put poetry against novel and make a case between them. Both can be given admission into the spiritual Parnassus — but not all poetry and all novels. All depends on the consciousness from which the thing is done. If it is done from the psychic or the spiritual consciousness and bears the stamp of its source, that is sufficient. Of course there are certain things that cannot be done from there, but neither poetry nor fiction is in that case. They can be lifted to a higher level and made the expression of the psychic or spiritual mind and vision. When that is said, all is said. I hope my brevity has been of the right kind — and not left the question mystically obscure.

9 June 1936

Tragedy in Fiction

I did not like the tragic ending of Jyotirmayi's story. The conditions of true tragedy are not fulfilled, so far as I can see. Why create sorrow in literature wantonly?

That depends on the work itself. If it involves inevitably a tragic end, that has to be allowed to come. It is only if the tragedy is dragged in unnaturally for the sake of a forceful ending that it is inartistic.

13 January 1936

Remarks on English Pronunciation

Monosyllables and Dissyllables

I wonder why you find fault with the rhythm of “A vision whose God-delight embraces all.” “Vision” is really a monosyllable, and I don’t suppose the frequent poetic dissyllabification of it precludes the use of its original sound-length.

You use your intellect too much and with too much ingenuity where you should train your ear. Another line with the same scansion might very well make an extremely good rhythm; this one does not. Its rhythm is at once flat and jerky. How is “vision” a monosyllable? You might just as well say that “omnibus” is a monosyllable. At any rate I get no thrill, subtle or other, no surprise, no revelation.

27 September 1934

*

The Oxford dictionary seems to leave me no choice as regards the number of syllables in the word “vision”. I quote below some of the words explained as monosyllables in the same way as “Rhythm” and “Prism”, which are given as Rhy·thm (-dhm); Pri·sm (-zm).

Fa·shion (-shn)
Passion (pa·shn)
Pri·son (-zn)
Scission (si·shn)
Trea·son (-ezn)
Vi·sion (-zhn)

Chambers’s Dictionary makes “vision” a dissyllable, which is quite sensible, but the monosyllabic pronunciation of it deserves to be considered at least a legitimate variant when H. W. Fowler and F. G. Fowler — the name of Fowler is looked upon as a synonym for authority on the English language —

give no other. I don't think I am mistaken in interpreting their intention.¹ Take "realm", which they pronounce in brackets as "rēlm"; now I see no difference as regards syllabification between their intention here and in the instances above.

You may not have a choice—but I have a choice, which is to pronounce and scan words like "vision" and "passion" and similar words as all the poets of the English language (those at least whom I know) have consistently pronounced and scanned them—as dissyllables. If you ask me to scan Shakespeare's line in the following way in order to please H. W. Fowler and F. G. Fowler

In mai|den med|itation | fan|cy free,

I shall decline without thanks. Shakespeare wrote, if I remember right, "treāsōns, strategems and spoils"; Shelley, Tennyson, any poet of the English language, I believe, would do the same—though I have no books with me to give chapter and verse. I lived in both northern and southern England, but I never heard vision pronounced "vizhn", it was always "vizhun"; "treason", of course, is pronounced "trez'n", but that does not make it a monosyllable in scansion because there is in these words a very perceptible slurred vowel sound in pronunciation which I represent by the '— in "poison" also. If "realm", "helm" etc. are taken as monosyllables, that is quite reasonable, for there is no vowel between "l" and "m" and none is heard, slurred or otherwise in pronunciation. The words "rhythm" and "prism" are technically monosyllables, because they are so pronounced in French (i.e. that part of the word, for there is a mute e in French): but in fact most Englishmen take the help of a slurred vowel sound in pronouncing "rhythms" and it would be quite permissible to write in English as a blank verse line, "The unheard rhythms that sustain the world".

This is my conviction and not all the Fowlers in the world

¹ In fact, the correspondent was mistaken. The six words he listed, as well as "rhythm" and "prism", were marked in the third edition of The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English (H. W. Fowler and F. G. Fowler, eds., 1934) to be pronounced as dissyllables.—Ed.

will take it away from me. I only hope the future lexicographers will not foul the language any more in that direction; otherwise we shall have to write lines like this —

O vizhn! O pashn! O fashn! m'd'tashn! h'rr'p'lashn!
Why did the infern'l Etern'l und'take creash'n?
Or else, creat'ng, could he not have afford'd
Not to allow the Engl'sh tongue to be Oxford'd?

P.S. I remember a book (Hamer's? someone else's? I don't remember) in which the contrast was drawn between the English and French languages, that the English tongue tended to throw all the weight on the first or earliest possible syllable and slurred the others, the French did the opposite — so that when an Englishman pretends to say "strawberries", what he really says is "strawb's". That is the exaggeration of a truth — but all the same there is a limit!

27 September 1934

*

I should like to ask you a few questions suggested by your falling foul of the Fowlers. The poetic pronunciation of words cannot be accepted as a standard for current speech — can it? On your own showing, "treason" and "poison" which are monosyllables in prose or current speech are scanned as dissyllables in verse; Shelley makes "evening" three syllables and Harin has used even "realm" as a dissyllable, while the practice of taking "precious" and "conscious" to be three syllables is not even noticeable, I believe. All the same, current speech, if your favourite Chambers's Dictionary as well as my dear Oxford Concise is to be believed, insists on "evening", "precious" and "conscious" being dissyllabic and "realm" monosyllabic. I am mentioning this disparity between poetic and current usages not because I wish "meditation" to be robbed of its full length or "vision" to lose half its effect but because it seems to me that Shelley's or Tennyson's or any poet's practice does not in itself prove anything definitely for English as it is spoken. And spoken English, very much more than written English, undergoes change; even the line you quote from Shakespeare was perhaps not scanned in his time as you would do it now, for "meditation" — as surely

"passion" and "fashion" also and most probably "vision" as well — was often if not always given its full vowel-value and the fourth foot of the line in question might to an Elizabethan ear have been very naturally an anapaest:

In mai|den me|dita|tion fan|cy free.

When, however, you say that your personal experience in England, both north and south, never recorded a monosyllabic "vision", we are on more solid ground, but the Concise Oxford Dictionary is specially stated to be in its very title as "of Current English": is all its claim to be set at nought? It is after all a responsible compilation and, so far as my impression goes, not unesteemed. If its errors were so glaring as you think, would there not have been a general protest? Or is it that English has changed so much in "word of mouth" since your departure from England? This is not an ironical query — I am just wondering.

P.S. Your exclamatory-interrogatory elegiacs illustrating the predicament we should fall into if the Fowlers were allowed to spread their nets with impunity were very enjoyable. But I am afraid the tendency of the English language is towards contraction of vowel sounds, at least terminal ones; and perhaps the Oxford Dictionary has felt the need to monumentalise — clearly and authoritatively — the degree to which this tendency has, in some cases more definitely, in others less but still perceptibly enough, advanced? The vocalised "e" of the suffix "-ed" of the Spenserian days is now often mute; the trisyllabic suffix "-ation" of the "spacious times" has shrunk by one syllable, and "treason" and "poison" and "prison", all having the same terminal sound if fully vowelised as "-ation", are already monosyllables in speech — so, if "passion" and "fashion" which too have lost their Elizabethan characteristic like "meditation" should contract by a natural analogy, carrying all "-ation"-suffixed words as well as "vision" and "scission" and the like with them, it would be quite as one might expect. And if current speech once fixes these contractions, they will not always keep outside the pale of poetry. What do you think?

Where the devil have I admitted that "treason" and "poison"

are monosyllables or that their use as dissyllables is a poetic licence? Will you please quote the words in which I have made that astounding and imbecile admission? I have said distinctly that they are dissyllables,—like risen, dozen, maiden, garden, laden, and a thousand others which nobody (at least before the world went mad) ever dreamed of taking as monosyllables. On my own showing, indeed! After I had even gone to the trouble of explaining at length about the slurred syllable “e” in these words, for the full sound is not given, so that you cannot put it down as pronounced maid-en, you have to indicate the pronunciation as maid’n. But for that to dub maiden a monosyllable and assert that Shakespeare, Shelley and every other poet who scans maiden as a dissyllable was a born fool who did not know the “current” pronunciation or was indulging in a constant poetic licence whenever he used the words garden, maiden, widen, sadden etc. is a long flight of imagination. I say that these words are dissyllables and the poets in so scanning them (not as an occasional licence but normally and every time) are much better authorities than any owl—or fowl—of a dictionary-maker in the universe. Of course the poets use licences in lengthening out words occasionally, but these are exceptions; to explain away their normal use of words as a perpetually repeated licence would be a wild wooden-headedness (5 syllables, please). That these words are dissyllables is proved farther by the fact that “saddened”, “maidenhood” cannot possibly be anything but respectively dissyllabic and trisyllabic, yet “saddened” could I suppose be correctly indicated in a dictionary as pronounced “saddnd”. A dictionary indication or a dictionary theory cannot destroy the living facts of the language.

I do not know why you speak of my “favourite” Chambers. Your attachment to Oxford is not balanced by any attachment of mine to Chambers or any other lexicographer. I am not inclined to swear by any particular dictionary as an immaculate virgin authority for pronunciation or a papal Infallible. It was you who quoted Chambers as differing from Oxford, not I. You seem indeed to think that the Fowlers are a sort of double-headed Pope to the British public in all linguistic matters and nobody could

dare question their dictates or ukases — only I do so because I am antiquated and am living in India. I take leave to point out to you that this is not yet a universally admitted catholic dogma. The Fowlers indeed seem to claim something of the kind, they make their enunciations with a haughty papal arrogance, condemning those who differ from them as outcasts and brushing them aside in a few words or without a mention. But it is not quite like that. What is current English? As far as pronunciation goes, every Englishman knows that for an immense number of words there is no such thing — Englishmen of equal education pronounce them in different ways, sometimes in more than two different ways. "Either" "neither" is a current pronunciation, so is "eether" "neether". In some words the "th" is pronounced variably as a soft "d" or a soft "t" or as "th" — and so on. If the Oxford pronunciation of "vision" and "meditation" is correct current English, then the confusion has much increased since my time, for then at least everybody pronounced "vizhun", "meditashun", as I do still and shall go on doing so. Or if the other existed, it must have been confined to uneducated people. But you suggest that my pronunciation is antiquated, English has changed since then as since Shakespeare. But I must point out that you yourself quote Chambers for "vizhun" and following your example — not out of favouritism — I may quote him for "summation" = "summashun" — not "shn". The latest edition of Chambers is dated 1931, and the editors have not thought themselves bound by the decisive change of the English language to change "shun" into "shn". Has the decisive change taken place since 1931? Moreover in the recent dispute about the standard Broadcast pronunciation, the decisions of Bernard Shaw's committee were furiously disputed — if Fowler and Oxford were "papal authorities" in England for current speech — it is current speech the Committee was trying to fix through the broadcasts — would it not have been sufficient simply to quote the Oxford in order to produce an awed and crushed silence?

So your P.S. has no solid ground to stand on since there is no "fixed" current speech and Fowler is not its Pope and there is no universal currency of his vizhn of things. Language is not bound

by analogy and because “meditation” has become “meditashun” it does not follow that it must become “meditashn” and that “tation” is now a monosyllable contrary to all common sense and the privilege of the ear. It might just as well be argued that it will necessarily be clipped farther until the whole word becomes a monosyllable. Language is neither made nor developed in that way — if the English language were so to deprive itself of all beauty and by turning vision into vizn and then into vzn and all other words into similar horrors, I would hasten to abandon it for Sanskrit or French or Bengali — or even Swahili.

P.S. By the way, one point. Does the Oxford pronounce in cold blood and so many set words that vision, passion (and by logical extension treason, maiden, madden, garden etc.) are monosyllables? Or is it your inference from “realm” and “prism”? If the latter, I would only say, Beware of too rigidly logical inferences. If the former, I can only say that Oxford needs some gas from Hitler to save the English mind from its pedants. This is quite apart from the currency of vizhns.

29 September 1934

*

I am sincerely sorry for mistaking you on an important point. But before my argumentative wooden-headedness gives up the ghost under your sledge-hammer it is bursting to cry a Themistoclean “Strike, but hear”. Please try to understand my misunderstanding. What you wrote was: “‘Treason’, of course, is pronounced ‘trez’n’, but that does not make it a monosyllable in scansion because there is in these words a very perceptible slurred vowel sound in pronunciation which I represent by the ’ — in ‘poison’ also.” I think it must have been the word “scansion” which led me astray — as if you had meant that these words were non-monosyllabic in poetry only. But am I really misjudging Chambers as well as the Fowlers when I draw the logical inference that, since a dictionary is no dictionary if it does not follow a coherent system and since these people absolutely omit to make any distinction between the indicated scansion of “prism”, “realm”, “rhythm” etc., and that of “treason” and “poison”, they definitely mean us to take all these words as monosyllables? If Chambers who

writes “vizhun” but “trezn” and “poizn” just as he writes “relm” and “rithm”, intends us to understand that there is some difference between the scensions of the latter pairs he, in my opinion, completely de-dictionaries his work by so illogical an expectation. He and the Fowlers may not say in cold blood and so many set words that “treason” and “poison” are monosyllables but it is their design, in most freezing blood and more eloquently than words can express, that they fall into the same category as “realm” and “rhythm”. Else, what could have prevented them from inventing some such sign as your ' to mark the dissimilarity? My sin was to have loved logic not wisely but too well where logicality had been obstreperously announced in flaring capitals on the title page and throughout the whole book by a fixed system of spelling and pronunciation. My Othello-like extremity of love plunged me into abysmal errors, but oh the Iagoistic “motiveless malignity” of lexicographers!

It seemed to me impossible that even the reckless Fowler — reckless in the excess of his learning — should be so audacious as to announce that this large class of words accepted as dissyllables from the beginning of (English) time were really monosyllables. After all the lexicographers do not set out to give the number of syllables in a word. Pronunciation is a different matter. “Realm” cannot be a dissyllable unless you violently make it so, because “l” is a liquid like “r” and you cannot make a dissyllable of words like “charm”, unless you Scotchify the English language and make it “char'r'r'm” or vulgarise it and make it “charrum” — and even “char'r'r'm” is after all a monosyllable. “Prism”, the “ism” in “Socialism”, “pessimism”, “rhythm” can be made dissyllabic, but by convention (convention has much to do with these things) the “ism”, “rhythm” are treated as a single syllable, because of the etymology. But there is absolutely no reason to bring in this convention with “treason”, “poison”, “garden” or “maiden” (coming from French *trahison*, *poison* and some O.E. equivalent of the German *Garten*, *Mädchen*). The dictionaries give the same mark of pronunciation for “thm”, “sm” and the “den” (dn) of maiden and son (sn) of treason because they are practically the same. The French pronounce “rhythme” =

“reethm” (I use the English sound indications) without anything to help them out in passing from “th” to “m”, but the English tongue can’t do that, there is a very perceptible quarter vowel sound or one-eighth vowel sound between “th” and “m”—if it were not so the plural “rhythms” would be unpronounceable. I remember in my French class at St. Paul’s our teacher (a Frenchman) insisted on our pronouncing *ordre* in the French way—in his mouth “orrdr”; I was the only one who succeeded, the others all made it *auder, orrder, audrer*, or some such variation. There is the same difference of habit with words like “rhythm”, and yet conventionally the French treatment is accepted so far as to impose rhythm as a monosyllable. Realm on the other hand is pronounced truly as a monosyllable without the help of any fraction of a vowel.

30 September 1934

Some Problems of Stress Accent

Why have you bucked at my “azûre” as a line-ending? And why so late in the day? Twice before I have used the same inversion and it caused no alarm. Simple poetic licence, Sir. If Wordsworth could write

What awful pérpective! while from our sight . . .

and leave no reverberation of “awful” in the reader’s mind, and if Abercrombie boldly come out with

To smite the horny eyes of men
With the renown of our Heaven,

and our horny eyes remain unsmitten by his topsy-turvy “Heaven”—why, then, Amal need not feel too shy to shift the accent of “azure” just because the poor chap happens to be an Indian. Not that an alternative line getting rid of that word is not possible—quite a fine one can be written with “obscure”. But how does this particular inversion shock you? There is nothing un-English or unpoetic about it—so far as I can see, though of course such things should not be done often. What do you say?

I can swallow “perspective” with some difficulty, but if anybody

tried to justify by it a line like this (let us say in a poem to Miss Mayo):

O ^linspector, why ^lsuggestive ^lof drains?

I would buck. I disapprove totally of Abercrombie's bold wriggle with Heaven, but even he surely never meant to put the accent on the second syllable and pronounce it "hevén". I absolutely refuse to pronounce "azure" as "azúre". "Perspective" can just be managed by making it practically atonal or unaccented or evenly accented, which comes to the same thing. "Sapphire" can be managed at the end of a line, e.g. "stróng sapphire", because "phire" is long and the voice trails over it, but the "ure" of "azure" is more slurred into shortness than trailed out into length as if it were "azyoore". In any case, even if the somersault is admitted the line won't do.

P.S. It is not to the use of "azure" in place of an iambic in the last foot that I object but to your blessed accent on the last syllable. I will even, if you take that sign off, allow you to rhyme "ázure" with "pure" and pass it off as an Abercrombiean acrobacy by way of fun. But not otherwise — the accent mark must go.

2 October 1936

*

In your sonnet *Man the Enigma* occurs the magnificent line:

His heart is a chaos and an empyrean.

But I am very much saddened by the fact that the rhythm of these words gets spoiled at the end by a mis-stressing in "empyrean". "Empyrean" is stressed in the penultimate syllable, thus: "empýréan". Your line puts the stress on the second syllable. It is in the adjective "empyreal" that the second syllable is stressed, but the noun is never stressed that way, so far as I know.

First of all let me deal with your charge against my "empyrean". I find in the Chambers Dictionary the noun "empyrean" is given two alternative pronunciations, each with a different stress, — first, "empyréan" and secondly, "empýrean". Actually in the

book the accent seems to fall on the consonant “r” instead of the vowel. That must be a mistake in printing; it is evident that it is meant to fall on the second vowel. If that is so, my variation is justified and needs no further defence. The adjective “empyreal” the dictionary gives as having the same alternative accentuation as the noun, that is to say, either “empyréal” with the accent on the long “e” or “empýreal” with the accent on the second syllable, but the “e” although unaccented still keeps its long pronunciation. Then? But even if I had no justification from the dictionary and the noun “empýrean” were only an Aurobindonian freak and a wilful shifting of the accent, I would refuse to change it; for the rhythm here is an essential part of whatever beauty there is in the line.

P.S. Your view is supported by the small Oxford Dictionary which, I suppose, gives the present usage, Chambers being an older authority. But Chambers must represent a former usage and I am entitled to revive even a past or archaic form if I choose to do so.

4 August 1949

Remarks on English Usage

Some Questions of Pronunciation and Usage

I am in general agreement with your answer to Mendonça strictures on certain points in your style and your use of the English language. His objections have usually some ground, but are not unquestionably valid; they would be so only if the English language were a fixed and unprogressive and invariable medium demanding a scrupulous correctness and purity and chaste exactness like the French; but this language is constantly changing and escaping from boundaries and previously fixed rules and its character and style, you might almost say, is whatever the writer likes to make it. Stephen Phillips once said of it in a libertine image that the English language is like a woman who will not love you unless you take liberties with her. As for the changeableness, it is obvious in recent violences of alteration, now fixed and recognised, such as the pronunciation of words like “nation” and “ration” which now sound as “gnashun” and “rashun”; one’s soul and one’s ear revolt, at least mine do, against degrading the noble word “nation” into the clipped indignity of the plebian and ignoble “gnashun”, but there is no help for it. As for “aspire for”, it may be less correct than “aspire to” or “aspire after”, but it is psychologically called for and it seems to me to be much more appropriate than “aspire at” which I would never think of using. The use of prepositions is one of the most debatable things, or at least one of the most frequently debated in the language. The Mother told me of her listening in Japan to interminable quarrels between Cousins and the American Hirsch on debatable points in the language but especially on this battlefield and never once could they agree. It is true that one was an Irish poet from Belfast and the other an American scholar and scientist, so perhaps neither could be

taken as an unquestionable authority on the English tongue; but among Englishmen themselves I have known of such constant disputes. Cousins had remarkably independent ideas in these matters; he always insisted that “infinite” must be pronounced “infighnight” on the ground that “finite” was so pronounced and the negative could not presume to differ so unconscionably from the positive. That was after all as good a reason as that alleged for changing the pronunciation of “nation” and “ration” on the ground that as the “a” in “national” and “rational” is short, it is illogical to use a different quantity in the substantive. “To contact” is a phrase that has established itself and it is futile to try to keep America at arm’s length any longer; “global” also has established itself and it is too useful and indeed indispensable to reject; there is no other word that can express exactly the same shade of meaning. I heard it first from Arjava who described the language of *Arya* as expressing a global thinking and I at once caught it up as the right and only word for certain things, for instance, the thinking in masses which is a frequent characteristic of the Overmind. As for the use of current French and Latin phrases, it may be condemned as objectionable on the same ground as the use of *clichés* and stock phrases in literary style, but they often hit the target more forcibly than any English equivalent and have a more lively effect on the mind of the reader. That may not justify a too frequent use of them, but in moderation it is at least a good excuse for it. I think the expression “bears around it a halo” has been or can be used and it is at least not worn out like the ordinary “wears a halo”. One would more usually apply the expression “devoid of method” to an action or procedure than to a person, but the latter turn seems to me admissible. I do not think I need say anything in particular about other objections, they are questions of style and on that there can be different opinions; but you are right in altering the obviously mixed metaphor “in full cry”, though I do not think any of your four substitutes have anything of its liveliness and force. Colloquial expressions have, if rightly used, the advantage of giving point, flavour, alertness and I think in your use of them they do that; they can also lower and damage the style, but

that danger is mostly when there is a set character of uniform dignity or elevation. The chief character of your style is rather a constant life and vividness and supple and ample abounding energy of thought and language which can soar or run or sweep along at will but does not simply walk or creep or saunter and in such a style forcible colloquialisms can do good service.

2 April 1947

*

Your "through whom" in place of my "wherethrough" is an improvement, but it is difficult to reject that word as a legal archaism inadmissible in good poetry. Your remark about "whereas" in my essay seemed to me just in pointing out the obscurity of connection it introduced between the two parts of my sentence, but the term itself has no stigma on it of obsolescence as does for instance "whenas": in poetry it would be rather prosaic, while "wherethrough" is a special poetic usage as any big dictionary will tell us, and in certain contexts it would be preferable to "through which", just as "whereon", "wherein", and "whereby" would sometimes be better than their ordinary equivalents. I wonder why you have become so ultra-modern: I remember you jibe also at "from out" a phrase which has not fallen into desuetude yet, and can be used occasionally even in a common context: e.g. "from out the bed".

I don't suggest that "whereas" was obsolete. It is a perfectly good word in its place, e.g. He pretended the place was empty, whereas in reality it was crowded, packed, overflowing; but its use as a loose conjunctive turn which can be conveniently shoved into any hole to keep two sentences together is altogether reprehensible. None of these words is obsolete, but "wherethrough" is rhetorically pedantic, just as "whereabout" or "wherewithal" would be. It is no use throwing the dictionary at my head — the dictionary admits many words which poetry refuses to admit. Of course you can drag any word in the D. into poetry if you like — e.g.:

My spirit parenthetically wise
Gave me its *obiter dictum*; à propos
I looked within with weird and brilliant eyes

And found in the pit of my stomach — the *juste mot*.

But all that is possible is not commendable. So if you seek a pretext wherethrough to bring in these heavy visitors, I shall buck and seek a means whereby to eject them. 2 October 1934

*

As between the forms — “with a view to express” and “with a view to expressing” — the Oxford Concise calls the former vulgar.

I don’t agree with Oxford. Both forms are used. If “to express” is vulgar, “to expressing” is cumbrous and therefore inelegant.

On Three Words Used by Sri Aurobindo

I should like to know what exactly the meaning of the word “absolve” is in the following lines from your *Love and Death*.

But if with price, ah God! what easier! Tears
Dreadful, innumerable I will absolve,
Or pay with anguish through the centuries . . .

There is another passage a few pages later where the same word is used:

For late
I saw her mid those pale inhabitants
Whom bodily anguish visits not, but thoughts
Sorrowful and dumb memories absolve,
And martyrdom of scourged hearts quivering.

In the second passage it is used in its ordinary sense. “Absolution” means release from sins or from debts — the sorrowful thoughts and memories are the penalty or payment which procures the release from the debt which has been accumulated by the sins and errors of human life.

In the first passage “absolve” is used in its Latin and not in its English sense, = “to pay off a debt”, but here the sense is stretched a little. Instead of saying “I will pay off with tears” he says: “I will pay off tears” as the price of the absolution.

This Latinisation and this inversion of syntactical connections are familiar licences in English poetry—of course, it is incorrect, but a deliberate incorrectness, a violence purposely done to the language in order to produce a poetic effect. The English language, unlike the French and some others, likes, as Stephen Phillips used to say, to have liberties taken with it. But, of course, before one can take these liberties, one must be a master of the language—and, in this case, of the Latin also.

The word “reboant” occurs in *The Rishi*. Evidently it is a misprint. What ought to be in its place?

Why is it evidently a misprint? It is a recognised (though rare and poetic) English word, from Latin *reboans*. *Reboare* in Latin means “to cry aloud again and again”. 1931

*

What do you mean when you write of my poem, “It is very felicitous in expression and taking.”

I think Shakespeare wrote somewhere “Daffodils that come before the swallow dares and take the winds of March with beauty.” Charm or beauty that takes the mind like that, is taking.

26 September 1936

On Some Words and Expressions Used by Writers of the Ashram

Under the gloam, like a withdrawing wave
I heard some flute-soul's visionary woe . . .

If you can justify the word “gloam” I would suggest

I heard in gloam like a withdrawing wave
A visionary flute-soul's plumbless woe.

23 September 1934

*

What is wrong with “gloam”?

I have no personal objection to the word “gloam”, I find it perfect—I was only doubtful about its existence because I did not remember ever to have met it before. I thought it might be a gap in my knowledge, so I looked at Chambers and the Concise Oxford but they share my ignorance. Then I thought it might be Spenserian, archaic or dialect, like Arjava’s *trouvailles* and in that case I would welcome it not only with pleasure but with confidence; so I asked you whether you could justify it. Your answer sent me at once diving again into Chambers—you seemed to be so sure of this little gem of a word that I thought I must have looked at the wrong place or made some other frightful blunder. But no, there is “gloaming” marching at the head of the words beginning with “glo” in a proud precedence but with no gleam of a gloam before it. There is only glitter which is not the same thing at all, not at all at all. Of course the word ought to exist, it is full of charm and suggests other beauties like “gloamy”, “gloamful” etc., but none of these language people seem to know anything about it. Or perhaps it is in the less concise and longer-winded lexicographers? Anyhow my remark stands; if you can justify it, it is a beautiful phrase. I prefer “in gloam” to “at gloam” though that too has its merits.

24 September 1934

*

Of course the big dictionary in the library mentions “gloam”—and not just as an archaism or obsolescence: it does it the honour, which it more than deserves, of calling it a variant of “gloaming”. Etymologically too, there can be no objection: “gloaming” and “gloom” derive from the same Anglo-Saxon “glōm,” so if “gloom” is legitimate, “gloam” is *a fortiori* so.

Not necessarily—if one proceeded in that argument, the English language would soon be a chaos.

Besides, at least twice before it has passed under your eyes and you have never demurred: I used it over a year ago in *Pointers*:

From the sea rise up
Fingers of foam
Trying to pierce through

The veil of gloam

And I remember Harin's use of it:

In me, the timeless, time forgets to roam,
Drunk with my poise, grown sudden unaware,
Offering up its noontide and its gloam
Withdrawn in a lost attitude of prayer.

If it were an obscure uglification, I could understand your objection; but as you admit its rare beauty and cannot doubt its sense nor its etymological coinability, and still reiterate your remark about the necessity of my justifying it I conjecture some solid principle behind your diffidence. Why should one hesitate to enrich the language?

It did not strike me in your poem. As for Harin, I never object to what he may invent in language or in grammar, because so much mastery of language carries with it a right to take liberties with it. But I am more severe with myself and others. However, if it is in the big dictionary, that is sufficient. Even if it had been an archaism, it would have been worth reviving. But if it had been a new invention, it would have been more doubtful — one could invent hundreds of beautiful words but the liberty to do so would end in a language like Joyce's which is not desirable.

25 September 1934

*

The English reader has digested Carlyle and swallowed Meredith and is not quite unwilling to REJOYCE in even more startling strangenesses of expression at the present day. Will his stomach really turn at my little novelties. "The voice of an eye" sounds idiotic, but "the voice of a devouring eye" seems to me effective. "Devouring eye" is then a synecdoche — isolating and emphasising Shakespeare's most remarkable quality, his eager multitudinous sight, and the "oral" epithet provides a connection with the idea of a voice, thus preventing the catachresis from being too startling. If Milton could give us "blind mouths" and Wordsworth

thou Eye among the blind,

That, deaf and silent, read'st the eternal deep,
is there very much to object to in this visioned voice?

Can't accept all that. "A voice of a devouring eye" is even more reJoycingly mad than a voice of an eye pure and simple. If the English language is to go to the dogs, let it go, but the Joyce cut by the way of Bedlam does not recommend itself to me.

The poetical examples have nothing to do with the matter. Poetry is permitted to be insane—the poet and the madman go together: though even there there are limits. Meredith and Carlyle are tortuous or extravagant in their style only—though they can be perfectly sane when they want. In poetry anything can pass—for instance, my "voice of a tilted nose":

O voice of a tilted nose,
Speak but speak not in prose!
Nose like a blushing rose,
O Joyce of a tilted nose!

That is high poetry, but put it in prose and it sounds insane.

5 May 1935

*

What about this: "It is the voice of an insatiable picturesqueness . . . "

A voice of picturesqueness is less startling but hardly better English than "a voice of an eye". I can't stomach the two expressions because they are not English. You can't say "voice of a devouring eye" any more than you can say "voice of a tilted nose". To the English reader the expression would sound grotesque, incongruous, almost comic.

A voice of picturesqueness would also sound incongruous, for picturesqueness applies to visible things, not to things audible like a voice.

5 May 1935

*

In my lines —

This heart grew brighter when your breath's proud chill
Flung my disperse life-blood more richly in!

a terminal “d” will at once English that Latin fellow “disperse”,¹ but is he really objectionable? At first I had “Drove” instead of “Flung”—so the desire for a less dental rhythm was his *raison d'être*, but if he seems a trifle weaker than his English avatar, he can easily be dispensed with now.

I don't think “disperse” as an adjective can pass,—the dentals are certainly an objection but do not justify this Latin-English neologism.

12 June 1937

*

Why should that poor “disperse” be inadmissible when English has many such Latin forms—e.g. “consecrate”, “dedicate”, “intoxicate”?

I don't think people use “consecrate”, “intoxicate” etc. as adjectives nowadays—at any rate it sounds to me too scholastic. Of course, if one chose, this kind of thing might be perpetrate—

O wretched man intoxicate,
Let not thy life be consecrate
To wine's red yell (spell, if you want to be “poetic”)
Else will thy soul be dedicate
To Hell.

but it is better not to do it. It makes no difference if there are other words like “diffuse” taken from French (not Latin) which have this form and are generally used as adjectives. Logic is not the sole basis of linguistic use. I thought at first it was an archaism and there might be some such phrase in old poetry as “lids disperse”, but as I could not find it even in the Oxford which claims to be exhaustive and omniscient, I concluded it must be a neologism of yours. But archaism or neologism does

¹ Sri Aurobindo had written in the margin of a typed copy of this poem: “What is this Latin fellow “disperse” doing here?” — Ed.

not matter. “Dispersed life-blood” brings three d’s so near together that they collide a little — if they were farther from each other it would not matter — or if they produced some significant or opportune effect. I think “diffuse” will do. 13 June 1937

*

What do I find this afternoon? Just read:

Suddenly
From motionless battalions as outride
A speed disperse of horsemen, from that mass
Of livid menace went a frail light cloud
Rushing through heaven, and behind it streamed
The downpour all in wet and greenish lines.

This is from your own *Urvasio!* Of course, it is possible that the printer has omitted a terminal “d” — but is that really the explanation?

I dare say I tried to Latinise. But that doesn’t make it a permissible form. If it is obsolete, it must remain obsolete. I thought at first it was an archaism you were trying on, I seemed to remember something of the kind, but as I could find it nowhere I gave up the idea — it was probably my own crime that I remembered.

29 June 1937

*

The noons of heart betray the lofts
Which splendid strength of Truth enfurls.

Now, look here! What are these lofts? I read in the Dictionary “loft”: Attic; room over stable; pigeon-house; flock of pigeons; gallery in church or hall; (Golf) backward slope in clubhead, lofting strokes. Now if some of these things can be betrayed by the noons (at a pinch, but not of the heart), none of them, not even the last can be enfurled. Not even the most splendid strength has ever enfurled any loft in the world, not even if it be curled and whirled a hundred times over for the desperate effort.

27 December 1936

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In my use of “loft” I follow its derivation from German “*Luft*” = the air, and Icelandic “*loft*” = sky, upper room.

Derivations are depravations — even when they are right they are useless, — what matters is what the word means, not what something else meant which gave birth to the word.

Notes on Usage Apropos of a Translation of Sarat Chandra Chatterji's *Nishkriti*²

I have gone carefully through the proof of the first chapters of *The Deliverance*, but find most of these unexplained red marks totally unintelligible; sometimes I can make a guess, but most often not even that. What, for instance, is the objection to the use of “its” and “it” for a river?

There seems to be an objection to any metaphors or figures such as “the scales of public opinion” or “a river rejecting someone from its borders”. This seems to me astonishing; at any rate the figures are there in the original and one cannot suppress them in a translation or alter arbitrarily the author's substance.

Objections are made also against quite good and appropriate English words such as “beggared” and “quadrupled” or against perfectly correct phrases like “All that was now a history of the past” or “reaching” a figure or “dropping” some money or “he sat at home in his room” in the sense of remaining inactive. One can say, for instance, “He sat in his palace listening to the footsteps of approaching Doom”. So too there appears to be some objection to the phrase “neither X nor another”, a common English turn; to “started (in the sense of beginning an action or movement) a relentless insistence and importunity”.³ Vivid epithets, e.g., “rapid visits” or familiar and lively phrases such as “she was back again”, are found to be improper and objectionable. “Cares of her household” gets a red mark, though

² Above a typed copy of this letter, Sri Aurobindo wrote the jocular heading: “Note on the red marks in the proof of ‘The Deliverance’ ” — Ed.

³ One can say for instance, “He started an obstinate resistance which never flagged nor ceased”.

one speaks of “household cares”, “cares of State”, cares of all kinds. A fever (one must not refer to it as “it”) is allowed to throw a person down, but not to let him rise from his bed. Incomprehensible?

All these startling red-ink surprises are packed together in the short space of the first chapter. But in the second we meet with still bigger surprises. One is not allowed to “make time” for anything, a most common phrase, or to “leave” a responsibility to someone. A meal must not be “vegetarian” though a diet can be, and though one speaks in English of “a frugal vegetarian dinner”. One is not allowed to have a school task to do or to “prepare” a task; but unhappily that is done in England at least and in English.

“Today” is objected to because it is applied to past “time”; but it is put here as part of the tone of vivid remembered actuality, the past described as if still present before the mind, which is constant in the original. Similarly, a little later on, “the early dusk had fallen a couple of hours ago”; in strict narrative time it should be “before” and not “ago”, but though the author writes in the past tense, he is always suggesting a past which is passing immediately before our eyes. I do not see how else the translator is to keep this suggestion. One could use more correctly the historic present: “It is winter and the dusk has fallen a couple of hours ago”; but that would be to falsify the original.

All right of passage is refused to a humorous use of the phrase “give voice”, nor can one “retort” instead of merely replying. There is perhaps a syntactical objection to the use of “desperate” at the beginning of the sentence, on p. 6, but the objection is itself incorrect. One says “Pale and haggard, he rose from his bed”. One is not allowed to speak humorously of a “portion” instead of a “part” of a big bed so as to emphasise its bigness and the dividing of it into occupied regions by the “gang”. A heart is not allowed to “pound away”, still less to pound “dismally”. The objector seems to damn everything vividly descriptive, everything new in turn, phrase or image, everything in fact not said before by everyone else. A man lying

down is not allowed to “start up”, though the dictionary meaning of the word is just that, “to rise up quickly or suddenly”, e.g. “he started up from his bed” or “from his chair”. What again is meant by the objection to such recognised locutions as “to take away the (bad) taste” or “much she cares”, and why should there not be an “implacable pressure” or why is one forbidden to “get out money” from a box? These red marks are terribly mysterious.

The criticism of the sentences “How could you etc.” and the use of “today” is intelligible and to a certain extent tenable. I have tried to explain on the proof itself why the ordinary tense-sequence can be disregarded here. In the latter case it is not so much a question of grammar as of the use of the word “today” for a past time. If it can be so used in order to express more vividly the actual thought in the mind of a person at the time, the unusual tense-sequence follows as a matter of course. I have, however, yielded the point for the sake of Sarat Chatterji’s reputation which, we are told, is imperilled by our audacities of language.

Chapter III. The objector begins with a queer missing of the obvious sense in the use of “my” and “us”. He goes on to challenge the possibility of “entering into” explanations, discussions etc. though it is commonly done, e.g. “He entered into a long discussion” or “You needn’t enter into tedious explanations; a few words will be enough.”

Chapter IV continues the inexplicable chain and “implacable” series of red objections. I have written “a discussion was in process”, which is a quite permissible phrase, but alter it to “progress” just to soften the redness of the red mark. But why cannot Atul “hold forth” as every orator does and what is the matter with the “cut” of a coat, a phrase sacred to every tailor? People in England do, after all, “blurt out” things every day and they “laugh in the face” of others, though of course it may be considered rude; but “to laugh in the face” is not considered as bad grammar — or bad English. “To give *the* order” is wrong in the opinion of the objector; but since the purchase of particular things like coats or suits has just been talked about, it is quite

correct to say “*the* order” instead of “*an* order”.

One can’t “speak out”, apparently, (or perhaps “speak up” either, one can only just speak?), nor can one “see to the making of coats” for a family. Also it is wrong to ask “what is wrong”. It is wrong, it seems, to say “All in the room”; so an Englishman is mistaken when he says “Tell all at home that I am not coming”! So too you can’t speak “once more” or “seek for”⁴ anything! The use of the plural of “devotion”, common in English,⁵ is red marked as an error!

Chapter V. One can’t “labour” to get a result, or “cover up” anything in the sense of “hiding” or even try to do it; one can’t put somebody up⁶ to do something, though in English it is constantly done. There is an objection to such perfectly natural figures as “could not summon up any reply” or “the sharp edge of your tongue” or “smouldering secretly within herself”. The objector seems indeed to cherish a deadly grudge against figures and images; he is opposed also to colloquial expressions (e.g. “get” out money, “give it here”) even in dialogue. He objects to my putting straight into English the Bengali figure of “falling from the sky”. There is an almost identical phrase in French with exactly the same sense, “to fall from on high” or “to fall from the clouds”:⁷ so I do not see why it should not be done, since it ought to be at once intelligible to an English reader. I note also that words cannot “jump” to the tongue, but why not? they manage to do it every day. Poor Shaila cannot “need” a cup.⁸ Then what is wrong with the sentence “Do you think everybody is your sister” i.e. the speaker herself? It is simply a vivid way of

⁴ “For” and “after” *can* be used with “seek”. One can say “He sought for an excuse but found none”; one would not usually say “He sought an excuse”. So too you can say “He has long been seeking for spiritual light but in vain.”

⁵ E.g. “She was still at her devotions”.

⁶ Cf., in kindred but slightly different senses, “He has not acted on his own initiative, I know by whom he has been put up to do this”; “A straw candidate put up for the occasion by a small secret clique”; “This is a put up job; there is nothing sincere or spontaneous in the whole affair”.

⁷ “*tomber d'en haut*”, “*tomber des nuages*”.

⁸ One can say, “she needs help and sympathy in her trouble”, or “you need rest and a change of air”, or “for this I need scissors and paste, get them”. Then why not “I need the cup”?

saying "Do you think everybody will be as patient with you as myself", or, "Do you think you can speak to everybody as you do to me".

I have written at length because the publisher and perhaps others seem to have been upset by the vicious red jabs of this high authority. In most cases they seem to me to have no meaning whatever. If they have, we should be informed to some extent at least of their why and wherefore.

There are, too, a few doubtful points in half a dozen sentences, points on which Englishmen themselves differ or might differ. I am ready to go through the whole book if the proofs are sent here. But I cannot revise or alter phrases, locutions or figures which, so far as I know English, are either current or natural or permissible,—unless I am told why these are thought to be incorrect or improper.

I cannot altogether understand Professor Maniyar's criticism. What does he mean by irregular language? If he refers to the style and means that it is bad, unchaste, too full of familiar or colloquial terms, not sufficiently dignified, bookish, conventional in phrase, not according to precedent, he is entitled to his view, of course. If he and the objector represent the Indian English-reading public, then Dilip must consider the matter. For in that case it is clear the book will not be understood by that public, may be banged and bashed by the reviewers, or may for kindred reasons be a failure. The suggestion that Sarat Chandra's high reputation will be tarnished and lowered by Dilip's deplorable style and my bad English and horrible grammar, not from any fault of his own, is very alarming. In that case Dilip ought to have the book corrected by some University professor who knows what to write and what not to write and its style chastened, made correct, common and unnoticeable. I don't think Amal will do. He is too brilliant and might make the hair of the correct and timid reader rise on his head in horror; besides Amal does not know Bengali.

The question also arises whether an English reader (an English Englishman, not made in India) would equally fail to appreciate the book; he might find it too Bengali in character

and substance and — who knows? — agree that the style of the translation is unorthodox and “irregular”. But here we are helpless — we cannot make the experiment, for the war is on and England is far away and paper scarce there as here.

5 August 1944

Remarks on Bengali Usage

Laws and Caprices of Usage

It is not very clear why the dictum about বৎসর should not apply to হংপাত্রে and মৃংপাত্রে. My own feeling is against this extra syllable in such words (দিক্ষণাত্রে seems to me different, because দিক্ is a separate word in Bengali), but neither feeling nor logic can stand against usage. A language is like an absolute queen; you have to obey her laws, reasonable or unreasonable, and not only her laws, but her caprices—so long as they last,—unless you are one of her acknowledged favourites and then you can make hay of her laws and (sometimes) defy even her caprices provided you are quite sure of the favour. In this case, Tagore perhaps feels the absoluteness of some usage with regard to these particular words? But one can always break through law and usage and even pass over the judgment of an “arbiter of elegances”,—at one's own risk.

26 January 1932

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Funny thing—this word-coinage! Sometimes people accept it, sometimes they reject.

After all when one coins a new word, one has to take the chance. If the word is properly formed and not ugly or unintelligible, it seems to me all right to venture.

If it is not accepted it will remain a blot in the poem. Tagore coined the word ত্রাণাধিত but he laments that people have not accepted it.

Why a blot? There are many words in Greek poetry which occur only once in the whole literature, but that is not considered a defect in the poem. It is called a *hapax legomenon*, “a once-

spoken word" and that's all. ভূগোলিত্ব for instance is a fine word and can adorn, not blot Tagore's poetry even if no one else uses it. I think Shakespeare has many words coined by him or at least some that do not occur elsewhere.

16 January 1937

A Language Grows and Is Not Made

Will it be a narrowness on the part of the Calcutta University if it does not include foreign words for the enrichment of Bengali literature?

It is a matter of opinion and tastes differ. But I don't see how a University can change the language. A language grows and is not made, except in so far as it is the great poets and prose writers who make it.

15 July 1937

Part Three

Literature, Art, Beauty and Yoga

Section One

Appreciation of Poetry and the Arts

Appreciation of Poetry

The Subjective Element

All criticism of poetry is bound to have a strong subjective element in it and that is the source of the violent differences we find in the appreciation of any given author by equally “eminent” critics. All is relative here, Art and Beauty also, and our view of things and our appreciation of them depends on the consciousness which views and appreciates. Some critics recognise this and go in frankly for a purely subjective criticism — “this is why I like this and disapprove of that, I give my own values”. Most labour to fit their personal likes and dislikes to some standard of criticism which they conceive to be objective; this need of objectivity, of the support of an impersonal truth independent of our personality or anybody else’s, is the main source of theories, canons, standards of art. But the theories, canons, standards themselves vary and are set up in one age only to be broken in another. Is there then no beauty of art independent of our varying mentalities? Is beauty a creation of our minds, a construction of our ideas and our senses, not at all existent in itself? In that case Beauty is non-existent in Nature, it is put upon Nature by our minds through mental imposition, *adhyāropa*. But this contradicts the fact that it is in response to an object and not independently of it that the idea of beautiful or not beautiful originally rises within us. Beauty does exist in what we see, but there are two aspects of it, essential beauty and the forms it takes. “Eternal beauty wandering on her way” does that wandering by a multitudinous variation of forms appealing to a multitudinous variation of consciousnesses. There comes in the difficulty. Each individual consciousness tries to seize the eternal beauty expressed in a form (here a particular poem or work of art), but is either assisted by the form or repelled by it, wholly attracted

or wholly repelled, or partially attracted and partially repelled. There may be errors in the poet's or artist's transcription of beauty which mar the reception, but even these have different effects on different people. But the more radical divergences arise from the variation in the constitution of the mind and its difference of response. Moreover there are minds, the majority indeed, who do not respond to "artistic" beauty at all—something inartistic appeals much more to what sense of beauty they have—or else they are not seeking beauty, but only vital pleasure.

A critic cannot escape altogether from these limitations. He can try to make himself catholic and objective and find the merit or special character of all he reads or sees in poetry and art, even when they do not evoke his strongest sympathy or deepest response. I have little temperamental sympathy for much of the work of Pope and Dryden, but I can see their extraordinary perfection or force in their own field, the masterly conciseness, energy, point, metallic precision into which they cut their thought or their verse, and I can see too how that can with a little infusion of another quality be the basis of a really great poetic style, as Dryden himself has shown in his best work. But there my appreciation stops; I cannot rise to the heights of admiration of those who put them on a level with or on a higher level than Wordsworth, Keats or Shelley—I cannot escape from the feeling that their work, even though more consistently perfect within their limits and in their own manner (at least Pope's), was less great in poetic quality. These divergences rise from a conception of beauty and a feeling for beauty which belongs to the temperament. So too Housman's exaltation of Blake results directly from his feeling and peculiar conception of poetic beauty as an appeal to an inner sensation, an appeal marred and a beauty deflowered by bringing in a sharp coating or content of intellectual thought. But that I shall not discuss now. All this however does not mean that criticism is without any true use. The critic can help to open the mind to the kinds of beauty he himself sees and not only to discover but to appreciate at their full value certain elements that make them beautiful or give them what is most characteristic or unique in their peculiar

beauty. Housman for instance may help many minds to see in Blake something which they did not see before. They may not agree with him in his comparison of Blake and Shakespeare, but they can follow him to a certain extent and seize better that element in poetic beauty which he overstresses but makes at the same time more vividly visible.

5 October 1934

Abiding Intuition of Poetic and Artistic Greatness

Yes, of course there is an intuition of greatness by which the great poet or artist is distinguished from those who are less great and these again from those who are not great at all. But you are asking too much when you expect this intuition to work with a mechanical instantaneousness and universality so that all shall have the same opinion and give the same values. The greatness of Shakespeare, of Dante, of others of the same rank is unquestioned and unquestionable and the recognition of it has always been there in their own time and afterwards. Virgil and Horace stood out in their own day in the first rank among the poets and that verdict has never been reversed since. The area of a poet's fame may vary; it may have been seen first by a few, then by many, then by all. At first there may be adverse critics and assailants, but these negative voices die away. Questionings may rise from time to time — e.g. as to whether Lucretius was not a greater poet than Virgil — but these are usually from individuals and the general verdict abides always. Even lesser poets retain their rank in spite of fluctuations of their fame. You speak of the discrediting of some and the rehabilitation of the discredited. That happened to Pope and Dryden. Keats and his contemporaries broke their canons and trampled over their corpses to reach romantic freedom; now there is a rehabilitation. But all this is something of an illusion — for mark that even at the worst Pope and Dryden retained a place among the great names of English poetic literature. No controversy, no depreciation could take that away from them. This proves my contention that there is an abiding intuition of poetic and artistic greatness.

The attempts at comparison of poets like Blake and Shakespeare or Dante and Shakespeare by critics like Housman and Eliot? It seems to me that these are irrelevant and otiose. Both Dante and Shakespeare stand at the summit of poetic fame, but each with so different a way of genius that comparison is unprofitable. Shakespeare has powers which Dante cannot rival; Dante has heights which Shakespeare could not reach; but in essence they stand as mighty equals. As for Blake and Shakespeare, that opinion is more a personal fantasy than anything else. Purity and greatness are not the same thing; Blake's may be pure poetry in Housman's sense and Shakespeare's not except in a few passages; but nobody can contend that Blake's genius had the width and volume and riches of Shakespeare's. It can be said that Blake as a mystic poet achieved things beyond Shakespeare's measure—for Shakespeare had not the mystic's vision; but as a poet of the play of life Shakespeare is everywhere and Blake nowhere. These are tricks of language and idiosyncrasies of preference. One has only to put each thing in its place, without confusing issues and one can see that Housman's praise of Blake may be justified but any exaltation of him by comparison with Shakespeare is not in accordance with the abiding intuition of these things which remains undisturbed by any individual verdict.

The errors of great poets in judging their contemporaries are personal freaks—they are failures in intuition due to the mind's temporary movements getting in the way of the intuition. The errors of Goethe and Bankim were only an overestimation of a genius or a talent that was new and therefore attractive at the time. Richardson's *Pamela* was after all the beginning of modern fiction. As I have said, the general intuition does not work at once and with a mechanical accuracy. Overestimation of a contemporary is frequent; underestimation also. But, taken on the whole, the real poet commands at first or fairly soon the verdict of the few whose eyes are open—and often the attacks of those whose eyes are shut—and the few grow in numbers till the general intuition affirms their verdict. There may be exceptions, for there is hardly a rule without exceptions, but this is, I think, generally true.

As for the verdict of Englishmen upon a French poet or *vice versa*, that is due to a difficulty in entering into the finer spirit and subtleties of a foreign language. It is difficult for a Frenchman to get a proper appreciation of Keats or Shelley or for an Englishman to judge Racine,—for this reason. But a Frenchman like Maurois who knows English as an Englishman knows it, can get the full intuition of a poet like Shelley well enough. These variations must be allowed for; the human mind is not a perfect instrument, its best intuitions are veiled by irrelevant mental formations; but in these matters the truth affirms itself and stands fairly firm and clear in essence through all changes of mental weather.

6 October 1934

Contemporary Judgment of Poetry

If you send your poems to five different poets, you are likely to get five absolutely disparate and discordant estimates of them. A poet likes only the poetry that appeals to his own temperament or taste, the rest he condemns or ignores. (My own case is different, because I am not primarily a poet and have made in criticism a practice of appreciating everything that can be appreciated, as a catholic critic would.) Contemporary poetry, besides, seldom gets its right judgment from contemporary critics.

Nothing can be more futile than for a poet to write in expectation of contemporary fame or praise, however agreeable that may be, if it comes: but it is not of any definitive value; for very poor poets have enjoyed a great contemporary fame and very great poets have been neglected in their time, their merit known only to a few and gathering very slowly a greater volume of appreciation around it. A poet has to go on his way, trying to gather hints from what people say for or against, when their criticisms are things he can profit by, but not otherwise moved (if he can manage it)—seeking mainly to sharpen his own sense of self-criticism by the help of others. Differences of estimate need not surprise him at all.

2 February 1932

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It is quite true that all art and poetry is largely dependent on the vital for its activity and if there is no force of vitality in the poetry then it cannot be strong or great. But it does not follow that the vital element in poetry will appeal to everybody or a great number of people; it depends on the kind of vital movement that is there. The forceful but inferior sort of vital energy that you find in Kipling's ballads appeals to a large mass of people,—the vital element in Milton which is very powerful affects only a few in comparison—the rest take him on trust because he is a great classic but have not the true intense enjoyment of him as of Kipling. Yet Milton's greatness will endure—that cannot be said certainly of Kipling's ballads. The problem therefore remains where it was. Spiritual poetry also needs the vital force for expression; mere spiritual philosophy without the uplifting poetic force in its expression (which needs the vital energy for its action) cannot appeal to anybody. But all the same in spiritual poetry the vital element adopts a turn which may not go home to many, unless it takes a popular religious form which has a general appeal. There I do not follow quite Khagen Mitra's position—does he contend that one ought to suit one's poetry to the mentality of others so that it may have a general appeal, not keeping it to its natural purpose of expressing what is felt and seen by the poet according to the truth of the inspiration within him? Surely that cannot be recommended; but if it is not done, the possibility of reaching (at first, of course) only a few remains uneliminated. It is not that a poet deliberately sets out to be appreciated by a few only—he sets out to be himself in his poetry and the rest follows. But consider a poet like Mallarmé. In writing his strange enigmatic profound style which turned the whole structure of French upside down he cannot have expected or cared to be read and appreciated even by that part of the general public which is interested in and appreciative of poetry. Yet there is no one who has had more influence on modern French poets—he helped to create Verlaine, Valéry and a number of others who rank among the great ones in French literature and he himself too now ranks very high though he must still, I should think, be read only by a comparatively small though select audience;

yet he has practically turned the current of French poetry. So there is something to be said for writing for oneself even if that implies writing only for the few and not for the many.

As for the actor, that is quite a different art, meant for the public, depending on its breath of applause, ineffective if its public is not moved or captured. A poet publishes, but he can take his chance; if he does not succeed in commanding widespread attention, he can still continue to write; there is something in him which maintains its energy and will to create. If he seeks acknowledged greatness and success — though that is a secondary matter to the force that makes him write — he can still sustain himself on the hope of a future greatness with posterity — there are plenty of illustrious examples to console him. But an actor unappreciated is an actor already dead — there is nothing before him.

5 November 1936

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Valéry, whom you mention, is unintelligible to all but a very narrow coterie, and even they say that he is too intellectual and divorced from the life of the emotions. This makes his poetry admirable as a specimen of great workmanship, but it will not last.

Well, but did they not say the same thing about Mallarmé? And what of Blake? Contemporary opinion is a poor judge of what shall live or not live. The fact remains that the impressionist movement in poetry initiated by Mallarmé has proved to be the most powerful stream in France and its influence is not confined to that country. The whole thing is that it is a mistake to erect a mental theory and try to force into its narrow mould the infinite variety of the processes of Nature. Shakespeare may have so much vital force as to recommend himself to a large audience not so much for his poetry at first as for his dramatic vividness and power; it must be remembered that it was the German romantics two centuries later who brought about the apotheosis of Shakespeare — before that he had a much more limited circle of admirers. Other great poets have started with a more scanty recognition. Others have had a great popularity in

their lifetime and sunk afterwards to a much lower level of fame. What is important is to preserve the right of the poet to write for himself, that is to say, for the Spirit that moves him, not to demand from him that he should write down to the level of the general or satisfy even the established taste and standard of the critics or connoisseurs of his time. For that would mean the end or decay of poetry — it would perish of its own debasement. A poet must be free to use his wings even if they carry him above the comprehension of the public of the day or of the general run of critics or lead him into lonely places. That is all that matters.

Tolstoy's logic is out of place. Nobody says that the value of the poet must be measured by the scantiness of his audience any more than it can be measured by the extent of his contemporary popularity. So there is no room for his *reductio ad absurdum*. What is contended is that it cannot be measured by either standard. It is to be measured by the power of his vision, of his speech, of his feeling, by his rendering of the world within or the world without or of any world to which he has access. It may be the outer world that he portrays like Homer and Chaucer or a vivid life-world like Shakespeare or an inmost world of experience like Blake or other mystic poets. The recognition of that power will come first from the few who recognise good poetry when they see it and from those who can enter into his world; afterwards it can spread to the larger number who can recognise good poetry when it is shown to them; finally, the still larger public may come in who learn to appreciate by a slow education, not by instinct and nature. There was a sound principle in the opinion always held in former times that it is time alone that can test the enduring power of a poet's work, for contemporary opinion is not reliable.

There remains the case of the poets great or small or null who immediately command a general hearing. They have an element in them which catches at once the mind of the time: they are saying things which have a general appeal in a way that everybody can understand, in a language and rhythm that all can appreciate. As you say, there must be a vital element in the poetry of such a writer which gets him his public. The question

is, has he anything else and, again what is the value of this vital element? If he has nothing else or not much of any high value, his aureole will not endure. If he has something but not of the best and highest, he will sink in the eyes of posterity, but not set out of sight. If he has in him something of the very greatest and best, his fame will grow and grow as time goes on — some of the elements that caught him his contemporary public may fade and lose their value but the rest will shine with an increasing brightness. But even the vital and popular elements in the work may have different values — Shakespeare's vitality has the same appeal now as then; Tennyson's has got very much depreciated; Longfellow's is now recognised for the easily current copper coin that it always was. You must remember that when I speak of the vital force in a poet as something necessary, I am not speaking of something that need be low or fitted only to catch the general mind, not fit to appeal to a higher judgment, but of something that can be very valuable — from the highest point of view. When Milton writes

Fallen Cherub, to be weak is miserable,

or describes the grandeur of the fallen archangel, there is a vital force there that is of the highest quality, — so is that of Shakespeare; so is that of many pieces of Blake. This vital energy makes the soul stir within you. Nothing can be more high and sublime than the vital energy in Arjuna's description of the Virat Purusha in the Gita.

6 November 1936

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I remain convinced that fame is a fluke. Even a settled literary fame seems to be a very fluctuating affair. Who gave a thought to Blake or Donne in former times, when I was in England, for instance? But now they bid fair to be reckoned among the great poets. I see that Byron is in the depths, the quotations for Pope and Dryden are rising; it was very different in those days.

5 February 1932

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Dilip says, "If you want to publish your literary work, you must see that people understand it—not the public at large but, as Virginia Woolf says, a select public."

What is not understood or appreciated by one select circle may be understood or appreciated by another select circle or in the future like Blake's poetry. Nobody appreciated Blake in his own time—now he ranks as a great poet,—more poetic than Shakespeare, says Housman. Tagore wrote he could not appreciate Dilip's poetry because it is too "Yogic" for him. Is Tagore unselect, one of the public at large?

I don't agree at all with not publishing because you won't be understood. At that rate many great poets would have remained unpublished. What about the unintelligible Mallarmé who had such a great influence on later French poetry? 24 July 1936

Housman's Poetics

I have been waiting for a long time to take a look at A. E. Housman's little book *The Name and Nature of Poetry*. It's been with you for months now. Perhaps you could spare it for a while? How did you like it?

[*A few days later*] What has happened to my Housman letter?

Housed, man!

[*Still later*] Here is the book. I kept it with the hope of noting down my own ideas on Housman's theory, but all this time has elapsed without my being able to do it. Apart from the theory, Housman, judging from the book, has a fine sense of true poetic quality—in others. For his own poetry, from the extracts I have seen, looks rather thin. I have read the book three or four times and always with satisfaction to my solar plexus.

22 September 1936

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Read the remarks of Housman on the magnificent poem of Blake he quotes in full [“*My Spectre around me night and day*”] and

the attempts of people to explain it. I quite agree with him there though not in his too sweeping theory of poetry. To explain that poem is to murder it and dissect the corpse. One can't explain it, one can only feel and live the truth behind it. 3 December 1936

Spiritual Poetry and Popular Taste

In a recently published lecture on art, Tagore writes [*in Bengali*]:

The question naturally arises, “Why has this [*mathematical delight*] not been made the subject of poetry?” The reason is that the experience of it is confined to very few people, it is out of the reach of the general public. The language through which it can be known is technical, it has not been made into a living material by contact with the hearts of the people.

Put “yogic poetry” in place of mathematics and you will at once understand why he cannot accept yogic poetry as poetry proper. Khagendra Mitra has echoed this identical view in his rather obscure term অনুভাবের স্বাজ্ঞাত.

Mathematical delight be blowed! What does he mean? that you can't write mathematics in verse? I suppose not, it was not meant to be. You can't start off

Oh, two by three plus four plus seven!
To add things is to be in heaven.

But all the same, if one thinks it worth while to take the trouble, one can express the mathematician's delight in discovery or the grammarian's in grammatising or the engineer's in planning a bridge or a house. What about Browning's *Grammarians Funeral*? The reason why these subjects do not easily get into poetry is because they do not lend themselves to poetic handling, their substance being intellectual and abstract and their language also, not as the substance and language of poetry must be, emotional and intuitive. It is not because they appeal only to a few people and not to the general run of humanity. A good dinner appeals

not to a few people but to the general run of humanity, but it would all the same be a little difficult to write an epic or a lyric on the greatness of cooking and fine dishes or the joys of the palate and the belly. Spiritual subjects on the other hand can lend themselves to poetic handling because they can be expressed in the language of high emotion and radiant intuition. How many people will appreciate it is a question which is irrelevant to the merit of the poetry. More people have appreciated sincerely Macaulay's *Lays* or Kipling's *Barrack Room Ballads* than ever really appreciated *Timon of Athens* or *Paradise Regained* — but that does not determine the relative value or appropriateness of these things as poetry. Artistic or poetic value cannot be reckoned by the plaudits or the reactions of the greatest number. I am only just reading Khagen Mitra's স্বাজাত্ত — this is only a splenetic comment on your quotation from Tagore. 2 November 1936

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Mystic poetry will ever remain for Tagore mystic and mysterious and occupy a second place.

That is another matter. It is a question of personal idiosyncrasy. There are people who thrill to Pope and find Keats and Shelley empty and misty. The clear precise intellectual meanings of Pope are to them the height of poetry — the emotional and romantic suggestions of the *Skylark* or the *Ode to the Nightingale* unsatisfactory. How the devil, they ask, can a skylark be a spirit, not a bird? What the hell has "a glow-worm golden in a dell of dew" to do with the song of the skylark? They are unable to feel these things and say Pope would never have written in that incoherent inconsequential way. Of course he wouldn't. But that simply means they like things that are intellectually clear and can't appreciate the imaginative connections which reveal what is deeper than the surface. You can, I suppose, catch something of these, but when you are asked to go still deeper into the concrete of concretes, you lose your breath and say "Lord! what an unintelligible mess. Give me an allegorical clue for God's sake, something superficial, which I can mentally formulate." Same attitude as the Popists' — in essence. 8 December 1936

Appreciation of the Arts in General

Poetic and Artistic Value and Popular Appeal

I do not know why your correspondent puts so much value on *general* understanding and acceptance. Really it is only the few that can be trusted to discern the true value of things in poetry and art and if the “general” run accept it is usually because acceptance is sooner or later imposed or induced in their minds at first by the authority of the few and afterwards by the verdict of Time. There are exceptions of course of a wide spontaneous acceptance because something that is really good happens to meet a taste or a demand in the general mind of the moment. Poetic and artistic value does not necessarily command mass understanding and acceptance.

24 October 1936

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I do not find your argument from numbers very convincing. Your 999,999 people would also prefer a jazz and turn away from Beethoven or only hear him as a duty and would feel happy in a theatre listening to a common dance tune and cold and dull to the music of Tansen. They would also prefer (even many who pretend otherwise) a catching theatre song to one of Tagore’s lyrics—which proves to the hilt, I suppose, that Beethoven, Tansen, Tagore are pale distant highbrow things, not the real, true, human, joy-giving stuff. In the case of Yogic or divine peace, which is not something neutral, but intense, overwhelming and positive (the neutral quiet is only a first or prefatory stage,) there is this further disadvantage that your million minus one have never known Yogic peace, and what then is the value of their turning away from what they never experienced and could not possibly understand even if it were described to them? The man of the world knows only vital excitement and pleasure or

what he can get of it, but does not know the Yogic peace and joy and cannot compare,— but the Yogen has known both and can compare. I have never heard of a Yogen who got the peace of God and turned away from it as something poor, neutral and pallid, rushing back to cakes and ale. If satisfaction in the experience is to be the test, Yogic peace wins by a hundred lengths. However, you write as if I had said peace was the one and only thing to be had by Yoga. I said it was a basis, the only possible secure basis for all other divine experience, even for a fulfilled and lasting intensity of bhakti and Ananda.

29 October 1932

Art and Life

There are artists and artists. A real artist with the spirit of artistry in his very blood will certainly be artistic in everything. But there are artists who have no taste and there are artists who are not born but made. Your example of Tagore is a different matter. A mastery in one department of art does not give mastery in another— though there may be a few who excel equally in many arts. Gandhi's phrase about asceticism is only a phrase. You might just as well say that politics is an art or that cooking is the greatest of arts or apply that phrase to bridge or boxing or any other human field of effort. As for Tolstoy's dictum it is that of a polemist, a man who had narrowed himself to one line of ideas — and such people can say anything. There is the same insufficiency about the other quotations. An artist or a poet may be the medium of a great power but in his life he may be a very ordinary man or else a criminal like Villon or Cellini. All kinds go to make this rather queer terrestrial creation.

15 August 1933

Modern Art and Poetry

Not only are there no boundaries left in some arts (like poetry of the ultra-modern schools or painting) but no foundations and no Art either. I am referring to the modernist painters and to the extraordinary verbal jazz which is nowadays often put forward as poetry. . . .

Modern Art opines that beauty is functional! that is, whatever serves its function or serves a true purpose is artistic and beautiful — for instance, if a clerk produces a neat copy of an official letter without mistakes, the clerk and his copy are both of them works of art and beautiful!

March 1935

Unity of Idea and Design in the Arts

I would recommend that you send the architect Raymond to Hyderabad to observe the modernised Moghul style of some of the buildings. He could then make some improvements to his design: a big dome in the centre, for instance, and dome-like decorations in the corners.

Two quite different styles cannot be mixed together — it would make a horribly inartistic effect. A dome would be utterly out of place in the plan of this building. Unity of idea and design is the first requisite in architecture as in any other art.

Comparison of the Arts

Each Art Has Its Own Province

I fear I must disappoint you. I am *not* going to pass the Gods through a competitive examination and assign a highest place to one and lower places to others. What an idea! Each has his or her own province on the summits and what is the necessity of putting them in rivalry with each other? It is a sort of Judgment of Paris you want to impose on me? Well, but what became of Paris and Troy? You want me to give the crown or the apple to Music and enrage the Goddesses of Painting, Sculpture, Architecture, Embroidery, all the Nine Muses, so that they will kick at our publications and exhibitions and troop off to other places? We shall have to build in the future — what then shall we do if the Goddess of Architecture turns severely and says, “I am an inferior Power, am I? Go and ask your Nirod to build your house with his beloved music!”

Your test of precedence — universal appeal — is all wrong. I don’t know that it is true, in the first place. Some kind of sound called music appeals to everybody, but has really good music a universal appeal? And, speaking of arts, more people go to the theatre or read fiction than go to the opera or a concert. What becomes then of the superior universality of music, even in the cheapest sense of universality? Rudyard Kipling’s *Barrack Room Ballads* exercises a more universal appeal than was ever reached by Milton or Keats — we will say nothing of writers like Blake or Francis Thompson; a band on the pier at a seaside resort will please more people than a great piece of music with the orchestration conducted by Sir Thomas Beecham. In a world of gods it might be true that the highest made the most universal appeal but here in a world of beasts and men (you bring in the beasts — why not play to Bushy and try how she responds?) it

is usually the inferior things that have the more general if not quite universal appeal. On the other hand the opposite system you suggest (the tables turned upside down — the least universal and most difficult appeal makes the greatest art) would also have its dangers. At that rate we should have to concede that the cubist and abstract painters had reached the highest art possible, only rivalled by the up to date modernist poets of whom it has been said that their works are not at all either read or understood by the public, are read and understood only by the poet himself, and are read without being understood by his personal friends and admirers.

When you speak of direct appeal, you are perhaps touching something true. Technique does not come in — for although to have a complete and expert judgment or appreciation you must know the technique not only in music and painting where it is more difficult, but in poetry and architecture also, it is something else and not that kind of judgment of which you are speaking. It is perhaps true that music goes direct to the intuition and feeling with the least necessity of using the thinking mind with its strongly limiting conceptions as a self-imposed middleman, while painting and sculpture do need it and poetry still more. At that rate music would come first, architecture next, then sculpture and painting, poetry last. I am aware that Housman posits nonsense as the essence of pure poetry and considers its appeal to be quite direct — not to the soul but to somewhere about the stomach. But then there is hardly any pure poetry in this world and the little there is is still *mélangé* with at least a homeopathic dose of intellectual meaning. But again if I admit this thesis of excellence by directness, I shall be getting myself into dangerous waters. For modern painting has become either cubist or abstract and it claims to have got rid of mental representation and established in art the very method of music; it paints not the object but the truth behind the object by the use of pure line and colour and geometrical form which is the very basis of all forms or else by figures that are not representations but significances. For instance a modern painter wishing to make a portrait of you will now paint at the top a clock surrounded by three triangles,

below them a chaos of rhomboids and at the bottom two table castors to represent your feet and he will put underneath this powerful design, "Portrait of Nirod". Perhaps your soul will leap up in answer to its direct appeal and recognise at once the truth behind the object, behind your vanished physical self,— you will greet your psychic being or your Atman or at least your inner physical or vital being. Perhaps also you won't. Poetry also seems to be striving towards the same end by the same means — the getting away from mind into the depths of life or, as the profane might put it, arriving at truth and beauty through ugliness and unintelligibility. From that you will perhaps deduce that the attempt of painting and poetry to do what music alone can do easily and directly without these acrobatics is futile because it is contrary to their nature — which proves your thesis that music is the highest art because most direct in its appeal to the soul and the feelings. Maybe — or maybe not; as the Jains put it, *syād vā na syād vā*.

I have written so much, you will see, in order to say nothing — or at least to avoid your attempt at putting me in an embarrassing dilemma. Q.E.F.

6 January 1936

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I did not know what to make of your reply on art.

If you did know, it would mean I had committed myself, which was just what I did not want to do. Or shall we put it in this way "Each of the great arts has its own appeal and its own way of appeal and each in its own way is supreme above all others"? That ought to do.

7 January 1936

Music and Poetry

I do not know what to say on the subject you propose to me — the superiority of music to poetry,— for my appreciation of music is bodiless and inexpressible while about poetry I can write at ease and with an expert knowledge. But is it necessary to fix a scale of greatness between two fine arts when each has its own

greatness and can touch in its own way the extremes of aesthetic Ananda? Music, no doubt, goes nearest to the infinite and to the essence of things because it relies wholly on the ethereal vehicle, *śabda* (architecture by the by can do something of the same kind at the other extreme even in its imprisonment in mass); but painting and sculpture have their revenge by liberating visible form into ecstasy, while poetry though it cannot do with sound what music does, yet can make a many-stringed harmony, a sound-revelation winging the creation by the word and setting afloat vivid suggestions of form and colour,—that gives it in a very subtle kind the combined power of all the arts. Who shall decide between such claims or be a judge between these godheads?

26 April 1933

Appreciation of Music

On Music

Written words are pale and lifeless things when one has to express the feelings raised by superb music and seem hardly to mean anything — not being able to convey what is beyond word and mere mental form — that is, at least, what I have felt and why I always find it a little difficult to write anything about music.

20 March 1933

Musical Excellence and General Culture

I have not seen the remarks in question. I don't suppose all-round general culture has much to do with excelling in music. Music is a gift independent of any such thing and it can hardly be said that, given a musical gift in two people, the one with an all-round culture would go farther than the other in musical excellence. That would not be true in any of the arts. But something else was meant, perhaps, — that there is a certain turn or element in the excellence which an all-round culture makes possible? It is only in that sense that it could be true. Shakespeare's poetry for instance is that of a man with a vivid and many-sided response to life; it gives the impression of a multifarious knowledge of things but it was a knowledge picked up from life as he went; Milton's gets a certain colour from his studies and learning; in neither case is the genius or the excellence of the poetry due to culture, but there is a certain turn or colouring in Milton which would have not been there otherwise and is not there in Shakespeare. It does not give any superiority in poetic excellence to one over the other.

12 November 1936

Section Two
On the Visual Arts

General Remarks on the Visual Arts

Art and Nature

There is no incompatibility between the inspiration from within and the dependence on Nature. The essence of the inspiration always comes from within but the forms of expression are based on Nature though developed and modified by the selective or interpretative sight of the artist. 6 September 1933

6 September 1933

A painter can certainly bring home the aspects of the sea and the beauty of Nature, but he does it as an artist, in the way of Art. He does it by representation and suggestion, not by mere reproduction of the object. The question of Art or Nature being more beautiful therefore does not arise. 16 March 1936

16 March 1936

Art cannot give what Nature gives; it gives something else.

20 June 1934

On Nandalal Bose's Ideas on Art

Nandalal Bose says: "In art three points are essential. We may say that the top point of the triangle is inspiration and the two points of the base are the study of nature and the study of tradition."

Nandalal's saying is true; but the three have to be combined and developed and harmonised in their combination to a sufficient degree before they bear the fruit of finished or great art.

10 January 1936

In a letter to me, Nandalal wrote of love as “the only thing for Art”.

It is a way of speaking, I suppose, in accordance with his own experience. It is the creative Force which he calls Love—others might call it by another name because they see it in another aspect.

4 November 1933

Inspiration and the Vital

For the last two or three days I have been getting inspirations for painting. But I have a question about that. Do these inspirations come from the vital world? Is this harmful?

It is of course vital. All art comes through the vital. But what manifests through it can only be said when one sees what it produces.

7 November 1933

Form and Colour

In order to get a significance through a picture there must be a definite form—form and colour are the essentials of painting and neither by itself is enough. Here [*in a painting sent to Sri Aurobindo*] there is colour but no form—or only a shapeless shape—as if you were trying to get rid of form and paint only forces or indefinite suggestions. But that is contrary to an art which depends on colour, line and design.

Cinema

I see no objection to your going for two or three days to Madras for this purpose [*to make a recording*]. I don't suppose you will paint the town red and the Cinema sounds harmless, though if the newspaper pictures are any guide, it is likely to be disappointing; I have yet to see anything that really suggested an artistic piece.

28 November 1936

Problems of the Painter

Nature and the Human Figure

The Mother had told you once that in your human figures you did not seem to be in contact with the right Influence and you had said that you felt the contact with an eternal Beauty in Nature but had not the same contact with regard to the human figure. It will be better then, now that you are practising the Yoga and to be in contact with right Influences only is very important, to avoid dealing with the human face and figure at present. In Yoga what may seem to the mind a detail may yet open the door to things that have strong effects on the consciousness, disturb its harmony or interfere with the sources of inspiration, vision and experience.

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Your relation with Nature has been much more psychic than your relation with human beings. You must have met the latter mainly on the vital plane and not come in close contact with the eternal Beauty behind. In Nature you have felt the touch of the eternal and infinite and entered therefore into a truer relation with her.

The influence that comes in the human figure is a force of disharmony and ugliness—a manifestation of ignorance in form.

13 January 1934

Portrait Painting

I would very much like to have instructions from the Mother on portrait painting: drawing, developing the features, finishing the details and bringing out the personality of the sitter.

For that each one must find his own technique. Only for you what you must find is a way to express the psychic instead of the vital. At present it is the vital you bring out. The psychic is the eternal character, the vital brings out only transient movements.

15 July 1935

*

The failure to bring out the personality is not at all due to any defect in the technique. With any technique the personality can be brought out. But to get it one must come out from one's own personality, one's ego with its characteristic and limited look on things, and identify oneself with the person of the sitter—that is how one seizes it and can naturally bring it out in the painting.

14 December 1936

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The portrait does not seem to us to be successful. In the externals the long projection of the nose over the lips and the eyes close together modify the type of the face and give it another character. It is not a question of resemblance or external appearance, but the basis of character is affected. This however would not be so much of an objection—but for the inner expression as it comes out through the mouth and eyes. There is something introduced here from a vital world—undivine—which is not part of the Mother's vital. It has come in through that Influence of which the Mother spoke—it throws its own shadow and so changes the inner vision of the thing to be done, the face to be portrayed. There is no such element in your paintings of Nature, which catch very finely the inner truth of what you paint.

It was not with this portrait that we connected what I wrote about the wrong Influence that brought the obstruction and depression.

21 September 1933

Drawing from Nature

I have drawn four faces from my imagination, each with a different character and personality.

Drawing from imagination is useless.

I have the idea of drawing the pictures of Nandalal Bose.

You can copy Nandalal — but drawing from Nature is best.

23 April 1933

*

You said that studies of human figures should be done from nature. I would like to ask if this could be done other ways as well — from photographs and paintings, for instance.

They must be done from nature. It is impossible to do it properly from photographs and paintings.

6 September 1935

Mastery of Drawing

May I enlarge your photograph? This will help me in drawing the human figure.

You can try by copying human figures from drawings, not photographs.

12 March 1933

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I don't think I have succeeded in bringing out the resemblance in this sketch.

To get the resemblance, one must concentrate so much as to be identified with what you see — then it comes.

22 June 1933

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Again that clumsiness in the drawing. It is due to want of practice, I suppose.

Want of practice and some tamas of the body. It is when the consciousness comes in the body that the skill comes — when you shake off the tamas, there is no clumsiness in you.

17 May 1934

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An Artist's Temperament

I was surprised at Krishnalal's refusal to do the fresco.

These things are matters of temperament. It is not a question of mastery of technique only as with a craftsman. A craftsman can go on working regularly always for any amount of time. An artist is not the same. He depends on his temperament (whether he is poet, painter or sculptor) and its response to a certain flow of force. If anything in it gets dull or jaded or does not respond, he ceases working — or if anything else goes wrong or is not responsive in him. Copy or original makes no difference to his method — he brings the same temperamental attitude to both. Of course there are artists whose temperament is so buoyant that they keep the flow at command almost (like Harin with his poems), painting or working every day for hours together. Others cannot — they work sometimes more, sometimes less — sometimes after long intervals etc.

27 September 1934

Uncreative Periods

I have noticed that after doing some pictures, there comes a period when I do not feel like doing any painting, there is no inspiration.

It is very common with artists, poets and all creators. The usual reason is that the vital gets fatigued and needs some time to recuperate itself and get back the creative effort.

During such periods I have to deal with the impulses of the vital nature. Is it because of this that I cannot concentrate on painting?

It is more likely that the vital, fatigued of the effort, begins to have movements of other kinds which you have then to control.

I feel that I should go to deeper and higher sources of inspiration. Am I correct in having this feeling?

It is correct. There is a movement to get at deeper and higher sources.

18 March 1935

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Sometimes something comes in and my inspiration for writing and painting fails. What is this?

It is an obstruction to the natural action of the mind; that happens often enough. People who do creative work, writing or painting, are often stopped like that for a time — they do not feel the obstruction, only the result which they call a failure of inspiration.

Painting in the Ashram

A General Remark

What you write about the expression of beauty through painting and the limitations of the work as yet done here, is quite accurate. The painters here have capacity and disposition, but as yet the work done ranks more as studies and sketches, some well done, some less well, than as great or finished art. What they need is not to be easily satisfied because they have put their ideas or imaginations in colour or because they have done some good work, but always to see what has not been yet achieved and train vision and execution-power till they have reached a truly high power of themselves.

10 January 1936

On Some Artists of the Ashram

Anilkumar is still learning; he is very clever and ingenious, loves painting and works hard at it and recently he has been making remarkable progress in technique.

Nishikanta has already his own developed technique and a certain originality of vision — two things which must be there before a man can take rank as a painter. There are on the other hand certain defects and limitations. Power he has but not as yet any consummate harmony.

These observations of course are private and for you only. Mother does not want to pass any public judgment. Let each grow in his own way and to his own possible stature — with as little rivalry or vainglory as may be.

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It is true that Romen has an instinctive artistic sense but also he has spent much time in painting and given much attention to it,

so he has progressed fast. He has also great self-confidence.

The artistic sense can be had by training—the capacity you have, but it has to be brought out more and more and disciplined by study and practice. By development you will get self-confidence.

7 November 1935

The Need of Artistic Training

You can write to him that the Mother has seen his pictures. If he wants seriously to take up painting, it can't be done out of his own mind without help of competent teachers. He would have to undergo a complete and long training so as to train his eye as well as his hand; his eye to see things as they appear to the artistic vision and his hand to execute that vision with a sure technique. Technique cannot be acquired without a sound training. Also he must learn to know all that is necessary about the human body and its details; otherwise he will not be able to build faultlessly a human face or figure. For instance in his picture of the flowers he has put a hand in which the thumb is in an impossible position and the fingers begin at the same level as the thumb and not far below. In art a taste for the art or even a faculty for it is not sufficient; there is necessary also a training.

8 September 1932

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Do you think that I shall be able to learn painting?

You can learn on condition you study and take pains. Painting is not like poetry which you can develop by the innate faculty and a growing inspiration with just a little knowledge of metrical technique. In painting you have to learn carefully any number of things—learn not by theory only but by practice with a good teacher, e.g. firm line and strong drawing, perspective, how to mix colours, how to use the right colours and what colours can go together and so on—all that goes by the name of technique. If you do not study that, no amount of inspiration will make you a good painter. You were progressing very well, but you must

learn these things carefully and you must take more pains about details.

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That is a great error of the human vital — to want compliments for their own sake and to be depressed by their absence and imagine that it means there is no capacity. In this world one starts with ignorance and imperfection in whatever one does — one has to find out one's mistakes and to learn, one has to commit errors and find out by correcting them the right way to do things. Nobody in the world has ever escaped from this law. So what one has to expect from others is not compliments all the time, but praise of what is right or well done and criticism of errors and mistakes. The more one can bear criticism and see one's mistakes, the more likely one is to arrive at the fullness of one's capacity. Especially when one is very young — before the age of maturity — one cannot easily do perfect work. What is called the juvenile work of poets and painters — work done in their early years — is always imperfect, it is a promise and has qualities — but the real perfection and full use of their powers comes afterwards. They themselves know that very well, but they go on writing or painting because they know also that by doing so they will develop their powers.

As for comparison with others, one ought not to do that. Each one has his own lesson to learn, his own work to do and he must concern himself with that, not with the superior or inferior progress of others in comparison with himself. If he is behind today, he can be in full capacity hereafter and it is for that future perfection of his powers that he must labour. You are young and have everything yet to learn — your capacities are yet only in bud, you must wait and work for them to be in full bloom — and you must not mind if it takes months and years even to arrive at something satisfying and perfect. It will come in its proper time, and the work you do now is always a step towards it.

But learn to welcome criticism and the pointing out of imperfections — the more you do so, the more rapidly you will advance.

1933

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If you work hard and patiently you can surely learn [*painting*] — but you must realise that you are very young and it takes years before an artist can learn to produce something really perfect.

Wanting to Learn

The difficulty with him [*a young painter of the Ashram*] is that he does not want to learn — it must all come by inspiration, as if such a thing were possible in things in which knowledge of technique and careful and long assiduous practice are needed, as in art and music. Besides he cannot bear to be criticised and [to have] his mistakes shown to him. All the talent in the world will not serve, if he does not change in these two things.

11 June 1934

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Someone who is learning to paint or play music or write and does not like to have his mistakes pointed out by those who already know — how is he to learn at all or reach any perfection of technique?

12 June 1934

Section Three

Beauty and Its Appreciation

General Remarks on Beauty

Beauty

Beauty is the way in which the physical expresses the Divine—but the principle and law of Beauty is something inward and spiritual which expresses itself through the form.

23 August 1933

*

What is the meaning of Supramental Beauty? Is it the perception of the Divine as the All-Beautiful and All-Delight?

No, that you can get on any plane, and it becomes easy as soon as one is in contact with the higher Mind. Beauty is the special divine Manifestation in the physical as Truth is in the mind, Love in the heart, Power in the vital. Supramental beauty is the highest divine beauty manifesting in Matter. 19 February 1934

Supramental Action and Beauty

Is the work of supermind direct, as one sees in the lower grades of creation?

Yes—supermind action is direct, spontaneous and automatic like that of inframental Nature—the difference is that it is perfectly conscious. As there is no disagreement or strife within itself, it produces a perfect harmony and beauty.

19 September 1933

Art, Beauty and Ananda

Art is a thing of beauty and beauty and Ananda are closely connected—they go together. If the Ananda is there, then the

beauty comes out more easily—if not, it has to struggle out painfully and slowly. That is quite natural. 14 December 1936

*

Beauty is Ananda taking form—but the form need not be a physical shape. One speaks of a beautiful thought, a beautiful act, a beautiful soul. What we speak of as beauty is Ananda in manifestation; beyond manifestation beauty loses itself in Ananda or, you may say, beauty and Ananda become indistinguishably one.

14 March 1933

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Your poem expresses very beautifully an aspect of beauty as it is circumstanced in this world. The lines of Keats also give one aspect only which it tries to generalise. In fact, Beauty is Ananda thrown into form—if it casts a shadow of pain, it is because the Divine Bliss which we mean by Ananda is watered down in the dullness of terrestrial consciousness into mere joy or pleasure and also because even that does not last for long and can easily have its opposite as a companion or a reaction. But if the consciousness of earth could be so deepened and strengthened and made so intensively receptive as not only to feel but hold the true Ananda, then the lines of Keats would be altogether true. But for that it would have to acquire first a complete liberation and an abiding peace.

16 February 1935

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Beauty is not the same as delight, but like Love it is an expression, a form of Ananda,—created by Ananda and composed of Ananda, it conveys to the mind that delight of which it is made. Aesthetically, the delight takes the appearance of Rasa and the enjoyment of this Rasa is the mind's and the vital's reaction to the perception of beauty. The spiritual realisation has a sight, a perception, a feeling which is not that of the mind and vital;—it passes beyond the aesthetic limit, sees the universal beauty, sees behind the object what the eye cannot see, feels what the emotion of the heart cannot feel and passes beyond Rasa and

Bhoga to pure Ananda — a thing more deep, intense, rapturous than any mental or vital or any physical rasa reaction can be. It sees the One everywhere, the Divine everywhere, the Beloved everywhere, the original bliss of existence everywhere, and all these can create an inexpressible Ananda of beauty — the beauty of the One, the beauty of the Divine, the beauty of the Beloved, the beauty of the eternal Existence in things. It can see also the beauty of forms and objects, but with a seeing other than the mind's, other than that of a limited physical vision — what was not beautiful to the eye becomes beautiful, what was beautiful to the eye wears now a greater, marvellous and ineffable beauty. The spiritual realisation can bring the vision and the rapture of the All-Beautiful everywhere.

26 October 1935

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The word “expression” [*in the first sentence of the preceding letter*] means only something that is manifested by the Ananda and of which Ananda is the essence. Love and Beauty are powers of Ananda as Light and Knowledge are of Consciousness. Force is inherent in Consciousness and may be called part of the Divine Essence. Ananda is always there even when Sachchidananda takes on an impersonal aspect or appears as the sole essential Existence; but Love needs a Lover and Beloved, Beauty needs a manifestation to show itself. So in the same way Consciousness is always there, but Knowledge needs a manifestation to be active, there must be a Knower and a Known. That is why the distinction is made between Ananda which is of the essence and Beauty which is a power or expression of Ananda in manifestation. These are of course philosophical distinctions necessary for the mind to think about the world and the Divine.

4 November 1935

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You say [*in the letter of 26 October 1935, pp. 700–701*], “Aesthetically, the delight takes the appearance of Rasa and the enjoyment of this Rasa is the mind's and the vital's reaction to the perception of beauty.” I find it hard to understand how beauty, Rasa and delight are connected with one another.

That can hardly be realised except by experience of Ananda. Ananda is not ordinary mental or vital delight in things. Rasa is the mind's understanding of beauty and pleasure in it accompanied usually by the vital's enjoyment of it (bhoga). Mental pleasure or vital enjoyment are not Ananda, but only derivations from the concealed universal Ananda of the Spirit in things.

7 November 1935

Universal Beauty and Ananda

There is a certain consciousness in which all things become full of beauty and Ananda — what is painful or ugly becomes an outward play, and becomes suffused with the beauty and Ananda behind. It is specially the Overmind consciousness of things — although it can be felt from time to time on the other planes also. A great equality and the view of the Divine everywhere is necessary for this to come fully.

10 March 1934

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As you say, there is a truth behind Tagore's statement.¹ There is such a thing as a universal Ananda and a universal beauty and the vision of it comes from an intensity of sight which sees what is hidden and more than the form — it is a sort of *viśvarasa* such as the Universal Spirit may have had in creating things. To this intensity of sight a thing that is ugly becomes beautiful by its fitness for expressing the significance, the guna, the rasa which it was meant to embody. But I doubt how far one can make an aesthetic canon upon this foundation. It is so far true that an artist can out of a thing that is ugly, repellent, distorted create a form of aesthetic power, intensity, revelatory force. The murder of Duncan is certainly not an act of beauty, but Shakespeare can use it to make a great artistic masterpiece. But we cannot go so far as to say that the intensity of an ugly thing makes it beautiful. It is the principle of a certain kind of modern caricature to make a face intensely ugly so as to bring out some side of the character more

¹ It is not known to what "statement" Sri Aurobindo is referring here. — Ed.

intensely by a hideous exaggeration of lines. In doing that it may be successful, but the intensity of the ugliness it creates does not make the caricature a thing of beauty; it serves its purpose, that is all. So too ugliness in painting must remain ugly, even if it gets out of itself a sense of vital force or expressiveness which makes it preferable in the eyes of some to real beauty. All that hits you in the midriff violently and gives you a sense of intense living is not necessarily a work of art or a thing of beauty. I am answering of course on the lines of your letter. I do not know what Tagore had precisely in view in thus defining beauty. 3 November 1936

Beauty and Truth

Is it not true that Beauty and Truth are always one — wherever there is Beauty there is Truth too?

In beauty there is the truth of beauty. What do you mean by Truth? There are truths of various kinds and they are not all beautiful. 10 September 1933

The Good and the Beautiful

In one of his recent essays, Rabindranath Tagore says that goodness and beauty are so intimately correlated that they are always found together. "The good is necessarily beautiful," he says, and "Beauty is the picture of the good; goodness is the reality behind beauty."

I can't say that I understand these epigrammatic sentences. What is meant by good? what is meant by beauty? The divine Good is no doubt necessarily beautiful, because on a higher plane good and beauty and all else that is divine in origin meet, coalesce, harmonise. But what men call good is often ugly or drab or unattractive. Human beauty is not always the picture of the good, it is sometimes the mask of evil — the reality behind that mask is not always goodness. These things are obvious, but probably Rabindranath meant good and beauty in their higher aspects or their essence. 9 September 1937

Experience of Beauty

In a recent poem, Harin makes the following observation on Beauty:

Beauty is not an attitude of sense
Nor an inherent something everywhere,
But keen reality of experience
Of which even beauty is all unaware,
Adding to it a living truth; intense
And ever living, that were else, not there.

How far is it correct to say that Beauty has no objective existence in itself and that it consists only of the subjective experience of the observer?

All things are creations of the Universal Consciousness, Beauty also. The “experience” of the individual is his response or his awakening to the beauty which the Universal Consciousness has placed in things; that beauty is not created by the individual consciousness. The philosophy of these lines is not at all clear. It says that the experience of beauty is a living truth added to beauty, a truth of which beauty is unaware. But if beauty is only the experience itself, then the experience constitutes beauty, it does not add anything to beauty; for such addition would only be possible if beauty already existed in itself apart from the experience. What is meant by saying that beauty is unaware of the experience which creates it? The passage makes sense only if we suppose it to mean that beauty is a “reality” already existing apart from the experience, but unconscious of itself and the consciousness of experience is therefore a living truth added to the unconscious reality, something which brings into it consciousness and life.

6 January 1937

Appreciation of Beauty

The Right Way of Appreciating Beauty

That is the right consciousness, not to desire or to be attached to the possession of anything for oneself, but to take the universal beauty etc. for a spiritual selfless Ananda. 6 November 1933

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There is nothing harmful in the thing [*aspiration for beauty*] itself — on the contrary to awake to the universal beauty and refinement of the Mahalakshmi force is good. It is not an expression of greed or lust — only into these things a perversion can always come if one allows it, as into the Mahakali experience there may come rajasic anger and violence, so here there may come vital passion for possession and enjoyment. One must look at the beauty as the artist does without desire of possession or vital enjoyment of the lower kind. 8 October 1933

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Is it possible to get rid of vital impurities without getting rid of vital enjoyment?

How can that be done? The enjoyment you speak of is vital-physical, while beauty has to be enjoyed with the aesthetic sense — either human or divinised. 6 April 1933

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It is usually a good rule for other inward things beside the appreciation of the beauty of Nature — to keep it for oneself or else to share it only with those who have the same sense or the same experience. 15 March 1934

Beauty in Women

In regard to beauty in women, is there something inherent in the body that we call beautiful, a well-formed shape, physiognomy, harmony of movements, etc. It seems to most men it is colour + skin + physiognomy. But there are some women who do not have these in the body and yet are attractive. Is it something in their vital that gives them this beauty?

It is something vital in some cases, something psychic in others that gives a beauty which appears in the body but is not beauty of shape, colour or texture.

Often the vital and mental character of persons who have physical beauty is not good, sometimes it is even repulsive. Many would refuse to recognise it as beautiful.

If it is vital in its origin, it need not come from beauty of mind or character; it is something in the life-force which may go with a good character but also with a bad one.

Indians hardly appreciate the beauty of the Chinese or Japanese; like Europeans, they cannot appreciate beauty in Negroes. Many Asiatics could not appreciate the beauty of European models or actresses, who are so lacking in modesty according to their conceptions.

Modesty is not part of physical beauty, that is a mental-vital element. As for physical beauty, different races have different conceptions. Indians and Europeans like curves, Chinese detest them in a woman.

An intellectual would find beauty only in an intellectual woman; an emotional person would call a woman beautiful only if she has refined tender feelings; for a Gandhian a woman would be beautiful only if she spins eight hours a day or works for Harijans.

That has nothing to do with beauty in the ordinary sense as it is beauty of intellect or beauty of character or beauty of spinning and Harijanising.

Perhaps at a certain stage of psychic development one could look at human beauty as one looks at beauty in cats or dogs — recognising the beauty without any attraction.

One can recognise and feel without any desire of possession or sexual feeling etc. That is how the artists look at beauty—they delight in it for its own sake.

Supposing people developed the faculty of seeing the layers below the skin, would not their whole conception of beauty crumble down?

Yes, probably, unless the mind reconstructed a new idea of it.

Does not the conception of beauty differ according to race, temperament and level of consciousness?

Yes.

Are not attractiveness and beauty different?

Yes.

Is there nothing constant called “beauty”?

There are two kinds of beauty. There is that universal beauty which is seen by the inner eye, heard by the inner ear etc.—but the individual consciousness responds to some forms, not to others, according to its own mental, vital and physical reactions. There is also the aesthetic beauty which depends on a particular standard of harmony, but different race or individual consciousnesses form different standards of aesthetic harmony.

18 October 1935

Physical Beauty and Sex-Sensation

Why should the pure sense of beauty have been so distorted by human beings as to be turned into desire for touch or sex?

It is part of the general degradation which things divine have

been subjected to in the evolution out of the material Inconscience under the pressure of the Powers of the Ignorance.

Are there people who have not been affected by this vital impurity and who appreciate beauty in a subtle aesthetic way only?

Yes, certainly. Artists who have trained their mind to a purely aesthetic look at beauty and beautiful things — for one instance. There are many others also, who have a sufficiently developed refinement of the aesthetic sense not to associate it with the crude vital wish for possession, enjoyment or sensual contact.

6 April 1933

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The aesthetic and impersonal vision of things can develop into the sight of the Divine Beauty everywhere which is in its nature entirely pure.

19 April 1933

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What is the difference between the artistic look and the vital look?

In the artistic look there is only the perception of beauty and the joy of it because it exists and one has seen and felt it. There is no desire to possess or enjoy in the vital way.

4 August 1933

Section Four

Literature, Art, Music and the Practice of Yoga

Literature and Yoga

Poetry and Sadhana

Can one gain as much profit (I mean spiritually) from writing poems, etc. as from devoting one's time to sadhana — meditation, etc. In other words, can literary activity be taken as part of one's sadhana?

Any activity can be taken as part of the sadhana if it is offered to the Divine or done with the consciousness or faith that it is done by the Divine Power. That is the important point.

29 March 1934

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It is obvious that poetry cannot be a substitute for sadhana; it can be an accompaniment only. If there is a feeling (of devotion, surrender etc.), it can express and confirm it; if there is an experience, it can express and strengthen the force of experience. As reading of books like the Upanishads or Gita or singing of devotional songs can help, especially at one stage or another, so this can help also. Also it opens a passage between the exterior consciousness and the inner mind or vital. But if one stops at that, then nothing much is gained. Sadhana must be the main thing and sadhana means the purification of the nature, the consecration of the being, the opening of the psychic and the inner mind and vital, the contact and presence of the Divine, the realisation of the Divine in all things, surrender, devotion, the widening of the consciousness into the cosmic Consciousness, the Self one in all, the psychic and the spiritual transformation of the nature. If these things are neglected and only poetry and mental development and social contacts occupy all the time, then that is not sadhana. Also the poetry must be written in the true spirit, not for fame or self-satisfaction, but as a means of contact

with the Divine through aspiration or of the expression of one's own inner being, as it was written formerly by those who left behind them so much devotional and spiritual poetry in India; it does not help if it is written only in the spirit of the Western artist or *littérateur*. Even works or meditation cannot succeed unless they are done in the right spirit of consecration and spiritual aspiration gathering up the whole being and dominating all else. It is the lack of this gathering up of the whole life and nature and turning it towards the one aim, which is the defect in so many here, that lowers the atmosphere and stands in the way of what is being done by myself and the Mother. 19 May 1938

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What I wrote to you about poetry was an entirely general answer to the question of the relation of poetry to sadhana. I wrote how poetry could be part of sadhana and under what conditions, what were its limitations and also that it could not be a substitute for sadhana. I made no personal application; I have not said or suggested anywhere that the ideas or bhakti expressed in your poetry were humbug or hypocrisy and I have not said or suggested anywhere that all our labour on you had been wasted and gone for nothing. These absurd ideas, like all the rest, are imaginations and inventions of the vital ego foisted by it on your mind in order to justify its pressure on you to leave Pondicherry and the Yoga.

I understood from what you had written and said before that you wanted to concentrate altogether on the sadhana — to do what I call “the gathering up of the *whole* life and nature and turning it towards the one aim”, and I wrote that the lack of this was the defect of the majority of the sadhaks here. What I wrote implied therefore an approval of your resolution. No doubt, it implied also that you had not yet made this total gathering up and turning; if you had, there would have been no need of this resolution of yours and no room for it. If your whole life and every part of your being has already been gathered up and entirely consecrated to the Divine, then you are on the perfect way and there is obviously no need of any change in your way

of life or your sadhana. But this can be said of very few in the Ashram. But that does not mean that all the people in the Ashram except a few are insincere and that all our work on them has been thrown away. What it means is that for our work to be fully done, for the decisive realisations and the complete inner and outer change, the entire gathering up and turning of the whole life and nature is indispensable and that if it is only partially done, it is a defect in the sadhana and stands in the way of a full working and decisive and total change of the consciousness. If your whole vital nature and all the movements of your outer life had been already gathered up and turned towards the Divine alone without any other aim or interest, how is it that this vital revolt came about? And how is it that it whirls furiously around such things as the refusal of an easy chair or an almirah or of a special room which the Mother has reserved for another purpose? Or around the gossip of sadhaks and what this one may have said or that one may have said or the attitude of sadhaks towards you? It is evident that the part of your vital which was concerned with these outward things or with the outward contacts with others was not yet turned solely towards the one aim, that it was still interested and affected by these things which have nothing to do with the realisation of the Divine or with Yoga.

It is quite true that when you first came, the Mother was not in favour of your staying and taking up the Yoga here, for you had then a very strong obscurity and impurity in your vital nature and this could easily make the Yoga too difficult for you and create serious trouble. When however you persisted in staying, we gave you your opportunity as we had done in similar cases before. For it is always possible for the psychic being to prevail, if it is determined to do so, over the difficulties of the vital nature, even though it may mean severe inner struggles for a time. This concession was justified by certain results; you opened in a remarkable way into the inner being by the poetic aspiration and you had experiences which strengthened the psychic call and created a psychic and mental basis for your sadhana. Even you were able to throw out from the vital the sexual obsession which

had been one of the chief difficulties there.¹

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It won't do to put excessive and sweeping constructions on what I write, otherwise it is easy to misunderstand its real significance. I said that there was no reason why poetry of a spiritual character (not any poetry like Verlaine's or Swinburne's or Baudelaire's) should bring *no realisation at all*. This did not mean that poetry was a major means of realisation of the Divine. I did not say that it would lead us to the Divine or that anyone had achieved the Divine through poetry or that poetry by itself can lead us straight into the sanctuary. Obviously if such exaggerations are put into my words, they become absurd and untenable.

My statement is perfectly clear and there is nothing in it against reason or common sense. The Word has power — even the ordinary written word has a power. If it is an inspired word it has still more power. What kind of power or power for what depends on the nature of the inspiration and the theme and the part of the being it touches. If it is the Word itself, — as in certain utterances of the great Scriptures — Veda, Upanishads, Gita, — it may well have a power to awaken a spiritual impulse, an uplifting, even certain kinds of realisation. To say that it cannot contradict spiritual experience.

The Vedic poets regarded their poetry as *mantras*, they were the vehicles of their own realisations and could become vehicles of realisation for others. Naturally, these mostly would be illuminations, not the settled and permanent realisation that is the goal of Yoga — but they could be steps on the way or at least lights on the way. Many have such illuminations, even initial realisations while meditating on verses of the Upanishads or the Gita. Anything that carries the Word, the Light in it, spoken or written, can light this fire within, open a sky, as it were, bring the effective vision of which the Word is the body. In all ages spiritual seekers have expressed their aspirations or their experiences in poetry or inspired language and it has helped themselves and

¹ Sri Aurobindo broke off here. He did not send this incomplete letter in this form. It is reproduced from his manuscripts. — Ed.

others. Therefore there is nothing absurd in my assigning to such poetry a spiritual or psychic value and effectiveness to poetry of a psychic or spiritual character.

24 December 1934

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I have always told you that you ought not to stop your poetry and similar activities. It is a mistake to do so out of asceticism or with the idea of *tapasyā*. One can stop these things when they drop of themselves, because one is in full experience and so interested in one's inner life that one has no energy to spare for the rest. Even then, there is no rule for giving up; for there is no reason why the poetry, etc., should not be a part of sadhana. The love of applause, of fame, the ego-feeling have to be given up, but that can be done without giving up the activity itself.

16 April 1935

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It is perfectly true that all human greatness and fame and achievement are nothing before the greatness of the Infinite and Eternal. There are two possible deductions from that, first, that all human action has to be renounced and one should go into a cave; the other is that one should grow out of ego so that the activities of the nature may become one day consciously an action of the Infinite and Eternal. But it does not follow that one must or can grow out of ego and the vital absorption at once and, if one does not, that proves incapacity for Yoga. I myself never gave up poetry or other creative human activities out of *tapasyā*; they fell into a subordinate position because the inner life became stronger and stronger slowly: nor did I really drop them, only I had so heavy a work laid upon me that I could not find time to go on. But it took me years and years to get the ego out of them or the vital absorption, but I never heard anybody say and it never occurred to me that that was a proof that I was not born for the Yoga. . . .

As to the born Yogi what I said was that there was a born Yogi in you, and I very explicitly based it on the personality that showed itself in your earlier experiences in a vivid way which no

one accustomed to the things of Yoga or having any knowledge about them could fail to recognise. But I did not mean that there was nothing in you which was not "born Yogic". Everyone has many personalities in him and many of them are not Yogic at all in their propensities. But if one has the will to Yoga, the born Yogi prevails as soon as he gets a chance of manifesting himself through the crust of the mind and vital nature. Only, very often that takes time. One must be prepared to give the time.

16 April 1935

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Of course when you are writing poems or composing you are in contact with your inner being, that is why you feel so different then. The whole art of Yoga is to get that contact and get from it into the inner being itself, for so one can enter directly into and remain in all that is great and luminous and beautiful. Then one can try to establish them in this troublesome and defective outer shell of oneself and in the outer world also. 10 November 1934

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Literature and art are or can be first introductions to the inner being — the inner mind and vital; for it is from there that they come. And if one writes poems of bhakti, poems of divine seeking etc., or creates music of that kind, it means that there is a bhakta or seeker inside who is supporting himself by that self-expression. There is also the point of view behind Lele's answer to me when I told him that I wanted to do Yoga but for work, for action, not for Sannyasa and Nirvana, — but after years of spiritual effort I had failed to find the way and it was for that I had asked to meet him. His first answer was, "It should be easy for you as you are a poet." But it was not from any point of view like that that Nirod put his question and it was not from that point of view that I gave my answer. It was about some special character-making virtue that he seemed to attribute to literature.

18 November 1936

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I don't understand why Lele told you that because you are a poet, sadhana will be easy to you through poetry.

Because I told him I wanted to do Yoga in order to get a new inner Yogic consciousness for life and action, not for leaving life. So he said that. A poet writes from an inner source, not from the external mind, he is moved by inspiration to write, i.e. he writes what a greater Power writes through him. So the Yogi karmachari has to act from an inner source, to derive his thoughts and movements from that, to be inspired and impelled by a greater Power which acts through him. He never said that sadhana will be easy for me through poetry. Where is "through poetry" phrase? Poetry can be done as a part of sadhana and help the sadhana—but sadhana "through" poetry is a quite different matter.

23 May 1938

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If poetic progress meant a progress in the whole range of Yoga, Nishikanta would be a great Yogi by this time. The opening in poetry or any other part helps to prepare the general opening when it is done under the pressure of Yoga, but it is at first something special, like the opening of the subtle vision or subtle senses. It is the opening of a special capacity in the inner being.

8 August 1936

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I do not think you need be anxious about the poetry; the power is sure to re-express itself as soon as you are ready for a progress. It has probably stopped working temporarily because the pressure is now for the inner self-creation more than for the outer expression—I am speaking, of course, of your case in particular. The expression in poetry and other forms must be, for the Yогin, a flowing out from a growing self within and not merely a mental creation or an aesthetic pleasure. Like that the inner self grows and the poetic power will grow with it.

9 December 1931

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What you say about the spontaneous development of the capacity in the metre after a silent and inactive incubation of over two years, is quite true. But it is not amazing; it often happens and is perfectly natural to those who know the laws of the being by observation and experience. In the same way one suddenly finds oneself knowing more of a language or a subject after returning to it subsequent to a short interim without study, problems which had been abandoned as unsolvable solving themselves spontaneously and easily after sleep or when they are taken up again; knowledge or ideas coming up from within without reading or learning or hearing from others. Sudden efflorescences of capacity, intuitions, wellings up of all sorts of things point to the same inner power or inner working. It is what we mean when we speak of the word, knowledge or activity coming out of the silence, of a working behind the veil of which the outer mind is unconscious but which one day bears its results, of the inner manifesting itself in the outer. It makes at once true and practical what sounds only a theory to the uninitiated,—the strong distinction made by us between the inner being and the outer consciousness. It is how also unexpected Yogic capacity reveals itself, sometimes no doubt as a result of long and apparently fruitless effort, sometimes as a spontaneous outflowering of what was concealed there all the time or else as a response to a call which had been made but at the time and for long seemed to be without an answer.

22 February 1935

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I like very much both the feeling and the form of your poem. Of course when you are writing poems or composing you are in contact with your inner being, that is why you feel so different then. The whole art of Yoga is to get that contact and get from it into the inner being itself, for so one can enter directly into and remain in all that is great and luminous and beautiful. Then one can try to establish them in this troublesome and defective outer shell of oneself and in the outer world also. 20 November 1934

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This poetry, even if it does not lead to any realisation,—though there is no reason why it should not, since it is not mundane,—is yet a link with the inner being and expresses its ideal. That is its value for the sadhana.

25 December 1934

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The use of your writing is to keep you in touch with the inner source of inspiration and intuition, so as to wear thin the crude external crust in the consciousness and encourage the growth of the inner being.

24 July 1938

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What do you wish me to be, an artist, a literary man, or a poet?

A sadhak — all these things can be included in sadhana.

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Why is my mind so wretchedly limited, my soul such a feeble flame?

It is not the question, for this is not a question of personal capacity but of the development of the receptivity and for that the sole thing necessary is an entire or at least a dominant will to receive. What you call your mind and your soul are only a small surface part of you, not your whole being. Personal capacity belongs to the temporary surface personality which you have put forward in this life and which is mutable, is already changing and can change much farther — e.g. the poems you are writing are certainly beyond what was your original capacity — they belong to a range of experience to the Word of which you have opened by a development beyond your old mental self — a farther development beyond not only your old mental self but also your old vital self is needed to get the concrete realisation of that range of experience.

What is standing in the way is something that is still attached to the limitations of the old personality and hesitates to take the plunge because by doing so it may lose these cherished

limitations. It stands back in apprehension from the plunge because it is afraid of being taken out of its depths—but unless one is taken out of the very shallow depth of this small part of the self, how can one get into the Infinite at all? Furthermore, there is no real danger in finding oneself in the Infinite, it is a place of greater safety and greater riches, not less; but this something in you does not like the prospect because it has to merge itself into a larger self-existence. You asked the Mother to press on you the lighting of the fire within and she has been doing so, but this is standing back with the feeling "Oh Lord! what will become of me if this flame gets lit." You must get rid of this clinging to the past self and life, then you can have a fire which will not be feeble. You have not fallen between two stools,—you are hesitating between two consciousnesses, the old and the new, the small and the great, that is all.

As for the poetry, well—you have developed up to a point at which your work is of a very rare and unique quality—in no way inferior to that of the others of whom you speak,—the difficulty of intermittency of production is nothing, for all feel that except Nishikanta and Dilip who have no misgivings about their creative power. Yours rises probably from the fact that in order to have free command of the highest planes of poetry, you have to rise into them and not only open to the Word from them—it is therefore the same difficulty in another form. Otherwise, if you had the old self-satisfaction of which you draw so glowing a picture, you would have found your present poetry marvellous and gone on writing freely only oscillating between the different planes achieved and content to do so. This is not a proof of incapacity but of the will to greater things. Only that will must not be in the mind only but take full hold of the vital also and must be a will that what you write of shall be a part not only of thought but of life. Which comes back to what I have written above—get free from the obscure hesitation to open and let the force do its work.

One must either do that if one wants a rapid change or go

quietly and wait for the slower working from behind the veil to reduce and break the obstacle.

10 August 1937

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There is nothing definite that I can tell you. Mother finds no conscious opposition in your mind or will to surrender and transformation. But probably the difficulty lies in the vital (not mind) of the artist (the poet, painter etc. in you), because the vital of the artist is always accustomed to its independence, to follow its own way, to make and live in its own world and pursue the impulses of its nature. If that element changes then probably surrender and transformation could be more rapid, but it is not always easy for it to change at once, it usually goes by a gradual and almost unobserved change.

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I hesitate to write in this high tone: "I am the Light of the One," etc. It sounds too high and grand. Some don't like this tone at all. Dilip is one. They call it insincere. Is there no justification for a poet-sadhak to use this tone?

If such poems are put as a claim, or vaunted as a personal experience of Yoga, they may be objected to on that ground. But a poet is not bound to confine himself to his personal experience. A poet writes from inspiration or from imagination or vision. Milton did not need to go to Heaven or Hell or the Garden of Eden before he wrote *Paradise Lost*. Are all Dilip's bhakti poems an exact transcription of his inner state? If so, he must be a wonderful Yogi and bhakta.

14 April 1938

Poetry, Peace and Ananda

I seek for Ananda, it eludes me — Love, Peace are nowhere. If poetry doesn't give them, what's the use?

Poetry does not give love and peace, it gives Ananda, intense but not wide or lasting.

You will say that it is my mind that obstructs by its struggle.

Your mind has obstructed the free flow of the poetry—but what it has obstructed more is the real peace and Ananda that is “deep, great and wide”. A quiet mind turned towards the भूमि is what you need.

28 July 1936

Literary Activity and Sadhana

I have no hesitation at all and feel very glad when I tell you of my aspiration to do the sadhana through literary activity.

Literary activity can be made a part of sadhana like other things, but sadhana through literary activity is a phrase whose meaning is not very clear.

29 June 1937

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What is the use of literature if the nature stays just the same?

Good heavens! where did you get this idea that literature can transform people? Literary people are often the most impossible on the face of the earth.

10 November 1936

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We may have progressed in literature, but the outer human nature remains almost the same.

Outer human nature can only change either by an intense psychic development or a strong and all-pervading influence from above. It is the inner being that has to change first—a change which is not always visible outside. That has nothing to do with the development of the faculties which is another side of the personality. That is another question altogether. But such sadhana means a slow laborious work of self-change in most cases, so why not sing on the way?

11 November 1936

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To be a literary man is not a spiritual aim; but to use literature as a means of spiritual expression is another matter. Even to

make expression a vehicle of a superior power helps to open the consciousness. The harmonising rests on that principle.

19 September 1936

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Literature like everything else can be made an instrumentation for the Divine Life. It can be made of some spiritual importance if it is taken up with that aim and, even so, it cannot have that importance for everybody. In ordinary life no particular pursuit or study can be imposed as necessary for everybody; it cannot be positively necessary for everybody to have a mastery of English literature or to be a reader of poetry or a scientist or acquainted with all the sciences (or encyclopaedia of knowledge). What is important is to have an instrument of knowledge that will apply itself accurately, calmly, perfectly to all that it has to handle.

29 December 1934

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Literature, poetry, science and other studies can be a preparation of the consciousness for life. When one does Yoga they can become part of the sadhana only if done for the Divine or taken up by the Divine Force, but then one should not want to be a poet for the sake of being a poet only, or for fame, applause, etc.

16 April 1935

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Has my writing any spiritual value?

No present value spiritually—it may have a mental value. It is the same with the work—it has a value of moral training, discipline, obedience, acceptance of work for the Mother. The spiritual value and result come afterwards when the consciousness in the vital opens upward. So with the mental work. It is a preparation. If you cannot yet do it with the true spiritual consciousness, it, the work as well as the mental occupation, must be done with the right mental or vital will in it.

14 May 1934

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Well, of course the first business of Yoga is not to make geniuses at all, but to make spiritual men—but Yoga can do the other thing also.

11 November 1934

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Am I right in feeling that the writing is doing me some good at present?

Yes, as it keeps you in the right frame of mind without the sinking into tamas and nervous troubles.

6 September 1934

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There is no incompatibility between spirituality and creative activity—they can be united.

Creative Activity Subordinate to One's Spiritual Life

Nirod, Nolini and Sahana are all wrong in laying down a rule of that kind for my conduct. I do not base my action on mental rules which have to be applied to every case. It is a still greater error to suppose that because I (or the Mother) do something in the case of one person or another, we are bound to do it for everybody and to complain of our not doing it as “making a difference”. All that belongs to the ignorance and clamour of the vital egoistic nature and has nothing to do with spiritual life.

I cannot allow myself to be drawn back into a preoccupation with the poetry of the sadhaks. I have much more serious things to deal with on which depends the whole work and Yoga. I have ceased to deal with Bengali poetry—if any is sent, which is no longer done, I send it back with or without a word of comment. But neither can I spend time in teaching beginners how to write English verse. Nirod’s case is one in which for special reasons I have made an exception, nor is he any more a beginner. Neither on his own nor on Romen’s poems have I need to spend a long time. Even so, I do it only because I have a few moments to dispose of; if they claimed it as a right, I would refuse.

The spiritual life and one’s own inner psychic and spiritual

change should be the first preoccupation of a sadhak — poetry or painting is something quite subordinate and even then it should be done not to be a great poet or artist but as a help to the inner sadhana. It is time that everyone got away from the vital view of things to the psychic and spiritual on which alone can stand Yoga and the spiritual life.

Fiction-Writing and Sadhana

Will it do any harm to my sadhana if I attempt stories or a novel?

You can try, if you like. The difficulty is that the subject matter of a novel belongs mostly to the outer consciousness, so that a lowering or externalising can easily come. This apart from the difficulty of keeping the inner poise when putting the mind into outer work. If you could get your established peace within, then it would be possible to do any work without disturbing or lowering the consciousness.

21 August 1934

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Sahana once told me that she gave up writing because you thought it was doing harm to her sadhana.

What is necessary for one, need not be necessary for another.

6 September 1934

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We remembered that Sahana had said you stopped her writing a novel, because her mind or consciousness was being externalised.

That is when one is already in a steady stream of spiritual experience, living partly at least in an inner realisation, while the rest of the being is not yet in it. Writing a novel means then going out of the inner state of experience and stimulating the rest of the nature. If the writing is something in harmony with the inner consciousness, then there would be no necessity for one to stop. On the other hand if one has attained the full consciousness in

both the inner and the outer nature then also one could write anything one is moved by that consciousness to write, whatever it might be. In certain cases this rule may not hold. One may be strong enough to do all kinds of outward things without affecting the inner state of experience. But ordinarily this can be done freely only in the earlier stages before one is drawn inwards and kept there or in the later stages when one is fully conscious spiritually in the outer being also. It is simply a question of "spiritual tactics" not a hard and fast rule for all in all states and stages.

Why did Sahana find it necessary to stop?

Because she was losing hold of her inner experience and thinking only of her novel.

When I was writing that novel or even while busy with poems, I had often a curious experience. I used to feel an inclination to read a passage from Sri Aurobindo's *Essays on the Gita*. . . . There I felt a depth which moved and inspired me and I could then sit down to write my novel. . . . What has a novel to do with the Gita or with Truth Supramental?

There is obviously nothing on their surface connecting the two. It may have been that the literary quality of the *Essays* and its depth of thought satisfied some ideal in your temperament and therefore put you into touch with the creative force behind you. A poet for instance can feel himself stimulated enough to creation after reading Homer, yet his own work may be quite different, not epic at all and dealing with quite another order of ideas and things. It is only that the reading stimulates his inner being to create, but according to its own quite different way and purpose.

26 October 1935

Reading and Sadhana

If I intend to take literature as a work to be done for sadhana, I must read all good stories, novels, poems, dramas etc., must I not?

No rule can be made, it differs with different people.

I felt that it will be a mistake to give up all that and to want to meditate all the time or to do only such things which do not hinder me from an inner concentration on you. I felt that all our faculties and capacities have to be given to you.

It is a question of the right consciousness — no unvarying mental rule can be made for these things.

All meditation and no work is not good and helpful to sadhana, I have heard; I don't know if it is true.

Writing and reading absorb the mind and fill it with images and influences; if the images and influences are not of the right kind they naturally turn one away from the true consciousness. It is only if one has the true consciousness well established already that one can read or write anything whatever without losing it or without any other harm.

17 May 1934

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To acquire a good style in prose I am reading any and every book in Bengali.

Any and every! That is more likely to spoil the style.

But I don't want to lose the peace and the joy I am in now. If you think that over-reading or reading anything will lower the consciousness I shall lessen the activity.

I do not know whether the peace and joy will stand over-reading. It may if it is very strong.

8 June 1934

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A "literary man" is one who loves literature and literary activity for their own separate sake. A Yogi who writes is not a literary man for he writes only what the inner Will and Word wants him to express. He is a channel and an instrument of something greater than his own literary personality.

Of course the literary man and the intellectual love reading — books are their mind's food. But writing is another matter. There are plenty of people who never write a word in the literary way, but are enormous readers. One reads for ideas, for knowledge, for the stimulation of the mind by all that the world has thought or is thinking.

Poetry, even perhaps all perfect expression of whatever kind, comes by inspiration; reading helps only to acquire for the outer instrument the full possession of a language or to get the technique of literary expression. Afterwards one develops one's own use of the language, one's own style, one's own technique. Reading and painstaking labour are very good for the literary man, but even for him they are not the cause of his good writing, only an aid to it. The cause is within himself.

If one lives in the inner consciousness, if the inner mind or higher mind become dynamic, all the ideas in the world and all sorts of knowledge come crowding in from within or from above; there is little or no need of outside food any longer. At most reading can be then an utility for keeping oneself informed of what is happening in the world — but not as food or one's own seeing of the world and Truth and things. One becomes an independent Mind in communion with the cosmic Thinker. It is a decade or two that I have stopped all but the most casual reading. Poetry too need no longer depend on any outer stimulus; the power of poetical and perfect expression can of itself increase tenfold; what was written with some difficulty, often great difficulty, comes with ease. There is a heightening of the consciousness and the greater inspiration that comes from the heightening.

11 September 1934

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Reading and study though they can be useful for preparing the mind, are not themselves the best means of entering the Yoga. It is self-dedication from within that is the means. It is with the consciousness of the Mother that you must unite, a sincere self-consecration in the mind and heart and the Will is the means for it. The work given by the Mother is always meant as field

for that self-consecration, it has to be done as an offering to her so that through the self-offering one may come to feel her force acting and her presence.

27 February 1935

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I do not think you should stop reading so long as the reading itself does not, as a passion, fall away from the mind; that happens when a higher order of consciousness and experiences begins within the being. Nor is it good to force yourself too much to do only the one work of painting. Such compulsion of the mind and vital tends usually either to be unsuccessful and make them more restless or else to create some kind of dullness and inertia.

For the work simply aspire for the Force to use you, put yourself inwardly in relation with the Mother when doing it and make it your aim to be the instrument for the expression of beauty without regard to personal fame or the praise and blame of others.

8 October 1936

Reading and Real Knowledge

Does not the knowledge of yoga come by itself?

Yes. The real knowledge comes of itself from within, by the touch of the Divine.

If so, then isn't it better to have only that knowledge and not the knowledge obtained by reading?

Reading can be only a momentary help to prepare the mind. But the real knowledge does not come by reading. Some preparation for the inner knowledge may be helpful — but the mind should not be too superficially active or seek to know only for curiosity's sake.

6 July 1933

Novel-Reading and Sadhana

Reading novels is always distracting if you are deep in sadhana.
It is better to avoid it now.

12 May 1933

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If novels touch the lower vital or raise it, they ought not to be read by the sadhak. One can read them only if one can look at them from the literary point of view as a picture of human life and nature which one can observe, as the Yogi looks at life itself, without being involved in it or having any reaction.

28 March 1936

Religious and Secular Literature

How is it that sometimes secular literature moves one more, and gives a greater light and illumination than religious literature?

Religious literature inspires only the religious-minded,— and most religious literature, apart from the comparatively few great books, is poor stuff. Secular literature either appeals to the idealistic mind or to the emotions or to the aesthetic element in us, and all that has a much easier and more common appeal. As for spiritual light, it is another thing altogether. Spirituality is other than mental idealism and other than religion.

In literary expression, I think, it is the inner man that counts. But that would be tantamount to saying that an insincere man can't write things which will move readers with a genuine and concrete something.

Plenty of insincere men have written inspiring things. That is because something in them felt it, though they could not carry it out in life, and that something was used by a greater power behind. Very often in his art, in his writings, the higher part of a man comes out, while the lower dominates his life.

18 October 1935

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How is it that one person reads sacred books, yet is very far from the Divine, while another reads the most stupid so-called literary productions and remains in contact with the Divine?

It is not reading that brings the contact, it is the will and aspiration in the being that bring it.

11 August 1933

Development of the Mind and Sadhana

The development of the mind is a useful preliminary for the sadhak; it can also be pursued along with the sadhana on condition that it is not given too big a place and does not interfere with the one important thing, the sadhana itself.

1933

Language-Study and Yoga

Learning languages makes the mind active. Does not the Yoga mean to keep the mind quiet and turn it always to the Divine?

Do you mean to say that in order to have quietness of the mind one must do nothing? Then neither the Mother nor I nor anyone else here has a quiet mind.

6 April 1937

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What is the need for so many here to learn French? Are you preparing them for giving lectures or opening centres in France or French-knowing countries?

Are life and mind to be governed only by material utility or outward practicality? Spiritual life would then be inferior even to ordinary mental life where people learn for the sake of acquiring knowledge and culturing the mind and not only for the sake of some outward utility.

24 March 1937

Reading Newspapers and Yoga

Is it very important in our sadhana to give up reading newspapers? I find that almost all the sadhaks including some of the best ones like Anilbaran read them. Moreover, since you also

read, there is an excuse that it is useful to read newspapers, otherwise one remains uninformed and blank.

These things depend on oneself and one's own conditions—there can be no general rule. It is true I read newspapers, but Mother never does unless her attention is called to a particular item. I dare say if Anilbaran stopped reading papers for a year, it might be very good for him. One has to see what is one's necessity for the sadhana. If the newspapers disperse the mind or externalise the consciousness too much, they should be avoided. If on the other hand one is dawdling over the sadhana and having no particular inner endeavour one can read newspapers—it is no worse than anything else. On the other hand if the newspapers do not affect the formed or forming inner consciousness in any way (by dispersion, lowering, externalisation etc.) one can read them. I read the newspapers mainly because I have to see what events are happening which might any day have an effect on my work etc. I don't read for the interest of reading. 9 July 1936

Painting, Music, Dance and Yoga

Yoga and the Arts

In the new creation would there not be great musicians,
painters, poets, athletes etc. created from the Ashram?

All kinds that are needed for the work or the manifestation
would, I suppose, come.

24 May 1933

Painting and Sadhana

Painting also is sadhana; so it is perfectly possible to make them
one. It is a matter of dedicating the painting and feeling the force
that makes you paint as the Mother's force. 4 September 1935

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Of course everybody is here for Yoga and not for painting.
Painting or any other activity has to be made here a part of Yoga
and cannot be pursued for its own sake. If it stands insuperably
in the way, then it has to be given up; but there is no reason why
it should if it be pursued in the proper spirit, as a field or aid for
spiritual growth, or as a work done for the Mother.

18 January 1936

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You have painting and music in you and if you apply yourself
they will develop in you. Only it is best to do it as an instrument
of the Mother and as an offering to her, and not allow any
personal desire for fame or appreciation by others or any
personal pride to be the motives—for it is that that gives
trouble. All work done as an offering is a great help and does
not give trouble.

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Is it really possible to get anything simply by faith and surrender? I heard Mother said to Sanjiban that if one wants to be an artist one must work hard. What is true of art, is true of everything, isn't it?

For heaven's sake, don't be so universal in your rules. Art means a technique (especially painting, sculpture, etc., music also, poetry less), and technique has to be developed. But that does not mean that there is nothing that can come by simply faith and surrender.

6 April 1935

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Let Thy grace abide with me so that I may keep the right attitude towards Thee at the time of painting. Often I feel a vital atmosphere around me and a sort of vital excitement in me.

What do you mean by vital excitement? There is an intensity and enthusiasm of the vital without which it would be difficult to do any poem, picture or music of a creative kind. That intensity is not harmful.

7 October 1933

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The Mother finds the pictures of Tagore hideous and monstrous, she would not dignify them with the name of art. But it is not because they depart from tradition. The Mother does not believe in tradition — she considers that Art should always develop new forms — but still these must be according to a truth of Beauty which is universal and eternal — something of the Divine.

8 December 1933

Music and Sadhana

I quite understood your main point to which I shall answer, but there were many side-issues which obscure the main one in your letter and I took the occasion to try to get rid of one of them at once. For the moment I am answering only to your question about the music. Let me say at once that all of you seem to have too great an aptitude for making drastic conclusions on the

strength of very minor facts. It is always perilous to take two or three small facts, put them together and build upon them a big inference. It becomes still more dangerous when you emphasise minor facts and set aside or belittle the meaning of the main ones. In this case the main facts are (1) that the Mother has loved music all her life and found it a key to spiritual experience, (2) that she has given all encouragement to your music in special and to the music of others also. She has also made clear the relation of Art and Beauty with Yoga. It is therefore rather extraordinary that anyone should think she only tolerates music here and considers it inconsistent with Yoga. It is perfectly true that Music or Art are not either the first or the only thing in life for her,—any more than Poetry or Literature are with me,—the Divine, the divine consciousness, the discovery of the conditions for a divine life are and must be our one concern, with Art, Poetry or Music as parts or means only of the divine life or expression of the Divine Truth and the Divine Beauty. That does not mean that they are only “tolerated”, but that they are put in their right place.

Then the minor facts and their significance. The Mother limited the concerts to one hour because that was the utmost she could give to them in the afternoons for which they are fixed and that meant checking a very natural tendency to spread over a greater length of time. On this occasion she first wanted it to be a half an hour affair because the more important occasion was to be reserved for November. But it was found that certain very undesirable psychological movements were tending to appear which would turn the occasion not into a part of the preparation for true expression or a part of the Yoga, but an occasion for the exhibition of a very mundane, almost professional egoism, vanity, rivalry, anger and spite at one's talent being “neglected” etc. It was decided that this anti-Yogic stuff should not be allowed to mix with the atmosphere of the 24th November and therefore the Sunday concert could be lengthened out and the November one dropped—and this was what was written to Venkataraman. It is not an objection to music that the decision represented, but an objection to bringing into music here these very undivine and unyogic and, if human, yet not very reputable human elements

and movements. The Mother said nothing to you about it because these things did not directly concern *you* and she did not besides care to make the causes of the change public.

Let us have music by all means; but also more rhythm and harmony in the atmosphere!

29 October 1932

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I don't think I can say anything about your non-appreciation of [X's] singing or rather your failure to feel it, for this is a matter of personality and its responses. [X] has put me the question as coming from you and I have made some kind of answer. His idea is that you have no appreciation of his music from the aesthetic point of view because it is new in its lines and you cling conservatively to the traditional music. If that is so, it is obviously a mental and aesthetic limitation. But what you say is that you admit his genius and the qualities of his singing — only you don't feel what you seek in his music. That is a different matter. Your interpretation may then be the right one. In any case what is important for you is to develop your inner realisation till it can take up all the feeling and outer action — whether for your own singing or for a new appreciation of music in general that is the one line opened to you and the one thing needful.

8 September 1937

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I meant exactly the same thing as when I wrote to you that the "famous singer" must disappear and the "inner singer" take her place. "The old psychological lines" means the mental and vital aesthetic source of the singing, the desire of fame or success, singing for an audience — the singing must come from the soul within and it must be for the Divine.

What I wrote about the conservative clinging to traditional music was in answer to Dilip's supposition about the source of your non-appreciation. I said if it were that it would be a mental limitation. I had written before that I gathered from what you had written that it was not that but a temperamental difference

or a seeking for another vibration than what his music could give. As to the newness of Dilip's music and how far he has been successful, I am not a musical expert and cannot pronounce. It was the Mother who gave him the advice and impulse to create something new. If Tagore's most recent verdict is sincere, he has succeeded in doing it, since Tagore speaks of him as a creator in music.

A new creation need not be on one line only, each creator follows his own line, otherwise he would be more of an imitator than a creator. There are many who receive inspiration from me in poetry but they do not all write on the same line. Nishikanta's poetry is different from Dilip's, Nirod's from Amal's.

As for your singing, I was not speaking of any new creation from the aesthetic point of view, but of the spiritual change—what form it takes must depend on what you find *within* you when the deeper basis is there.

I do not see any necessity for giving up singing altogether. I only meant,—it is the logical conclusion from what I have written to you not now only but before,—that the inner change must be the first consideration and the rest must arise out of that. If singing to an audience pulls you out of the inner condition, then you could postpone that and sing for yourself and the Divine until you are able, even in facing an audience, to forget the audience. If you are troubled by failure or exalted by success, that also you must overcome.

10 September 1935

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If Sahana gives up music,—I presume it is only a temporary step—I suppose it must be for a reason personal to her sadhana. There is no incompatibility in principle between music and sadhana.

28 June 1931

*

You can learn the song and sing—do it as Mother's work without desire, such as even the wish to sing before her—but simply as something to be done for her service.

Only you must not allow it to interfere with your painting

which is your main work — that in which you are making much progress. That you must go on doing every day.

7 December 1933

*

Can I take up the esraj when my hands get tired from practising the sitar?

One instrument is enough. If you feel tired so soon, it may be that the physical takes no pleasure in it, and then you should not trouble to learn.

10 October 1932

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When I first took up the sitar, I could practise only for ten minutes without exhaustion, then went on to half-an-hour. But Dilip says if I can't do it for at least three or four hours a day, I should give it up.

What Dilip says is not untrue. It is hard work if you want really to learn and otherwise it is not much use.

It is only for myself when I am alone and tired of other things that I want music. I really want to learn one instrument. I hope you will not forbid my asking Nirod or someone else for help.

I don't think it will be very helpful to your sadhana; but if you want to ask, you can do so.

28 January 1933

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Yesterday suddenly I felt a great desire or impulse to sing. The music seemed to come or rather pushed out from inside me by an automatic force. Something was felt — very tangibly so — to be doing it as if I was a mere instrument in its hold. Since then I had tried again to do it, but it won't come.

It is no use trying — it comes or it does not come. One must be open for its coming, that is all.

9 April 1933

*

It is absurd to say that you have narrowed or deteriorated because one no longer sings erotic songs. One is not narrowed if

one loses taste for jazz and can hear with real pleasure only the great masters or music of a high or exquisite quality. It is not deterioration when one rises from a lower to a higher plane of thinking, feeling or artistic self-expression. Can one say of the man who has grown out of childishness and no longer plays with nursery toys that he has narrowed and deteriorated by the change?

26 August 1933

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I often catch myself acting as the great composer, musician, *littérateur* and all that sort of rot.

Well, that is an almost universal human weakness, especially with artists, poets, musicians and the whole splendid tribe—I have known even great Yogis suffer from just a touch of it! If one can see mentally the humour of it, it will fall off in the end.

19 July 1943

Dance and Sadhana

Dance alone with rhythm and significance can express something of the occult or of the Divine as much as writing or poetry or art—why should it not and why should there be anything in it condemnable?

17 July 1933

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To feel the vibration and develop from it the rhythm of the dance is the right way to create something true; the other way, to understand with the mind and work out with the mind only or mainly, is the mental way; it is laborious and difficult and has not the same spontaneous inspiration.

28 April 1932

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After seeing Udayshankar dance, I asked him for instructions and he showed me some exercises. May I know whether it is desirable for me to continue?

Dancing is a private thing—we can't deal with it as part of the

Yoga. So it depends on your choice.

Can dancing not become part of the yoga, like poetry, music and painting?

If it is done in the right spirit, it can. But we answered like that because Udayshankar's coming brought only the vital side with it and dancing in its vital side is a personal affair and cannot be part of Yoga. It would only raise the vital turn in the consciousness.

15 October 1934

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I know nothing about Udayshankar or his qualities; but if he was calm himself, his coming certainly did not create calm in the Ashram but much unnecessary excitement. I do not quite see how Udayshankar is to be useful to the Ashram. The visits of celebrities are not the means by which the work of the Ashram can be helped. These are ideas that belong to the ordinary external consciousness in which the coming of famous So and So creates an exultation and a flutter.

5 October 1934

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Appendices

APPENDIX I

The Problem of the Hexameter

The perfection of the hexameter is one of the unsolved problems of English prosody. Either the problem is insoluble, the noble rhythm so satisfying in Greek and Latin unsuited to the brief Saxon vocables—or else the secret of a successful measure has not yet been discovered. Even were the solution found, there are many obstacles in the way of its acceptation. Yet a new metrical movement is felt to be a necessity and half-unconsciously strained after by the modern mind in poetry. If one could be found that, without admitting too wide a licence, without breaking down the mould of metre in which poetry by a wise instinct has always sought to restrain herself, yet provided a freer scope and a fuller mould for the more subtle and complex emotions and the vaster conceptions in which we have begun to live, the change might mean a new life and energy for a great literature now too much overburdened and fettered by its past successes and triumphs. The present poem is an experiment in this direction. No doubt the definite entry of the hexameter among the ordinary forms of English prosody must wait until it is chosen by a supreme poetical genius or a master rhythmist. But meanwhile something may possibly be done by a careful attempt founded on a clear and definite conception of the difficulties to be solved and a consistent method in their solution.

The poems of Clough and Longfellow are, I think, the only serious essays in the hexameter in English literature. Many have dallied with the problem, from the strange experiments of Spenser to the insufficient but carefully reasoned attempts of Matthew Arnold. But it is only by a long and sustained effort like *Evangeline* or the *Bothie* that the solution can really come. Longfellow in this connexion can be safely neglected,

but Clough's work is of a different order. Occasionally he really grappled with his task and for a moment [conquered] [.....]¹. But it is Clough's defect that he is unable ordinarily to combine force with harmony. Either he produces verse of a rough energy, like the general type of hexameter used by him in the *Bothie*, or, as in the pentameter experiments in the *Amours de Voyage*, the breath of life and power is wanting in a harmonious shell of sound. Yet once or twice he has surmounted every difficulty. Especially is there one verse with the right Homeric movement in the *Bothie*, —

He like a god came leaving his ample Olympian chamber
which gave to my mind the key to the just use of the hexameter.

¹ *Manuscript damaged. Two or three words missing. — Ed.*

APPENDIX II

An Answer to a Criticism

Milford accepts, (incidentally, with special regard to the word *frosty* in Clough's line about the Cairngorm¹), the rule that two consonants after a short vowel make the short vowel long, even if they are outside the word and come in another word following it. To my mind this rule accepted and generally applied would amount in practice to an absurdity; it would result, not indeed in ordinary verse where quantity by itself has no metrical value, but in any attempt at quantitative metre, in eccentricities like the scensions of Bridges. I shall go on pronouncing the *y* of *frosty* as short whether it has two consonants after it or only one or none; it remains *frosty* whether it is a *frosty scalp* or *frosty top* or a frosty anything. In no case does the second syllable assume a length of sound equivalent to that of two long vowels. My hexameters are intended to be read naturally as one would read any English sentence; stress is given its full metrical value, long syllables also are given their full metrical value and not flattened out so as to assume a fictitious metrical brevity; short vowels even with two consonants after them are treated as short, because they have that value in any natural reading. But if you admit a short syllable to be long whenever there are two consonants after it, then Bridges' scensions are perfectly justified. Milford does not accept that conclusion; he says Bridges' scensions are an absurdity and I agree with him there. But he bases this on his idea that quantitative length does not count in English verse. It is intonation that makes the metre, he says, high tones or low tones — not longs and shorts; obviously, stress is a high tone of the greatest importance and to ignore it is fatal to any metrical theory or metrical treatment of the language —

¹ "Found amid granite-dust on the frosty scalp of the Cairn-Gorm", Bothie of Tober-Na-Vuolich, Part I.—Ed.

and so far I agree. But on that ground he refuses to discuss my idea of weight or dwelling of the voice or admit quantity or anything else but tone as determinative of the metre; he even declares that there can be no such thing as metrical length; the very idea is an error. Perhaps also that is the reason why he counts *frosty* as a spondee before *scalp*; he thinks that it causes it to be intoned in a different way. I don't see how it does that; for my part, I intone it just the same before *top* as before *scalp*. The ordinary theory is, I believe, that the *sc* of *scalp* acts as a sort of stile (because of the opposition of the two consonants to rapid motion) which you take time to cross, so that *ty* must be considered as long because of this delay of the voice, while the *t* of *top* is merely a line across the path which gives no trouble. I don't see it like that; the delay of motion, such as it is and it is very slight, is not caused by any dwelling on the last syllable of the preceding word, it is in the word *scalp* itself that the delay is made; one takes longer to pronounce *scalp*, *scalp* is a slightly longer sound than *top* and there is too a slight initial impediment to the voice which is absent in the lighter vocable and this may have an effect for the rhythm of the line but it cannot change the metre; it cannot lengthen the preceding syllable so as to turn a trochee into a spondee. Sanskrit quantitation is irrelevant here (it is the same as Latin or Greek in respect to this rule); but both of us agree that the Classical quantitative conventions are not reproducible in English metre and it is for that reason that we reject Bridges' eccentric scensions. Where we disagree is that I treat stress as equivalent to length and give quantity as well as stress a metrical and not merely a rhythmic value.

This answers also your question as to what Milford means by "fundamental confusion" regarding *aridity*. He refuses to accept the idea of metrical length. But I am concerned with natural *metrical* as well as natural vowel (and consonantal) quantities. My theory is that natural length in English depends on the dwelling of the voice giving a high or strong sound value or weight of voice to the syllable; in quantitative verse one has to take account of all such dwelling or weight of the voice, both weight or sharp dwelling by ictus (= stress) and weight

by prolongation or long dwelling of the voice (ordinary syllabic length); the two are different, but at any rate for metrical purposes in a quantitative verse can rank as of equal value. I do not say that stress turns a short vowel into a long one, but that it gives a strong sound value (= metrical length) to the syllable it falls upon, even if that syllable has a short vowel and no extra consonants to support it. There is a heavier voice incidence on the first *i* of *aridity* than on the second: this incidence I call weight; the voice dwells more on it, sharply, and that dwelling gives it what I call metrical length and equates it to the long syllable, gives it an equal value.

Milford does not take the trouble to understand the details of my theory — he ignores the importance I give to modulations and treats cretis and antibacchii and molossi as if they were dactyls, whereas I regard them as only substitutes for dactyls; he ignores my objection to stressing short insignificant words like *and*, *with*, *but*, *the* — and thinks that I do that everywhere, which would be to ignore my theory. In fact I have scrupulously applied my theory in every detail of my practice. Take for instance

Art thou not | heaven-bound | even as | I with the | earth? Hast
 thou | ended.

Here *art* is long by natural quantity though *unstressed*,² which disproves Milford's criticism that in practice I never put an unstressed long as the first syllable of a dactylic foot or spondee, as I should do by my theory. I don't do it often because normally in English rhythm stress bears the foot — a fact on which I have laid emphasis in my theory as well as in my practice. That is the reason why I condemn the Bridgean disregard of stress in the rhythm, — still whenever it can come in quite naturally, this variation can occasionally be made. It is a question of the relations possible between stress value and unstressed quantitative

² I refuse to put an artificial stress here; if one wrote "Yes, thou art beautiful, but with a magical terrible beauty", the *art* is obviously unstressed, though long (creating an initial molossus); in the interrogative inversion it does not acquire any stress by its coming first in the sentence or in the line.

values in a quantitative metrical system, which is not the same as their relations in accentual or stress verse. My quantitative system, as I have shown at great length, is based on the natural movement of the English tongue, the same in prose and poetry, not on any artificial theory.

In stress hexameter only dactyls, spondees and trochees doing duty for spondees are counted; but in quantitative verse all feet have to take their natural value and to act as modulations of the dactyl and spondee while both in the opening foot and the body of the line amphibrachii and creticas abound, even molossi come in at times. Opening tribachs are very frequent in my hexameter

Is he the | first? was there | none then before him? shall none come after?

Milford seems to think I have stressed the first short syllable in what would be naturally tribachs and anapaests to make them into dactyls—a thing I abhor. Cf. also in *Ahana* initial anapaests:

In the hard | reckoning | made by the | grey-robed ac|countant at even

or

Yet survives | bliss in the | rhythm of our | heart-beats, | yet is
there | wonder

or again

And we go | stumbling, maddened and thrilled to his dreadful embraces

or in my poem *Ilion*

And the first | Argive fell | slain as he leaped on the Phrygian beaches.

There are even opening amphibrachs here and there

Illumi|nations, | trance-seeds of | silence, flowers of musing.

APPENDIX III

Remarks on a Review²

[A]

Marginal Comments

The writer justly contends that Quantitative Verse has, hitherto, been misunderstood by English poets who have used it, because the constituent elements of such verse have not been correctly appreciated. These elements are accent, stress, and quantity. Accent is voice-weightage on a syllable; stress is voice-weightage on a one-syllable word (which may or may not be accented by itself) considered *hic et nunc* as a component part of a phrase, clause or sentence;

Not in my theory; stress occurs in English words of all lengths, not only in monosyllables.

quantity is this voice-weightage in poetry. The best (and the only true) Quantitative Verse is that in which accent, stress and quantity fall on the same syllable.

This is not part of my theory, where accent is disregarded for metrical purposes (though it counts in the intonation and rhythm) except when it coincides with stress. On the other hand unstressed long syllables count as long and here stress and quantity do *not* fall on the same syllable.

English being an accentual language, poets writing in English have a natural bias towards accentual verse. The result is, that

² In April 1943 a review of Sri Aurobindo's On Quantitative Metre by a certain F. J. Friend-Pereira was published by the New Review of Calcutta. Sri Aurobindo jotted down some comments in the margins of a copy of the journal, and also began a reply, which he abandoned after writing a single paragraph. Here, in [A], Sri Aurobindo's marginal comments are published, along with the relevant passages of the review. (Page references to On Quantitative Metre have been altered to agree with THE COMPLETE WORKS OF SRI AUROBINDO edition.) Sri Aurobindo's incomplete reply follows in [B].

they tend to regard quantity in verse as secondary, and by misplacing both accent and stress produce (when they venture into such fields) Quantitative Verse of unbelievable badness. This is written in a slipshod metre whose “tread-mill movement” (p. 346) has been charged against it as an incurable defect. . . .

All this is, assuredly, excellent in theory. But in practice, certain serious objections arise. If it be true, as the author asserts that it is true, that only certain heroic themes can be treated in English hexameter (the most practised of the numerous types of Quantitative Verse),

This has nowhere been said; epic, pastoral, epistle, satire, familiar speech, poems of reflection have all been admitted,—only there must be either power or beauty.

then the utility of the suggested adoption of verse based on quantity will be utility in name alone, since the just claim of poetry at present to give not only airy nothing, but everything, a local habitation and a name, would be effectively quashed.

This objection would arise if it were proposed to write quantitative verse *only*; that is not so.

If it be true, further, that because of the undactylic nature of English, the hexameter needs to be “modulated” by bacchius, by lighter cretic, by the first paeon, by the choriamb or double trochee (similar variations to be used in the other quantitative metres), what remains of the fundamental metric of the original form?

The ground given is not the undactylic nature of English, but the natural tendency of English poetry to resort to modulation for the sake of freedom and variety. I have said that this device should be adopted in transferring classical metres into English, so as to create a natural English quantitative verse — not a rigid imitation of Greek and Latin models.

The verse so written would, doubtless, be something rich and strange:

So much the better.

but would it be really hexameter, simply because it would (and then not always) have a dactyl in the 5th, and a spondee (or more likely a trochee) in the 6th?

Why not? All that is necessary is that it should be a six-foot verse with a sound and predominant dactylic basis.

Would sapphics, with the changes advocated as a relief to monotony, remain genuine sapphics?

Again, why not? The modulations are few and do not destroy the characteristic swing of the Sapphic verse.

And ionics, ionics? It would seem, then, that the learned author's scheme would amount merely to *some* sort of quantitative verse; this is native to English, as Langland, Hopkins and others have shown, and shown most successfully.

If it is some sort of quantitative verse, rich and strange, and based on the recovery by quantity of its place in metre, that would be enough. Hopkins, I believe, wrote sprung verse — it is not entirely quantitative.

There are a number of other points, of more or less importance, to which attention must, in fairness, be drawn. The punctuation leaves something to be desired: on p. 322, line 13 from the bottom, there should be a colon or a fullstop instead of a comma; on p. 323, line 8 . . . a semi-colon instead of a comma.

No, that would disturb the connection and balance. The comma is intended to preserve the close connection of the two statements.

Grammar is also defective, as in the following:

(i) “ . . . they can seldom intervene or only if *it* is done very carefully” (p. 362) where *it* lacks a true antecedent.

“It” refers to the intervention; there is an unexpressed or implied antecedent. This is a liberty, but one that can be taken. Literary style *can* take such liberties sometimes with schoolmaster’s grammar.

(ii) “All that is necessary is that artificial quantity . . . *must* be abandoned.” (p. 363) *Must* ought to be *should*.

“must” ought to remain “must”. It is meant to indicate the nature of the necessity and its imperativeness.

(iii) “A better statement may lead to a solution that *could* well be viable.” (p. 317) *May* or *might* instead of *could* would be an improvement.

No. “Could” has a different shade of meaning from “may” or “might”.

(iv) On p. 318, bottom line, “they” lacks an antecedent, unless it be “desire”!

Yes, there should be in the previous sentence “by many” after “vividly felt”.

(v) The order of words in “He perpetrates frequently lines that are wholly trochaic” (p. 355) could scarcely be more un-English. *Frequently* should be the first or, preferably, the second word in the sentence.

The word can be where it is to give a certain effect.

(vi) What, one wonders, is meant by “no insuperable impossibility”? (p. 363) If a thing is an impossibility, there is no necessity to say that it is insuperable; if it is not insuperable, then it cannot be an impossibility. What the author meant was either “no *apparently* insuperable impossibility” or “no insuperable difficulty”.

“insuperable impossibility” gives a single idea, something that is impossible and therefore insuperable; it is not meant that there are impossibilities that are not insuperable.

- (vii) On p. 352, line 5, “verily evidently” is a misprint for “very evidently”.

These are, however, flaws of little importance. More serious is the claim, put forward on p. 321 that Spenser, Tennyson and Swinburne were great geniuses. It would be nearer the truth to say that they were poets whose technical ability was considerable.

New and strange opinions! “My opinion” would be preferable to “the truth”.

And in a treatise on metre, one hardly expects to find the following:

- (i) “The way was long, the wind was cold” is referred to as iambic *pentameter!* (p. 324)

The “pentameter” is evidently a slip of the pen; it should be “iambic verse”.

- (ii) We are told (p. 338) that the correct way to read the first line of the Aeneid is to place a stress on *que*.

That is obviously a misprint, quite as obvious as the “verily evidently”. The stress mark should be omitted.

- (iii) In a detailed scanning of the speech beginning “The lunatic, the lover and the poet” from *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, one of the lines is quoted as

And as imagination bodies forth.

In all the editions of Shakespeare your reviewer has consulted, this line runs

And, as imagination bodies forth.

In the second form, it is clear that *And*, followed by a comma, must be stressed: the line then has 5 stresses; therefore is regular. But its irregularity (without the comma and hence with only 4 stresses) is pointed out by our author. (p. 326)

Even with the comma (is it Shakespeare's?) it is an accentual inflexion that I should put on "and" not a stress.

(iv) On p. 333, we find the following accentuations: *narrâtive*; *contemplâtive*, *incarnâte*, *swîft*, *abstrâct*. These are wrong; except the last, if it is a verb.

The signs do not indicate accentuations, but natural long quantities. Accentedly these "a"s are short because unaccented, but in quantitative reckoning they should recover their native value. The second "a" in "abstract" is a short vowel, but the 4 consonants of the syllable can be taken as giving it quantitative force.

Moreover, when producing examples from prose to show that accent, stress and quantity do fall on the same syllables, and that therefore English "preserves the natural sound values", (p. 341), it might appear to some readers that the author is out-Jourdaining Monsieur Jourdain.

Why? The idea that English prose is capable of scansion is not at all new or absurd.

Nor is he quite certain whether poetic composition is conscious or unconscious (p. 348 and ff.)

Psychologically it is both, or let us say, partly conscious and partly subconscious.

and he sometimes mars the utility of his criticism by taking refuge in such phrases as "the rhythmic rendering of significance" (p. 360) and "the native utterance of things seen" which "conveys by significant sound its natural atmosphere." (p. 328)

Why? These are not phrases in which I took refuge, but express a recognised fact, both psychological and practical, of poetic technique. Is it denied that either in music or word-music sound can convey significance or reproduce the natural atmosphere of a thing seen? This is a constant experience of a sensitive reader of poetry.

The book is intended to show the possibility of writing in a metre that will “read as if it were a born English rhythm, not a naturalised alien.” (p. 363) The words that give the clue to the result, are, one feels, the words *as if*. Quantitative Verse, except what is written in Sprung Rhythm, will always masquerade in English *as if* it were in everyday garb: it will always be meretricious.

“As if” here refers to the fact that the hexameter is in origin an importation from Greek and Latin, but it must not read as such, it must not sound like a naturalised alien music; it must have a native English sound and for that it must follow the native rhythm of the English tongue. If it sounds “meretricious” the condition has not been satisfied. “As if” does not mean that it must be a false metre pretending to be a native one. The hexameter has not to pretend to be in everyday garb, for it is admittedly a new dress, but it has to fit perfectly the body of the English language. It may use the Sprung Rhythm which is also not an everyday garb, but a dress novel, reinvented and artistically fashioned. It seems to me that “meretricious” here means simply new and unfamiliar and therefore felt by the conservative mind to be foreign and artificial, just as blank verse first sounds when it is first brought into a language accustomed to rhymes; after a while it becomes quite natural, native, to the manner born — as has happened in French, in Bengali and other tongues.

Is this book, then, one of which “love’s labour’s lost” must be said? By no means. There is in it a great deal of illuminating criticism on Longfellow, Clough and Kingsley. There are some extremely wise remarks on poetry, of which these are samples:

It is evident that a crowding or sparseness of consonants will make a great difference to the total rhythm, it will produce a greater or less heaviness or lightness; but that is a rhythmic effect quite distinct from any imperative influence on the metre. (p. 339)

A great deal of free verse is nothing but prose cut up into lines to make it look like verse. (p. 348)

And one must admire the generous “expense of spirit” that went to the writing of *On Quantitative Metre*, and acknowledge that Sri Aurobindo’s poems are far more than mere illustrations of a poetic theory.

In spite of being written in a false and artificial rhythm? Queer!

[B]

Incomplete Reply

A criticism of my book *On Quantitative Metre* in the Calcutta *New Review* (*Pitfalls on Parnassus* by F. J. Friend-Pereira) attacks, not the principles of quantitative verse put forward by me,—these it holds excellent in theory, but the practice and even the possibility of putting them in practice. Unfortunately even the approval of the theory loses its value, as it seems to be based on a misconception. For the writer starts by thus describing the three constituent elements of quantitative verse,—accent, stress and quantity. “Accent is voice-weightage on a syllable; stress is voice-weightage on a one-syllable word (which may or may not be accented in itself) considered *hic et nunc* as a component part of a phrase, clause or sentence; quantity is this voice-weightage in poetry.” The reviewer evidently accepts the theory of voice-weightage as determining quantitative sound-value and accepts these three different weights, accent weight, stress weight, quantity weight. But the exact sense of the description of quantity is not clear to me and that of stress I find bewildering. In my own theory I have admitted two kinds of quantity, stress weight, weight of natural syllable quantity depending on vowel length or consonant weight, while accentual weight is disregarded as I accept it is a metrical length producer only when it coincides with stress and there its action is superfluous, since stress by itself is sufficient for the purpose. Other accentual pitches I disregard for metrical purposes and leave them only a rhythmic importance. Practically, then, in quantitative verse accent disappears as a quantity-determiner and takes a back place in the rhythm; just as does natural syllabic quantity in accentual verse.

Note on the Texts

Note on the Texts

LETTERS ON POETRY AND ART includes most of the letters on poetry, literature, art and aesthetics that Sri Aurobindo wrote between 1929 and 1950. During these years he was living in retirement in his ashram in Pondicherry and had no direct contact with others, but he carried on an enormous correspondence with the members of his ashram as well as outsiders. Most of the letters he wrote at this time were concerned with the recipients' practice of yoga and day-to-day life. But a significant number were about literary and artistic matters. The most important of such letters are published in the present volume.

Sri Aurobindo's letters on poetry, literature, art and aesthetics have been published previously in three different books: *Letters on Poetry, Literature and Art*; *Letters on "Savitri"*; and *On Himself*. (The literary letters in *On Himself* appeared in the section entitled "The Poet and the Critic".) The appropriate contents of these books, along with around five hundred letters that have not appeared in any previous collection of Sri Aurobindo's letters, are combined in the present volume under a new title.

Sri Aurobindo wrote most of the letters in this volume in reply to questions posed by his correspondents, and they deal for the most part with points the correspondents raised. As a result, the letters cannot be said to constitute a fully worked-out theory of poetics. (Such a theory is presented in Sri Aurobindo's major work of literary criticism, *The Future Poetry*, published as volume 26 of THE COMPLETE WORKS OF SRI AUROBINDO. This theory is elaborated in some of the letters.) Likewise, the critical judgments Sri Aurobindo made in the letters were confined largely to works that had been submitted to him by his correspondents. Many of these works were written by the correspondents themselves. Accordingly the poets and poems dealt with should not be taken as a catalogue of Sri Aurobindo's critical preferences, though they may be said to constitute a representative sampling of his literary interests.

The Writing of the Letters

Sri Aurobindo's correspondents wrote to him in notebooks or on loose sheets of paper that were sent to him in an internal "post" once or twice a day. He generally replied on the same sheet of paper as the question, below it or in the margin or between the lines. Sometimes, however, he wrote his answer on a separate sheet. In a few cases he had his secretary prepare a typed copy of a letter, which he revised before it was sent. All the letters were written between 1929 and 1950, the majority between 1931 and 1937. Sometimes Sri Aurobindo dated his answers, but most of the dates given at the end of the letters in this volume are those of the letter to which he was replying.

The present volume, excluding the appendixes, comprises 976 separate items, an "item" being defined as what is published here between one heading or asterisk and another heading or asterisk. Many items correspond precisely to individual letters; a good number, however, consist of portions of single letters, or (portions of) two or more letters that were joined together by earlier editors or typists and revised as such by Sri Aurobindo. A few of the items were not written as letters, but rather as comments on poems and articles that were submitted to him.

Sri Aurobindo wrote most of the letters in this volume to around a dozen correspondents, all of them members of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram. Seven of these recipients deserve special mention, since their names occur frequently in the correspondence, and their poems are discussed in letters reproduced in Part Two: Dilip Kumar Roy (1897–1980), Harindranath Chattopadhyaya (1898–1990), Arjava (J. A. Chadwick) (1899–1939), Jyotirmayi (1902–?), Nirodbaran (1903–), Amal Kiran (K. D. Sethna) (1904–), and Nishikanta (1909–1973).

The Revision of the Letters

As early as 1933, plans were made to bring out a printed collection of Sri Aurobindo's letters on poetry. Towards the end of that year, K. D. Sethna wrote to Sri Aurobindo asking whether portions of two letters he had received ought to be typed "for your book on art and literature, to be published after *The Riddle*". (*The Riddle of This*

World, published in November 1933, was the first collection of Sri Aurobindo's letters on yoga to be published.) Sri Aurobindo replied: "The best thing would be to type both the letters and send them to me so that I may put them into some possible form—of course only the general parts need be typed." The letters were duly typed, but Sri Aurobindo was unable to do much revision as there was, he wrote, "an ocean of paper drowning me". In 1935 and 1936, two further books of letters on yoga, *Lights on Yoga* and *Bases of Yoga*, were brought out. In February 1936, just before the publication of the latter volume, there was another push to bring out a collection of letters on poetry. Sri Aurobindo's secretary, Nolini Kanta Gupta, had by this time made a selection of literary letters, which he gave to Sethna for arrangement. On 25 February 1936, Sethna wrote to Sri Aurobindo asking him for advice on editorial categories and headings. Sri Aurobindo replied that he had no time to look into the matter, but remarked by the way that he could "not conceive how these stray letters can be classified under groups". He does however seem to have begun revising some of the letters around this time. He did his work on sheets that were typed from the originals or else from earlier typed or printed versions. Many of these copies had been typed immediately after the reception of the original letters, in order to be circulated among interested members of the ashram. Often minor errors crept in when the letters were typed. Moreover the recipients sometimes deliberately omitted passages that seemed to them to be of no general interest, or added words or phrases that were meant to make Sri Aurobindo's intentions more clear. As a result, the typed copies that Sri Aurobindo used for his revision did not always correspond exactly to the letters he had written.

The revision that Sri Aurobindo did during the middle and late thirties amounted sometimes to a full rewriting of the letter, sometimes to minor touches here and there. He normally removed personal references if this had not already been done by the typist. He also, when necessary, rewrote the openings or other parts of the answers in order to free them from dependence on the correspondent's question. As a result, many items now read more like brief essays than personal communications. A letter Sri Aurobindo wrote to Sethna in August 1937 reflects this approach to the revision:

I had no idea of the book being published as a collection of personal letters—if that were done, they would have to be published whole as such without a word of alteration. I understood the book was meant like the others [*i.e.*, *like* Bases of Yoga, *etc.*] where only what was helpful for an understanding of things Yogic was kept with necessary alterations and modifications. Here it was not Yoga, but certain judgments etc. about art and literature. With that idea I have been not only omitting but recasting and adding freely. Otherwise as a book it would be too scrappy and random for public interest. In the other books things too personal were omitted—it seems to me that the same rule must hold here—except very sparingly where unavoidable.

The work of revision seems to have gone on slowly until the end of 1938. It was discontinued in November of that year after Sri Aurobindo fractured his leg, and not resumed for almost a decade. (During the interval Sri Aurobindo was busy with the revision of his major works: *The Life Divine*, *The Synthesis of Yoga*, etc.) In 1947, the Sri Aurobindo Circle, Bombay, published a collection of Sri Aurobindo's letters on yoga under the title *Letters of Sri Aurobindo: First Series*. Around this time, Kishor Gandhi, the editor of the Circle's publications, began to collect material for a volume of letters on literature. His manuscript was sent to Sri Aurobindo in December 1948, and read out to him by his scribe, Nirodbaran, who took down Sri Aurobindo's dictated revisions. These were generally less extensive than the handwritten revisions of the 1930s.

The Publication of the Letters

The third series of Sri Aurobindo's correspondence, *Letters of Sri Aurobindo: Third Series (On Poetry and Literature)*, was published in 1949 by the Sri Aurobindo Circle, Bombay. It consisted of 162 items. Most of these were preceded by headings, which, with one or two exceptions, were provided by the editor. The manuscript of the book had been typed from various sources. Some items incorporated the revision work of the 1930s. More often, however, the basis of the text of the 1949 manuscript was the original handwritten letter

or a typed copy of it. At some point during the revision of 1948–49, parts of the earlier revision were uncovered, and an effort was made to incorporate some of this work in the final version. Editorial dilemmas sometimes resulted, since the two sets of revision were not always compatible.

Selections from Sri Aurobindo's letters on literature continued to be published after his passing in 1950. Sixty-two items dealing with his epic poem *Savitri* were issued as *Letters on "Savitri"* (1951). This book was meant to serve as a sort of introduction to that poem, which had been published in 1950–51. (Since 1954, these letters, along with some others, have been appended to most editions of *Savitri*.) In 1953, twenty-one items relating to Sri Aurobindo as poet and critic were included in *Sri Aurobindo on Himself and on the Mother*. During the 1950s, disciples of Sri Aurobindo began to publish their correspondences with him. K. D. Sethna brought out a collection of letters on various topics under the title *Life—Literature—Yoga* in 1952. Two years later, Nirodbaran released the first volume of his *Correspondence with Sri Aurobindo*. In both of these books, and in subsequent collections of letters from Sri Aurobindo to specific disciples, a summary of the disciple's question was often put before Sri Aurobindo's reply in order, as Sethna put it, "to give the utmost point to the replies, bring out best the personal touch in them and frame more definitely both their profundity and their humour".

In 1970–73, Sri Aurobindo's collected works were published as the *Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary Library* (SABCL). Letters on poetry, literature and art appeared in three volumes of this set. The main series of letters, consisting of the 162 items published in *Letters of Sri Aurobindo: Third Series (On Poetry and Literature)*, along with 145 additional items from manuscript and printed sources, was published as the second part of SABCL volume 9, *The Future Poetry and Letters on Poetry, Literature and Art* (1972). The 21 items that had been published in *Sri Aurobindo on Himself and on the Mother*, along with 101 additional items, were reproduced in SABCL volume 26, *On Himself*, in a section entitled "The Poet and the Critic". Most of the additional items in this section were from *Life—Literature—Yoga*, and included the questions that had been published with them there. The 62 items from *Letters on "Savitri"*, along with 26 others, were

printed at the end of the second volume of *Savitri* (SABCL volume 29). Finally, five items dealing with some of Sri Aurobindo's lyrical poems were published after the poems in *Collected Poems* (SABCL volume 5). Summing up, 522 items of correspondence on literary and artistic matters were reproduced in four volumes of the Centenary Library. Around twenty of these items were duplicated in two or even three volumes. Thus a total of around five hundred letters on poetry and art were published in the SABCL.

The Present Edition

This edition, the first to be entitled *Letters on Poetry and Art*, includes almost all the letters on poetry, literature and art reproduced in volumes 5, 9, 26 and 29 of the SABCL, along with around five hundred items that have not appeared in any previous collection of Sri Aurobindo's letters (collections edited by recipients excepted). Most of the new items are relatively short; nevertheless the present volume contains 757 pages, as against the 492 pages devoted to letters on poetry and art in the four SABCL volumes. It is difficult to establish precise correspondences between the number of items published in the SABCL and the COMPLETE WORKS, because certain letters published as two or more items in the SABCL have been combined, while other letters published as single items in the SABCL have been split into separate items. These operations have been done in accordance with Sri Aurobindo's manuscripts, as explained below.

The 162 items in *Letters of Sri Aurobindo: Third Series (On Poetry and Literature)* (1949) were arranged by the editor in nine sections. When these and other items were reproduced in SABCL volume 9, a tenth section was added. In the present volume, owing to the large number of additional items, it proved impossible for the editors to preserve the earlier arrangement. The material is now placed in three parts, containing a total of eleven sections and fifty-five subsections.

The letters in Part One differ in kind and in manner of presentation from most of those published in the other two parts. As noted above, Sri Aurobindo revised a number of the letters, removing personal references and making it possible for them to stand independent of the questions that elicited them. Such letters are published here as

he revised them. For the sake of consistency, most unrevised letters placed by the editors in this part have been published without questions. If some contextual information was required for intelligibility, it has been given in footnotes. (Questions have been included in three sections of Part One, in which examples of specific passages of poetry are discussed.)

Many letters that appeared for the first time in volumes like K. D. Sethna's *Life—Literature—Yoga* and Nirodbaran's *Correspondence with Sri Aurobindo*, and later in *On Himself*, were published with the correspondent's question. These have been retained (often in modified form) by the present editors. When appropriate, the editors have included the questions of letters reproduced for the first time. They have also reproduced the questions of certain letters that have hitherto been published without them. The two types of presentation — without and with questions and personal references — are each appropriate for a certain sort of material. Statements about the nature of poetry and the elements of poetic technique, which make up the bulk of Part One, are best presented in the impersonal way. This keeps the discussion from getting tied down to the immediate context of the letter's creation. Comments on specific writers and their work, and advice intended for specific individuals, which make up the bulk of Parts Two and Three, are best presented along with their context. This prevents specific judgments and advice from being taken as universal dicta.

Most questions have been copy-edited and abbreviated. A few that reveal the correspondent's relationship with Sri Aurobindo in an interesting way have been reproduced at some length.

While preparing the present edition for publication, the editors have consulted every available state of every letter: handwritten manuscripts, revised typescripts, versions in the manuscript of *Letters of Sri Aurobindo* (1949), and printed versions. Special attention has been given to manuscript versions. In earlier editions many "letters" were actually extracts from single letters or (parts of) different letters published as one. In the present edition, single letters are generally printed in their entirety. The editors have sometimes restored parts of letters that have hitherto been omitted. This has not been done when (1) Sri Aurobindo's revision of the letter made restoration impossible,

(2) the letter was of the kind that was better off published without personal references, or (3) the omitted material was irrelevant to the topic under discussion. In a few of Sri Aurobindo's letters, different paragraphs or groups of paragraphs deal with subjects that are covered in different sections of the book. In some such cases, the passages are printed as separate items. Items composed of more than one letter that were typed as units and revised by Sri Aurobindo in that form have generally been retained as compound items in the present edition.

Portions of the original letters that do not deal with the subject under discussion have generally been omitted. If the omitted portion is from a part of the letter preceding or following the printed portion, the elision has not been indicated. If the omitted portion is from the midst of the printed portion, it has been indicated by ellipsis points (...). Ellipsis points at the end of an item indicate that the end of the letter has been lost.

Each letter or group of letters in volumes 9 and 26 of the SABCL had a heading. With one exception, these headings were the work of the editors. The exception, "Yeats and the Occult" (page 415 of the present volume) was written by Sri Aurobindo when he revised a typed copy of the letter in question.

The text of each of the items has been checked against all its available handwritten, typed and printed versions. The number of versions available varies greatly from letter to letter. For items published in the 1949 edition, there may be a handwritten manuscript, one or more typed copies, and the version in the typed manuscript of the book. In other instances, there may be only a single handwritten manuscript. In cases where no manuscript was available, the editors have used reliably produced typed or printed versions as the basis of the text.

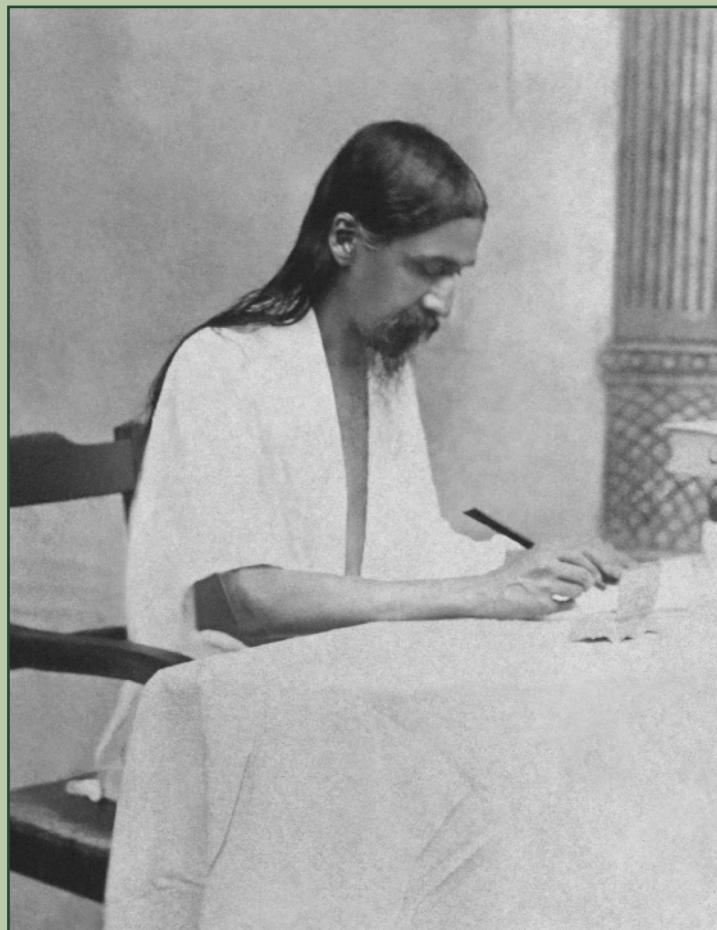
In previous editions the names of individuals were represented by their initials or by "X", "Y", etc. In the present edition, names written by Sri Aurobindo in the manuscripts have been spelled out. (In two letters initials remain, because these letters are preserved only in the form of copies in which initials replaced the names.) In one or two cases Sri Aurobindo himself used initials. These have been preserved.

All quotations from poets and prose writers in the letters have been checked against the original texts as well as against Sri Aurobindo's manuscripts. If Sri Aurobindo misquoted a line, his version has been

allowed to stand, as his choice of words may be significant. If the misquotation was introduced by someone else (for example, the person who typed out a passage for Sri Aurobindo's opinion), it has been corrected against a reliable text of the original work. Following Sri Aurobindo's own preference, the editors have used modernised editions of sixteenth and seventeenth century poets. The Reference Volume of the COMPLETE WORKS includes a table that gives the source of all quotations, and the correct text of misquoted lines.

Letters on Yoga

I



Sri Aurobindo

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Letters on Yoga — I

Foundations of the Integral Yoga

Publisher's Note

Letters on Yoga—I comprises letters written by Sri Aurobindo on the philosophical and psychological foundations of the Integral Yoga. It is the first of four volumes of *Letters on Yoga*, arranged by the editors as follows:

- I. Foundations of the Integral Yoga
- II. Practice of the Integral Yoga
- III. Experiences and Realisations in the Integral Yoga
- IV. Transformation of Human Nature in the Integral Yoga

The letters in these volumes have been selected from the large body of letters that Sri Aurobindo wrote to disciples and others between 1927 and 1950. Other letters from this period are published in *Letters on Poetry and Art* and *Letters on Himself and the Ashram*, volumes 27 and 35 of THE COMPLETE WORKS OF SRI AUROBINDO. Letters written before 1927 are reproduced in *Autobiographical Notes and Other Writings of Historical Interest*, volume 36 of THE COMPLETE WORKS.

During Sri Aurobindo's lifetime, relatively few of his letters were published. Three small books of letters on Yoga were brought out in the 1930s. A more substantial collection came out between 1947 and 1951 in a four-volume series entitled *Letters of Sri Aurobindo* (including one volume of letters on poetry and literature). In 1958, many more letters were included in the two large tomes of *On Yoga—II*. A further expanded collection in three volumes entitled *Letters on Yoga* was published in 1970 as part of the Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary Library. The present collection, also entitled *Letters on Yoga*, constitutes volumes 28–31 of THE COMPLETE WORKS. These volumes incorporate previously published letters and contain many new ones as well. About one-third of the letters in the present volume were not published in the Centenary Library.

The present volume is arranged by subject in five parts:

1. The Divine, the Cosmos and the Individual
2. The Parts of the Being and the Planes of Consciousness
3. The Evolutionary Process and the Supermind
4. Problems of Philosophy, Science, Religion and Society
5. Questions of Spiritual and Occult Knowledge

The texts of all letters have been checked against the available manuscripts, typescripts and printed versions.

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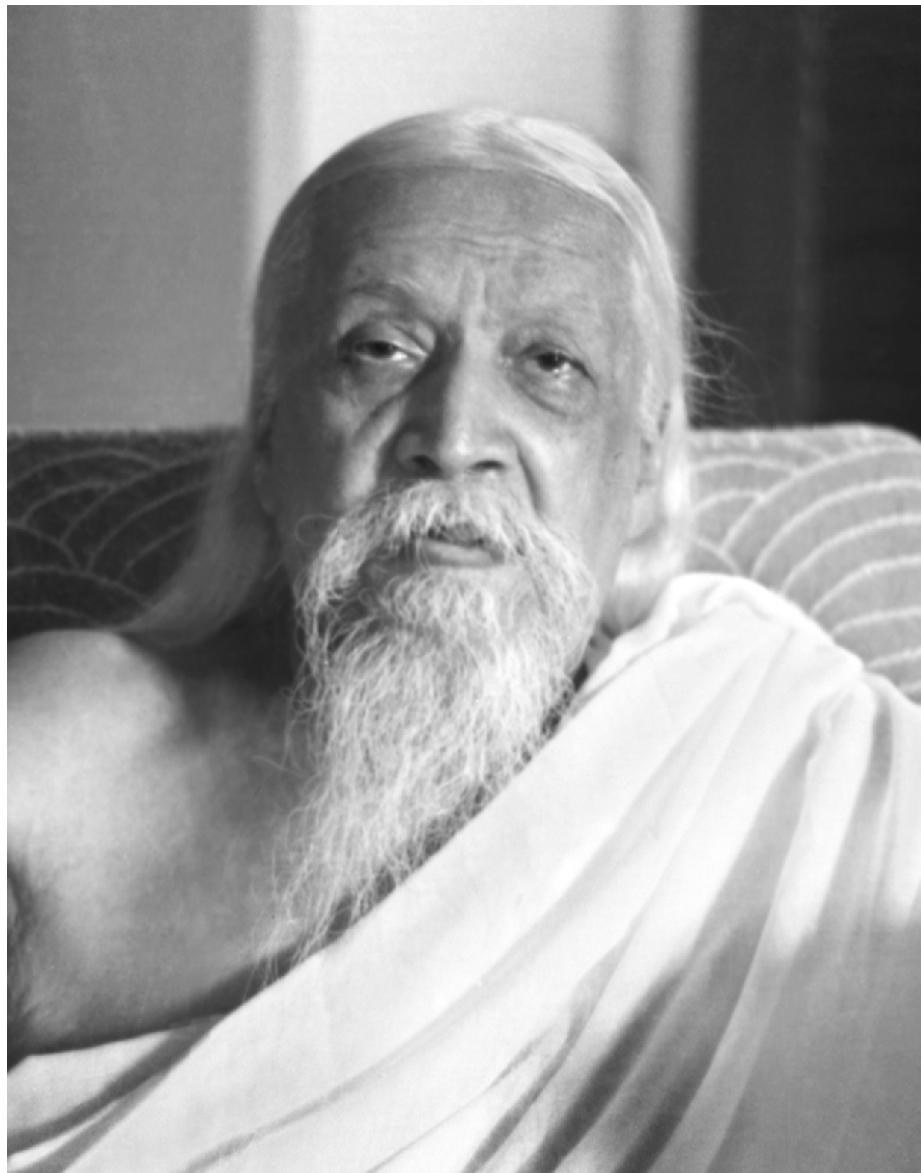
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Sri Aurobindo, 1950

Part One

The Divine, the Cosmos and the Individual

Section One

The Divine, Sachchidananda,
Brahman and Atman

Chapter One

The Divine and Its Aspects

The Divine

The Divine is the Supreme Truth because it is the Supreme Being from whom all have come and in whom all are.

*

The Divine is that from which all comes, in which all lives, and to return to the truth of the Divine now clouded over by Ignorance is the soul's aim in life. In its supreme Truth, the Divine is absolute and infinite peace, consciousness, existence, power and Ananda.

*

The Divine is everywhere on all the planes of consciousness seen by us in different ways and aspects of his being. But there is a Supreme which is above all these planes and ways and aspects and from which they come.

*

The Divine is neither personal nor impersonal, formless nor formed. He is the Divine. You talk of these distinctions as if they separated the Divine into so many separate Divines which have nothing to do with each other.

The Divine Consciousness

By the Divine Consciousness we mean the spiritual consciousness to which the Divine alone exists, because all is the Divine and by which one passes beyond the Ignorance and the lower nature into unity with the Divine and the Divine Nature.

Here in the Ignorance we are not aware of the Divine and we obey the lower nature.

*

All that is true Truth is the direct expression in one way or another of the Divine Consciousness. Life is the dynamic expression of Consciousness-Force when thrown outward to realise itself in concrete harmonies of formation; Love is an intense self-expression of the soul of Ananda, and Light is what always accompanies the Supramental Consciousness and its most essential power.

The Divine: One in All

The Divine is everywhere and in all—but this is a world of Ignorance in which each one is separated from the Divine within him by his ego and he acts according to the ego and not according to the Divine. When he sees the Divine in all, then he begins to have the right consciousness and be free.

*

All things are the Divine because the Divine is there, but hidden not manifest; when the mind goes out to things, it is not with the sense of the Divine in them, but for the appearances only which conceal the Divine. It is necessary therefore for you as a sadhak to turn entirely to the Mother in whom the Divine is manifest and not run after the appearances, the desire of which or the interest in which prevents you from meeting the Divine. Once the being is consecrated, then it can see the Divine everywhere—and then it can include all things in the one consciousness without a separate interest or desire.

*

Wherever the Divine is, everything is—it is only concealed, not non-existent. The Divine is there below in the unconsciousness itself—mind and life are concealed in Matter, so is Supermind and Sachchidananda. The below is not something outside the Divine Existence. But as mind manifested in Matter only after the descent of Mind opened it into creation, so it is with Supermind.

Aspects of the Divine

The Divine is infinite and a single experience or poise of experience cannot exhaust all the truth of the Divine. The seers have experienced each some aspect or aspects of the Divine Reality. Their mental differences have been illustrated in the analogue of the blind men who all felt the elephant and described it in different figures according to the part they felt. One must go beyond mind altogether, even beyond the spiritualised mind, to have the real complete experience. "Rare", says Sri Krishna, "are the few among the seekers who know me in my totality in all the truth of my being." In fact, it is only in the supramental light that all opposition disappears and the aspects are indivisibly united in the Whole. One must go on enlarging knowledge, adding experience to experience till all the limitation disappears.

The Transcendent, Cosmic and Individual Divine

The Divine has three aspects for us:

1. It is the Cosmic Self and Spirit that is in and behind all things and beings, from which and in which all is manifested in the universe — although it is now a manifestation in the Ignorance.

2. It is the Spirit and Master of our own being within us whom we have to serve and learn to express his will in all our movements so that we may grow out of the Ignorance into the Light.

3. The Divine is transcendent Being and Spirit, all bliss and light and divine knowledge and power, and towards that highest divine existence and its Light we have to rise and bring down the reality of it more and more into our consciousness and life.

In the ordinary nature we live in the Ignorance and do not know the Divine. The forces of the ordinary nature are undivine forces because they weave a veil of ego and desire and unconsciousness which conceals the Divine from us. To get into the higher and deeper consciousness which knows and lives consciously in the Divine, we have to get rid of the forces of the

lower nature and open to the action of the Divine Shakti which will transform our consciousness into that of the Divine Nature.

This is the conception of the Divine from which we have to start—the realisation of its truth can only come with the opening of the consciousness and its change.

*

The distinction between the Transcendental, the Cosmic, the Individual Divine is not my invention, nor is it native to India or to Asia—it is on the contrary a recognised European teaching current in the esoteric tradition of the Catholic Church where it is the authorised explanation of the Trinity,—Father, Son and Holy Ghost,—and it is very well-known to European mystic experience. In essence it exists in all spiritual disciplines that recognise the omnipresence of the Divine—in Indian Vedantic experience and in Mahomedan Yoga (not only the Sufi, but other schools also)—the Mahomedans even speak of not two or three but many levels of the Divine until one reaches the Supreme. As for the idea in itself, surely there is a difference between the individual, the cosmos in space and time, and something that exceeds this cosmic formula or any cosmic formula. There is a cosmic consciousness experienced by many which is quite different in its scope and action from the individual consciousness, and if there is a consciousness beyond the cosmic, infinite and essentially eternal, not merely extended in Time, that also must be different from these two. And if the Divine is or manifests Himself in these three, is it not conceivable that in aspect, in His working, He may differentiate Himself so much that we are driven, if we are not to confound all truth of experience, if we are not to limit ourselves to a mere static experience of something indefinable, to speak of a triple aspect of the Divine?

In the practice of Yoga there is a great dynamic difference in one's way of dealing with these three possible realisations. If I realise only the Divine as that, not my personal self, which yet moves secretly all my personal being and which I can bring forward out of the veil, or if I build up the image of that Godhead in my members, it is a realisation but a limited one. If it is the

Cosmic Godhead that I realise, losing in it all personal self, that is a very wide realisation, but I become a mere channel of the universal Power and there is no personal or divinely individual consummation for me. If I shoot up to the transcendental realisation only, I lose both myself and the world in the transcendental Absolute. If on the other hand my aim is none of these things by itself, but to realise and also to manifest the Divine in the world, bringing down for the purpose a yet unmanifested Power,—such as the Supermind,—a harmonisation of all three becomes imperative. I have to bring it down, and from where shall I bring it down—since it is not yet manifested in the cosmic formula—if not from the unmanifest Transcendence, which I must reach and realise? I have to bring it into the cosmic formula and, if so, I must realise the cosmic Divine and become conscious of the cosmic self and the cosmic forces. But I have to embody it here,—otherwise it is left as an influence only and not a thing fixed in the physical world—and it is through the Divine in the individual alone that this can be done.

These are elements in the dynamics of spiritual experience and I am obliged to admit them if a divine work has to be done.

*

The European type of monism is usually pantheistic and weaves the universe and the Divine so intimately together that they can hardly be separated. But what explanation of the evil and misery can there be there? The Indian view is that the Divine is the inmost substance of the Universe, but he is also outside it, transcendent; good and evil, happiness and misery are only phenomena of cosmic experience due to a division and diminution of consciousness in the manifestation, but are not part of the essence or of the undivided whole-consciousness either of the Divine or of our own spiritual being.

*

I know what is your difficulty about the Cosmic Divine. It was not present to my mind because I look at these things from the point of view of facts as they are both to our spiritual and our

outward experience—whereas the point of view on which you lay stress is that they are not what they ought to be or what the mind, ethical feeling and the vital in man feel that they ought to be. That this world is full of queer, ugly and inharmonious things is the very plain and self-evident fact with which we have to start,—wherever we may want or hope to arrive. But the whole question is there, whether there is something behind, something that warrants this hope to arrive at something better. For the spiritual experience there is—and this something behind is to it as undeniable a fact as the very apparent character of this world in its surface aspect as a world of Ignorance, tribulation, suffering, disharmony, disorder, obscure Inconscience. To spiritual experience it is not a speculation but a fact that there is a God-head immanent within behind this flawed and imperfect human nature into some likeness to which this nature can try to grow; there is something behind the cosmic movement with all its disorder which is of the nature of abiding peace, calm, strength, joy and all-embracing universality and to enter into it and abide in it is possible for our consciousness also. It is also a part of spiritual experience that there is something Beyond in which this Divinity—or whatever other name you may give to it—is above the contradiction offered to it by this world of disorder and ignorance; that is the meaning of the Transcendence. Whatever wide differences there may be between different ways of spiritual experience or whatever names may be put on these things, so much is fairly universal. If there were not these certitudes, there could be no assured spiritual life or endeavour.

*

The transcendent [*is the state beyond the universal forces*]—which for the purposes of our universe would mean the Sach-chidananda planes and the supramental as a link with the present manifestation.

Of course the absolutely transcendent would be beyond all planes altogether.

Personal and Impersonal Sides of the Divine

There is always the personal and the impersonal side of the Divine and the Truth and it is a mistake to think the impersonal alone true or important—for that leads to a void incompleteness in part of the being while only one side is given satisfaction. Impersonality belongs to the intellectual mind and the static self, personality to the soul and heart and dynamic being. Those who disregard the personal Divine ignore something which is profound and essential.

In X's case there exists a conflict between his ideas of the Truth and his heart. But in following the heart in its purer impulses one follows something that is at least as precious as the mind's loyalty to its own conceptions of what the Truth may be.

*

Many have had communion with the Personal Divine, through the mind and the heart—but that is not the complete or supreme realisation.

*

The usual experience of the Impersonal is that It is everywhere, without form or limitation in any place or time.

*

The impersonal Divine has no abode and cannot have; it is all-pervading. If anybody says the impersonal Divine has its abode in the heart he can be asked what he means by the impersonal Divine.

*

Whatever impersonal Truth or Light there is, you have to find it, use it, do what you can with it. It does not trouble itself to hunt after you. It is the Buddhist idea that you must do everything for yourself, that is the only way.

*

When one follows after the impersonal Self, one is moving

between two opposite principles—the silence and purity of the impersonal inactive Atman and the activity of the ignorant Prakriti. One can pass into the Self, leaving the ignorant Nature or reducing it to silence. Or else, one can live in the peace and freedom of the Self and watch the action of Nature as a witness. Even one may put some sattvic control, by tapasya, over the action of the Prakriti; but the impersonal Self has no power to change or divinise the Nature. For that one has to go beyond the impersonal Self and seek after the Divine who is both personal and impersonal and beyond these two aspects. If, however, you practise living in the impersonal Self and can achieve a certain spiritual impersonality, then you grow in equality, purity, peace, detachment, you get the power of living in an inner freedom not touched by the surface movement or struggle of the mental, vital and physical nature, and this becomes a great help when you have to go beyond the impersonal and to change the troubled nature also into something divine.

The Divine and the Atman

The Divine is more than the Atman. It is Nature also, it contains everything in Itself.

*

It is the individual being that is a portion of the Divine. The universal self or Atman which is the same in all, is not a portion but an aspect of the Divine.

The Divine and the Supermind

One can become one with the Divine on the mental plane. The Supermind is necessary for manifesting the Divine on earth.

*

The Divine can be and is everywhere, masked or half-manifest or beginning to be manifest, in all the planes of consciousness; in the Supramental it begins to be manifest without disguise or veil in its own *svariūpa*.

Chapter Two

Sachchidananda: Existence, Consciousness-Force and Bliss

Sachchidananda

Sachchidananda is the One with a triple aspect. In the Supreme the three are not three but one — existence is consciousness, consciousness is bliss, and they are thus inseparable, not only inseparable but so much each other that they are not distinct at all. In the superior planes of manifestation they become triune — although inseparable, one can be made more prominent and base or lead the others. In the lower planes below they become separable in appearance, though not in their secret reality, and one can exist phenomenally without the others so that we become aware of what seems to us an inconscient or a painful existence or a consciousness without Ananda. Indeed without this separation of them in experience pain and ignorance and falsehood and death and what we call conscience could not have manifested themselves — there could not have been this evolution of a limited and suffering consciousness out of the universal nescience of Matter.

*

The Sachchidananda is not in itself an active consciousness, it is simply pure existence, consciousness and bliss. By a Truth Consciousness is meant a knowledge consciousness which is immediately, inherently and directly aware of Truth in manifestation and has not to seek for it like Mind. Sachchidananda is everywhere behind the manifestation and supporting it as well as above it and can be experienced below the supermind — even in mind and vital it can be experienced.

*

The original substance of the spirit is pure existence carrying in it pure self-existent consciousness (or consciousness-force) and pure self-existent Ananda.

*

There is no plane beyond Sachchidananda.

*

People say like that [*the Transcendent is something beyond Sachchidananda*] because the transcendent Absolute is not only what to us is existence but also what to us is non-existence. But there is really no such thing as non-existence. So the Transcendent can be conceived as transcendent Sat, transcendent Chit, transcendent Ananda.

Sat or Pure Existence

You must remember that there are reflections of the higher worlds in the lower planes which can easily be experienced as supreme for that stage of the evolution. But the supreme Sachchidananda is not a world, it is supracosmic. The Sat (Satyaloka) world is the highest of the scale connected with this universe.

*

Substance and being are the same thing. In the creation they can be looked at as two aspects of the Spirit.

*

The Pure Existence is not something abstract, but substantial and concrete. Moreover it is descending into the body, so it is quite natural to feel it materially.

Chit or Consciousness

You seem to want to reduce everything to a catalogue and a scientific analysis. Nobody has ever been able to do that with the working of the consciousness. The elements of a condition of

consciousness cannot be classified like the “elements” of Matter.

*

I had intended to give only a concise answer to your question about consciousness but it began to develop itself at great length and I could not as yet finish it. I send you for the moment a more summary reply.¹

Consciousness is not, to my experience, a phenomenon dependent on the reactions of personality to the forces of Nature and amounting to no more than a seeing or interpretation of these reactions. If that were so, then when the personality becomes silent and immobile and gives no reactions, as there would be no seeing or interpretative action, there would therefore be no consciousness. That contradicts some of the fundamental experiences of Yoga, e.g., a silent and immobile consciousness infinitely spread out, not dependent on the personality but impersonal and universal, not seeing and interpreting contacts but motionlessly self-aware, not dependent on the reactions, but persistent in itself even when no reactions take place. The subjective personality itself is only a formation of consciousness which is a power inherent, not in the activity of the temporary manifested personality, but in the being, the Self or Purusha.

Consciousness is a reality inherent in existence. It is there even when it is not active on the surface, but silent and immobile; it is there even when it is invisible on the surface, not reacting on outward things or sensible to them, but withdrawn and either active or inactive within; it is there even when it seems to us to be quite absent and the being to our view unconscious and inanimate.

Consciousness is not only power of awareness of self and things, it is or has also a dynamic and creative energy. It can determine its own reactions or abstain from reactions; it can not only answer to forces, but create or put out from itself forces. Consciousness is Chit but also Chit Shakti.

¹ Sri Aurobindo's incomplete draft reply, which “began to develop itself at great length”, is reproduced immediately after the present letter.—Ed.

Consciousness is usually identified with mind, but mental consciousness is only the human range which no more exhausts all the possible ranges of consciousness than human sight exhausts all the gradations of colour or human hearing all the gradations of sound—for there is much above or below that is to man invisible and inaudible. So there are ranges of consciousness above and below the human range, with which the normal human has no contact and they seem to it unconscious,—supramental or overmental and submental ranges.

When Yajnavalkya says there is no consciousness in the Brahman state, he is speaking of consciousness as the human being knows it. The Brahman state is that of a supreme existence supremely aware of itself, *svayamprakāśa*,—it is Sachchidananda, Existence-Consciousness-Bliss. Even if it be spoken of as beyond that, *parātparam*, it does not mean that it is a state of Non-existence or Non-consciousness, but beyond even the highest spiritual substratum (the “foundation above” in the luminous paradox of the Rig Veda) of cosmic existence and consciousness. As it is evident from the description of Chinese Tao and the Buddhist Shunya that that is a Nothingness in which all is, so with the negation of consciousness here. Superconscious and subconscious are only relative terms; as we rise into the superconscious we see that it is a consciousness greater than the highest we yet have and therefore in our normal state inaccessible to us and, if we can go down into the subconscious, we find there a consciousness other than our own at its lowest mental limit and therefore ordinarily inaccessible to us. The Inconscient itself is only an involved state of consciousness which like the Tao or Shunya, though in a different way, contains all things suppressed within it so that under a pressure from above or within all can evolve out of it—“an inert Soul with a somnambulist Force”.

The gradations of consciousness are universal states not dependent on the outlook of the subjective personality; rather the outlook of the subjective personality is determined by the grade of consciousness in which it is organised according to its typal nature or its evolutionary stage.

It will be evident that by consciousness is meant something which is essentially the same throughout but variable in status, condition and operation, in which in some grades or conditions the activities we call consciousness can exist either in a suppressed or an unorganised or a differently organised state; while in other states some other activities may manifest which in us are suppressed, unorganised or latent or else are less perfectly manifested, less intensive, extended and powerful than in those higher grades above our highest mental limit.

*

If your definition is correct, consciousness cannot be a self-existent reality; it is a result, a phenomenon dependent on the reactions of something — you say a personality, but what is a personality apart from consciousness? — to the universal forces of Nature. We can take a purely external view and say that consciousness is the result of a mass of reactions to the impact of outward physical things on the brain and nerves of a physical being. In this case consciousness is a sort of effective hallucination — there is no real and permanent consciousness but only a subjective impression created by a constant activity of reactions. As a number of dancing fires may create a glow in the sky, so consciousness is created by these reactions and is suspended or disappears when they halt or cease. In your definition you add a real (?) subjective personality and supplement the reactions of physical outward things by reactions of inner things or things from above or below. But still the consciousness is only a seeing or interpretation of reactions, — it is a result of them, a phenomenon. If there are no more reactions, consciousness ceases to exist — for what other basis has it or standing place than the impermanent reaction to forces? Unless it is something intrinsic and inherent in the “subjective personality”; but then it is not a result of the reactions or a seeing and interpretation of them, but rather the reactions are the result of a pre-existent consciousness and the seeing or interpretation is merely an activity, perhaps only a very partial and surface activity, of the consciousness already and always inherent in the “personality”. Even if there

were no impact of forces and no reactions, the consciousness would still be there, but static and inactive. But again this activity of consciousness might not be limited to an interpretation or a passive reaction to forces; it might also, if it chose, be the creator or determinant of its reactions — as for instance to a blow on the body or the vital it might refuse the natural reactions of pain or anger and remain still and immobile or it might return an unusual reaction of love or pleasure. Also this consciousness might not be only a recipient and seer of forces, but a creator or putter out of forces — it might be not only a knower, but an energy, a dynamis. In this view, your definition becomes totally inadequate. Farther, the word personality is misleading; for what we usually know as personality is itself only a formation of consciousness. Behind it we are aware of a Person or Purusha who puts forward the mutable surface formation we call personality and who may even have many personalities at a time or different personalities at different times. This Purusha would be then a being and consciousness, would be not a result or an activity, but a constant reality, an intrinsic power of awareness and action inherent in the being, — as the being is self-existent, so the consciousness self-existent in the being, the Purusha. This is the realisation we have of it in Yogic experience, eternal reality of consciousness inherent in the eternal reality of existence, as in the concept and experience of Sachchidananda.

This is the crucial point in the question, what is consciousness, whether it is a temporary phenomenon of Nature or a reality in itself fundamental to existence. The first is the conclusion that is drawn, and must be drawn, from normal experience on the surface. The other is at best a metaphysical speculation or an instinctive feeling in humanity unless we go beyond the normal experience, deepen and widen the range of our present consciousness and test its inner depths and inferior abysses and supernormal heights, until we can touch its fundamental or its ultimate or its total reality as is done in Yoga. To judge from only normal and superficial experience as the ordinary mind does with phenomena is to miss the truth of things — we have to go behind the surface phenomenon to find the reality of what a

thing is. There are no gradations of consciousness if the ordinary phenomenon of consciousness is taken, unless perhaps we distinguish two gradations, the animal and the human; the differences created by the variations of subjective personality amount only to degrees of power of the same human-animal consciousness, a better or worse, cruder or more complex organisation of the instruments by which it receives or reacts to the contacts of Nature. If, on the contrary, consciousness is an inherent power of existence present even when it is not apparent to us or active on the surface, then we can conceive of it arranging its own manifestation in gradations which rise or fall between what seem to us now the subconscious depths and superconscious summits of existence.

The ordinary view of consciousness is based on normal superficial experience plus science. For physical science consciousness is a temporary phenomenon in an unconscious world, something evolved in an animate organisation that somehow develops in an originally inanimate and unconscious Matter. It is not inherent in life, for the plant has it not, it is rather a growing flicker that, once established, lasts intermittently through sleep and waking while life lasts and disappears with the dissolution of life. The ordinary mind identifies consciousness with human waking consciousness possibly shared by the animal—though that is not certain, for many refuse consciousness to the animal. A man is conscious while he lives, when he is dead consciousness disappears, when he is asleep, stunned, drugged, anaesthetised, in trance, then his consciousness is suspended; he is temporarily unconscious. How far is this scientific-superficial view correct or maintainable? For it raises two fundamental questions—is the waking surface consciousness the only form of consciousness possible? and again, is the consciousness synonymous with mind, is all consciousness mental or are other forms of it, supramental or submental, possible?

Outer Consciousness and Inner Consciousness

Consciousness is inherent in Being, though it is here involved and

concealed in things so that it has to emerge out of an apparent unconsciousness and organise itself in individual life. But this is only on the surface which is all of which we are aware because we live on the surface of ourselves. This surface (the ordinary waking mind of man) is what we think to be ourselves, the whole of us, because living awake on the surface we are conscious of that only. But within, with a sort of wall of obscurity or oblivion between it and the outer being, there is an inner being, an inner mind, vital, physical and an inmost or psychic being of which we are not aware. We are only aware of what comes up from there to the surface and do not know its source or how it comes. By Yoga the wall is slowly broken down and we become aware of this inner and inmost being — by doing so we build up a new, a Yogic, consciousness which is able to communicate direct with the universal consciousness around and the higher spiritual above.

As the individual has a consciousness of his own, so too there is a universal consciousness, a cosmic Being, a universal Mind, a universal Life, a universal physical conscious Nature. We are unaware of it because we are shut up in our outer physical selves. By the inner awakening and the opening above we become aware of this cosmic consciousness, cosmic Nature and cosmic Self and its movements; our consciousness can widen and become one with it. The forces of universal Nature are always working on us without our knowing how they act or being able to get any general control over their action on us. By becoming conscious of the universal we are able to detect this working and control it.

*

It all depends upon where the consciousness places itself and centralises itself. If the consciousness places or associates itself within the ego, you are identified with the ego — if in the mind, it is identified with the mind and its activities and so on. If the consciousness puts its stress outside, it is said to live in the external being and becomes oblivious of its inner mind and vital and inmost psychic; if it goes inside, puts its centralising stress there, then it knows itself as the inner being or, still deeper, as the

psychic being; if it ascends out of the body to the planes where self is naturally conscious of its wideness and freedom, it knows itself as the self and not the mind, life or body. It is this stress of consciousness that makes all the difference. That is why one has to concentrate the consciousness in heart or mind in order to go within or go above. It is the disposition of the consciousness that determines everything, makes one predominantly mental, vital, physical or psychic, bound or free, separate in the Purusha or involved in the Prakriti.

*

Good heavens! what a magnificent muddle [*in the correspondent's response to the preceding letter*]! The Jivatman is on the supramental plane and the Jiva is the psychic? It is the consciousness with a clear individual "I" that disposes variously the centralising stress on one part or another of the being and yet the quality of this "I" is determined by the part with which it identifies itself — therefore it must be a pure conscious I? All that has no basis whatever and does not hang together. I never said that the Jivatman belongs to the supramental plane or is situated there. The word Jiva in its ordinary sense is the living creature, but in its philosophic sense it is often used as a short way of speaking of the Jivatman, the individual being. Neither can it be said that the psychic being is the Jiva. Nor is it the fact that it is the consciousness with a clear individual "I" that disposes variously the centralising stress on one part or another of the being. Consciousness has no need of a clear individual "I" to dispose the stress, — it can do that of itself; wherever the stress is put the "I" attaches itself to that, so that one thinks of oneself as a mental being or physical being or whatever it may be. The consciousness in me can be utterly free of any sense of an individual "I" and yet dispose its stress in this way or the other way — it may go down into the physical and work there in the physical nature keeping all the rest behind or above for the time or it may go up into the overhead level and stand above mind, life and body seeing them as instrumental lower forms of itself; or it may not see them at all but rather immerge

in the free undifferentiated Self; or it may throw itself into an active dynamic cosmic consciousness and identify with that or do any number of other things without resorting to the help of this much overrated and meddlesome fly on the wheel which you call the clear individual “I”. The real “I”—if you want to use that word—is not a “clear individual”, that is, a clear-cut limited separative ego,—it is as wide as the universe and wider, and can contain the universe in itself; it is not the *ahaṅkāra*, it is the Atman.

Consciousness is a fundamental thing, it is the fundamental thing in existence—it is the energy, the action, the movement of consciousness that creates the universe and all that is in it—not only the macrocosm, but the microcosm is nothing but consciousness arranging itself. For instance when consciousness in its movement, or rather a certain stress of movement, forgets itself in the action it becomes an apparently “unconscious” energy; when it forgets itself in the form it becomes the electron, the atom, the material object. In reality it is still consciousness that works in the energy and determines the form and the evolution of form. When it wants to liberate itself, slowly, evolutionarily, out of matter, but still in the form, it emerges as life, as the animal, as man and it can go on evolving itself still farther out of its involution and become something more than mere man. If you can grasp that, then it ought not to be difficult to see farther that it can subjectively formulate itself as a physical, a vital, a mental, a psychic consciousness—all these are present in man, but as they are all mixed up together in our external being and their real status is hidden behind in our inner secret nature one can only become fully aware of them by releasing the original limiting stress of the consciousness which makes us live in our external selves and becoming awake and centred within in the inner being. As the consciousness in us, by its external concentration or stress, has put all these things behind—behind a wall or veil—it has to break down the wall or veil and get back in its stress into these inner parts of existence—that is what we call living within; then our external being seems to us something small and superficial, we are or can become aware of

the large and rich and inexhaustible kingdoms within. So also consciousness in us has drawn a lid or covering or whatever one likes to call it between the lower planes of mind, life, body supported by the psychic and the higher planes which contain the spiritual kingdoms where the self is always free and limitless,— and it can break or open the lid or covering and ascend there and become the Self free and wide and luminous or else bring down the influence, reflection, finally even the presence and power of the higher consciousness into the lower nature.

Now that is what consciousness is—it is not composed of parts, it is fundamental to being and itself formulates any parts it chooses to manifest—developing them from above downward by a progressive coming down from spiritual levels towards the evolution in matter or formulating them in an upward working in the front by this process that we call evolution. If it chooses to work in you through the sense of ego, you think that it is the clear-cut individual I that does everything; if it begins to release itself from that limited working, then you too either begin to expand your sense of I till it bursts into infinity and no longer exists or to shed it and flower into spiritual wideness. Of course this is not what is spoken of in modern materialistic thought as consciousness, because that thought is governed by science. Science sees consciousness only as a phenomenon which emerges out of inconscient Matter and consists of certain reactions of the system to outward things. But that is phenomenon of consciousness, it is not consciousness itself, it is even only a very small part of the possible phenomena of consciousness and can give no clue to the true nature of Consciousness, the spiritual Reality which is of the very essence of existence.

That is all at present. You will have to fix yourself in that—for it is fundamental—before it can be useful to go any farther.

*

Certainly, the mind and the inner being are consciousness. For human beings who have not got deeper into themselves mind and consciousness are synonymous. Only when one becomes more aware of oneself by a growing consciousness, then one

can see different degrees, kinds, powers of consciousness, mental, vital, physical, psychic, spiritual. The Divine has been described as Being-Consciousness-Ananda, even as a Consciousness (Chaitanya), as putting out a force or energy, Shakti, that creates worlds. The mind is a modified consciousness that puts forth a mental energy. But the Divine can stand back from his energy and observe it at its work, it can be the Witness Purusha watching the works of Prakriti. Even the mind can do that—a man can stand back in his mind-consciousness and watch the mental energy doing things, thinking, planning, etc.; all introspection is based upon that fact that one can so divide oneself into a consciousness that observes and an energy that acts. These are quite elementary things supposed to be known to everybody. Anybody can do that merely by a little practice; anybody who observes his own thoughts, feelings, actions has begun doing it already. In Yoga we make the division complete, that is all.

Consciousness and Force or Energy

Consciousness is made up of two elements, awareness of self and things and forces and conscious power. Awareness is the first thing necessary, you have to be aware of things in the right consciousness, in the right way, seeing them in their truth; but awareness by itself is not enough. There must be a Will and a Force that make the consciousness effective. Somebody may have the full consciousness of what has to be changed, what has to go and what has to come in its place, but may be helpless to make the change. Another may have the will-force, but for want of a right awareness may be unable to apply it in the right way at the right place. The advantage of being in the psychic consciousness is that you have the right awareness and its will being in harmony with the Mother's will, you can call in the Mother's Force to make the change. Those who live in the mind and the vital are not so well able to do this; they are obliged to use mostly their personal effort and as the awareness and will and force of the mind and vital are divided and imperfect, the work done is imperfect and not definitive. It is only

in the supermind that Awareness, Will, Force are always one movement and automatically effective.

*

If consciousness and energy are the same thing, there would be no use in having two different words for them. In that case instead of saying, "I am conscious of my defects", one can say, "I am energetic of my defects." If a man is running fast, you can say of him, "He is running with great energy." Do you think it would mean the same if you said, "He is running with great consciousness"? Consciousness is that which is aware of things—energy is a force put in action which does things. Consciousness may have energy and keep it in or put it out, but that does not mean that it is only another word for energy and that it has to go out when the energy goes out and that it cannot stand back and observe the energy in action. You have plenty of inertia in you but that does not mean that you and inertia are the same and when inertia rises and swamps you it is you who rise and swamp yourself.

Force, Energy, Power, Shakti

There is a force behind each action acting in a manner appropriate to that action. It takes all these many forms for the necessity of the working, but it is one Force.

*

I have never classified the different forms [of *Force*]—they can be hundreds or thousands in number. Force varies its form according to the work it has to do.

*

A passive Force has no meaning—Force is always dynamic. Only a Force can act on a basis of calm passivity just as in the material world the Force acts on the basis of inertia.

*

Static and dynamic in reality always go together—it is in appearance that anything seems only dynamic or only static.

*

In each atom of the being there is an Energy, a Shakti—just as there is in every material atom a great material energy. When you see like that, you become aware of these energies. They are neither good nor bad—it depends on how they are used or how they act.

*

Power means strength and force, Shakti, which enables one to face all that can happen and to stand and overcome, also to carry out what the Divine Will proposes. It can include many things, power over men, events, circumstances, means etc. But all this not of the mental or vital kind, but by an action through unity of consciousness with the Divine and with all things and beings. It is not an individual strength depending on certain personal capacities, but the Divine Power using the individual as an instrument. It has no special relation to occult siddhis.

*

Force is the essential Shakti; Energy is the working drive of the Force, its active dynamism; Power is the capacity born of the Force; Strength is energy consolidated and stored in the Adhar.

*

The Divine Force can act on any plane—it is not limited to the Supramental Force. The Supramental is only one aspect of the power of the Divine.

*

The Supreme cannot create through the Transcendent because the Transcendent is the Supreme. It is through the Cosmic Shakti that the Divine creates.

Ananda

Ananda is a thing to be felt—it cannot be defined except negatively that it is not mere joy, but something much more deep and essential.

*

It is the statement of the Upanishad that there is an ether of Ananda in which all breathe and live; if it were not there, none could breathe or live.

*

It is fundamentally true for most people that the pleasure of life, of existence in itself, predominates over the troubles of life; otherwise most people would want to die whereas the fact is that everybody wants to live—and if you proposed to them an easy means of eternal extinction they would decline without thanks. That is what X is saying and it is undeniable. It is also true that this comes from the Ananda of existence which is behind everything and is reflected in the instinctive pleasure of existence. Naturally, this instinctive essential pleasure is not the Ananda,—it is only a pale and dim reflection of it in an inferior life-consciousness—but it is enough for its purpose. I have said that myself somewhere and I do not see anything absurd or excessive in the statement.

*

Why should the joy of creation be unyogic? Every creator feels the joy of creation—including the Divine Creator.

Chapter Three

Brahman

The Impersonal Brahman

You speak of the Impersonal as if it were a Person. The Impersonal is not He, it is It. How can an It guide or help? The Impersonal Brahman is inactive, aloof, indifferent, not concerned with what happens in the universe. Buddha's Permanent is the same.

*

There is no thought in the pure Impersonal, it is silent — but it is true that divine Truth can manifest in the background of the silence. This is of course the truth of things up to the Overmind.

The Inactive Brahman and the Active Brahman

The inactive Brahman and the active personal Brahman are two aspects of the Divine. In the Supreme these are fused into each other, not separate.

*

There are two aspects of the Divine — the static Peace and the dynamic Force. In the end they unite.

*

It is in the inactive Brahman that one merges if one seeks laya or Moksha. One can dwell in the Personal Divine but does not merge in Him. As for the Supreme, He holds in Himself the world-existence and it is in His Consciousness that it moves; so by entering into the Supreme one rises above subjection to Nature, but one does not disappear from all consciousness of world-existence.

*

The immutable Brahman is only a base for the transcendent action which comes down into its peace and silence and fills it with power also and Ananda and the light of knowledge.

Spirit and Life

In the sphere of the Spirit are only the eternal truths—all is eternally itself there, there is no development, nothing unrealised or striving to be fulfilled. There are no such things as possibilities therefore.

In life on the other hand all is a play of possibilities—nothing is realised, all is seeking to be realised—or if not yet seeking, then waiting behind the veil for that. Nothing is realised in its highest form, in its truth or completeness, but all is possible. All these possibilities are derived from the truths above—e.g., the possibility of knowledge, the possibility of love, the possibility of joy etc.

Intellect, will etc. are intermediaries which try to catch something of the hidden higher truths and bring them into life or else raise life to them—so that the possibilities of life here may become the complete realities that are already there above.

Chapter Four

The Self or Atman

The Self

It [*the self*] is being, not a being. By self is meant the conscious essential existence, one in all.

*

The self is the Divine itself in an essential aspect; it is not a portion. There is no meaning in the phrase “not even a portion” or “only an aspect”. An aspect is not something inferior to a portion.

*

Do you not know what “essential” means? There is a difference between the essence of a thing which is always the same and its formations and developments which vary. There is, for instance, the essence of gold and there are the many forms which gold can take.

*

Essence can never be defined — it simply is.

*

Everything acts in the self. The whole play of Nature takes place in the self, in the Divine. The self contains the universe.

The Cosmic Spirit or Self

The Cosmic Spirit or Self contains everything in the cosmos — it upholds cosmic Mind, universal Life, universal Matter as well as the Overmind. The Self is more than all these things which are its formulations in Nature.

*

It [*the Cosmic Spirit*] uses Truth and Falsehood, Knowledge and Ignorance and all the other dualities as elements in the manifestation and works out what has to be worked out till all is ready for a higher working.

*

The Cosmic Spirit contains the Supermind, but it keeps it above and works for the present between the Overmind and the physical. It is only when the Ignorance is removed that the Supramental becomes directly a dynamic part of the workings of cosmic Nature here. Till then there are only reflections of it.

*

The Self is essentially universal; the individualised self is only the universal experienced from an individual centre. If what you have realised is not felt to be one in all, then it is not the "Atman"; possibly it is the central being not yet revealing its universal aspect as Atman.

*

The Self is felt as either universal, one in all, or a universalised individual the same in essence as others, extended everywhere from each being but centred here. Of course centre is a way of speaking, because no physical centre is usually felt—only all the action takes place around the individual.

*

All is in the self; when identified with the universal self, all is in you.

Also, the microcosm reproduces the macrocosm—so all is present in each, though all is not expressed (and cannot be) in the surface consciousness.

The Atman, the Soul and the Psychic Being

The Atman is one in all, is not born, does not evolve or change.

The soul is something that comes from the Divine into the evolution and as the psychic being it evolves and assumes

different personalities from life to life.

*

To live in the consciousness of the Atman is to live in the calm, unity and peace that is above things and separate from the world even when pervading it. But for the psychic consciousness there are two things, the world and itself acting in the world. The Jivatman has not come down into the world, it stands above, always the same—supporting the different beings, mental etc. which act here. The psychic is what has come down here—its function is to offer all things to the Divine for transformation.

The Self and Nature or Prakriti

The Self or Atman is inactive, Nature (Prakriti) or Shakti acts. When the Self is realised it is first an infinite existence, wideness, silence, freedom, peace that is felt—that is called Atman or Self. When action takes place, it is according to the realisation either felt as forces of Nature working in that wideness, as the Divine Shakti working or as the cosmic Divine or various powers of him working. It is not felt that the Self is acting.

*

One may be aware of the silent static self without relation to the play of the cosmos. Again, one may be aware of the universal static self omnipresent in everything without being supra-sensuously awake to the movement of the dynamic *viśvaprakṛti*. The first realisation of the Self or Brahman is often a realisation of something that separates itself from all form, name, action, movement, exists in itself only, regarding the cosmos as only a mass of cinematographic shapes unsubstantial and empty of reality. That was my own first complete realisation of the Nirvana in the Self. That does not mean a wall between Self and Brahman, but a scission between the essential self-existence and the manifested world.

*

In the experience of Yoga the self or being is in essence one with the Divine or at the least it is a portion of the Divine and has all the divine potentialities. But in manifestation it takes two aspects, the Purusha and Prakriti, conscious being and Nature. In Nature here the Divine is veiled, and the individual being is subjected to Nature which acts here as the lower Prakriti, a force of Ignorance, Avidya. The Purusha in itself is divine, but exteriorised in the ignorance of Nature it is as the individual apparent being imperfect with her imperfection. Thus the soul or psychic essence, which is the Purusha entering into the evolution and supporting it, carries in itself all the divine potentialities, but the individual psychic being which it puts forth as its representative assumes the imperfection of Nature and evolves in it till it has recovered its full psychic essence and united itself with the Self above of which the soul is the individual projection in the evolution. This duality in the being on all its planes, for it is true in different ways not only of the Self and the psychic but of the mental, vital and physical Purushas, has to be grasped and accepted before the experiences of the Yoga can be fully understood.

The Being is one throughout, but on each plane of Nature, it is represented by a form of itself which is proper to that plane, the mental Purusha in the mental plane, the vital Purusha in the vital, the physical Purusha in the physical. The Taittiriya Upanishad speaks of two other planes of the being, the Knowledge or Truth plane and the Ananda plane, each with its Purusha, but although influences may come down from them these are superconscious to the human mind and their nature is not yet organised here.

Section Two

The Cosmos: Terms from Indian Systems

Chapter One

The Upanishadic and Puranic Systems

Virat

Virat is the outer manifestation and if we take all that as Brahman without knowing what is behind the manifestation we shall fall into the intellectual error of Pantheism, not realising that the Divine is more than this outer manifestation and cannot be known by it alone. In the vital we may fall into the error of accepting what is dark and imperfect on the same terms as that which makes for the light and divine perfection. There may be many other consequent errors also.

Visva or Virat, Hiranyagarbha or Taijasa, Prajna or Ishwara

These two sets of three names each mean the same things. Visva or Virat = the Spirit of the external universe, Hiranyagarbha or Taijasa (the Luminous) = the Spirit in the inner planes, Prajna or Ishwara = the Superconscious Spirit, Master of all things and the highest Self on which all depends. The Mental cannot be Ishwara.

*

It is the external consciousness, the inner consciousness, the superconscious that are meant [*by vaiśvānara, taijasa and prājña in the Mandukya Upanishad*]. The terms waking, dream, sleep are applied because in the ordinary consciousness of man the external only is awake, the inner being is mostly subliminal and acts directly only in a state of sleep when its movements are felt like things of dream and vision; while the superconscious (supermind, overmind, etc.) is beyond even that range and is to the mind like a deep sleep.

Vaisvanara, Taijasa, Prajna, Kutastha

But why do you want to connect these things with the soul? These four names [*vaiśvānara*, *taijasa*, *prājña*, *kūṭastha*] are given to four conditions of transcendent and universal Brahman or Self,—they are merely conditions of Being and Consciousness—the Self that supports the Waking State or *sthūla* consciousness, the Self that supports the Dream State or subtle consciousness, the Self that supports the Deep Sleep State or Causal consciousness, *kāraṇa*, and the Self in the supracosmic consciousness. The individual of course participates, but these are conditions of the Self, not the Self and soul. The meaning of these expressions is fixed in the Mandukya Upanishad.

Karana, Hiranyagarbha, Virat

Three planes—

(1) Karana (2) Hiranyagarbha (3) Virat

The parallel between Vijnana or Karana Jagat of the Upanishad presided over by Prajna and equated with Sushupti, as the Hiranyagarbha world with Swapna and things subtle, does not altogether equate with my account of the Supermind. But it might be said that to the normal mind approaching or entering the Supramental plane it becomes a state of Sushupti. If the writer had put the superconscious sleep of Supermind—for so the supramental state appears to the untransformed mind when it touches or apprehends it, for it falls inevitably into such a superconscious sleep—then the difference would be cured.

The Seven Worlds

1. Bhu — Physical¹
2. Bhuvah — Vital
3. Swar — Mental

¹ The correspondent asked for the terms in Sri Aurobindo's yoga system corresponding to the planes mentioned in the ancient yoga systems of India. — Ed.

- 4. Mahat — Vijnana (supramental)
- 5. Jana — Ananda world
- 6. Tapah — World of Chit-tapas } Sachchidananda worlds
- 7. Satya — World of Sat

The Worlds of the Lower Hemisphere

The *bhuvarloka* is not part of the material universe—it is the vital world that goes by that name. *Dyuloka* = mind world, *bhuvarloka* = vital world, *bhūrloka* = material world. *Svarloka* is the highest region of the *dyuloka*, but it came to be regarded as identical with it.

Tapoloka and the Worlds of Tapas

That is the original Tapoloka in which the principle is Chit and its power of Tapas, but there are other worlds of Tapas on the other planes below. There is one in the mental, another in the vital range. It is one of these Tapas worlds from which the being you saw must have come.

Chapter Two

The Sankhya-Yoga System

Purusha

Purusha is the conscious Being who supports all the action of Nature. There is no fixed place, but as the central being he usually stands above the adhar—he becomes also the mental, vital, physical, psychic being.

*

The word being is used with all kinds of significances—it is a very imprecise word and can embrace everything. Purusha has a precise significance. It is the Soul or Spirit side of the being as opposed to the Nature side.

*

There is one Purusha—its action is according to the position and need of the consciousness at the time.

It is the nature of the action above the ordinary mind or in the cosmic consciousness which is many-sided.

*

The Purusha is one thing and the ordinary mental will and force are another. The latter may be unsuccessful in their action. When you are in the Purusha consciousness, that of itself implies a state of concentration and receptivity.

*

By development of the inner will it [*the Purusha*] can become active.

*

The Purusha in men is normally passive not active. It is the Prakriti that is active.

Purusha and Prakriti

There is a Purusha or essential being for each plane of the consciousness — just as each has its prakriti (nature, especial force of action and movement), so each has its Purusha, a part of the being which supports and observes and experiences and can also control the movements of Prakriti.

*

It is Prakriti (Nature) that sends these impulses [*to act*] — Nature sends all kinds of forces and experiences to each. It is for you as a conscious being (Purusha) to choose whether you shall do or not do — you should reject what you see to be wrong, accept only what is true and right. In Nature there is the higher and the lower, the true and the false. What the Divine wants of you is that you should grow in the Truth and the higher Nature, reject the false and the lower Nature.

*

As you have indulged the Prakriti for the last ten thousand lives or so, it has been accustomed to impose its own way on the Purusha. To be separate is only the first step. Also I fancy the Purusha in you is still very mental in its will.

*

In order to get the dynamic realisation it is not enough to rescue the Purusha from subjection to Prakriti; we must transfer the allegiance of the Purusha from the lower Prakriti with its play of ignorant Forces to the Supreme Divine Shakti, the Mother.

It is a mistake to identify the Mother with the lower Prakriti and its mechanism of forces. Prakriti here is a mechanism only which has been put forth for the working of the evolutionary Ignorance. As the ignorant mental, vital or physical being is not itself the Divine, although it comes from the Divine — so the mechanism of Prakriti is not the Divine Mother. No doubt something of her is there in and behind this mechanism maintaining it for its evolutionary purpose — but what she is in herself is not

a Shakti of Avidya, but the Divine Consciousness, Power, Light, Para Prakriti to whom we turn for the release and the divine fulfilment.

The realisation of the Purusha Consciousness calm, free, observing the play of forces but not attached or involved in them is a means of liberation. The calm, the detachment, a peaceful strength and joy (*ātmarati*) must be brought down into the vital and physical as well as into the mind. If this is established, one is no longer a prey to the turmoil of the vital forces. But this calm, peace, silent strength and joy is only the first descent of the Power of the Mother into the Adhar. Beyond that is a Knowledge, an executive Power, a dynamic Ananda which is not that of the ordinary Prakriti even at its best and most sattwic, but divine in its nature.

First, however, the calm, the peace, the liberation is needed. To try to bring down the dynamic side too soon is not advisable — for then it would be a descent into a troubled and impure nature unable to assimilate it and serious perturbations might be the consequence.

*

There is a constant movement (Prakriti) and a constant silence (Purusha).

*

It is the Purusha and Prakriti sides of the nature — one leading to pure conscious existence, static, the other to pure conscious force, dynamic. The past darkness they have come out of is that of ignorance, the future darkness that is felt above is superconscious. But of course the superconscious is really luminous — only its light is not seen. The three forms of consciousness are the three sides of Nature represented by the three gunas — force of subconscious tamas, Inertia, which is the law of Matter, force of half-conscious desire, Kinesis, which is rajas, which is the law of Life, force of sattwic Prakasha, which is the law of Intelligence.

Prakriti

Prakriti is a name given to the Force that works out everything in the person and in the world; it takes the form of mental, vital, psychic, physical and other forces, of all sorts of powers and qualities, movements, forms, thoughts, sensations, feelings, actions — all that is the result of Prakriti. It is as when a machine is moved by forces of electricity or steam or gas — so the world may be regarded as a huge and complicated machine worked by the forces of Prakriti. It is what is called in English “Nature”, and they say everything in the world is the work of Nature.

*

It is Prakriti or Nature that acts; the Divine does not compel people to do anything. Nothing can happen without the presence and support of the Divine, for Nature or Prakriti is the Divine Force and it is this that works out things, but it works them out according to the nature and through or with the will of each man which is full of ignorance — that goes on until men turn to the Divine and become conscious of Him and united with Him. Then only can it be said that all begins to be done in them by the direct Will of the Divine.

*

The lower Prakriti is the ordinary consciousness of man with its ignorance, desires and bondage. I suppose you know that one has to transcend this ordinary consciousness of the lower Nature and arrive at a higher divine consciousness, if one wants to be free?

*

By Prakriti [*in a passage in* Bases of Yoga] is meant universal Prakriti. Universal Prakriti entering into the vital being creates desires which appear by its habitual response as an individual nature; but if the habitual desires she throws in are rejected and exiled, the being remains but the old individual prakriti of vital desire is no longer there,— a new nature is formed responding

to the Truth above and not to the lower Nature.

*

Universal Prakriti determined it [*the habit of response to vital movements*] and the soul or Purusha accepted it. In the acceptance lies the responsibility. The Purusha is that which sanctions or refuses. The vital being responds to the ordinary life waves in the animal; man responds to them but has the power of mental control. He has also as the mental Purusha is awake in him the power to choose whether he shall have desire or train his being to surmount it. Finally, there is the possibility of bringing down a higher nature which will not be subject to desire but act on another vital principle.

Prakriti and Shakti or Chit-Shakti

What is meant by Prakriti or Nature is the outer or executive side of the Shakti or Conscious Force which forms and moves the worlds. This outer side appears here to be mechanical, a play of the forces, gunas etc. Behind it is the living Consciousness and Force of the Divine, the divine Shakti. The Prakriti itself is divided into the lower and higher,—the lower is the Prakriti of the Ignorance, the Prakriti of mind, life and matter separated in consciousness from the Divine; the higher is the Divine Prakriti of Sachchidananda with its manifesting power of Supermind, always aware of the Divine and free from Ignorance and its consequences. Man so long as he is in the ignorance is subject to the lower Prakriti, but by spiritual evolution he becomes aware of the higher Nature and seeks to come into contact with it. He can ascend into it and it can descend into him—such an ascent and descent can transform the lower nature of mind, life and matter.

*

Prakriti is only the executive or working force—the Power behind Prakriti is Shakti. It is the Chit-Shakti in manifestation: that is the spiritual consciousness.

*

All energies derive from the Chit-Shakti; but they differentiate from it as they descend.

This much is true that Life is characteristically Force — the Physical is characteristically substance; but the dynamism of both derives from Chit — mind dynamism also, all dynamism.

Purusha, Prakriti and Action

It is more difficult for the Prakriti [*to separate itself from outer action than for the Purusha*] as its ordinary play is that of the surface being. It has to divide itself into two to separate from that. The Purusha on the contrary is in its nature silent and separate — so it has only to go back to its original nature.

*

It [*Prakriti*] divides itself into an inner Force that is free from its action (free from rajas, tamas etc.) and the outer Prakriti which it is using and changing.

*

If ego and desire are different things from the gunas, then there can be an action of the gunas without ego and desire and therefore without attachment. That is the nature of the action of the gunas in the unattached liberated Yogi. If it were not possible, then it would be nonsense to talk of the Yogis being unattached, for there would remain still attachment in part of their being. To say that they are unattached in the Purusha, but attached in the Prakriti, therefore they are unattached, is to talk nonsense. Attachment is attachment in whatever part of the being it may be. In order to be unattached one must be unattached everywhere, in the mental, vital, physical action and not only in the silent soul somewhere inside.

*

You seem to think that action and Prakriti are the same thing and where there is no action there can be no Prakriti! Purusha and Prakriti are separate powers of the being. It is not that Purusha

= quiescence and Prakriti = action, so that when all is quiescent, there is no Prakriti and when all is active there is no Purusha. When all is active, there is still the Purusha behind the active Nature and when all is quiescent there is still the Prakriti, but the Prakriti at rest.

*

The outer being is also detached [*when a Yogi engages in detached action*] — the whole being is without desire or attachment and still action is possible. Action without desire is possible, action without attachment is possible, action without ego is possible.

It is not the inner Purusha only that remains detached then — the inner Purusha is always detached, only one is not conscious of it in the ordinary state. It is the Prakriti also that is not disturbed by the action of the gunas or attached to it — the mind, the vital, the physical (which are Prakriti) begin to get the same quietude, unperturbed peace and detachment as the Purusha, but it is a quietude, not a cessation of all action, it is quietude in action itself. If it were not so, my statement in the *Arya* that there can be a desireless or liberated action on which I found the possibility of a free (*mukta*) action would be false. The whole being, Purusha-Prakriti, becomes detached (having no desire or attachment) even in the action of the gunas.

*

Prakriti is the Force that acts. A Force may be in action or in quiescence, but when it rests, it is as much a Force as when it acts. The gunas are an action of the Force, they are in the Force itself. The sea is there and the waves are there, but the waves are not the sea and when there are no waves and the sea is still, it does not stop being the sea.

The Gunas or Qualities of Nature

Prakriti and Nature are the same thing — the gunas are modes or processes of Nature (Prakriti).

*

If the gunas are quiescent, then Prakriti ceases to act — unless the gunas are transformed into their divine equivalents, — then Prakriti becomes the higher or divine Nature.

*

I don't think it¹ is correct myself. It is supposed that when the three qualities are not in an equalised condition, when there is a diversity and movement of variation, then creation is active — otherwise all becomes quiescent original Prakriti. It is doubtful if it is actually so.

*

Transcendence of the three gunas is a state of liberation in which one is not affected by the action of the gunas; but even before that is attained there can be a complete and living faith in the Divine.

Transformation of the Gunas

The three gunas become purified and refined and changed into their divine equivalents: sattwa becomes *jyotih*, the authentic spiritual light; rajas becomes *tapas*, the tranquilly intense divine force; tamas becomes *śama*, the divine quiet, rest, peace.

*

You cannot drive out rajas and tamas, you can only convert them and give the predominance to sattwa. Tamas and rajas disappear only when the higher consciousness not only comes down but controls everything down to the cells of the body. They then change into the divine rest and peace and the divine energy or Tapas; finally sattwa also changes into the divine Light. As for remaining quiet when tamas is there, there can also be a tamasic quiet.

*

¹ The correspondent asked for an explanation of an aphorism in the Sankhya Sutra (1.61): sattvarajastamasāṁ sāmyāvasthā prakṛtiḥ. — Ed.

The Prakriti can be psychicised and spiritualised and the gunas yet remain, but with the sattwa dominant and the rajas and tamas enlightened by the sattwa. As the transformation increases, the gunas change more and more towards their divine equivalents, but it is only when the supramental comes that there is the full change.

*

The transformation of the gunas is necessary for the *perfection* of the nature, not for liberation. Liberation comes by loss of ego and desire.

Sattwa and Liberation

When the consciousness as well as the action is free from ego and desire, there is always a fundamental calm. This calm remains whether sattwa predominates or not. Sattwa need not always predominate, because to become sattwic is not the object of sadhana. To need to be always sattwic would be a limitation. Whatever guna predominates in the action, to be free, desireless, calm behind all actions, is the condition of the liberated man.

*

The sattwa predominates [*when action is done without desire and ego*], the rajas acts as a kinetic movement under the control of sattwa until the tamas imposes the need of rest. That is the usual thing. But even if the tamas predominates and the action is weak or the rajas predominates and the action is excessive, neither the Purusha nor the Prakriti get disturbed, there is a fundamental calm in the whole being and the action is no more than a ripple or an eddy on the surface.

Transformation of Rajas and Tamas

It is possible that the fatigue or lethargy comes as the wrong condition which has to be replaced by the peace. As rajas, kinetic passion, has to be replaced by *tapas*, the spiritual force, so tamas,

the obscure inertia, has to be replaced by *śama*, the luminous quietude and peace.

*

The peace (*śama*) is the pure form, tamas is its degraded or perverted form—just as rajas is the degraded or perverse form of Tapas. When there is the transformation, tamas can be got rid of—but till then there is always a possibility of its mixing with the peace or stillness so long as that is not perfect and all-pervading.

*

A dynamic descent brings *tapas* not *śama*. It is a greater and greater descent of peace that brings *śama*—the dynamic descent helps it by dispersing the element of rajasic disturbance and changing rajas into *tapas*.

Transformation of Tamas into *Śama*

The tamas is part of the general physical Nature and so long as that is not fully changed and illumined, something of it remains; but one has only to go on opening oneself to the Mother's consciousness and in time the tamas too will change into the inner divine rest and peace.

*

All undesirable things are a mistranslation in the Ignorance of something that on a higher plane is or might be desirable. Inertia, tamas, is the mistranslation of the divine *śama*, rest, quietude, peace; pain is a mistranslation of Ananda, lust of love etc. It is only when the lower perversions are got rid of that the higher things in their truth can reign.

*

It is the tendency of the physical to substitute its own inertia for the emptiness. The true emptiness is the beginning of what I call in the *Arya śama*—the rest, calm, peace of the eternal Self—

which has finally to replace tamas, the physical inertia. Tamas is the degradation of *śama*, as rajas is the degradation of Tapas, the Divine Force. The physical consciousness is always trying to substitute its own inertia for the calm, peace or rest of the true consciousness, just as the vital is always trying to substitute its rajas for the true action of the Force.

*

It [*sleepiness*] is the physical tamas trying to push itself into the place of the calm. Part of the transformation consists in replacing the element of tamas in the nature by the *śama* or true calm, peace, rest, of which tamas or inertia is the degradation or perversion in the lower nature (for each of the three gunas has its divine counterpart in the higher nature). But tamas being the settled habit of the inferior nature tries to persist and keep or get back its place. That is the reason why this kind of alternation takes place between the two.

*

Inert *śama* is *śama* still mixed with tamas — a quietude that has no force of action (*tapas*) in it, no positive principle of happy ease, no positive light of knowledge — but is still calm, repose, release from all disturbance.

*

It [*tamas*] has to be transformed into *śama*, the peace and rest of the higher Prakriti, and then filled with *tapas* and *jyotih*. But this can only be done completely in the physical when the physical is finally transformed by the supramental Power.

Mahat

Mahat is, I suppose, the essential and original matrix of consciousness (involved, not evolved) in Prakriti out of which individuality and formation come.

Tanmatra

Tanmatra is only the basis of matter. In the Sankhya the basis is Pradhana (of Prakriti) out of which come Buddhi and everything else. In the Vedanta it is spiritual substance out of which all comes.

Section Three

The Jivatman and the Psychic Being

Chapter One

The Jivatman in the Integral Yoga

The Jivatman or Individual Self

By Jivatma we mean the individual self. Essentially it is one self with all others, but in the multiplicity of the Divine it is the individual self, an individual centre of the universe — and it sees everything in itself or itself in everything or both together according to its state of consciousness and point of view.

*

The self, Atman, is in its nature either transcendent or universal (Paramatma, Atma); when it individualises and becomes a central being, it is then the Jivatman. The Jivatman feels his oneness with the universal but at the same time his central separateness as a portion of the Divine.

*

The individual Self is usually described as a portion of the Transcendent and cosmic Self—in the higher and subtler ranges of the consciousness it knows itself as that, but in the lower where the consciousness is more and more clouded it identifies itself with surface forms of personality, creations of Prakriti, and becomes unaware of its divine origin. Self, when one becomes aware of it, is felt as something self-existent and eternal which is not identified with forms of mental, vital and physical personality,—these are only small expressions of its potentialities in Nature. What people call themselves now is only the ego or the mind or the life-force or the body, but that is because they think in the terms of the formations of Prakriti and do not see behind them.

*

For the most part the Supreme acts through the Jiva and its

nature and the Jiva and the nature act through the ego and the ego acts through the outer instruments — that is the play of the Ignorance.

*

Essentially one Jiva has the same nature as all — but in manifestation each puts forth its own line of Swabhava.

*

The Jivatma is above all planes. It has no fixed form or colour, though it may represent itself in a form.

*

The Jivatma has always calm and peace — it is the nature (prakriti) that is not quiet.

The Jivatman, the Psychic Being and Prakriti

The Spirit is the Atman, Brahman, Essential Divine.

When the one Divine manifests its ever inherent multiplicity, this essential Self or Atman becomes for that manifestation the Jivatman, the central being who presides from above over the evolution of its personalities and terrestrial lives here, but is itself an eternal portion of the Divine and prior to the terrestrial manifestation — *parā prakṛtir jīvabhūtā*.

In this lower manifestation, *aparā prakṛti*, this eternal portion of the Divine appears as the soul, a spark of the Divine Fire, supporting the individual evolution, supporting the mental, vital and physical being. The psychic being is the spark growing into a Fire, evolving with the growth of the consciousness. The psychic being is therefore evolutionary, not like the Jivatman, prior to the evolution.

But man is not aware of the self or Jivatman, he is aware only of his ego, or he is aware of the mental being which controls the life and the body. But more deeply he becomes aware of his soul or psychic being as his true centre, the Purusha in the heart; the psychic is the central being in the evolution, it proceeds from and represents the Jivatman, the eternal portion of the

Divine. When there is the full consciousness, the Jivatman and the psychic being join together.

The ego is a formation of Nature; but it is not a formation of physical nature alone, therefore it does not cease with the body. There is a mental and vital ego also.

The base of the material consciousness here is not only the Ignorance, but the Inconscience—that is, the consciousness is involved in form of matter and energy of matter. It is not only the material consciousness but the vital and the mental too that are separated from the Truth by the Ignorance.

*

The body is not the individual Self—it is the basis of the external personality or of the physical self, if you like so to express it; but that is not the individual Self. The individual Self is the central being (Jivatma) manifesting in the lower nature as the psychic being—it is directly a portion of the Divine.

*

The soul, representative of the central being, is a spark of the Divine supporting all individual existence in Nature; the psychic being is a conscious form of that soul growing in the evolution—in the persistent process that develops first life in matter, mind in life, until finally mind can develop into overmind and overmind into the supramental Truth. The soul supports the nature in its evolution through these grades, but is itself not any of these things.

The lower Nature, Apara Prakriti, is this external objective and superficial subjective apparent Nature which manifests all these minds, lives and bodies. The supreme Nature, Para Prakriti, concealed behind it is the very nature of the Divine—a supreme Consciousness-Force which manifests the multiple Divine as the Many. These Many are in themselves eternal selves of the Supreme in his supreme Nature, Para Prakriti. Here in relation to this world they appear as the Jivatmas supporting the evolution of the natural existences, *sarvabhūtāni*, in the mutable Becoming which is the life of the Kshara (mobile or mutable)

Purusha. The Jiva (= Jivatma) and the creatures, *sarvabhūtāni*, are not the same thing. The Jivatmas really stand above the creation even though in it, the natural existences, *sarvabhūtāni*, are the creatures of Nature. Man, bird, beast, reptile are natural existences, but the individual self in them is not even for a moment characteristically man, bird, beast or reptile; in its evolution it is the same through all these changes, a spiritual being that consents to the play of Nature.

What is original and eternal for ever in the Divine is the Being, what is developed in consciousness, conditions, forces, forms, etc., by the Divine Power is the Becoming. The eternal Divine is the Being, the universe in Time and all that is apparent in it is a Becoming. The eternal Being in its superior nature, Para Prakriti, is at once One and Many; but the eternal Multiplicity of the Divine when it stands behind the created existences, *sarvabhūtāni*, appears as (or as we say, becomes) the Jiva. That is the meaning of the *parā prakṛtir jīvabhūtā*. In the psychic on the other hand there are two aspects, the psychic existence or soul behind and in front the form of individuality it takes in its evolution in Nature.

The soul or psychic is immutable only in the sense that it contains all the possibility of the Divine within it, but this it has to evolve and in its evolution it assumes the form of a developing psychic individual evolving in the manifestation the individual Prakriti and taking part in the evolution. It is the spark of the Divine Fire that grows behind the mind, vital and physical by means of the psychic being until it is able to transform the Prakriti of Ignorance into a Prakriti of Knowledge. This evolving psychic being is not therefore at any time all that the soul or essential psychic existence bears within it; it temporalises and individualises what is eternal in potentiality, transcendent in essence in this projection of the spirit.

The central being is the being which presides over the different births one after the other but is itself unborn, for it does not descend into the being but is above it—it holds together the mental, vital and physical being and all the various parts of the personality and it controls the life either through the mental

being and the mental thought and will or through the psychic, whichever may happen to be most in front or most powerful in action. If it does not exercise its control, then the consciousness is in great disorder and every part of the personality acts for itself so that there is no coherence in the thought, feelings or action.

The psychic is not above, but behind — its seat is behind the heart; its power is not knowledge but an essential or spiritual feeling — it has the clearest sense of the truth and a sort of inherent perception of it which is of the nature of soul-feeling. It is our inmost being and supports all the others, mental, vital, physical, but it is also much veiled by them and has to act upon them as an influence rather than by its sovereign right of direct action; its direct action becomes normal and preponderant only at a high stage of development or by Yoga. It is not the psychic being which, you feel, gives you the intuitions of things to be or warns you against the results of certain actions; that is some part of the inner being, sometimes the inner mental, sometimes the inner vital, sometimes, it may be, the inner or subtle physical Purusha. The inner being — inner mind, inner vital, inner or subtle physical — knows much that is unknown to the outer mind, the outer vital, the outer physical, for it is in a more direct contact with the secret forces of Nature. The psychic is the inmost being of all; a perception of truth which is inherent in the deepest substance of the consciousness, a sense of the good, true, beautiful, the Divine, is its privilege.

The central being — the Jivatman which is not born nor evolves, but presides over the individual birth and evolution — puts forward a representative of himself on each plane of the consciousness. On the mental plane it is the true mental being, *manomaya puruṣa*, on the vital plane the true vital being, *prāṇamaya puruṣa*, on the physical plane the true physical being, *annamaya puruṣa*. Each being therefore is, so long as the Ignorance lasts, centred round his mental, vital or physical Purusha, according to the plane on which he predominantly lives, and that is to him his central being. But the true representative all the time is concealed behind the mind, vital and physical — it is the psychic, our inmost being.

When the inmost knowledge begins to come, we become aware of the psychic being within us and it comes forward and leads the sadhana. We become aware also of the Jivatman, the individual Self or Spirit above the manifestation of which the psychic is the representative here.

The Central Being and the Psychic Being

The central being is above the Adhara—most people are not aware of their central being (Jivatma)—they are aware only of the ego.

The psychic is the soul—it is a portion of the Divine that supports the mind, life and body in the evolution. The psychic gets the Divine's help directly from the Divine.

*

The central being is that which is not born, does not evolve, but presides over all the individual manifestation. The psychic is its projection here—for the psychic being is in the evolution and from within supports our whole evolution; it receives the essence of all experience and by that develops the personality Godward.

The Self is at once one in all and many—one in its essence, it manifests also as the individual self which may be described as in Nature an eternal portion of the Divine; in spirit a centre of the manifestation, individual but extending into universality and rising into transcendence.

*

It is the central being above the evolution (always the same) that we call the Jivatma—the psychic being is the same in the evolution, it is the spark of the Divine there growing into its full divinity as a portion of the Divine.

*

The central being and the soul are both in different ways portions of the Divine. They are in fact two aspects of the same entity,

but one is unevolving above Nature, the other evolves a psychic being in Nature.

*

The phrase “central being” in our Yoga is usually applied to the portion of the Divine in us which supports all the rest and survives through death and birth. This central being has two forms — above, it is the Jivatman, our true being, of which we become aware when the higher self-knowledge comes, — below, it is the psychic being which stands behind mind, body and life. The Jivatman is above the manifestation in life and presides over it; the psychic being stands behind the manifestation in life and supports it.

The natural attitude of the psychic being is to feel itself as the child, the son of God, the Bhakta; it is a portion of the Divine, one in essence, but in the dynamics of the manifestation there is always even in identity a difference. The Jivatman, on the contrary, lives in the essence and can merge itself in identity with the Divine; but it too, the moment it presides over the dynamics of the manifestation, knows itself as one centre of the multiple Divine, not as the Parameshwara. It is important to remember this distinction; for, otherwise, if there is the least vital egoism, one may begin to think of oneself as an Avatar or lose balance like Hriday with Ramakrishna.

The Surrender of the Central Being

The central being is that on which all the others depend. If it makes its surrender, that is, renounces its separate fulfilment in order to be an instrument of the Divine, then it is easier for the mental, vital and physical to surrender.

*

It [*the central being's surrender to the Divine*] has nothing to do with suitable circumstances. If the will of the central being turns towards union with the Divine, then it renounces its separate fulfilment.

The Central Being after Liberation

What will remain [*after liberation*] is the central being — not the ego. The central being will live in the consciousness of the Divine everywhere and in all other beings also; so it will not have the consciousness of a separate ego but of one centre among many of the Divine Multiplicity.

*

On the higher spiritual planes there is no ego, because the oneness of the Divine is felt, but there may be the sense of one's true person or individual being — not ego, but a portion of the Divine.

The Karana Purusha

The Karana Purusha is what is called the central being by us, the Jiva. It stands above the play, supporting it always.

The Jivatman and the *Caitya Puruṣa*

Jivatma is not psychic being — we have fixed on *caitya puruṣa* as the equivalent in Sanskrit of the psychic being. Jivatma is the individual Self — the central being.

*

Caitya puruṣa means rather the Purusha in the *cit*, the fundamental (inner) consciousness.

Jiva is the fundamental, or as we call it, the central being. But the fundamental being is not *combined* of the mental, vital, psychic etc., these are only expressions of the Jivatman; the Jivatman itself is self-existent in the Divine; *essential* in its being, it cannot be regarded as a combination of things.

The Jivatman and the Mental Purusha

When the Atman is individualised — i.e. supporting from above the play of individual being, it is called the Purusha or sometimes

the Jivatman. It is the central being. Usually however it is the mental Purusha one first becomes aware of and through that the nature is led. To become aware of the psychic being or the central Purusha is more difficult.

*

The mental being within watches, observes and passes judgment on all that happens in you. The psychic does not watch and observe in this way like a witness, but it feels and knows spontaneously in a much more direct and luminous way by the very purity of its own nature and the divine instinct within it, and so, whenever it comes to the front it reveals at once what are the right and what the wrong movements in your nature.

The being of man is composed of these elements — the psychic behind supporting all, the inner mental, vital and physical, and the outer, quite external nature of mind, life and body which is their instrument of expression. But above all is the central being (Jivatman) which uses them all for its manifestation; it is a portion of the Divine Self, but this reality of himself is hidden from the external man who replaces this inmost self and soul of him by the mental and vital ego. It is only those who have begun to know themselves that become aware of their true central being; but still it is always there standing behind the action of mind, life and body and is most directly represented by the psychic which is itself a spark of the Divine. It is by the growth of the psychic element in one's own nature that one begins to come into conscious touch with one's central being above. When that happens and the central being uses a conscious will to control and organise the movements of the nature, it is then that one has a real, a spiritual as opposed to a partial and merely mental or moral self-mastery.

*

I don't think the Jivatma is concentrated anywhere,— except in this sense that in the waking state it is the mental Purusha that leads and the seat of the mental Purusha is in the head, behind the centre between the eyebrows. In the dream state what

remains active in the body is the externalising consciousness (or something of it) and the centre of that is in the neck (throat). In the *susupti*, if it is real *susupti*, not merely unconscious of dreams, but absence of dreams, the consciousness is deep within in the heart centre or behind it — for that is the veiled centre of the innermost being.

The Jivatman, Spark-Soul and Psychic Being

The Jivatman, spark-soul and psychic being are three different forms of the same reality and they must not be mixed up together, as that confuses the clearness of the inner experience.

The Jivatman or spirit is self-existent above the manifested or instrumental being — it is superior to birth and death, always the same; it is the individual self or Atman, the eternal true being of the individual.

The soul is a spark of the Divine in the heart of the living creatures of Nature. It is not seated above the manifested being; it enters into the manifestation of the self, consents to be a part of its natural phenomenal becoming, supports its evolution in the world of material Nature. It carries with it at first an undifferentiated power of the divine consciousness, containing all possibilities, but at first unevolved possibilities, which have not yet taken form but to which it is the function of evolution to give form. This spark of Divinity is there in all terrestrial living beings from the earth's highest to its lowest creatures.

The psychic being is a spiritual personality put forward by the soul in its evolution; its growth marks the stage which the spiritual evolution of the individual has reached and its immediate possibilities for the future. It stands behind the mental, the vital, the physical nature, grows by their experiences, carries the consciousness from life to life. It is the psychic Person, *caitya puruṣa*. At first it is veiled by the mental, vital and physical parts, limited by them in its self-expression by their limitations, bound to the reactions of Nature, but, as it grows, it becomes capable of coming forward and dominating the mind, life and body. In the ordinary man it still depends on them for expression and is not

able to take them up and freely use them. The life of the being is animal and human, not divine. When the psychic being can by sadhana become dominant and freely use its instruments, then the impulse towards the Divine becomes complete and the transformation of mind, vital and body, not merely their liberation, becomes possible.

As the Self or Atman is free and superior to birth and death, the experience of the Jivatman and its unity with the supreme or universal Self is sufficient to bring the sense of liberation; but for the transformation of the life and nature the full awareness and awakening of our psychic being also is indispensable.

The psychic being realises at this stage its oneness with the true being, the Self, but it does not disappear or change into it; it remains as its instrument for psychic and spiritual self-expression, a divine manifestation in Nature.

The *bindu* seen by you above may be a symbolic way of seeing the Jivatman, the individual self as a drop of the Sea, an individual portion of the universal Divine; the aspiration on that level would naturally be for the opening of the higher consciousness so that the being may dwell there and not in the ignorance. The Jivatman is already one with the Divine in reality, but its spiritual demand may be for the rest of the consciousness also to realise it.

The aspiration of the psychic being would then translate this demand entirely for the opening of the whole lower nature, mind, vital, body to the Divine, for the love and union with the Divine, for its presence and power within the heart, for the transformation of the mind, life and body by the descent of the higher consciousness into this instrumental being and nature.

Both aspirations are necessary for the fullness of this Yoga, the demand of the self on the nature from above, the psychic aspiration of the nature from below. When the psychic imposes its aspiration on the mind, vital and body, then they too aspire and this is what was felt by you as the aspiration from the level of the lower being. The aspiration felt above is that of the Jivatman for the higher consciousness with its realisation of the One to manifest in all the being. Both aspirations help

and are necessary to each other. But the seeking of the lower being is at first intermittent and oppressed by the obscurity and limitations of the ordinary consciousness. It has by sadhana to become clear, constant, strong and enduring; it then compels realisation, makes it inevitable.

The sense of peace, purity and calm felt by you is brought about by a union or strong contact of the lower with the higher consciousness; it cannot be permanent at first, but it can become so by an increased frequency and durability of the calm and peace and finally by the full descent of the eternal peace and calm and silence of the higher consciousness into the lower nature.

The Jivatman in a Supramental Creation

I have used the words Jiva and Jivatman in these and all the passages¹ in exactly the same sense—it never occurred to me that there could be a difference. If I had so intended it, I would have drawn the distinction—the two words being similar—very clearly and not left it to be gathered by inference.

In the passage from the chapter [*in* The Life Divine] on the triple status of the Supermind I was describing how the Supermind working as a force of the highest self-determination of the Divine manifested it in three poises and what was the consciousness of the Jivatman in a supramental creation. There is no statement that the place of the Jivatman is in the supramental plane alone—if that were so, man could have no knowledge of his individual Self or Spirit before he rose to the supramental plane; he could not have any experience of the Self, though he may have the sense of the dissolution of his ego in something Universal. But he can become aware of his unborn non-evolving Self, a centre of the Divine Consciousness, long before that; the Self cosmic or individual is experienced long before rising to Supermind. If it were not so, spiritual experience of that high

¹ *The correspondent cited passages from two of Sri Aurobindo's works: The Life Divine, volume 21 of THE COMPLETE WORKS OF SRI AUROBINDO, p. 157, and Essays on the Gita, volume 19, p. 445 and p. 542.*

kind would be impossible to mental man, liberation would be impossible; he would first have to become a supramental being. As for the Purusha it is there on all planes; there is a mental Purusha, *manomaya*, leader of the life and body, as the Upanishad puts it, a vital, a physical Purusha; there is the psychic being or Chaitya Purusha which supports and carries all these as it were. One may say that these are projections of the Jivatman put there to uphold Prakriti on the various levels of the being. The Upanishad speaks also of a supramental and a Bliss Purusha, and if the supramental and the Bliss Nature were organised in the evolution on earth we could become aware of them upholding the movements here.

As for the psychic being it enters into the evolution, enters into the body at birth and goes out of it at death; but the Jivatman, as I know it, is unborn and eternal although upholding the manifested personality from above. The psychic being can be described as the Jivatman entering into birth, if you like, but if the distinction is not made, then the nature of the Atman is blurred and a confusion arises. This is a necessary distinction for metaphysical knowledge and for something that is very important in spiritual experience. The word "Atman" like "spirit" in English is popularly used in all kinds of senses, but both for spiritual and philosophical knowledge it is necessary to be clear and precise in one's use of terms so as to avoid confusion of thought and vision by confusion in the words we use to express them.

If I had meant that it is an individual consciousness that determines all this working, as you tell me, then I should be in contradiction with my own teaching of the Divine as the Master of all and the need of surrender — for an individual who can do everything himself, can carry out his own salvation — he has no need of surrender.

Chapter Two

The Jivatman in Other Indian Systems

The Jivatman in Other Schools

The word Jiva has two meanings in the Sanskritic tongues—"living creature"¹ and the spirit individualised and upholding the living being in its evolution from birth to birth. In the latter sense the full term is Jivatma—the Atman, spirit or eternal self of the living being. It is spoken of figuratively by the Gita as "an eternal portion of the Divine"—but the word fragmentation (used by you) is too strong, it could be applicable to the forms, but not to the spirit in them. Moreover the multiple Divine is an eternal reality antecedent to the creation here. An elaborate description of the Jivatma would be: "the multiple Divine manifested here as the individualised self or spirit of the created being". The Jivatma in its essence does not change or evolve, its essence stands above the personal evolution; within the evolution itself it is represented by the evolving psychic being which supports all the rest of the nature.

The Adwaita Vedanta (Monism) declares that the Jiva has no real existence, as the Divine is indivisible. Another school attributes a real but not an independent existence to the Jiva—it is, they say, one in essence, different in manifestation, and as the manifestation is real, eternal and not an illusion, it cannot be called unreal. The dualistic schools affirm the Jiva as an independent category or stand on the triplicity of God, soul and Nature.

The Jivatman and the Pure "I" of the Adwaita

Well, it is a little difficult to explain. Perhaps the best thing is to

¹ In Bengal when one is about to kill a small animal, people often protest saying, "Don't kill — it is Krishna's Jiva (his living creature)."

break up my answer into a number of separate statements, for the whole thing has got too complicated to do otherwise.

(1) It is impossible to equate my conception or experience of the Jivatman with the pure "I" of the Adwaita, by which you mean, I suppose, something which says, "I am He" and by that perception merges itself into the Brahman. According to the Adwaita of the Mayavadins this Jivatman, like the Ishwara himself, is simply an appearance of the Brahman in illusory Maya. There is no Ishwara, Lord of the world, because there is no world—except in Maya; so too there is no Jivatman, only the Paramatman illusorily perceived as an individual self by the lower (illusory) consciousness in Maya. Those, on the other hand, who wish to unite with the Ishwara, regard or experience the Jiva either as a separate being dependent on the Ishwara or as something one in essence with him, yet different, but this difference like the essential oneness is eternal—and there are also other ideas of the Jivatman and its relation to the Divine or Supreme. So this pure "I", if that is how it is to be described, presents itself differently, in different aspects, one may say, to different people. The Overmind presents the truth of things in all sorts of aspects and mind, even the spiritual mind, fastens on one or the other as the very truth, the one real truth of the matter. It is the mind that makes these differences, but that does not matter, because, through its own way of seeing and experiencing the soul or individualised consciousness or whatever you may like to call it, the mental being goes where it has to go. I hope this much is clear as the first step in the matter.

(2) I do not dispute at all the fact that one can realise the Self, the Brahman or the Ishwara without going into the overhead regions, the dynamic spiritual planes, or stationing oneself permanently above the body as happens in this Yoga. Even if it is done through the Sahasrara, well, the Sahasrara extends to the spiritualised mind and can be felt on the top of the head, so any ascent above is not indispensable. But, apart from that, one can very well, as you say, realise the Atman if one stands back from the mind and heart, detaches oneself from the parts of Prakriti, ceases to identify oneself with mind, life and body, falls

into an inner silence. One need not even explore the kingdoms of the inner mind or inner vital, still less is it compulsory to spread one's wings in ranges above. The Self is everywhere and by entering into full detachment and silence, or even by either detachment or silence, one can get anywhere some glimpse, some reflection, perhaps even a full reflection, or a sense of the Self's presence or of one's own immittance in that which is free, wide, silent, eternal, infinite. Obviously if it is a pure "I", of whatever nature, which gets the experience, it must be looked on by the consciousness that has the realisation as the individual self of the Being, Jivatman.

(3) One can also have the experience of oneself as not the mind but the thinker, not the heart but the self or "I" which supports the feelings, not the life but that which supports life, not the body but that which assumes a body. This self can be obviously dynamic as well as silent; or else you may say that, even though still and immobile, from its silence it originates the dynamism of Nature. One can also feel this to be the Spirit one in all as well as the true "I" in oneself. All depends on the experience. Very usually, it is the experience of the Purusha, often felt first as the Witness silent, upholding all the nature; but the Purusha can also be experienced as the Knower and the Ishwara. Sometimes it is as or through the mental Purusha in one centre or another, sometimes as or through the vital Purusha that one can become aware of one's self or spirit. It is also possible to become aware of the secret psychic being within by itself as the true individual; or one can be aware of the psychic being as the pure "I" with these others standing in mind or vital as representatives in these domains or on these levels. According to one's experience one may speak of any of these as the Jiva or pure "I" (this last is a very dubious phrase) or the true Person or true Individual who knows himself as one with or a portion of or wholly dependent on the universal or transcendent Being and seeks to merge himself in that or ascend to that and be it or live in oneness with it. All these things are quite possible without any need of the overhead experience or of the stable overhead Permanence.

(4) One may ask, first, why not then say that the Jivatman which can be realised in this way is the pure "I" of which the lower self has the experience and through which it gets its salvation; and, secondly, what need is there of going into the overhead planes at all? Well, in the first place, this pure "I" does not seem to be absolutely necessary as an intermediary of the liberation whether into the impersonal Self or Brahman or into whatever is eternal. The Buddhists do not admit any soul or self or any experience of the pure "I"; they proceed by dissolving the consciousness into a bundle of sanskaras, getting rid of the sanskaras and so are liberated into some Permanent which they refuse to describe or some Shunya. So the experience of a pure "I" or Jivatman is not binding on everyone who wants liberation into the Eternal but is content to get it without rising beyond the spiritualised mind into a higher Light above. I myself had my experience of Nirvana and silence in the Brahman, etc. long before there was any knowledge of the overhead spiritual planes; it came first simply by an absolute stillness and blotting out as it were of all mental, emotional and other inner activities—the body continued indeed to see, walk, speak and do its other business but as an empty automatic machine and nothing more. I did not become aware of any pure "I"—nor even of any self, impersonal or other,—there was only an awareness of That as the sole Reality, all else being quite unsubstantial, void, non-real. As to what realised that Reality, it was a nameless consciousness which was not other than That;² one could perhaps say this, though hardly even so much as this, since there was no mental concept of it, but no more. Neither was I aware of any lower soul or outer self called by such and such a personal name that was performing this feat of arriving at the consciousness of Nirvana. Well then, what becomes of your pure "I" and lower "I" in all that? Consciousness (not this or that part of consciousness or an "I" of any kind) suddenly emptied itself of all inner contents and remained aware only of unreal surroundings and of Something

² Mark that I did not think these things, there were no thoughts or concepts nor did they present themselves like that to any Me; it simply just was so or was self-apparently so.

real but ineffable. You may say that there must have been a consciousness aware of some perceiving existence, if not of a pure "I", but, if so, it was something for which these names seem inadequate.

(5) I have said the overhead ascension is not indispensable for the usual spiritual purposes,—but it is indispensable for the purposes of this Yoga. For its aim is to become aware of and liberate and transform and unite all the being in the light of a Truth-consciousness which is above and cannot be reached if there is no entirely inward-going and no transcending and upward-going movement. Hence all the complexity of my psychological statements as a whole, not new in essence—for much of it occurs in the Upanishads and elsewhere, but new in its fullness of collective statement and its developments directed towards an integral Yoga. It is not necessary for anyone to accept it unless he concurs in the aim; for other aims it is unnecessary and may very well be excessive.

(6) But when one *has* made the inner exploration and the ascension, when one's consciousness is located above, one cannot be expected to see things precisely as they are seen from below. The Jivatman is for me the Unborn who presides over the individual being and its developments, associated with it but above it and them and who by the very nature of his existence knows himself as universal and transcendent no less than individual and feels the Divine to be his origin, the truth of his being, the master of his nature, the very stuff of his existence. He is plunged in the Divine and one with the Eternal for ever, aware of his own expression and instrumental dynamism which is the Divine's, dependent in love and delight, with adoration, on That with which yet through that love and delight he is one, capable of relation in oneness, harmonic in this many-sidedness without contradiction, because this is another consciousness and existence than that of the mind, even of the spiritualised mind; it is an intrinsic consciousness of the Infinite, infinite not only in essence but in capacity, which can be to its own self-awareness all things and yet for ever the same and one. This triune realisation, therefore, full of difficulties for the mind, is quite natural, easy,

indisputable to the supramental consciousness or, generally, to the consciousness of the upper hemisphere. It can be seen and felt as knowledge in all the spiritual planes, but the completely indivisible knowledge, the full dynamics of it can only be realised through the supramental consciousness itself on its own plane or by its descent here.

(7) The description of a pure "I" is quite insufficient to describe the realisation of the Jivatman—it is rather describable as the true Person or Divine Individual, though that too is not adequate. The word "I" always comes with an undersuggestion of ego, of separateness; but there is no separateness in this self-vision, for the individual here is a spiritual living centre of action for the One and feels no separation from all that is the One.

(8) The Jivatman has its representative power in the individual nature here; this power is the Purusha upholding the Prakriti—centrally in the psychic, more instrumentally in the mind, vital and physical being and nature. It is therefore possible to regard these or any of them as if they were the Jiva here. All the same I am obliged to make a distinction not only for clear thinking but because of the necessity of experience and integral dynamic self-knowledge without which it is difficult to carry through this Yoga. It is not indispensable to formulate mentally to oneself all this, one can have the experience and, if one sees clearly with an inner perception, it is sufficient for progress towards the goal. Nevertheless if the mind is clarified without falling into mental rigidity and error, things are easier for the sadhak of the Yoga. But plasticity must be preserved, for loss of plasticity is the danger of a systematic intellectual formulation; one must look into the thing itself and not get tied up in the idea. Nothing of all this can be really grasped except by the actual spiritual experience.

Part Two

The Parts of the Being and the Planes of Consciousness

Section One

The Organisation of the Being

Chapter One

The Parts of the Being

Men Do Not Know Themselves

Men do not know themselves and have not learned to distinguish the different parts of their being; for these are usually lumped together by them as mind, because it is through a mentalised perception and understanding that they know or feel them; therefore they do not understand their own states and actions, or, if at all, then only on the surface. It is part of the foundation of Yoga to become conscious of the great complexity of our nature, see the different forces that move it and get over it a control of directing knowledge. We are composed of many parts each of which contributes something to the total movement of our consciousness, our thought, will, sensation, feeling, action, but we do not see the origination or the course of these impulsions; we are aware only of their confused pell-mell results on the surface upon which we can at best impose nothing better than a precarious shifting order.

The remedy can only come from the parts of the being that are already turned towards the Light. To call in the light of the Divine Consciousness from above, to bring the psychic being to the front and kindle a flame of aspiration which will awaken spiritually the outer mind and set on fire the vital being, is the way out.

*

What you see and know at present is not the whole of what exists. You do not see your mind and you know only a little part of it — yet your mind exists and is part of your being. There are other parts of your being which you don't know at all — the subconscious for instance. Your sexual impulse or feeling comes out of this subconscious and yet you don't know how or from where it comes in spite of your own will — yet that too is part of

your being. But it is possible to know and control. Only a man must give up the pride of his ignorance and have faith in what he does not yet know—then it is possible for him to have the experience.

Many Parts, Many Personalities

The being is made up of many parts. One part may know, the other may not care for the knowledge or act according to it. The whole being has to be made one in the light so that all parts may act harmoniously according to the Truth.

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The consciousness has in it many parts and many movements and in different conditions and different activities it changes position and arranges its activities in a different way so as to suit what it is doing—but most people are not aware of this because they live only on the surface and do not look into themselves. By sadhana you have become conscious and so you notice these differences.

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Everybody is an amalgamation not of two but of many personalities. It is a part of the Yogic perfection in this Yoga to accord and transmute them so as to “integrate” the personality.

*

The “tragi-ridiculous” inconsistency you speak of comes from the fact that man is not made up of one piece but of many pieces and each part of him has a personality of its own. That is a thing which people yet have not sufficiently realised—the psychologists have begun to glimpse it, but recognise only when there is a marked case of double or multiple personality. But all men are like that, in reality. The aim should be in Yoga to develop (if one has it not already) a strong central being and harmonise under it all the rest, changing what has to be changed. If this central being is the psychic, there is no great difficulty. If it is the mental being,

manomayaḥ puruṣaḥ prāṇa-śarīra-netā, then it is more difficult — unless the mental being can learn to be always in contact with and aided by the greater Will and Power of the Divine.

*

Each part of the being has its own nature or even different natures contained in the same part.

*

Each part [*of the being*] has to be kept clear from the other and do its own work and each has to get the truth in it from the psychic or above. The Truth descending from above will more and more harmonise their action, though the perfect harmony can come only when there is the supramental fulfilment.

Chapter Two

Classification of the Parts of the Being

Different Categories in Different Systems

1. The soul and the psychic being are practically the same, except that even in things which have not developed a psychic being, there is still a spark of the Divine which can be called the soul. The psychic being is called in Sanskrit the Purusha in the heart or the Chaitya Purusha. (The psychic being is the soul developing in the evolution.)

2. The distinction between Purusha and Prakriti is according to the Sankhya System—the Purusha is the silent witness consciousness which observes the actions of Prakriti—Prakriti is the force of Nature which one feels as doing all the actions, when one gets rid of the sense of the ego as doer. Then there is the realisation of these two entities. This is quite different from the psychic being. It is felt in the mind, vital, physical—most easily in the mind where the mental being (Purusha) is seated and controls the others (*manomayah puruṣah prāṇa-sarīra-netaḥ*).

3. Prajna, Taijasa etc. are a different classification and have to do, not with the different parts of the being, but with three different states (waking, dream, sleep—gross, subtle, causal).

I think one ought not to try to relate these different things to each other—as that may lead to confusion. They belong to different categories—and to a different order of experiences.

The Concentric and Vertical Systems

I do not think exact correlations can always be traced between one system of spiritual and occult knowledge and another. All deal with the same material, but there are differences of standpoint, differences of view-range, a divergence in the mental idea

of what is seen and experienced, disparate pragmatic purposes and therefore a difference in the paths surveyed, cut out or followed; the systems vary, each constructs its own schema and technique.

In the ancient Indian system there is only one triune supernal, Sachchidananda. Or if you speak of the upper hemisphere as the supernal, there are three, Sat plane, Chit plane and Ananda plane. The Supermind could be added as a fourth, as it draws upon the other three and belongs to the upper hemisphere. The Indian systems did not distinguish between two quite different powers and levels of consciousness, one which we can call Overmind and the other the true Supermind or Divine Gnosis. That is the reason why they got confused about Maya (Overmind-Force or Vidya-Avidya) and took it for the supreme creative power. In so stopping short at what was still a half-light they lost the secret of transformation — even though the Vaishnava and Tantra Yogas groped to find it again and were sometimes on the verge of success. For the rest, this, I think, has been the stumbling-block of all attempts at the discovery of the dynamic divine Truth; I know of none that has not imagined, as soon as it felt the Overmind lustres descending, that this was the true illumination, the gnosis, — with the result that they either stopped short there and could get no farther, or else concluded that this too was only Maya or Lila and that the one thing to do was to get beyond it into some immovable and inactive Silence of the Supreme.

Perhaps, what may be meant by supernals [*in a text submitted by the correspondent*] is rather the three *fundamentals* of the present manifestation. In the Indian system, these are Ishwara, Shakti and Jiva, or else Sachchidananda, Maya and Jiva. But in our system which seeks to go beyond the present manifestation, these could very well be taken for granted and, looked at from the point of view of the planes of consciousness, the three highest — Ananda (with Sat and Chit resting upon it), Supermind and Overmind — might be called the three Supernals. Overmind stands at the top of the lower hemisphere, and you have to pass through and beyond Overmind if you would reach

Supermind, while still above and beyond Supermind are the worlds of Sachchidananda.

You speak of the gulf below the Overmind. But is there a gulf—or any other gulf than human unconsciousness? In all the series of the planes or grades of consciousness there is nowhere any real gulf, always there are connecting gradations and one can ascend from step to step. Between the Overmind and the human mind there are a number of more and more luminous gradations; but, as these are superconscious to human mind (except one or two of the lowest of which it gets some direct touches), it is apt to regard them as a superior Inconscience. So one of the Upanishads speaks of the Ishwara consciousness as *susupta*, deep Sleep, because it is only in Samadhi that man usually enters into it, so long as he does not try to turn his waking consciousness into a higher state.

There are in fact two systems simultaneously active in the organisation of the being and its parts;—one is concentric, a series of rings or sheaths with the psychic at the centre; another is vertical, an ascension and descent, like a flight of steps, a series of superimposed planes with the Supermind-Overmind as the crucial nodus of the transition beyond the human into the Divine. For this transition, if it is to be at the same time a transformation, there is only one way, one path. First, there must be a conversion inwards, a going within to find the inmost psychic being and bring it out to the front, disclosing at the same time the inner mind, inner vital, inner physical parts of the nature. Next, there must be an ascension, a series of conversions upwards and a turning down to convert the lower parts. When one has made the inward conversion, one psychicises the whole lower nature so as to make it ready for the divine change. Going upwards, one passes beyond the human mind and at each stage of the ascent there is a conversion into a new consciousness and an infusion of this new consciousness into the whole of the nature. Thus rising beyond intellect through illuminated higher mind to the intuitive consciousness, we begin to look at everything not from the intellect range or through intellect as an instrument, but from a greater intuitive height and through an intuitivised

will, feeling, emotion, sensation and physical contact. So, proceeding from intuition to a greater overmind height, there is a new conversion and we look at and experience everything from the overmind consciousness and through a mind, heart, vital and body surcharged with the overmind thought, sight, will, feeling, sensation, play of force and contact. But the last conversion is the supramental, for once there, once the nature is supramentalised, we are beyond the Ignorance and conversion of consciousness is no longer needed, though a farther divine progression, even an infinite development is still possible.

*

The inner consciousness means the inner mind, inner vital, inner physical and behind them the psychic which is their inmost being. But the inner mind is not the higher mind; it is more in touch with the universal forces and more open to the higher consciousness and capable of an immensely deeper and larger range of action than the outer or surface mind — but it is of the same essential nature. The higher consciousness is that above the ordinary mind and different from it in its workings; it ranges from higher mind through illumined mind, intuition and overmind up to the border line of the supramental.

If the psychic were liberated, free to act in its own way, there would not be all this stumbling in the Ignorance. But the psychic is covered up by the ignorant mind, vital and physical and compelled to act through them according to the law of the Ignorance. If it is liberated from this covering, then it can act according to its own nature with a free aspiration, a direct contact with the higher consciousness and a power to change the ignorant nature.

*

Higher Mind is one of the planes of the spiritual mind, the first and lowest of them; it is above the normal mental level. Inner mind is that which lies behind the surface mind (our ordinary mentality) and can only be directly experienced (apart from its vrittis in the surface mind such as philosophy, poetry, idealism

etc.) by sadhana, by breaking down the habit of being on the surface and by going deeper within.

Larger mind is a general term to cover the realms of mind which become our field whether by going within or widening into the cosmic consciousness.

The true mental being is not the same as the inner mental — true mental, true vital, true physical being means the Purusha of that level freed from the error and ignorant thought and will of the lower Prakriti and directly open to the knowledge and guidance from above.

Higher vital usually refers to the vital mind and emotive being as opposed to the middle vital which has its seat in the navel and is dynamic, sensational and passionate and the lower which is made up of the smaller movements of human life-desire and life-reactions.

Section Two

The Concentric System: Outer to Inner

Chapter One

The Outer Being and the Inner Being

The Outer and the Inner Being and Consciousness

There are always two different consciousnesses in the human being, one outward in which he ordinarily lives, the other inward and concealed of which he knows nothing. When one does sadhana, the inner consciousness begins to open and one is able to go inside and have all kinds of experiences there. As the sadhana progresses, one begins to live more and more in this inner being and the outer becomes more and more superficial. At first the inner consciousness seems to be the dream and the outer the waking reality. Afterwards the inner consciousness becomes the reality and the outer is felt by many as a dream or delusion, or else as something superficial and external. The inner consciousness begins to be a place of deep peace, light, happiness, love, closeness to the Divine or the presence of the Divine, the Mother. One is then aware of two consciousnesses, this inner one and the outer which has to be changed into its counterpart and instrument—that also must become full of peace, light, union with the Divine. At present you are moving between the two and in this period all the feelings you have are quite natural. You need not be at all anxious about that, but wait for the full development of the inner consciousness in which you will be able to live.

*

There is always a double nature in human beings, the inner (psychic and spiritual) which is in touch with the Divine; the outer, mental, vital and physical, which has been brought up in the Ignorance and is full of defects, imperfections and impurities. It is for this reason that in sadhana things cannot be changed in a

moment. The inner experience grows and extends and fills more and more of the nature, but till all is filled, the imperfections remain somewhere.

*

It is a usual experience—to live within in one consciousness while the external being (mind, life, body) goes on of itself under the impulsion of the cosmic Force, doing quietly whatever is necessary to do. This is part of the Yogic consciousness and to have it means a very real and considerable advance on the path of Yoga.

*

You have been accustomed to feel your outer consciousness as if it were yourself and so, when you are in your inner realisation, you feel as if you were not in this old accustomed self. As you grow in the sadhana, you must learn to live in this inner being and to feel the outer as something a little outside and this inner being as your real self.

*

The inner parts in everybody remain vulgar or become high according as they are turned to the outward forces of the Ignorance or towards the higher forces from above and the inner impulsion of the psychic. All forces can play there. It is the outer being that is fixed in a certain character, certain tendencies, certain movements.

*

The outer consciousness is shut up in the body limitation and in the little bit of personal mind and sense dependent on the body—it sees only the outward, sees only things. But the inner consciousness can see behind the thing, it is aware of the play of forces, personal or universal—for it is in conscious touch with the universal action.

*

The outer consciousness is that which usually expresses itself in ordinary life. It is the external mental, vital, physical. It is not connected very much with the inner being except in a few—until one connects them together in the course of the sadhana.

*

The exterior being is the physical which is connected in an ignorant way with the physical universe. It is this physical being which has developed an external mind and vital. The inner mind and vital are on the contrary in direct contact with the universal mental and vital and their forces; the inner subtle physical can also be in direct touch with the cosmic forces of the physical universe. But the exterior being is not in direct touch with the universal or cosmic—only through the outer mind and senses.

*

It is the outer nature that is obscure and when it is at ease, feels no necessity of remembering the Mother—when the difficulty comes, then it feels the necessity and remembers. But the inner being is not like that.

*

The inner being is not usually unquiet but it can be quiet or unquiet like the outer.

The Inner, the Outer and the Process of Yoga

It is only by virtue of the inner consciousness that the outer can awaken to the Divine Influence at all—it receives the inner urge even when it is not aware whence it comes.

*

They [*the inner mind and vital*] exercise an influence and send out their powers or suggestions which the outer sometimes carries out as best it can, sometimes does not follow. How much they work on the outer depends on how far the individual has an inner life. E.g. the poet, musician, artist, thinker, live much from

within—men of genius and those who try to live according to an ideal also. But there are plenty of people who have very little inner life and are governed entirely by the forces of Nature.

*

As one gathers experience from life to life, mental or vital, the inner mind and vital also develop according to the use made of our experiences and the extent to which they are utilised for the growth of the being.

*

You are mistaken in thinking that your external being alone is like that. Hardly anybody has the external being of a Yogi—it is the inner being that has the Yogic turn—the external has to be converted and transformed.

*

If the inner being does not manifest or act, the outer being will never get transformed.

*

If the inner being is safe, then there is no longer any struggle or overpowering [*of the outer being*] by inertia or depression or other fundamental difficulties. The rest can be done progressively and quietly, including the coming down of the Force. The outer being becomes merely a machinery or an instrumentation to be set right. It is not so easy to be entirely *mukta* in the inner being.

*

When the inner being once thoroughly establishes its separateness, even oceans of inertia cannot prevent it from keeping it. It is the first thing to be done in order to have a secure basis in the Yoga, to establish thoroughly this separateness. It comes most usually when the peace is thoroughly fixed in all inner parts, that the separateness also becomes fixed and permanent.

The Inner Being

The inner being is the inner mind, inner vital, inner physical with the psychic behind them. The [term] higher being is used to denote the conscious self on planes higher than the ordinary human consciousness.

*

Do you not know that the inner being means the inner mind, inner vital, inner physical with the psychic behind as the inmost? How can there be one centre for all that?

*

The inner being cannot be “located” above, it can only join with the above, penetrate it and be penetrated by it. If it were located above, then there would be no inner being.

*

The inner being has its own time which is sometimes slower, sometimes faster than the physical.

The Inner Being, the Antaratma and the Atman

The word Antaratma is very vaguely used like the word soul in English—so used, it covers all the inner being, inner mind, inner vital, inner physical even, as well as the inmost being, the psychic.

*

Our inner being is in touch with the universal mind, life, matter, a part of all that, but by that very fact it cannot be in possession of liberation and peace. You are thinking probably of the Atman and confusing it with the inner being.

The Inner Being and the Psychic Being

I did not mean by the inner being the psychic or inmost being. It is the psychic being that feels love, bhakti and union with the

Mother. I was speaking of the inner mental, inner vital, inner physical; in order to reach the hidden seat of the psychic one has first to pass through these things. When one leaves the outer consciousness and goes inside, it is here that one enters—some or most entering into the inner vital first, others into the inner mental or inner physical; the emotional vital is the most direct road, for the seat of the psychic is just behind the emotional in the heart centre. It is absolutely necessary for our purpose that one should become conscious in these inner regions, for if they are not awake, then the psychic being has no proper and sufficient instrumentation for its activities; it has then only the outer mind, outer vital and body for its means and these are too small and narrow and obscure. You as yet have been able only to enter the outskirts of the inner vital and are still insufficiently conscious there. By becoming more conscious there and going deeper one can reach the psychic—the safe refuge, *nirāpad sthāna*, of which you speak, and you will not be disturbed by the confused visions and experiences of the inner vital outskirts.

*

The psychic stands behind the inner mind, inner vital and inner physical and supports them all—they are the inner, this the inmost being.

*

I do not know what you mean by its [*the inner being's*] being “around” the psychic. It is obviously nearer to the psychic than the outer mind, vital or physical, but that does not ensure its being open to the psychic only and not to other universal forces.

*

The psychic can have peace behind it—but the inner mind, vital and physical are not necessarily silent—they are full of movements. It is the higher consciousness that has a basis of peace.

*

The psychic being is described in the Upanishads as no bigger than the size of one's thumb! That of course is a symbolic image. For usually when one sees anybody's psychic being in a form, it is bigger than that. As for the inner being, one feels it big because the true mental or the true vital or even the true physical being is much wider in consciousness than the external consciousness which is limited by the body. If the external parts seem to occupy the whole consciousness, it is when one comes down into the physical and feels all the activities of Nature playing in it—even the mental and vital movements are then felt through the physical and not as things of a separate plane. But when one lives in the inner being then one is aware of a consciousness which begins to spread into the universal and the external is only a surface movement thrown up by the universal forces.

The Outer Being and Consciousness

The outer being is a means of expression only, not one's self. One must not identify with it, for what it expresses is a personality formed by the old ignorant Nature. If not identified, one can change it so as to express the true inner personality of the Light.

*

They [*the outer mind, vital and body*] are small, but not unimportant in spite of their apparent insignificance—because they are a necessary passage of transmission between the soul and the outer world.

*

You take the outer waking consciousness as if it were the real person or being and conclude that if it is not this but something else that has the realisation or abides in the realisation, then no one has it—for there is no one here except this waking consciousness. That is the very error by which the ignorance lasts and cannot be got rid of. The very first step in getting out of the ignorance is to accept the fact that this outer consciousness is not one's soul, not oneself, not the real person, but only a temporary

formation on the surface for the purposes of the surface play. The soul, the person is within, not on the surface—the outer personality is the person only in the first sense of the Latin word *persona* which meant originally a mask.

Chapter Two

The True Being and the True Consciousness

The True Being

The true being may be realised in one or both of two aspects—the Self or Atman and the soul or *antarātman*, psychic being or *caitya puruṣa*. The difference is that one is felt as universal, the other as individual supporting the mind, life and body. When one first realises the Atman one feels it separate from all things, existing in itself and detached, and it is to this realisation that the image of the dry coconut fruit may apply. When one realises the psychic being, it is not like that; for this brings the sense of union with the Divine and dependence upon it and sole consecration to the Divine alone and the power to change the nature and discover the true mental, the true vital, the true physical being in oneself. Both realisations are necessary for this Yoga.

The “I” or the little ego is constituted by Nature and is at once a mental, vital and physical formation meant to aid in centralising and individualising the outer consciousness and action. When the true being is discovered, the utility of the ego is over and this formation has to disappear—the true being is felt in its place.

*

The psychic is the true being here—the ego is simply a mental, vital, physical formation of the mobile consciousness in Nature which is wrongly taken for our true being so long as the psychic is veiled and the consciousness is in the Ignorance.

*

As to the change of nature, the first step is to become conscious

and separate from the old surface nature. For this rajasic vital nature is a surface creation of Prakriti, it is not the true being; however persistent it seems, it is only a temporary combination of vital movements. Behind is the true mental and vital being supported by the psychic—this true being is calm, wide, peaceful. By drawing back and becoming separate one creates the possibility of living in the peace of this inner Purusha no longer identified with the surface Prakriti. Afterwards it will be much easier to change, by the force of the psychic perception and the Peace and Power and Light from above, the surface being.

*

The outward disturbances cannot touch the true being. If one is in the true being, they are not felt as belonging to oneself, but as outside or surface movements which leave one unmoved and unidentified with them.

*

The true inner being—the true mental, the true vital, the true physical represent each on its plane and answer to the central being, but the whole of the nature and especially the outer nature does not nor the ordinary mental, vital or physical personality. The psychic being is the central being for the purposes of the evolution—it grows and develops; but there is a central being above of which the mind is not aware which presides unseen over the existence and of which the psychic being is the representative in the manifested nature. It is what is called the Jivatman.

*

The true being mental, vital or subtle physical has always the greater qualities of its plane—it is the Purusha and like the psychic, though in another way, the projection of the Divine, therefore in connection with the Higher Consciousness and reflects something of it, though it is not altogether that—it is also in tune with the cosmic Truth.

The True Consciousness

The condition you describe¹ is the true consciousness, psychic and spiritual, which will become the base of the sadhana. If it is only for a brief time that it comes, it is always so at the beginning of its coming, but afterwards it fixes and becomes a pervading basis. It is a sign of the psychic opening and when the psychic fully opens and inspires the mind and heart, the love you wish to have will undoubtedly be there. Aspire and persevere and all will come with the growing consciousness.

*

The consciousness that is aware of the Divine and the Truth and does not look at things from the ego [*is the true consciousness*] —it is wide and calm and strong and aspires to union and surrender —it is many things besides, but this is the essential.

*

It [*an experience reported by the correspondent*] is the true Yogic consciousness in which one feels the oneness and lives in it, not touched by the outer being and its inferior movements, but looking on them with a smile at their ignorance and smallness. It will become much more possible to deal with these outer things if that separateness is maintained always.

*

Living in the true consciousness is living in a consciousness in which one is spiritually in union with the Divine in one way or another. But it does not follow that by so living one will have the complete, exact and infallible truth about all ideas, all things and all persons.

*

It is the true consciousness growing within that gives the power [*to be free from the vital forces*]. As it grows, these vital forces

¹ *The correspondent's letter is not available. —Ed.*

get more and more externalised and foreign to the nature. It is only by the power of past habit that they rise.

*

This [*vast consciousness above the head*] was the true consciousness that must establish itself, but before it can establish itself it must come down below the head and take full possession of the navel and two lower centres and pervade the body down to the feet and even below. Once established, it holds the ego-forces outside or, even if they come, whether in rajas or tamasic obstructive form, keeps the inner being totally detached and unmoved all the time by their environmental presence.

*

The consciousness of the mind, life, body in each person is ordinarily shut up in itself; it is narrow, not wide, sees itself as the centre of everything, judges all things according to its own impressions — it does not know anything as it really is. But when by Yoga one begins to open to the true consciousness, then this barrier begins to break down. One feels the mind grow wider, even in the end the physical consciousness grows wider and wider, until you feel all things in yourself, yourself one with all things. You then become one with the Mother's universal Consciousness. That is why you feel the mind becoming wide. But also there is much above the human mind and it is this which you feel like a world above your head. All these are the ordinary experiences of our Yoga. It is only a beginning. But in order that it may go on developing, you must become more and more quiet, more and more able to hold whatever comes without getting too eager and excited. Peace and calmness are the first thing, and with it wideness — in the peace you can bear whatever love or Ananda comes, whatever strength comes or whatever knowledge.

*

To feel quietude, peace, the force working *is* to be conscious; the unconscious condition comes only by confusion and admitting

wrong suggestions and restlessness; if you reject these things, the true consciousness will grow in you. Naturally, the consciousness you have now is nothing to what you will have hereafter when it has grown; but it has to begin in this way and increase by quietude. You cannot have the full complete consciousness now and it is no use repining and doubting because it is not complete or fully established as yet; that fretting only delays and hinders. Open yourself; remain quiet; let it grow.

*

There is no insincerity in asking me again and again for the right condition — the feeling of connection and the true consciousness and the psychic state. It is most important that you should have them and become able to keep them. It is indeed the one thing needful for you.

Chapter Three

The Psychic Being

The Psychic and the Divine

They [*the psychic being and the Divine Presence in the heart*] are quite different things. The psychic being is one's own individual soul-being. It is not the Divine, though it has come from the Divine and develops towards the Divine.

*

It [*the psychic*] is constantly in contact with the immanent Divine — the Divine secret in the individual.

*

It is the psychic that is in direct relation with the transcendent Divine and leads the nature upwards towards the Supreme.

*

The Divine is always in the inner heart and does not leave it.

*

The psychic is not, by definition,¹ that part [*of the being*] which is in direct touch with the supramental plane, — although, once

¹ Someone had asked what the psychic being was, whether it could be defined as that part of the being which is always in direct touch with the supramental. I replied that it could not be so defined. For the psychic being in animals or in most human beings is not in direct touch with the supramental — therefore it cannot be so described, *by definition*.

But once the connection between the supramental and the human consciousness is made, it is the psychic being that gives *the readiest response* — more ready than the mind, the vital or the physical. It may be added that it is also a purer response; the mind, vital and physical can allow other things to mix with their reception of the supramental influence and spoil its truth. The psychic is pure in its response and allows no such mixture.

The supramental change can take place only if the psychic is awake and is made the chief support of the descending supramental power.

the connection with the supramental is made, it gives to it the readiest response. The psychic part of us is something that comes direct from the Divine and is in touch with the Divine. In its origin it is the nucleus pregnant with divine possibilities that supports this lower triple manifestation of mind, life and body. There is this divine element in all living beings, but it stands hidden behind the ordinary consciousness, is not at first developed and, even when developed, is not always or often in the front; it expresses itself, so far as the imperfection of the instruments allows, by their means and under their limitations. It grows in the consciousness by Godward experience, gaining strength every time there is a higher movement in us, and, finally, by the accumulation of these deeper and higher movements there is developed a psychic individuality,—that which we call usually the psychic being. It is always this psychic being that is the real, though often the secret cause of man's turning to the spiritual life and his greatest help in it. It is therefore that which we have to bring from behind to the front in the Yoga.

The word "soul", as also the word "psychic", is used very vaguely and in many different senses in the English language. More often than not in ordinary parlance no clear distinction is made between mind and soul and often there is an even more serious confusion, for the vital being of desire—the false soul or desire-soul—is intended by the words "soul" and "psychic" and not the true soul, the psychic being. The psychic being is quite different from the mind or vital; it stands behind them where they meet in the heart. Its central place is there, but behind the heart rather than in the heart; for what men call usually the heart is the seat of emotion, and human emotions are mental-vital impulses, not ordinarily psychic in their nature. This mostly secret power behind, other than the mind and the life-force, is the true soul, the psychic being in us. The power of the psychic, however, can act upon the mind and vital and body, purifying thought and perception and emotion (which then becomes psychic feeling) and sensation and action and everything else in us and preparing them to be divine movements.

The psychic being may be described in Indian language as the Purusha in the heart or the *caitya puruṣa*,² but the inner or secret heart must be understood, *ḥṛdaye guhāyām*, not the outer vital-emotional centre. It is the true psychic entity (distinguished from the vital desire-mind)—the psyche—spoken of on the page of the *Arya* to which you make reference.

*

The psychic is the soul, the divine spark animating matter and life and mind and as it grows it takes form and expresses itself through these three touching them to beauty and fineness—it works even before humanity in the lower creation leading it up towards the human, in humanity it works more freely though still under a mass of ignorance and weakness and coarseness and hardness leading it up towards the Divine. In Yoga it becomes conscious of its aim and turns inward to the Divine. It sees behind and above it—that is the difference.

*

The psychic is the spark of the Divine involved here in the individual existence. It grows and evolves in the form of the psychic being—so obviously it cannot have already the powers of the Divine. Only its presence makes it possible for the individual to open to the Divine and grow towards the Divine Consciousness and when it acts it is always in the sense of the Light and the Truth and with the push towards the Divine.

² The chitta and the psychic part are not in the least the same. Chitta is a term in a quite different category, something from which are thrown up to be combined and set in action the main movements of our external consciousness, and to know it we need not go deep behind our surface or external nature. Category means here another class of psychological factors, *tattva-vibhāga*. The psychic belongs to one class or category—supermind, mind, life, psychic, physical—which covers both the inner and the outer nature. Chitta belongs to quite another class or category—buddhi, manas, chitta, prana etc.—which is the classification made by ordinary Indian psychology; it covers only the psychology of the external being. In this category it is the main functions of our external consciousness only that are coordinated and put in their place by the Indian thinkers; chitta is one of these main functions of the external consciousness and, therefore, to know it we need not go behind the external nature.

The Self or Spirit and the Psychic or Soul

The Spirit is the consciousness above mind, the Atman or self, which is always in oneness with the Divine—a spiritual consciousness is one which is always in unity or at least in contact with the Divine.

The psychic is a spark come from the Divine which is there in all things and as the individual evolves it grows in him and manifests as the psychic being, the soul seeking always for the Divine and the Truth and answering to the Divine and the Truth whenever and wherever it meets it.

*

All contact with the Divine through the essential substance of the consciousness is spiritual and it is that consciousness in the essential substance—what is called self—that is the spiritual consciousness. The soul or psychic being is a spark of the Divine that grows and evolves through successive lives and leads the rest towards the Divine. The spirit or self is the same always.

*

The self feels always its unity with the Divine and is always the same. The soul is a portion of the Divine that comes down into the evolution and evolves a psychic being more and more developed through experiences of successive lives until it is ready for the divine realisation here.

*

There is no distinction between the Self and the spirit. The psychic is the soul that develops in the evolution—the spirit is the Self that is not affected by the evolution, it is above it—only it is covered or concealed by the activity of mind, vital and body. The removal of this covering is the release of the spirit—and it is removed when there is a full and wide spiritual silence.

*

The soul in evolution is only a power for the evolution, it

contains everything in potentiality; but that can only be worked out by the psychic being. It is quite different from the condition of the self.

*

There is a difference between the psychic and the self. The self is the Atman above which is one in all, remains always wide, free, pure, untouched by the action of life in its ignorance. Its nature is peace, freedom, light, wideness, Ananda. The psychic (*antarātmā*) is the individual being which comes down into life and travels from birth to birth and feels the experiences and grows by them till it is able to join itself with the free Atman above.

*

The psychic being is concealed in the depths behind the heart-centre.

The Self has no separate place—it is everywhere. Your self and the self of all beings is the same.

*

Love, joy and happiness come from the psychic. The Self gives peace or a universal Ananda.

The Atman, the Jivatman and the Psychic

The Jiva is realised as the individual Self, Atman, the central being above the Nature, calm, untouched by the movements of Nature but supporting their evolution though not involved in it. Through this realisation silence, freedom, wideness, mastery, purity, a sense of universality in the individual as one centre of this divine universality become the normal experience. The psychic is realised as the Purusha behind the heart. It is not universalised like the Jivatman, but is the individual soul supporting from its place behind the heart-centre the mental, vital, physical, psychic evolution of the being in Nature. Its realisation brings Bhakti, self-giving, surrender, turning of all the movements Godward, discrimination and choice of all that belongs

to the Divine Truth, Good, Beauty, rejection of all that is false, evil, ugly, discordant, union through love and sympathy with all existence, openness to the Truth of the Self and the Divine.

*

The psychic is a spark of the Divine — but I do not know that it can be called a portion of the Jivatma — it is the same put forward in a different way.

*

The *bindu* of which you speak is not the psychic being, but the soul or spark of the Divine which supports each existence; the psychic being is usually seen in form as a Purusha. The psychic being is the soul or spark of the Divine developing a form of itself in the evolution which travels from life to life. The Jivatma and the soul are the same, but in two different statuses. The Jivatma is the Ansha of the Divine standing above the consciousness as the individual self and unchanged by the evolution — the soul is the same descended into the evolution and developing its consciousness from life to life until in the opening of knowledge the psychic being realises its oneness with the self above.

The ego is quite different — it is a creation of Prakriti and part of Prakriti, which centralises the thoughts, desires, passions etc. of the nature and is involved in them entirely. The ego is not a real and eternal existence, but only a formation of Nature. It has to disappear by the coming of knowledge and be replaced by the true psychic and spiritual self.

*

The psychic is the soul in evolution; the Atman is the self above the evolution.

*

There is always a part of the mind, of the vital, of the body which is or can be influenced by the psychic; they can be called the psychic-mental, the psychic-vital, the psychic-physical. According to the personality or the degree of evolution of each person,

this part can be small or large, weak or strong, covered up and inactive or prominent and in action. When it acts the movements of the mind, vital or physical accept the psychic motives or aims, partake of the nature of the psychic or follow its aims but with a modification in the manner which belongs to the mind, vital or physical. The psychic-vital seeks after the Divine, but it has a demand in its self-giving, desire, vital eagerness the psychic has not, for the psychic has instead pure self-giving, aspiration, intensity of psychic fire. The psychic-vital is subject to pain and suffering, which there is not in the psychic.

Atma is not the same as psychic—Atma is the self which is one in all, calm, wide, ever at peace, always free. The psychic being is the soul within that experiences life and develops with evolving mind and life and body. The psychic does not suffer like the vital or body, it has not pain or anguish or despair; but it has a psychic sorrow which is different from these things. It has a kind of quiet sweet sadness of yearning which it feels when things go against the Divine, when the obscurity and obstacles are too heavy, when the mind, vital and physical follow after other things, when evil and falsehood and darkness seem to be too strong for the Light. It does not despair, but feels that these things ought not to be and the psychic yearning for it to be otherwise becomes so intense that it is felt as if something akin to sadness.

As for the psychic not being in front, that cannot be brought about all at once; the other parts of the being must be prepared for the change and the veil between must become thinner and thinner. It is for that experiences come and there is the working on the inner mind and vital and physical as well as on the outer nature.

*

What do you mean by a personal vital? What people call personality is a formation. There is no unchangeable vital personality. There is a Presence called the Purusha, something projected by the Self or Atman, which supports on each plane the formation of the personalities on that plane, but the Purusha is not a

personality and it has no name or form. But it is best for you not to speculate too much about these subtle things at present; you have not sufficient experience to grasp correctly the complexity of the truth. The one thing you are concerned with is that you have a soul, a psychic being, which stands for your centre of existence, a part of the Divine. Become aware of that and put all your mental, vital and physical nature in relation to it, in order that they may become purified, harmonised, divinised, and the supramental being and nature may descend and be manifested in you—for until this is done, this conscious linking and relation with the psychic centre, there can be no supramental descent.

The Words “Soul” and “Psychic”

The European mind, for the most part, has never been able to go beyond the formula of soul + body—usually including mind in soul and everything except body in mind. Some occultists make a distinction between spirit, soul and body. At the same time there must be some vague feeling that soul and mind are not quite the same thing, for there is the phrase “This man has no soul”, or “he is a soul” meaning he has something in him beyond a mere mind and body. But all that is very vague. There is no clear distinction between mind and soul and none between mind and vital and often the vital is taken for the soul.

*

Psychic is ordinarily used in the sense of anything relating to the inner movements of the consciousness or anything phenomenal in the psychology; in this case I have made a special use of it, relating it to the Greek word psyche meaning soul; but ordinarily people make no distinction between the soul and the mental-vital consciousness; for them it is all the same.

*

“Psychic” in the sense in which it is used commonly by people has no definite meaning—it is applied to anything non-physical or supraphysical. In the language of our Yoga it refers always to

the inner soul. Therefore the use of the words “psychic significance” is incorrect here. One can say “occult significance” or “symbolic significance” or “inner significance”. “Psychic significance” we can say only of experiences belonging to the psychic as opposed to the mental, vital and physical planes.

The Psychic or Soul and Traditional Indian Systems

It appears the Maharshi at the time supposed that by the psychic being I meant the enlightened ego! But people do not understand what I mean by the psychic being, because the word psychic has been used in English to mean anything of the inner mental, inner vital or inner physical or anything abnormal or occult or even the more subtle movements of the outer being, all in a jumble—also occult phenomena are often called psychic. The distinction between these different parts of the being is unknown. Even in India the old knowledge of the Upanishads in which they are distinguished has been lost. The Jivatman, psychic being (*puruṣo antarātmā*), the *manomaya puruṣa*, the *prāṇamaya puruṣa* are all confused together.

*

The *antarātman* is the soul, the portion of the Divine that is at the inmost basis of the evolving individual and supports the mind and life and body which are the instrumental parts of nature through which it tries to grow from the material Inconscience towards the divine Light and Immortality which are its proper being. The limitations of its instruments impose upon it an acceptance of the lower movements and a compromise between soul and nature which retard this movement even while it gets its means of advance from that interchange. The psychic being is the soul-form or soul-personality developing through this evolution and passing from life to life till all is ready for the higher evolution beyond the Ignorance.

*

The psychic being is the Soul, the Purusha in the secret heart

supporting by its presence the action of the mind, life and body. The vital is the Pranamaya Purusha spoken of in the Taittiriya Upanishad—the being behind the Force of Life; in its outer form in the Ignorance it generates the desire soul which governs most men and which they mistake often for the real soul.

The Atma is the Self or Spirit that remains above, pure and stainless, unaffected by the stains of life, by desire and ego and ignorance. It is realised as the true being of the individual, but also more widely as the *same being* in all and as the Self of the cosmos; it has also a self-existence above the individual and cosmos and it is then called the Paramatma, the supreme Divine Being. This distinction has nothing to do with the distinction between the psychic and the vital; the vital being is not what is known as the Atma.

The vital as the desire-soul and desire-nature controls the consciousness to a large extent in most men because men are governed by desire. But even in the surface human nature the proper ruler of the consciousness is the mental being, the *manomayah puruṣah prāṇa-śarīra-netā* of the Upanishad. The psychic influences the consciousness from behind, but one has to go out of the ordinary consciousness into the inmost being to find it and make it the ruler of the consciousness as it should be. To do that is one of the principal aims of the Yoga. The vital should be an instrument of the consciousness, not its ruler.

The vital being is not the I—the ego is mental, vital, physical. Ego implies the identification of our existence with outer self, the ignorance of our true self above and our psychic being within us.

In a certain sense the various Purushas or beings in us, psychic, mental, vital, physical, are projections of the Atma, but that gets its full truth only when we get into our inner being and know the inner truth of ourselves. On the surface in the Ignorance, it is the mental, vital, physical Prakriti that acts and the Purusha is disfigured, as it were, in the action of Prakriti. It is not our true mental being, our true vital being, our true physical being even that we are aware of; these remain behind,

veiled and silent. It is the mental, vital, physical ego that we take for our being until we get knowledge.

*

The psychic being in the old systems was spoken of as the Purusha in the heart (the secret heart—*hṛdaye guhāyām*) which corresponds very well to what we define as the psychic being behind the heart centre. It was also this that went out from the body at death and persisted—which again corresponds to our teaching that it is this which goes out and returns, linking new life to former life. Also we say that the psychic is the divine portion within us—so too the Purusha in the heart is described as Ishwara of the individual nature in some places.

The word soul is very vaguely used in English—as it often refers to the whole non-physical consciousness including even the vital with all its desires and passions. That is why the word psychic being has to be used so as to distinguish this divine portion from the instrumental parts of the nature.

*

I do not know what is exactly meant by this phrase.³ It is too vague and limited for a description of the psychic. Antahkarana usually means the mind and vital as opposed to the body—the body being the outer instrument and *manah-prāṇa* the inner instrument of the soul. By psychic I mean something different from a purified mind and vital. A purified mind and vital are the result of the action of the awakened and liberated psychic being but it is not itself the psychic.

Again it depends on what is meant by Ahambhava. But the psychic is not a “bhava”; it is a being, a Purusha. Ahambhava is a formation of Prakriti, it is not a being or a Purusha. Ahambhava can disappear and yet the Purusha will be there.

By liberated psychic being, I mean that it is no longer obliged to express itself under the conditions of the obscure and ignorant instruments, from behind a veil, but is able to come forward,

³ The correspondent's letter is not available to identify the phrase.—Ed.

control and change the action of mind and vital and body. Purified and perfected are not epithets that can properly be applied to the psychic—the psychic is always pure and has no positive imperfection. The thing that has to be perfected is its control over the instruments. If it is perhaps sometimes spoken of as purified or perfected, what must be meant is the psychic action in the mind, vital and physical instruments. A purified inner being does not mean a purified psychic, but a purified inner mental, vital and physical. The epithets I used for the psychic were “awakened and liberated”.

Spiritual individuality is rather a vague term and might be variously interpreted. I have written about the psychic being that the psychic is the soul or spark of the Divine Fire supporting the individual evolution on the earth and the psychic being is the soul-consciousness developing itself or rather its manifestation from life to life with the mind, vital and body as its instruments until all is ready for the union with the Divine. I don't know that I can add anything to that.

*

The mental being spoken of by the Upanishad is not part of the mental nervous physical composite—it is the *manomayah puruṣah prāṇa-śarīra-netā*, the mental being leader of the life and body. It could not be so described if it were part of the composite. Nor can the composite or part of it be the Purusha,—for the composite is composed of Prakriti. It is described as *manomaya* by the Upanishad because the psychic being is behind the veil and man being the mental being in the life and body lives in his mind and not in his psychic, so to him the *manomaya puruṣa* is the leader of the life and body,—of the psychic behind supporting the whole he is not aware or dimly aware in his best moments. The psychic is represented in man by the Prime Minister, the *manomaya*, itself being a mild constitutional king; it is the *manomaya* to whom Prakriti refers for assent to her actions. But still the statement of the Upanishad gives only the apparent truth of the matter, valid for man and the human stage only—for in the animal it would be rather the

prāṇamaya puruṣa that is the *netā*, leader of mind and body.

*

Purusha Prakriti is the Kshara Purusha — standing back from it is the Akshara Purusha.

Ego-sense and Purusha are two quite different things—ego-sense is a mechanism of Prakriti, Purusha is the conscious being.

The psychic being evolves, so it is not the immutable.

The psychic being is especially the soul of the individual evolving in the manifestation the individual Prakriti and taking part in the evolution. It is that spark of the Divine Fire that grows behind the mind, vital and physical as the psychic being until it is able to transform the Prakriti of Ignorance into a Prakriti of Knowledge. These things are not in the Gita, but we cannot limit our knowledge by the points in the Gita.

The Soul and the Psychic Being

A distinction⁴ has to be made between the soul in its essence and the psychic being. Behind each and all there is the soul which is the spark of the Divine — none could exist without that. But it is quite possible to have a vital and physical being supported by such a soul essence but without a clearly evolved psychic being behind it.

There is indeed an inner being composed of the inner mental, inner vital, inner physical, — but that is not the psychic being. The psychic is the inmost being of all and quite distinct from these. The word psychic is indeed used in English to indicate anything that is other or deeper than the external mind, life and body or it indicates sometimes anything occult or supraphysical; but that is a use which brings confusion and error and we have almost entirely to discard it.

⁴ The original text of this letter was revised by Sri Aurobindo on two different occasions. As the two revised versions differ considerably at places, both of them are published here, one after the other.—Ed.

The psychic being is veiled by the surface movements and expresses itself as best it can through the three outer instruments which are more governed by the outer forces than by the inner being or the psychic entity. But that does not mean that they are entirely isolated from the soul. The soul is in the body in the same way as the mind or vital—but the body is not this gross physical body only, but the subtle body also. When the gross body falls away, the vital and mental sheaths of the body still remain as the soul's vehicle till these too dissolve.

The soul of a plant or an animal is not dormant—only its means of expression are less developed than those of a human being. There is much that is psychic in the plant, much that is psychic in the animal. The plant has only the vital-physical elements evolved in its form; the consciousness behind the form of the plant has no developed or organised mentality capable of expressing itself,—the animal takes a step farther; it has a vital mind and some extent of self-expression, but its consciousness is limited, its mentality limited, its experiences are limited; the psychic essence too puts forward to represent it a less developed consciousness and experience than is possible in man. All the same, animals have a soul and can respond very readily to the psychic in man.

The “ghost” of a man is of course not his soul. It is either the man appearing in his vital body or it is a fragment of his vital structure that is seized on by some force or being of the vital world for its own purpose. For normally the vital being with its personality exists after the dissolution of the physical body for some time only; afterwards it passes away into the vital plane where it remains till the vital sheath dissolves. Next one passes in the mental sheath, to some mental world; but finally the soul leaves its mental sheath also and goes to its place of rest. If the mental is strongly developed, then the mental being can remain and so also can the strongly developed vital, provided they are organised by and centred around the true psychic being—they then share the immortality of the psychic. But ordinarily this does not happen; there is a dissolution of the mental and vital as well as the physical parts and the soul in rebirth assumes a

new mind, life and body and not, as is often supposed, a replica of its old nature-self. Such a repetition would be meaningless and useless and would defeat the purpose of rebirth which is a progression of the nature by experience, an evolutionary growth of the soul in nature towards its self-finding. At the same time the soul preserves the impression of what was essential in its past lives and personalities and the new birth and personality are a balance between this past and the soul's need for its future.⁵

*

A distinction has to be made between the soul in its essence and the psychic being. Behind each and all there is the soul which is the spark of the Divine — none could exist without that. But it is quite possible to have a vital and physical being without a clearly evolved psychic being behind it. Still, one cannot make general statements that no aboriginal has a soul or there is no display of soul anywhere.

The inner being is composed of the inner mental, inner vital, inner physical, — but that is not the psychic being. The psychic is the inmost being and quite distinct from these. The word psychic is indeed used in English to indicate anything that is other or deeper than the external mind, life and body, anything occult or supraphysical, but that is a use which brings confusion and error and we entirely discard it when we speak or write about Yoga. In ordinary parlance we may sometimes use the word psychic in the looser popular sense or in poetry, which is not bound to intellectual accuracy, we may speak of the soul sometimes in the ordinary and more external sense or in the sense of the true psyche.

The psychic being is veiled by the surface movements and expresses itself as best it can through these outer instruments which are more governed by the outer forces than by the inner influences of the psychic. But that does not mean that they are

⁵ There are cases in which there is a rapid rebirth of the exterior being with a continuation of the old personality and even the memory of its past life, but this is exceptional and happens usually when there is a frustration by premature death and a strong will in the vital to continue its unfinished experience.

entirely isolated from the soul. The soul is in the body in the same way as the mind or vital — but the body it occupies is not this gross physical frame only, but the subtle body also. When the gross sheath falls away, the vital and mental sheaths of the body still remain as the soul's vehicle till these too dissolve.

The soul of a plant or an animal is not altogether dormant — only its means of expression are less developed than those of a human being. There is much that is psychic in the plant, much that is psychic in the animal. The plant has only the vital-physical evolved in its form, so it cannot express itself; the animal has a vital mind and can, but its consciousness is limited and its experiences are limited, so the psychic essence has a less developed consciousness and experience than is present or at least possible in man. All the same, animals have a soul and can respond very readily to the psychic in man.

The ghost is of course not the soul. It is either the man appearing in his vital body or it is a fragment of his vital that is seized on by some vital force or being. The vital part of us normally exists after the dissolution of the body for some time and passes away into the vital plane where it remains till the vital sheath dissolves. Afterwards it passes, if it is mentally evolved, in the mental sheath to some mental world and finally the psychic leaves its mental sheath also and goes to its place of rest. If the mental is strongly developed, then the mental part of us can remain; so also can the vital, provided they are organised by and centred around the true psychic being — for they then share the immortality of the psychic. Otherwise the psychic draws mind and life into itself and enters into an internatal quiescence.

*

There is the divine spark from the beginning, the soul, in all things, but it takes a long time and a long evolution for it to arrive at a conscious expression and form of manifested being — what we call the psychic being.

*

The soul is described as a spark of the Divine Fire in life and

matter, that is an image. It has not been described as a spark of consciousness.

There is mental, vital, physical consciousness—different from the psychic. The psychic being and consciousness are not identical.

When the soul or “spark of the Divine Fire” begins to develop a psychic individuality, that psychic individuality is called the psychic being.

The soul or spark is there before the development of an organised vital and mind. The soul is something of the Divine that descends into the evolution as a divine Principle within it to support the evolution of the individual out of the Ignorance into the Light. It develops in the course of the evolution a psychic individual or soul individuality which grows from life to life, using the evolving mind, vital and body as its instruments. It is the soul that is immortal while the rest disintegrates; it passes from life to life carrying its experience in essence and the continuity of the evolution of the individual.

It is the whole consciousness, mental, vital, physical also, that has to rise and join the higher consciousness and, once the joining is made, the higher has to descend into them. The psychic is behind all that and supports it.

*

The soul is always pure, but the knowledge and force in it are involved and come out only as the psychic being evolves and grows stronger.

*

The psychic being is the soul evolving in the course of birth and rebirth and the soul is a portion of the Divine—but with the soul there is always the veiled Divine.

*

The psychic being is the developing soul consciousness manifested for the created being as it evolves. At first, the soul is something essential behind the veil, not developed in front. In

front there is only the body, life, mind. In the evolution the soul consciousness develops more and more in the created being until it is so developed that it can come entirely in front and govern mind, life and body.

*

The difference [*between one psychic being and another*] is one of evolution. The psychic being is more developed in some, but the soul-principle is the same in all.

*

The soul and the psychic are the same—only as there is a vital being supported by the vital and expressing itself through it, so there is a growing psychic being supported on the psychic and expressing itself through the soul-nature.

*

But, hang it all, the psychic is part of the human nature or of ordinary nature,—it has been there even before the human began.

The Form of the Psychic Being

Formed souls enter only into formed organisms—in the protoplasm etc. it is only the spark of the Divine that is there, not the formed soul.

*

As there is in us a mind which one does not see in form but is aware of and as there is at the same time a mental being which one can see in form, so there is a soul and a psychic being. The soul is the same always, the psychic being is what it develops in the evolution.

*

The soul is not limited by any form, but the psychic being puts out a form for its expression, just as the mental, vital and subtle physical Purushas do—that is to say, one can see or another person can see one's psychic being in such and such a form. But

this seeing is of two kinds — there is the standing characteristic form taken by this being in this life and there are symbolic forms, such as when one sees the psychic as a newborn child in the lap of the Mother. If the sadhak in question really saw his psychic in the form of a woman it can only have been a constructed appearance expressing some quality or attitude of the psychic.

*

Yes, the psychic being has a form. But that does not appear from the photo [*of a person*]; for the psychic has not always or usually a form closely resembling that of the physical body, it is sometimes even quite different. When looking at the photo [*with Yogic vision*] what is seen is not a form, but something of the consciousness that either is expressed in the body or comes through somehow; one perceives or feels it there through the photo.

The Psychic Being and the Intuitive Consciousness

No, the intuitive self is quite different [*from the psychic*], or rather the intuitive consciousness — that is somewhere above the mind. The psychic stands behind the being — a simple and sincere devotion to the Divine, single-hearted, an immediate sense of what is right and helps towards the Truth and the Divine, an instinctive withdrawal from all that is the opposite are its most visible characteristics.

The Psychic Being and the External Being

What you experience is the first condition of the Yogic consciousness and self-knowledge. The ordinary mind knows itself only as an ego with all the movements of the nature in a jumble and, identifying itself with these movements, thinks “I am doing this, feeling that, thinking, in joy or in sorrow etc.” The first beginning of real self-knowledge is when you feel yourself separate from the nature in you and its movements and then you see that there are many parts of your being, many personalities each acting on its own behalf and in its own way. The two different

beings you feel are — one, the psychic being which draws you towards the Mother, the other the external being mostly vital which draws you outward and downwards towards the play of the lower nature. There is also in you behind the mind the being who observes, the witness Purusha, who can stand detached from the play of the nature, observing it and able to choose. It has to put itself always on the side of the psychic being and assent to and support its movements and to reject the downward and outward movement of the lower nature, which has to be subjected to the psychic and changed by its influence.

The Psychic or Soul and the Lower Nature

All belongs to Nature — the soul itself acts under the conditions and by the agency of Nature.

*

The moral of the condition you describe is not that Yoga should not be done but that you have to go on steadily healing the rift between the two parts of the being. The division is very usual, almost universal in human nature, and the following of the lower impulse in spite of the contrary will in the higher parts happens to almost everybody. It is the phenomenon noted by Arjuna in his question to Krishna, “Why does one do evil, even though one wishes not to do it, as if compelled to it by force?”, and expressed sententiously by Ovid, “*video meliora proboque, Deteriora sequor*”.⁶ By constant effort and aspiration one can arrive at a turning point when the psychic asserts itself and what seems a very slight psychological change or reversal alters the whole balance of the nature.

*

Every soul is not awake and active; nor is every soul turned directly to the Divine before practising Yoga. For a long time

⁶ “*I see the better and approve of it, I follow the worse.*” Metamorphoses 7.20 — Ed.

it seeks the Divine through men and things much more than directly.

*

In the ordinary consciousness in which the mind etc. are *not* awakened, the psychic acts as well as it can through them, but according to the laws of the Ignorance.

*

These things, love, compassion, kindness, bhakti, Ananda are the nature of the psychic being, because the psychic being is formed from the Divine Consciousness, it is the divine part within you. But the lower parts are not yet accustomed to obey or value the influence and control of the psychic for in men the vital and physical are accustomed to act for themselves and do not care for what the soul wants. When they do care and obey the psychic, that is their conversion — they begin to put on themselves the psychic or divine nature.

*

The psychic is the support of the individual evolution; it is connected with the universal both by direct contact and through the mind, vital and body.

*

It may be said of the psychic that it is that [*the luminous part of our being*], because the psychic is in touch with the Divine and a projection of the Divine into the lower nature. But the inner mind, vital and physical are a part of the universal and open to the dualities — only they are wider than the external mind, life and body and can receive more largely and easily the divine influence.

*

The psychic is deep within in the inner heart-centre behind the emotional being. From there it stretches upward to form the psychic mind and below to form the psychic vital and psychic physical, but usually one is aware of these only after the

mind, vital and physical are subjected and put under the psychic influence.

The Psychic Being or Soul and the Vital or Life

The soul and the life are two quite different powers. The soul is a spark of the Divine Spirit which supports the individual nature; mind, life, body are the instruments for the manifestation of the nature. In most men the soul is hidden and covered over by the action of the external nature; they mistake the vital being for the soul, because it is the vital which animates and moves the body. But this vital being is a thing made up of desires and executive forces good and bad; it is the desire-soul, not the true thing. It is when the true soul (*psyche*) comes forward and begins first to influence and then govern the actions of the instrumental nature that man begins to overcome vital desire and grow towards a greater divine nature.

*

We are concerned with the growth of the soul out of the Ignorance, not its plunge into it. The lower nature is the nature of the Ignorance, what we seek is to grow into the nature of the Truth. How do you make out that when the soul has looked towards the Truth and is moving towards it, a pull-back by the vital and the ego towards the Ignorance is a glorious action of the soul and not a revolt of the lower nature? I suppose you are floundering about in the confusion of the idea that the “desire-soul” in the vital is the true *psyche* of man. If you like — but that is no part of my explanation of things; I make a clear distinction between the two, so I refuse to sanctify the revolt of the lower nature by calling it the sanction of the soul. If it is the soul that wants to fail, why is there any struggle or sorrow over the business? It would be a perfectly smooth affair.

*

The psychic being is not the fulfiller of desires — it is the spark of the Divine in all things manifested here that grows into the

psychic being and supports the evolution. It is that which survives the dissolution of the vital and physical sheaths and returns to birth again.

*

The two feelings you have are that of two different personalities or parts in the being, one which has the feeling of service is in the vital, the other which has the feeling of the child and of the self-giving is psychic. In the progress of the sadhana these different parts or personalities get developed or transformed and harmonised with each other — all becoming parts of the ultimate perfection of the being in the Mother's consciousness.

The Psychic Being and the Ego

There is individuality in the psychic being but not egoism. Egoism goes when the individual unites himself with the Divine or is entirely surrendered to the Divine.

*

It is the psychic inmost being that replaces the ego. It is through love and surrender to the Divine that the psychic being becomes strong and manifest, so that it can replace the ego.

The Psychic World or Plane

There is a psychic world — a sort of Heaven of peace and beauty and harmony. It is also a place of rest for the soul between two incarnations in which it absorbs its past experiences and becomes ready for another birth.

*

What you describe [*lying calmly in a realm of peace, joy and oneness*] is what we mean by the psychic being in its own plane of existence, for the psychic plane is like that. The psychic stands behind the rest of the being supporting it with its own purity, truth and joy.

Section Three

The Vertical System: Supermind to Subconscious

Chapter One

The Planes or Worlds of Consciousness

The System of Planes or Worlds

What we speak of are planes of consciousness — the physical is the lowest, above it the ordinary vital, above it the emotional (heart), above it the mental, above the mental are other planes. There is a psychic plane behind the emotional which influences all the others.

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The physical is not the only world; there are others that we become aware of through dream records, through the subtle senses, through influences and contacts, through imagination, intuition and vision. There are worlds of a larger subtler life than ours, vital worlds; worlds in which Mind builds its own forms and figures, mental worlds; psychic worlds which are the soul's home; others above with which we have little contact. In each of us there is a mental plane of consciousness, a psychic, a vital, a subtle physical as well as the gross physical and material plane. The same planes are situated in the consciousness of general Nature. It is when we enter or contact these other planes that we come into connection with the worlds above the physical. In sleep we leave the physical body, only a subconscious residue remaining, and enter all planes and all sorts of worlds. In each we see scenes, meet beings, share in happenings, come across formations, influences, suggestions which belong to these planes. Even when we are awake, part of us moves in these planes, but their activity goes on behind the veil; our waking minds are not aware of it. Dreams are often only incoherent constructions of our subconscious, but others are records (often much mixed and distorted) or transcripts of experiences in these supraphysical

planes. When we do sadhana, this kind of dream becomes very common; then subconscious dreams cease to predominate.

The forces and beings of the vital world have a great influence on human beings. The vital world is on one side a world of beauty,—the poet, artist, musician are in close contact with it; it is also a world of powers and passions, lusts and desires,—our own lusts and desires, and passions and ambitions can put us into connection with the vital worlds and their forces and beings. It is again a world of things dark, dangerous and horrible. Nightmares like X's are contacts with this side of the vital plane. Its influences are also the source of much in men that is demoniac, dirty, cruel and base.

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It is good that you were able to overcome the difficulty and have a good meditation. Your observation that the difficulty is only in the head and throat and mainly in the latter is very significant. These are the mental centres and it is evident therefore that the difficulty comes from the physical mind. The higher part of the mind belongs to the thinking mind proper, the buddhi, that which understands and observes and guides; the throat is the centre of the externalising mind, that which deals with outer and physical things and responds to them. Its activity is always one of the chief difficulties of the sadhana. If it is quiet it is easier, as you have seen, for the whole being to be quiet.

The last of the four experiences, that of the being within arranged in layers one under the other like the steps of a ladder, is also very significant and very true. It is so that inner consciousness is arranged. There are five main divisions of this ladder. At the top above the head are layers (or as we call them planes) of which we are not conscious and which become conscious to us only by sadhana—those above the human mind—that is the higher consciousness. Below from the crown of the head to the throat are the layers (there are many of them) of the mind, the three principal being one at the top of the head communicating with the higher consciousness, another between the eyebrows where is the thought, sight and will, a third in the throat which is

the externalising mind. A second division is from the shoulders to the navel, these are the layers of the higher vital presided over by the heart centre where is the emotional being with the psychic hidden behind it. From the navel downwards is the rest of the vital being containing several layers. From the bottom of the spine downward are the layers of the physical consciousness proper, the material, and below the feet is the subconscious which has also many levels.

The experience of the splitting of the forehead from the middle and the pouring out of light signified the opening of the centre of thought, will and vision there. When this opens, there is the opening of the inner mind consciousness through which the light of the higher can pour out—here it is the Mother's white light that was pouring out through the opening.

The lights you saw were the many lights (powers, forces full of light) of the higher consciousness, the Truth consciousness or divine consciousness. Their pouring down was preceded and made possible by the appearance of the moon, the spiritual light. It is when the spiritual light is there that the presence of the Mother is revealed and her action brings down the powers of the Truth, the Divine and she gives them to the sadhak.

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If we regard the gradation of worlds or planes as a whole, we see them as a great connected complex movement; the higher precipitate their influences on the lower, the lower react to the higher and develop or manifest in themselves within their own formula something that corresponds to the superior power and its action. The material world has evolved life in obedience to a pressure from the vital plane, mind in obedience to a pressure from the mental plane. It is now trying to evolve supermind in obedience to a pressure from the supramental plane. In more detail, particular forces, movements, powers, beings of a higher world can throw themselves on the lower to establish appropriate and corresponding forms which will connect them with the material domain and, as it were, reproduce or project their action here. And each thing created here has, supporting it,

subtler envelopes or forms of itself which make it subsist and connect it with forces acting from above. Man, for instance, has, besides his gross physical body, subtler sheaths or bodies by which he lives behind the veil in direct connection with supraphysical planes of consciousness and can be influenced by their powers, movements and beings. What takes place in life has always behind it preexistent movements and forms in the occult vital planes; what takes place in mind presupposes preexistent movements and forms in the occult mental planes. That is an aspect of things which becomes more and more evident, insistent and important, the more we progress in a dynamic Yoga.

But all this must not be taken in too rigid and mechanical a sense. It is an immense plastic movement full of the play of possibilities and must be seized by a flexible and subtle tact or sense in the seeing consciousness. It cannot be reduced to a too rigorous logical or mathematical formula. Two or three points must be pressed in order that this plasticity may not be lost to our view.

First, each plane, in spite of its connection with others above and below it, is yet a world in itself, with its own movements, forces, beings, types, forms existing as if for its and their own sake, under its own laws, for its own manifestation without apparent regard for other members of the great series. Thus, if we regard the vital or the subtle physical plane, we see great ranges of it (most of it) existing in themselves, without any relation with the material world and with no movement to affect or influence it, still less to precipitate a corresponding manifestation in the physical formula. At most we can say that the existence of anything in the vital, subtle physical or any other plane creates a possibility for a corresponding movement of manifestation in the physical world. But something more is needed to turn that static or latent possibility into a dynamic potentiality or an actual urge towards a material creation. That something may be a call from the material plane, e.g. some force or someone in the physical existence entering into touch with a supraphysical power or world or part of it and moved to bring it down into the earth life. Or it may be an impulse in the vital or other plane itself, e.g. a vital being moved to extend his action

towards the earth and establish there a kingdom for himself or the play of the forces for which he stands in his own domain. Or it may be a pressure from above, let us say some supramental or mental power precipitating its formation from above and developing forms and movements on the vital level as a means of transit to its self-creation in the material world. Or it may be all these things acting together, in which case there is the greatest possibility of an effective creation.

Next, as a consequence, it follows that only a limited part of the action of the vital or other higher planes is concerned with the earth-existence. But even this creates a mass of possibilities which is far greater than the earth can at one time manifest or contain in its own less plastic formulas. All these possibilities do not realise themselves; some fail altogether and leave at the most an idea that comes to nothing; some try seriously and are repelled and defeated and, even if in action for a time, come to nothing. Others effectuate a half manifestation, and this is the most usual result, the more so as these vital or other supraphysical forces come into conflict and have not only to overcome the resistance of the physical consciousness and of matter, but their own internecine resistance to each other. A certain number succeed in precipitating their results in a more complete and successful creation, so that if you compare that creation with its original in the higher plane, there is something like a close resemblance or even an apparently exact reproduction or translation from the supraphysical to the physical formula. And yet even there the exactness is only apparent; the very fact of translation into another substance and another rhythm of manifestation makes a difference. It is something new that has manifested and it is that that makes the creation worth while. What for instance would be the utility of a supramental creation on earth if it were just the same thing as a supramental creation on the supramental plane? It is that, in principle, but yet something else, a triumphant new self-discovery of the Divine in conditions that are not elsewhere.

No doubt, the subtle physical is closest to the physical, and most like it. But yet the conditions are different and the thing too different. For instance, the subtle physical has a freedom,

plasticity, intensity, power, colour, wide and manifold play (there are thousands of things there that are not here) of which as yet we have no possibility on earth. And yet there is something here, a potentiality of the Divine which the other in spite of its greater liberties has not, something which makes creation more difficult, but in the last result justifies the labour.

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Each plane of consciousness contains the others in itself in principle. In the physical consciousness there is a physical mind, a vital force and action which we call the vital physical, and the physical proper or material.

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Mind has its own realms and life has its own realms just as matter has. In the mental realms life and substance are entirely subordinated to Mind and obey its dictates. Here on earth there is the evolution with matter as the starting point, life as the medium, mind emerging from it. There are many grades, realms, combinations in the cosmos—there are even many universes. Ours is only one of many.

The Planes and the Body

The heavenly worlds are above the body. What the parts of the body correspond to are planes—subtle physical, higher, middle and lower vital, mental. Each plane is in communication with various worlds that belong to it.

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The appearance of the being in other planes is not the same necessarily as that of the physical body. Very often the form taken by the vital or psychic or mental being is very different from the physical form. Even when they resemble on the whole, there is always some difference.

Chapter Two

The Supermind or Supramental

Supermind and the Purushottama

Purushottama of the Gita is the supreme being; the supermind is a power of the Supreme—or proceeding from him, if you like.

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Supermind is not *the* Purushottama consciousness, it is *a* Purushottama consciousness, a certain level and power of being which he can share with his “eternal portions”, *amśāḥ sanātanāḥ*, provided they can climb out of the Ignorance. As for embodying it, it is certainly difficult but not impossible.

Supermind and Sachchidananda

Supermind is between the Sachchidananda planes and the lower creation. It contains the self-determining Truth of the Divine Consciousness and is necessary for a Truth creation.

One can of course realise Sachchidananda in relation to the mind, life, body also—but then it is something stable, supporting by its presence the lower Prakriti, but not transforming it. The supermind alone can transform the lower nature.

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In the supramental consciousness, there are no problems—the problem is created by the division set up by the Mind. The Supramental sees the Truth as a single whole and everything falls into its place in that whole. The Supramental is also spiritual, but the old Yogas reach Sachchidananda through the spiritualised mind and depart into the eternally static oneness of Sachchidananda or rather pure Sat (Existence) absolute and eternal or else a pure Non-existence absolute and

eternal. Ours having realised Sachchidananda in the spiritualised mind plane proceeds to realise it in the supramental plane.

The supreme supra-cosmic Sachchidananda is above all. Supermind may be described as its power of self-awareness and world-awareness, the world being known as within itself and not outside. So to live consciously in the supreme Sachchidananda one must pass through the Supermind. If one is in the supra-cosmic apart from the manifestation, there is no place for problems or solutions. If one lives in the transcendence and the cosmic view at the same time, that can only be by the supramental consciousness in the supreme Sachchidananda consciousness—so why should the question arise? Why should there be a difference between the supreme Sachchidananda version of the cosmos and the Supermind's version of it? Your difficulty probably comes from thinking of both in terms of the mind.

The Supermind is an entirely different consciousness not only from the spiritualised Mind, but from the planes above spiritualised Mind which intervene between it and the supramental plane. Once one passes beyond Overmind to Supermind, one enters into a consciousness to which the norms of the other planes do not at all apply and in which the same Truth, e.g. Sachchidananda and truth of this universe, is seen in quite a different way and has a different dynamic consequence. This necessarily results from the fact that Supermind has an indivisible knowledge, while Overmind proceeds by union in division and Mind by division taking division as the first fact, for that is the natural process of its knowledge.

In all planes the essential experience of Sachchidananda, pure Existence, Consciousness, Bliss is the same and Mind is often contented with it as the sole Truth and dismisses all else as part of the grand Illusion, but there is also a dynamic experience of the Divine or of Existence (e.g. as One and Many, Personal and Impersonal, the Infinite and Finite etc.) which is essential for the integral knowledge. The dynamic experience is not the same in the lower planes as in the higher, in the intermediate spiritual planes and in the Supramental. In these the oppositions

can only be put together and harmonised, in the Supermind they fuse together and are inseparably one; that makes an enormous difference.

The universe is dynamism, movement — the essential experience of Sachchidananda apart from the dynamism and movement is static. The full dynamic truth of Sachchidananda and the universe and its consequence cannot be grasped by any other consciousness than the Supermind, because the instrumentation in all other (lower) planes is inferior and there is therefore a disparity between the fullness of the static experience and the incompleteness of the dynamic power, knowledge, result of the inferior light and power of other planes. This is the reason why the consciousness of the other spiritual planes even if it descends can make no radical change in the earth-consciousness, it can only modify or enrich it. The radical transformation needs the descent of a supramental power and nature.

One cannot speak of two classes of Sachchidananda, for Sachchidananda is the same always — but the knowledge of Sachchidananda and the universe differs according to the degree of the consciousness which has the experience.

The personal realisation of the Divine may be sometimes with Form, sometimes without Form. Without Form, it is the Presence of the living Divine Person, felt in everything. With Form, it comes with the image of the One to whom worship is offered. The Divine can always manifest himself in a form to the bhakta or seeker. One sees him in the form in which one worships or seeks him or in a form suitable to the Divine Personality who is the object of the adoration. How it manifests depends on many things and it is too various to be reduced to a single rule. Sometimes it is in the heart that the Presence with the form is seen, sometimes in any of the other centres, sometimes above and guiding from there; sometimes it is seen outside and in front as if an embodied Person. Its advantages are an intimate relation and constant guidance or if felt or seen within, a very strong and concrete realisation of the constant Presence. But one must be very sure of the purity of one's adoration and seeking — for the disadvantage of this kind of embodied relation is that

other Forces can imitate the Form or counterfeit the voice and the guidance and this gets more force if it is associated with a constructed image which is not the true thing. Several have been misled in this way because pride, vanity or desire was strong in them and robbed them of the finer psychic perception that is not mental and can at once turn the Mother's light on such misleadings or errors.

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It is the supramental Power that transforms mind, life and body — not the Sachchidananda consciousness which supports impartially everything. But it is by having experience of the Sachchidananda, pure existence-consciousness-bliss, that the ascent to the supramental and the descent of the supramental become (at a much later stage) possible. For first one must get free from the ordinary limitation by the mental, vital and physical formations, and the experience of the Sachchidananda peace, calm, purity and wideness gives this liberation.

The supermind has nothing to do with passing into a blank. It is the Mind overpassing its own limits and following a negative and quietistic way to do it that reaches the big blank. The Mind, being the Ignorance, has to annul itself in order to enter into the supreme Truth — or, at least, so it thinks. But the supermind being the Truth-Consciousness and the Divine Knowledge has no need to annul itself for the purpose.

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The Will of Sachchidananda can act under different conditions in the Knowledge or the Ignorance. The Supermind is the Truth Consciousness, the Knowledge, and the will there works out spontaneously the unmixed Knowledge — whereas below the Supermind it allows the forces to play in quite another way and supports them or intervenes according to the need of the play in the Ignorance.

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In the supermind, consciousness is existence eternally aware both *that it is* and of what it is and also of what it intends

to do with itself and become for its own Ananda. Consciousness and knowledge there are one.

The Supracosmic, the Supramental, the Overmind and Nirvana

(1) I mean by the supracosmic Reality the supreme Sachchidananda who is above this and all manifestations, not bound by any, yet from whom all manifestation proceeds and all universe.

(2) The supramental and the supracosmic are not the same. If it were so there could be no supramental world and no descent of the supramental principle into the material world — we would be brought back to the idea that the divine Truth and Reality can only exist beyond and the universe, any universe can only be a half-truth or an illusion of ignorance.

(3) I mean by the supramental the Truth-Consciousness whether above or in the universe by which the Divine knows not only his own essence and being but his manifestation also. Its fundamental character is knowledge by identity, by that the Self is known, the Divine Sachchidananda is known, but also the truth of the manifestation is known, because this too is That — *sarvam khalvidam brahma, Vāsudevaḥ sarvam* etc. Mind is an instrument of the Ignorance trying to know — Supermind is the Knower possessing knowledge because one with it and the known, therefore seeing all things in the Light of His own Truth, the light of their true Self which is He. It is a dynamic and not only a static Power, not only a Knowledge, but a Will according to Knowledge — there is a supramental Power or Shakti which can manifest directly its world of Light and Truth in which all is luminously based on the harmony and unity of the One, not disturbed by a veil of Ignorance or any disguise. The Supermind therefore does not transcend all manifestation, but it is above the triplexity of mind, life and matter which is our present experience of this manifestation.

(4) The Overmind is a sort of delegation from the Supermind (this is a metaphor only) which supports the present evolutionary universe in which we live here in Matter. If Supermind were

to start here from the beginning as the direct creative Power, a world of the kind we see now would be impossible; it would have been full of the divine Light from the beginning, there would be no involution in the unconsciousness of Matter, consequently no gradual striving evolution of consciousness in Matter. A line is therefore drawn between the higher half of the universe of consciousness, *parārdha*, and the lower half, *aparārdha*. The higher half is constituted of Sat, Chit, Ananda, Mahas (the supramental)—the lower half of mind, life, Matter. This line is the intermediary Overmind which, though luminous itself, keeps from us the full indivisible supramental Light, depends on it indeed, but in receiving it, divides, distributes, breaks it up into separated aspects, powers, multiplicities of all kinds, each of which it is possible by a further diminution of consciousness such as we reach in Mind to regard as the sole or the chief Truth and all the rest as subordinate or contradictory to it. To this action of the Overmind may be applied the words of the Upanishad, “The face of the Truth is covered by a golden Lid”, or those of the Vedic *r̥tena r̥tam apihitam*. Here there is the working of a sort of *vidyā-avidyāmayaī māyā* which makes possible the predominance of *avidyā*. It is by this primitive divisional principle that the Mind is enabled to regard for example the Impersonal as the Truth and the Personal as only a mask or the personal Divine as the greatest Truth and impersonality as only an aspect; it is so too that all the conflicting philosophies and religions arise, each exalting one aspect or potentiality of Truth presented to Mind as the whole sufficient explanation of things or exalting one of the Divine’s Godheads above all others as the true God than whom there can be no other or none so high or higher. This divisionary principle pursues man’s mental knowledge everywhere and even when he thinks he has arrived at the final unity and harmony, it is only a constructed unity based on an Aspect. It is so that the scientist seeks to found the unity of knowledge on some original physical aspect of things, Energy or Matter, Electricity or Ether, or the Mayavadin thinks he has arrived at absolute Adwaita by cutting existence into two and calling the upper side Brahman and the lower side Maya. It

is the reason why mental knowledge can never arrive at a final solution of anything, for the aspects of Existence as distributed by Overmind are numberless and one can go on multiplying philosophies and religions for ever.

In the Overmind itself there is not this confusion, for the Overmind knows the One as the support, essence, fundamental power of all things, but in the dynamic play proper to it it lays emphasis on its divisional power of multiplicity and seeks to give each Power or Aspect its full chance to manifest, relying on the underlying Oneness to prevent disharmony or conflict. Each Godhead, as it were, creates his own world, but without conflict with others; each Aspect, each Idea, each Force of things can be felt in its full separate energy or splendour and work out its values, but this does not create a disharmony because the Overmind has the sense of the Infinite and in the true (not spatial) Infinite many concording infinities are possible. This peculiar security of Overmind is however not transferable to the lower planes of consciousness which it supports and governs, because as one descends in the scale the stress on division and multiplicity increases and in the Mind the underlying oneness becomes vague, abstract, indeterminate and indeterminable and the only apparent concreteness is that of the phenomenal which is by its nature a form and representation — the self-view of the One has already begun to disappear. Mind acts by representations and constructions, by the separation and weaving together of its constructed data; it can make a synthetic construction and see it as the whole, but when it looks for the reality of things, it takes refuge in abstractions — it has not the concrete vision, experience, contact sought by the mystic and the spiritual seeker. To know Self and Reality directly or truly, it has to be silent and reflect some light of these things or undergo self-exceeding and transformation, and this is only possible either by a higher Light descending into it or by its ascent, the taking up or immittance of it into a higher Light of existence. In Matter, descending below Mind, we arrive at the acme of the principle of fragmentation and division; the One, though secretly there, is lost to knowledge and we get the fullness of the Ignorance,

even a fundamental Inconscience out of which the universe has to evolve consciousness and knowledge.

(5) If we regard Vaikuntha or Goloka each as the world of a Divinity, Vishnu or Krishna, we would be naturally led to seek its place or its origin in the Overmind plane. The Overmind is the plane of the highest worlds of the Gods. But Vaikuntha and Goloka are human conceptions of states of being that are beyond humanity. Goloka is evidently a world of Love, Beauty and Ananda full of spiritual radiances (the cow is the symbol of spiritual light) of which the souls there are the keepers or possessors, Gopas and Gopis. It is not necessary to assign any single plane to this manifestation—in fact there can be a reflection or possession of it or of its conditions on any plane of consciousness—the mental, vital or even the subtle physical plane. The explanation of it which you mention is not therefore excluded, it is quite feasible.

(6) It is not possible to situate Nirvana as a world or plane, for the Nirvana push is to a withdrawal from world and world-values; it is therefore a state of consciousness or rather of super-consciousness without habitation or level. There is more than one kind of Nirvana (extinction or dissolution) possible. Man being a mental being in a body, *manomaya puruṣa*, makes this attempt at retreat from the cosmos through the spiritualised mind, he cannot do otherwise and it is this that gives it the appearance of an extinction or dissolution, *laya, nirvāṇa*; for extinction of the mind and all that depends on it including the separative ego in something Beyond is the natural way, almost the indispensable way for such a withdrawal. In a more affirmative Yoga seeking transcendence but not withdrawal there would not be this indispensability, for there would be the way already alluded to of self-exceeding or transformation of the mental being. But it is possible also to pass to that through a certain experience of Nirvana, an absolute silence of mind and cessation of its activities, constructions, representations which can be so complete that not only to the silent mind but also to the passive senses the whole world is emptied of its solidity and reality and things appear only as unsubstantial forms without

any real habitations or else floating in something that is a nameless Infinite: this Infinite or else something still beyond is That which alone is real; an absolute calm, peace, liberation would be the resulting state. Action would continue, but no initiation or participation in it by the silent liberated consciousness; a nameless Power would do all until there began the descent from above which would transform the consciousness, making its silence and freedom a basis for a luminous knowledge, action, Ananda. But such a passage would be rare; ordinarily a silence of the mind, a liberation of the consciousness, a renunciation of its belief in the final value or truth of the mind's imperfect representations or constructions would be enough for the higher working to be possible.

(7) Now about the cosmic consciousness and Nirvana. Cosmic consciousness is a complex matter. To begin with, there are two sides to it, the experience of the Self free, infinite, silent, inactive, one in all and beyond all and the direct experience of the cosmic Energy and its forces, workings and formations, this latter experience not being complete till one has the sense of being commensurate with the universe or pervading, exceeding and containing it. Till then there may be direct contacts, communications, interchanges with cosmic forces, beings, movements, but not the full unity of mind with the cosmic Mind, of life with the cosmic Life, of body and physical consciousness with the cosmic material Energy and its substance. Again there may be a realisation of the Cosmic Self which is not followed by the realisation of the dynamic universal oneness. Or on the contrary there may be some dynamic universalising of consciousness without the experience of the free static Self omnipresent everywhere,—the preoccupation with and pleasure of the greater energies that one would thus experience would stop the way to that liberation. Also the identification or universalisation may be more on one plane or level of consciousness than on another, predominantly mental or predominantly emotional (through universal sympathy or love) or vital of another kind (experience of the universal life forces) or physical. But in any case, even with the full realisation and experience it should be evident that this

cosmic play would be something that one would finally feel as limited, ignorant, imperfect from its very nature. The free soul might regard it untouched and unmoved by its imperfections and vicissitudes, do some appointed work, try to help all or be an instrument of the Divine, but neither the work nor the instrumentation would have anything like the perfection or even the full light, power, bliss of the Divine. This could only be gained by an ascension into higher planes of cosmic existence or their descent into one's consciousness — and, if this were not envisaged or accepted, the push to Nirvana would still remain as a way of escape. The other way would be the ascent after death into these higher planes, — the heavens of the religions signify after all nothing but such an urge to a greater, luminous, beatific Divine Existence.

But, one might ask, if the higher planes or if the Overmind itself were to manifest their consciousness with all that power, light, freedom and vastness and these things were to descend into an individual consciousness here, would not that make unnecessary both the cosmic negation or the Nirvanic push and the urge towards some Divine Transcendence? But in the result, though one might live in a union with the Divine in a luminous wide free consciousness embracing the universe in itself and be a channel of great energies or creations, spiritual or external, yet this world here would remain fundamentally the same — there would be a gulf of difference between the Spirit within and its medium and stuff on which it acted, between the inner consciousness and the world in which it was working. The achievement inner, subjective, individual might be perfect, but the dynamic outcome insufficient, disparate, a mixture, not a perfect harmony of the inner and the outer, a new integral rhythm of existence here that could be called truly divine. Only a consciousness like the supramental, unconditioned and in perfect unity with its source, a Truth-Consciousness empowered to create its own free determinations would be able to establish some perfect harmony and rhythm of the higher hemisphere in this lowest rung of the lower hemisphere. Whether it is to do so or not depends on the significance of the evolutionary

existence; it depends on whether that existence is something imperfect in its very nature and doomed to frustration — in which case either a negative way of transcendence by some kind of Nirvana or a positive way of transcendence, perhaps by breaking the shining lid of Overmind, *hiranymaya pātra*, into what is above it, would be the final end of the soul escaping from this meaningless universe; unless indeed like the Amitabha Buddha one were held by compassion or else the Divine Will within to continue helping and sharing the upward struggle towards the Light of those here still in the darkness of the Ignorance. If on the contrary this world is a Lila of spiritual involution and evolution in which one power after another up to the highest is to appear as Matter, Life and Mind have already appeared out of an apparent indeterminate Inconscience, then another culmination is possible.

The push to Nirvana has two motive forces behind it. One is the sense of the imperfection, sorrow, death, suffering of this world — the original motive force of the Buddha. But for escape from these afflictions Nirvana might not be necessary, if there are higher worlds into which one can ascend where there is no such imperfection, sorrow, death or suffering. But this other possibility of escape is met by the idea that these higher worlds too are transient and part of the Ignorance, that one has to return here always till one overcomes the Ignorance, that the Reality and the cosmic existence are as Truth and Falsehood, opposite, incompatible. This brings in the second motive force, that of the call to Transcendence. If the Transcendent is not only supracosmic but an aloof Incommunicable, *avyavahāryam*, which one cannot reach except by a negation of all that is here, then some kind of Nirvana, an absolute Nirvana even is inevitable. If on the other hand the Divine is transcendent but not incommunicable, the call will still be there and the soul will leave the chequered cosmic play for the beatitude of the transcendent existence, but an absolute Nirvana would not be indispensable; a beatific union with the Divine offers itself as the way before the seeker. This is the reason why the Cosmic Consciousness is not sufficient and the push away from it is so strong, — it is only if the golden

lid of the Overmind is overpassed and opened and the dynamic contact with the Supermind and a descent of its Light and Power here is intended that it can be otherwise.

Supermind and Other Planes

The words supermind and supramental were first used by me, but since then people have taken up and are using the word supramental for anything above the mind.

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The highest or true Vijnana is the supramental plane — the plane of the Divine Knowledge — it is only at the end of the sadhana, when there is the full siddhi that one can have free connection with that plane.

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The Supramental is a higher level of consciousness than the mind in which one gets the direct truth of the Supreme and the whole truth. One can meet the One in the mind, but it is an imperfect knowledge and experience.

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It is only the supramental that is all Knowledge. All below that from Overmind to Matter is Ignorance — an Ignorance growing at each level nearer to the full Knowledge. Below Supermind there may be Knowledge but it is not all Knowledge.

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I have not said that everything is falsehood except the supramental Truth. I said that there was no complete Truth below the supramental. In the Overmind the Truth of supermind which is whole and harmonious enters into a separation into parts, many Truths fronting each other and moved each to fulfil itself, to make a world of its own or else to prevail or take its share in worlds made of a combination of various separated Truths and Truth-forces. Lower down in the scale, the fragmentation

becomes more and more pronounced, so as to admit of positive error, falsehood, ignorance, finally, inconscience like that of Matter. This world here has come out of the Inconscience and developed the Mind which is an instrument of Ignorance trying to reach out to the Truth through much limitation, conflict, confusion and error. To get back to Overmind, if one can do it completely, which is not easy for physical beings, is to stand on the borders of the supramental Truth with the hope of entry there.

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If the supermind were not to give us a greater and completer truth than any of the lower planes, it would not be worth while trying to reach it. Each plane has its own truths. Some of them are no longer true on a higher plane; e.g. desire and ego are truths of the mental, vital and physical Ignorance — a man there without ego or desire would be a tamasic automaton. As we rise higher, ego and desire appear no longer as truths, they are falsehoods disfiguring the true person and the true will. The struggle between the Powers of Light and the Powers of Darkness is a truth here — as we ascend above, it becomes less and less of a truth and in the supermind it has no truth at all. Other truths remain but change their character, importance, place in the whole. The difference or contrast between the Personal and Impersonal is a truth of the Overmind — there is no separate truth of them in the supermind, they are inseparably one. But one who has not mastered and lived the truths of Overmind cannot reach the supramental Truth. The incompetent pride of man's mind makes a sharp distinction and wants to call all else untruth and leap at once to the highest truth whatever it may be — but that is an ambitious and arrogant error. One has to climb the stairs and rest one's feet firmly on each step in order to reach the summit.

*

Each plane is true in itself but only in partial truth to the Supermind. When these higher truths come into the physical they try to realise themselves there but can do so only in part and under

the conditions of the material plane. It is only the Supermind that can overcome this difficulty.

*

Supermind is not organised in the lower planes as the others are. It is only a veiled influence. Otherwise the supramental realisation would be easy.

Supermind and Overmind

Supermind is not merely a step higher than Overmind—it is beyond the line, that is, a different consciousness and power beyond the mental limit.

*

It is hardly possible to say what the Supermind is in the language of Mind, even spiritualised Mind, for it is a different consciousness altogether and acts in a different way. Whatever may be said of it is likely to be not understood or misunderstood. It is only by growing into it that one can know what it is and this also cannot be done until after a long process by which mind heightening and illuminating becomes pure Intuition (not the mixed thing that ordinarily goes by that name) and Intuition widens and masses itself into Overmind; after that Overmind can be lifted into and suffused with Supermind till it undergoes a transformation.

In the Supermind all is self-known self-luminously, there are no divisions, oppositions or separated aspects as in Mind whose principle is division of Knowledge into parts and setting each part against another. Overmind approaches this at its top and is often mistaken for Supermind, but it cannot reach it—except by uplifting and transformation.

*

By the Supermind is meant the full Truth-consciousness of the Divine Nature in which there can be no place for the principle of division and ignorance; it is always a full light and knowledge superior to all mental substance or mental movement. Between the

Supermind and the human mind are a number of ranges, planes or layers of consciousness — one can regard it in various ways — in which the element or substance of mind and consequently its movements also become more and more illumined and powerful and wide. The Overmind is the highest of these ranges; it is full of lights and powers; but from the point of view of what is above it, it is the line of the soul's turning away from the complete and indivisible knowledge and its descent towards the Ignorance. For although it draws from the Truth, it is here that begins the separation of aspects of the Truth, the forces and their working out as if they were independent truths and this is a process that ends, as one descends to ordinary Mind, Life and Matter, in a complete division, fragmentation, separation from the indivisible Truth above. There is no longer the essential, total, perfectly harmonising and unifying knowledge, or rather knowledge for ever harmonious because for ever one, which is the character of Supermind. In the Supermind mental divisions and oppositions cease, the problems created by our dividing and fragmenting mind disappear and Truth is seen as a luminous whole. In the Overmind there is not yet the actual fall into Ignorance, but the first step is taken which will make the fall inevitable.

*

The Supermind is the One Truth deploying and determining the manifestation of its Powers — all these Powers working as a multiple Oneness, in harmony, without opposition or collision, according to the One Will inherent in all. The Overmind takes these Truths and Powers and sets each working as a force in itself with its necessary consequences — there can be harmony in their action, but the Overmind's harmonies are synthetic and partial rather than inherent, total and inevitable and, as one descends from the highest Overmind, separation, collision and conflict of forces increase, separability dominates, ignorance grows, existence becomes a clash of possibilities, a mixture of conflicting half-truths, an unsolved and apparently unsolvable riddle and puzzle.

*

The Supermind is the Truth-Consciousness; below it there intervenes the Overmind of which the principle is to receive the powers of the Divine and try to work them out separately, each acting in its own right and working to realise a world of its own or, if it has to act with others, enforcing its own principle as much as possible. Souls descending into the Overmind act in the same way. The principle of separated Individuality is from here. At first still aware of its divine origin, it becomes as it descends still more and more separated and oblivious of it, governed by the principle of division and ego. For Mind is farther removed from the Truth than Overmind, Vital Nature is engrossed in the realisation of ignorant forces, while in Matter the whole passes into what seems an original Inconscience. It is the Overmind Maya that governs this world, but in Matter it has deepened into Inconscience out of which consciousness reemerges and climbs again bringing down into Matter life and mind, and opening in mind to the higher reaches—which are still in some direct connection with the Truth (Intuition, Overmind, Supermind).

*

At the time when these chapters [*the last chapters of The Synthesis of Yoga*] were written, the name “overmind” had not been found, so there is no mention of it. What is described in these chapters is the action of the supermind when it descends into the overmind plane and takes up the overmind workings and transforms them.¹ It was intended in later chapters to show how difficult even this was and how many levels there were between human mind and supermind and how even supermind, descending, could get mixed with the lower action and turned into something that was less than the true Truth. But these later chapters were not written.

*

The distinction [*between the Supermind and the Overmind*] has

¹ The highest Supermind or Divine Gnosis existent in itself is something that lies beyond still and quite above.

not been made in the *Arya* because at that time what I now call the Overmind was supposed to be an inferior plane of the Supermind. But that was because I was seeing them from the Mind. The true defect of Overmind, the limitation in it which gave rise to a world of Ignorance, is seen fully only when one looks at it from the physical consciousness, from the result (Ignorance in Matter) to the cause (Overmind division of the Truth). In its own plane Overmind seems to be only a divided, many-sided play of the Truth, so can easily be taken by the Mind as a supramental province. Mind also when flooded by the Overmind lights feels itself living in a surprising revelation of divine Truth. The difficulty comes when we deal with the vital and still more with the physical. Then it becomes imperative to face the difficulty and to make a sharp distinction between Overmind and Supermind—for it then becomes evident that the Overmind Power (in spite of its lights and splendours) is not sufficient to overcome the Ignorance because it is itself under the law of Division out of which came the Ignorance. One has to pass beyond and supramentalise Overmind so that mind and all the rest may undergo the final change.

*

The Supermind is the total Truth Consciousness; the Overmind draws down the truths separately and gives them a separate activity—e.g. in the Supermind the Divine Peace and Power, Knowledge and Will are one. In the Overmind each of these becomes a separate aspect which can exist or act on its own lines apart from the others. When it comes down to Mind, this turns into an ignorance and incapacity—because Knowledge can come without a Will to support it or Peace can be disturbed by the action of Power etc.

*

Supermind by the way is synthetic only in the lowest spaces of itself where it has to prepare the principles of Overmind—synthesis is necessary only where analysis has taken place; one has dissected everything, put in pieces (analysis) so one has to

piece together. But Supermind is unitarian, has never divided up, so it does not need to add and piece together the parts and fragments. It has always held the conscious Many together as the conscious One.

*

To return to the supramental—the supramental is simply the direct self-existent Truth Consciousness and the direct self-effective Truth Power. There can therefore be no question of jugglery about it. What is not true is not supramental. As for calm and silence, there is no need of the supramental to get that. One can get it even on the level of Higher Mind which is the next above the human intelligence. I got these things in 1908, twenty-seven years ago and I can assure you they were solid enough and marvellous enough without any need of supramentality to make it more so! Again, a calm that “seems like motion” is a phenomenon of which I know nothing. A calm or silence which can support or produce action—that I know and that is what I have had—the proof is that out of an absolute silence of the mind I edited the *Bande Mataram* for four months and wrote $6\frac{1}{2}$ volumes of the *Arya*, not to speak of all the letters and messages etc. etc. I have written since. If you say that writing is not an action or motion but only something that seems like it, a jugglery of the consciousness,—well, still out of that calm and silence I conducted a pretty strenuous political activity and have also taken my share in keeping up an Asram which has at least an appearance to the physical senses of being solid and material! If you deny that these things are material or solid (which of course metaphysically you can), then you land yourself plump into Shankara’s illusionism, and there I will leave you.

You will say however that it is not the Supramental but at most the Overmind that helped me to these non-nebulous motions. But the Supermind is by definition a greater dynamic activity than mind or Overmind. I have said that what is not true is not supramental; I will add that what is ineffective is not supramental. And finally I will conclude by saying that I have

not told X that I have taken possession of the supramental—I only admit to be very near to it, or at least to its tail. But “very near” is—well, after all a relative phrase like all human phrases.

*

One must have already become intuitively conscious to know about the overmind and the supermind. To give “signs” is useless, for the mind would only make mistakes in trying to judge by the “signs”—one has to become conscious within and know directly.

Knowledge and Will in the Supermind

That [*the division between knowledge and will*] is true of mental knowledge and will, but not of the higher knowledge-will. In the Supermind knowledge and will are one.

*

Knowledge and will have naturally to be one before either can act perfectly.

*

Force and Knowledge are two different things and in the consciousness below supermind may go together or may not.

Chapter Three

The Overmind

Overmind and the Cosmic Consciousness

Overmind is the highest source of the cosmic consciousness available to the embodied being in the Ignorance. It is part of the cosmic consciousness—but the human individual when he opens into the cosmic usually remains in the cosmic Mind-Life-Matter receiving only inspirations and influences from the higher planes of Intuition and Overmind. He receives through the spiritualised higher and illumined mind the fundamental experiences on which spiritual knowledge is based; he can become even full of intuitive mind movements, illuminations, various kinds of powers and illumined light, liberation, Ananda. But to rise fully into the Intuition is rare, to reach the Overmind still rarer—although influences and experiences can come down from there.

*

It is (sometimes directly, sometimes indirectly) by the power of the Overmind releasing the mind from its close partitions that the cosmic consciousness opens in the seeker and he becomes aware of the cosmic spirit and the play of the cosmic forces.

It is from or at least through the overmind plane that the original rearrangement of things in this world is effected; for from it the determining vibrations originally come. But there are corresponding movements on all the planes, the mind, the vital, the physical even, and it is possible in a very clear or illumined condition of the lower consciousness to become aware of these movements and understand the plan of things and be a conscious instrument or even, to a limited extent, a determinant Will or Force. But the stuff of the lower planes always mixes with the overmind forces and diminishes or even falsifies and perverts their truth and power.

It is even possible for the Overmind to transmit to the lower

planes of consciousness something of the supramental Light; but, so long as the Supermind does not directly manifest, its Light is modified in Overmind itself and still further modified in the application by the needs, the demands, the circumscribing possibilities of the individual nature. The success of this diminished and modified Light, e.g. in purifying the physical, cannot be immediate and absolute as the full and direct supramental action would be; it is still relative, conditioned by the individual nature and the balance of the universal forces, resisted by adverse powers, baulked of its perfect result by the unwillingness of the lower workings to cease, limited either in its scope or in its efficacy by the want of a complete consent in the physical nature.

*

Probably what X calls overmind is the first “above-mind” layers of consciousness. Or it may be experiences from the larger Mind or Vital ranges. To the human mind all these are so big that it is easy to take them for overmind or even supermind. One can get indirect overmind touches if one opens into the cosmic consciousness, still more if one enters freely into that consciousness. Direct overmind experience cannot come unless part of the being at least is seated in the wideness and peace.

*

You cannot do it [*recognise the different planes of the Overmind*] at present. Only those who have got fully into the cosmic consciousness can do it and even they cannot do it at first. One must first go fully through the experience of higher mind and illumined mind and intuition before it can be done.

Planes of the Overmind

There are different planes of the Overmind. One is mental, directly creative of all the formations that manifest below in the mental world — that is the mental Overmind. Above is the overmind Intuition. Still above are the planes of overmind that are more and more connected with the supermind and have a

partly supramental character. Highest in the overmind ranges is the supramental Overmind or Overmind gnosis. But these are things you cannot understand until you get a higher experience.

*

It [*the overmind*] can for convenience be divided into four planes—mental overmind and the three you have written [*intuitive overmind, true overmind and supramental overmind*]—but there are many layers in each and each of these can be regarded as a plane in itself.

*

There are many stages in the transition from mental overmind to supramentalised overmind and then from that to supramental overmind and from that to supermind. Do not be in a hurry to say, “This is the last highest overmind.”

*

What you call supramental overmind¹ is still overmind—not a part of the true Supermind. One cannot get into the true Supermind (except in some kind of trance or Samadhi) unless one has first objectivised the overmind Truth in life, speech, action, external knowledge and not only experienced it in meditation and inner experience.

The Overmind, the Intuition and Below

The Overmind receives the Divine Truth and disperses it in various formations and diverse play of forces, building thus different worlds out of this dispersion.

In the Intuition the nature of Knowledge is Truth not global or whole, but coming out in so many points, edges, flashes of a Truth that is behind it and supplies it with its direct perceptions.

*

¹ This expression is a misnomer since overmind cannot be supramental: it can at most receive some light and truth from the higher source.

It is from the Overmind that all these different arrangements of the creative Truth of things originate. Out of the Overmind they come down to the Intuition and are transmitted from it to the Illumined and higher Mind to be arranged there for our intelligence. But they lose more and more of their power and certitude in the transmission as they come down to the lower levels. What energy of directly perceived Truth they have is lost in the human mind; for to the human intellect they present themselves only as speculative ideas, not as realised Truth, not as direct sight, a dynamic vision coupled with a concrete undeniable experience.

The Overmind and the Supermind Descent

The Overmind has to be reached and brought down before the Supermind descent is at all possible — for the Overmind is the passage through which one passes from mind to Supermind.

The Overmind and the *Kārana Deha*

The *kārana deha* may be simply a form answering to the higher consciousness (overmental, intuitive etc.) and I suppose a being could be there working in that consciousness and body. It is not likely to be the supramental being and supramental body — for in that case the whole consciousness, thought, action subjective and objective would begin to be faultlessly true and irresistibly effective. Nobody has reached that stage yet, even the overmind is, for all but the Mother and myself, either unrealised or only an influence mostly subjective.

The Dividing Aspect of the Overmind

There are no Overmind dangers — it is only the lower consciousness misusing overmind or higher consciousness intimations that can make a danger. There are also no Overmind Falsehoods. The Overmind is part of the Ignorance in this sense that it is the highest knowledge to which the Ignorance can attain, but the knowledge is still divided and so can be a knowledge of parts

and aspects of the Truth, not the integral knowledge. As such it can be misused and turned into falsehood by the Mind.

*

What I said was that the scission between the two aspects of the Divine [*Personal and Impersonal*] is a creation of the Overmind which takes various aspects of the Divine and separates them into separate entities. Thus it divides Sat, Chit and Ananda, so that they become three separate aspects different from each other. In fact in the Reality there is no separateness, the three aspects are so fused into each other, so inseparably one that they are a single undivided reality. It is the same with the Personal and Impersonal, the Saguna and Nirguna, the Silent and the Active Brahman. In the Reality they are not contrasted and incompatible aspects; what we call Personality and what we call Impersonality are inseparably fused together in a single Truth. In fact “fused together” even is a wrong phrase, because there they were never separated so that they have to be fused. All the quarrels about either the Impersonal being the only true truth or the Personal being the only highest truth are mind-created quarrels derivative from this dividing aspect of the Overmind. The Overmind does not deny any of the aspects as the Mind does, it admits them all as aspects of the One Truth, but by separating them it originates the quarrel in the more ignorant and more limited and divided Mind, because the Mind cannot see how two opposite things can exist together in one Truth, how the Divine can be *nirguna gunī*;—having no experience of what is behind the two words it takes each in an absolute sense. The Impersonal is Existence, Consciousness, Bliss, not a Person, but a state. The Person is the Existent, the Conscious, the Blissful; consciousness, existence, bliss taken as separate things are only states of his being. But in fact the two (personal being and eternal state) are inseparable and are one reality.

The Overmind and the World

[*How the world appears to one living at the overmind level:*] As

a manifestation of the One Divine with a thousand aspects, a development of all the potentialities in the one existence, a play of Forces and Ideas which you can look at from many centres and points of view, each having its own truth in the whole. In the highest overmind all these prepare to meet and reunite themselves in one central Truth which is the Supramental.

Chapter Four

The Higher Planes of Mind

The Higher Planes and Higher Consciousness

The higher planes are the higher mind, illumined, intuitive, overmind, supermind. The psychic, mind, vital, physical belong to the ordinary manifestation.

*

The planes and the body are not the same. Above the head are seen all the planes from the overmind down to the higher mind, but this is only a correlation in the consciousness—not an actual location in space.

*

The spiritual mind is a mind which, in its fullness, is aware of the Self, reflecting the Divine, seeing and understanding the nature of the Self and its relations with the manifestation, living in that or in contact with it, calm, wide and awake to higher knowledge, not perturbed by the play of the Forces. When it gets its full liberated movement, its central station is very usually felt above the head, though its influence can extend downward through all the being and outward through space.

*

It [*higher consciousness*] means the larger spiritual consciousness which contains all these things [*cosmic consciousness, intuitive consciousness, other planes of consciousness between Intuition and mind*] in possibility and once it is there can develop them in their due place or order.

*

The planes below [*the Supermind, from the Overmind to the Higher Mind*] are of the spiritual consciousness but when there

is a dynamic action from them, it is always a mixed action, not an action of pure knowledge but of knowledge subduing itself to the rule of the Ignorance, the cosmic necessity in a world of Ignorance. If their action was that of the full Knowledge, there would be no need of any supramental descent.

*

The higher consciousness is a concentrated consciousness, concentrated in the Divine Unity and in the working out of the Divine Will, not dispersed and rushing about after this or that mental idea or vital desire or physical need as is the ordinary human consciousness — also not invaded by a hundred haphazard thoughts, feelings and impulses, but master of itself, centred and harmonious.

The Plane of Intuition

Intuition sees the truth of things by a direct inner contact, not like the ordinary mental intelligence by seeking and reaching out for indirect contacts through the senses etc. But the limitation of the Intuition as compared with the Supermind is that it sees things by flashes, point by point, not as a whole. Also in coming into the mind it gets mixed with the mental movement and forms a kind of intuitive-mind activity which is not the pure truth, but something in between the higher Truth and the mental seeking. It can lead the consciousness through a sort of transitional stage and that is practically its function.

*

Intuition is in direct contact with the higher Truth but not in an integral contact. It gets the Truth in flashes and turns these flashes of Truth-perception into intuitions — intuitive ideas. The ideas of the true Intuition are always correct so far as they go — but when intuition is diluted in the ordinary mind stuff, its truth gets mixed with error.

*

Intuitivising [*of the being*] is not sufficient to prevent a drop [*in consciousness*]; if it is complete (and it is not complete until not only the mind, but the vital and physical are intuitivised) it can make you understand and be conscious of all the processes in you and around but it does not necessarily make you entire master of the reactions. For that Knowledge is not enough—a certain Knowledge-Will (knowledge and will fused together) or Consciousness-Power is needed.

*

One can get intuitions — communications from there [*the intuitive plane*] even while the ego exists — but to live in the wideness of the Intuition is not possible with the limitation of the ego.

*

The Intuition is the first plane on which there is a real opening to the full possibility of realisation — it is through it that one goes farther — first to Overmind and then to Supermind.

*

It [*the individual Self*] is not specially related [*to intuition*] — intuition is the highest power the embodied individual can reach without universalising itself; when it universalises itself it is then possible for it to come in contact with overmind. If by the individual Self is meant the Jivatman, it can be on any plane of consciousness.

*

By the intuitive self I meant the intuitive being, that part which belongs to the intuitive plane or is in connection with it. The intuition is one of the higher planes of consciousness between the human thinking mind and the supramental plane.

*

The difference between intuition and thought is very much like that between seeing a thing and badgering one's brains to find out what the thing can possibly be like. Intuition is truth-sight.

The thing seen may not be the truth? Well, in that case it will at least be one of its hundred tails or at least a hair from one of the tails. The very first step in the supramental change is to transform all operations of consciousness from the ordinary mental to the intuitive, only then is there any hope of proceeding farther,—not to, but towards the supramental.

The Plane of Intuition and the Intuitive Mind

Intuition proper is true in itself (when not interpreted or altered by mind), although fragmentary—intuitive mind is mixed with mind and therefore not infallible because the truth intuition gives may be mixed or imperfectly put by mind.

*

There is the Intuition and below it there is the intuitive mind which may have several degrees or layers. Also there is a partial power of intuition in ordinary mind itself, in the vital, in the physical consciousness, in the material itself.

*

To live in the Intuitive it is necessary first to have the opening into the cosmic consciousness and to live first in the higher and the illumined Mind, seeing everything from there. To receive constantly the intuition from above, that is not necessary—it is sufficient to have the sense of the One everywhere and to get into contact with things and people through the inner mind and senses more than with the outer mind and senses—for the latter meet only the surface of things and are not intuitive.

*

The intuitive “mind” does not get the touch *direct* from the supramental. Above it is the Overmind—in which there is a higher and greater intuition and above that are the supermind ranges.

*

The intuitive mind is a level of consciousness which is touched by the light of higher truths and receives them vividly and conveys them to the consciousness below.

*

I do not think it can be said that there are separate strata in the intuitive for purity, strength and beauty. These are separate powers of the Divine, not separate strata. But of course they can be arranged by the Mind in that way for some organised purpose.

Yogic Intuition and Ordinary Intuitions

Some people have a faculty of receiving impressions about others which is not by any means infallible, but often turns out to be right. That is one thing and the Yogic intuition by which one directly knows or feels what is in a man, his capacities, character, temperament, is another. The first may be a help for developing the other, but it is not the same thing. The Yogic faculty has to be and it can be complete only with a great development of the inner consciousness.

*

To have the true intuition one must get rid of the mind's self-will and the vital's also, their preferences, fancies, fantasies, strong insistences, and eliminate the mental and vital ego's pressure which sets the consciousness to work in the service of its own claims and desires. Otherwise these things will come in with force and claim to be intuitions, inspirations and the rest of it. Or if any intuitions come, they can be twisted and spoiled by the mixture of these forces of the Ignorance.

*

It [*intuition*] is the power of knowing any truth or fact directly without reasoning or sense-proof, by a spontaneous right perception.

*

As for intuition — well! One has to make a distinction — if one can — between a pure intuition and a mixed one. A pure intuition carries in it a truth, even if it is only a fragment or point of truth, and can be trusted. A mixed one carries in it some suggestion of truth which gets coated with mental matter — here one has to use discrimination and separate the true suggestion from the less reliable mental matter. Intuition and discrimination must always go together so long as one mixes in the mental plane — and for some time after.

*

Mental intuitive knowledge catches directly some aspect of a truth but without any completeness or certitude and the intuition is easily mixed with ordinary mental stuff that may be erroneous; in application it may easily be a half truth or be so misinterpreted and misapplied as to become an error. Also, the mind easily imitates the intuition in such a way that it is difficult to distinguish between a true or a false intuition. That is the reason why men of intellect distrust the mental intuition and say that it cannot be accepted or followed unless it is tested and confirmed by the intellect. What comes from the overmind intuition has a light, a certitude, an effective force of Truth in it that the mental intuition at its best even has not.

*

Yes,¹ but it does not *necessarily* come from the original source — the plane of Intuition. There are mental, vital, subtle physical intuitions as well as intuitions from the higher and the illumined Mind.

Powers of the Intuitive Consciousness

Revelation is a part of the intuitive consciousness.

*

¹ *The correspondent asked: "Is the knowledge got by the Samyama of Rajayoga of the same kind as one would get by Intuition? Is the source of the knowledge not the same?" — Ed.*

There is a discrimination [*in the intuitive consciousness*] that is not intellectual—a direct perception.

*

No, the world of Knowledge is composed of several planes. It is from one of them that inspiration comes.

The Illumined Mind

Intuition is above illumined Mind—which is simply higher Mind raised to a great luminosity and more open to modified forms of intuition and inspiration.

*

The substance of knowledge is the same [*in the higher mind and the illumined mind*], but the higher mind gives only the substance and form of knowledge in thought and word—in the illumined mind there begins to be a peculiar light and energy and ananda of knowledge which grows as one rises higher in the scale or else as the knowledge comes from a higher and higher source. This light etc. are still rather diluted and diffused in the illumined mind; it becomes more and more intense, clearly defined, dynamic and effective on the higher planes, so much so as to change always the character and power of the knowledge.

The Higher Mind

The higher mind is a thing in itself above the intellect. It is only when something of its power comes down and is modified in the lower mind substance that it acts as part of the intellect.

*

It depends on what is meant by the higher buddhi—whether you use the word to mean the higher part of the intellect or the higher Mind. The higher Mind in itself on its own level knows, but when it is involved in the ordinary human intelligence and works under limitations, it often does not know—or it has the

idea merely that it must be so but has not the consciousness of its separate existence. The intellect can rise above its ordinary movements and feel itself as a separate power no longer working under the limitations of the vital and physical mind and the senses. It then begins to reflect something of the action of the higher mind but without the full freedom and greater light and truth of the higher mind.

Chapter Five

The Lower Nature or Lower Hemisphere

The Higher Nature and the Lower Nature

The lower nature is called lower because it is unenlightened — it can't be enlightened and changed by ignoring it, the higher has to be brought there. So one must speak of both, not of the higher alone.

*

But why do you suppose that you alone are made of the lower nature? Every earthly being is so made. The higher nature is there but behind and above. It has to be brought forward from the inner being or brought down from above constantly and persistently till the lower is changed.

The Three Planes of the Lower Hemisphere and Their Energies

There is a vital plane (self-existent) above the material universe which we see; there is a mental plane (self-existent) above the vital and material. These three together, — mental, vital, physical, — are called the triple universe of the lower hemisphere. They have been established in the earth-consciousness by evolution — but they exist in themselves before the evolution, above the earth-consciousness and the material plane to which the earth belongs.

*

Forces, movements are not really planes but lines of consciousness or force which you may feel in that way one over the other. The planes are planes of consciousness and its powers — in the

mind there is a mind of Knowledge (higher mind), a mind of will (dynamic mind) and a mind of thought (intellect) which are one above the other and it is these you probably mean. They easily get covered when their forces come down into the ordinary mind — covered by the lower consciousness.

*

It is not possible to give a name to all the energies that act in the being. They are put into several classes. First are the mental thought energies (intelligence, dynamic mind, physical perceptive mind); the vital — 1st emotional vital with all the emotional movements in it; 2nd the central vital (the larger desires, passions, ambitions, forces of work, possession, conquest); 3rd the lower vital (all the small egoistic movements of desire, enjoyment, lust, greed, jealousy, envy, vanity etc. etc.); 4th the physical energies concerned with the material life and its functioning, needs, outer action, instrumental fulfilment of the other powers.

*

It cannot be explained accurately in a few words; but roughly thoughts are of the mind, emotions are of the heart, desires are of the vital. On the surface they are all mixed together, but behind they come from separate parts of the being.

The Adhara

The Adhara is that in which the consciousness is now contained — mind-life-body.

*

The Adhar means the mind, life and body as instruments of the expression of the being — the being is the conscious Existence within which uses mind, life and body as its instruments of thought, feeling and action. But sometimes the word being is used to signify the whole — soul and nature together.

Chapter Six

The Mind

Mind in the Integral Yoga and in Other Indian Systems

The “Mind” in the ordinary use of the word covers indiscriminately the whole consciousness, for man is a mental being and mentalises everything; but in the language of this Yoga, the words mind and mental are used to connote specially the part of the nature which has to do with cognition and intelligence, with ideas, with mental or thought perceptions, the reactions of thought to things, with the truly mental movements and formations, mental vision and will etc. that are part of his intelligence. The vital has to be carefully distinguished from mind, even though it has a mind element transfused into it; the vital is the Life nature made up of desires, sensations, feelings, passions, energies of action, will of desire, reactions of the desire soul in man and of all that play of possessive and other related instincts, anger, fear, greed, lust etc. that belong to this field of the nature. Mind and vital are mixed up on the surface of the consciousness, but they are quite separate forces in themselves and as soon as one gets behind the ordinary surface consciousness one sees them as separate, discovers their distinct action and can with the aid of this knowledge analyse their surface mixtures. It is quite possible and even usual during a time shorter or longer, sometimes very long, for the mind to accept the Divine or the Yogic ideal while the vital is unconvinced and unsurrendered and goes obstinately on its way of desire, passion and attraction to the ordinary life. Their division or their conflict is the cause of most of the more acute difficulties of the sadhana.

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I don't use these terms [*Manas, Buddhi etc.*] myself as a rule — they are the psychological phraseology of the old Yoga.

*

The terms Manas etc. belong to the ordinary psychology applied to the surface consciousness. In our Yoga we adopt a different classification based on the Yoga experience. What answers to this movement of the Manas there would be two separate things — a part of the physical mind communicating with the physical vital. It receives from the physical senses and transmits to the Buddhi — i.e. to some part or other of the Thought-Mind; it receives back from the Buddhi and transmits idea and will to the organs of sensation and action. All that is indispensable in the ordinary action of the consciousness. But in the ordinary consciousness everything gets mixed up together and there is no clear order or rule. In the Yoga one becomes aware of the different parts and their proper action, and puts each in its place and to its proper action under the control of the higher consciousness or else under the control of the Divine Power. Afterwards all gets surcharged with the spiritual consciousness and there is an automatic right perception and right action of the different parts because they are controlled entirely from above and do not falsify or resist or confuse its dictates.

Manas and Buddhi

Manas is the sense mind, that which perceives physical objects and happenings through the senses and forms mental percepts about them and mental reactions to them; it also observes the reactions of the Chitta, feelings, emotions, sensations etc. (which belong to what in the system of this Yoga is called the vital). Buddhi is the thinking mind which stands above and behind all these things, reflects, judges, decides what is to be thought or done or not done, what is right or wrong, true or false etc. At least that is what it should do in all independence, but usually it is obscured by the vital movements, desires etc. and its ideas and judgments are not pure.

*

In physical mind there can be an action of intelligent reasoning and coordination which is a delegation from the Buddhi

and would perhaps not be attributed to the Manas by the old psychology. Still the larger part of the action of physical mind corresponds to that of Manas, but it comprises also much of what we would attribute to vital mind and to the nervous being. It is a little difficult to equate this old nomenclature with that of this Yoga, for the former takes the mixed action of the surface and tries to analyse it—while in this Yoga what is mixed together on the surface gets separated and seen in the light of the deeper working behind which is hidden from the surface awareness. So we have to adopt a different classification.

The physical mind has first to open to the higher consciousness—its limitations are then removed and it admits what is supraphysical and begins to see things in harmony with the higher knowledge. It becomes an instrument for externalising that knowledge in the pragmatic perceptions and actions of the physical life. It sees things as they are and deals with them according to the larger Truth with an automatic rightness of perception and will and reaction to impacts.

*

To sense things and react mentally to objects and convey impressions to the Buddhi etc. [*is the function of Manas*].

*

The right activity of the buddhi is always to observe, discern, discriminate, understand rightly and give the right direction to the vital and the body. But it does it imperfectly so long as it is in the Ignorance; by opening to the Mother it begins to get the true light and direction. Afterwards it is transformed into intuition and from intuition to the instrumental action of the overmind or the supermind Consciousness.

Chitta

The Chitta is the general stuff of mental consciousness which supports Manas and everything else—it is an indeterminate consciousness which gets determined into thoughts and

memories and desires and sensations and perceptions and impulses and feelings (*cittavṛtti*).

*

There is no special plane of chitta. Chitta in the language of the old Yogas meant the stuff of consciousness out of which thought, will, memory, emotion, desire, sensation all arise — all these are called chittavṛtti, movements of the chitta. It was distinguished from Chit, the higher or divine consciousness.

*

Usually the word [*Chitta*] is employed for the general surface consciousness in which thoughts, feelings, desires, emotions, sensations (these being called chittavṛtti) arise. There is therefore no special location. Its function is to receive the impacts of the world and give back reactions which take the form of thoughts, feelings etc.

*

The Chitta is not near the heart — if you mean the substance of the lower consciousness, it has no particular place. All things of this life are there in this stuff of consciousness, but the memory of past lives is wrapped up and involved elsewhere. The heart is the main centre of this consciousness for most men, so of course you may feel its activities centred on that level.

*

Chitta really means the ordinary consciousness including the mind, vital and physical — but practically it can be taken to mean something central in the consciousness. If that is centred in the Divine, the rest follows more or less quietly as a natural result.

*

The Chitta receives these things [*thoughts, desires, etc.*], gives them for formation to the vital and mind and all is transmitted to the Buddhi, but also it receives thoughts from the Buddhi and

turns these into desires and sensations and impulses.

*

Yes, certainly [*the Chitta must stop catching influences from outside at random*]—but as its whole business is to receive from above or below or around, it cannot stop doing it, it cannot of itself determine what it shall or shall not receive. It has to be assisted by the Buddhi, vital will or some higher power. Afterwards when the higher consciousness descends it begins to be transformed and capable of an automatic rejection of what is not true or right or divine or helpful to the growth of the divine in the being.

*

The Chitta does not receive desires and sensations from the Buddhi. It takes thoughts from the Buddhi and turns them into desires.

*

There is always or generally at least a modifying reaction [*to thoughts, desires etc. from outside*] in the chitta—except when it simply receives and stores without passing them on to the instruments.

*

If the word *vāsanā* is used in the original [*the Yogavasishtha*], it does not mean “desire”. It means usually the idea or mental feeling rising from the chitta, imaginations, impressions, memories etc., impressions of liking and disliking, of pain and pleasure. What Vasishtha wants to say is that while the ideas, impressions, impulsions that lead to action in an ordinary man rise from the chitta, those that rise in the Jivanmukta come straight from the *sattva*—from the essential consciousness of the being—in other words they are not mental but spiritual formations. As one might say, instead of *cittavṛtti* they are *sattvapreranā*, direct indications from the inner being of what is to be thought, felt or done. When the chitta is no longer active and the mind silent—which

happens when the *mukti* comes and no one can be Jivanmukta without that — then what remains and perceives and does things is felt as an essential consciousness, the consciousness of the true self or true being.

*

There is a subconscious action of the chitta which keeps the past impression of things and sends up forms of them to the consciousness in dream or else keeps the habit of old movements and sends up these whenever it finds an opportunity.

*

The chitta is the consciousness out of which all is formed, but the formation is made by the mind or vital or other force — which are, as it were, the instruments of the chitta for self-expression.

Western Ideas of Mind and Spirit

St. Augustine was a man of God and a great saint, but great saints are not always — or often — great psychologists or great thinkers. The psychology here¹ is that of the most superficial schools, if not that of the man in the street; there are as many errors in it as there are psychological statements — and more, for several are not expressed but involved in what he writes. I am aware that these errors are practically universal, for psychological enquiry in Europe (and without enquiry there can be no sound knowledge) is only beginning and has not gone very far, and what has reigned in men's minds up to now is a superficial statement of the superficial appearances of our consciousness as they look to us at first view and nothing more. But knowledge only begins when we get away from the surface phenomena and look behind them for their true operations and causes. To the superficial view of the outer mind and senses the sun is a little fiery ball circling in mid air round the earth and the stars twinkling little things stuck in the sky for our benefit at night.

¹ In St. Augustine's Confessions 8.9.21. — Ed.

Scientific enquiry comes and knocks this infantile first view to pieces. The sun is a huge affair (millions of miles away from our air) around which the small earth circles and the stars are huge members of huge systems indescribably distant which have nothing apparently to do with the tiny earth and her creatures. All science is like that, a contradiction of the sense view or superficial appearances of things and an assertion of truths which are unguessed by the common sense and the uninstructed reason. The same process has to be followed in psychology if we are really to know what our consciousness is, how it is built and made and what is the secret of its functionings or the way out of its disorders.

There are several capital and common errors here—

- (1) That mind and spirit are the same thing.
- (2) That all consciousness can be spoken of as “mind”.
- (3) That all consciousness therefore is of a spiritual substance.
- (4) That the body is merely matter, not conscious, therefore something quite different from the spiritual part of the nature.

First, the spirit and the mind are two different things and should not be confused together. The mind is an instrumental entity or instrumental consciousness whose function is to think and perceive — the spirit is an essential entity or consciousness which does not need to think or perceive either in the mental or the sensory way, because whatever knowledge it has is direct or essential knowledge, *svayānīprakāśa*.

Next, it follows that all consciousness is not necessarily of a spiritual make and it need not be true and is not true that the thing commanding and the thing commanded are the same, are not at all different, are of the same substance and therefore are bound or at least ought to agree together.

Third, it is not even true that it is the mind which is commanding the mind and finds itself disobeyed by itself. First there are many parts of the mind, each a force in itself with its formations, functionings, interests, and they may not agree. One part of the mind may be spiritually influenced and like to think of the Divine and obey the spiritual impulse, another part may be

rational or scientific or literary and prefer to follow the formations, beliefs or doubts, mental preferences and interests which are in conformity with its education and its nature. But quite apart from that, what was commanding in St. Augustine may very well have been the thinking mind or reason while what was commanded was the vital, and mind and vital, whatever anybody may say, are not the same. The thinking mind or buddhi lives, however imperfectly in man, by intelligence and reason, and tries to act or makes the rest act under that law as far as and in the way that it has conceived the law of intelligence and reason. The vital on the other hand is a thing of desires, impulses, force-pushes, emotions, sensations, seekings after life fulfilment, possession and enjoyment; these are its function and its nature; — it is that part of us which seeks after life and its movements for their own sake and it does not want to leave hold of them even if they bring it suffering as well as or more than pleasure; it is even capable of luxuriating in tears and suffering as part of the drama of life. What then is there in common between the thinking intelligence and the vital and why should the latter obey the mind and not follow its own nature? The disobedience is perfectly normal instead of being, as Augustine suggests, unintelligible. Of course man can establish a mental control over his vital and in so far as he does it he is a man,— because the thinking mind is a nobler and more enlightened entity and consciousness than the vital and ought therefore to rule and, if the mental will is strong, can rule. But this rule is precarious, incomplete and established and held only by much self-discipline. For if the mind is more enlightened, the vital is nearer to earth, more intense, vehement, more directly able to touch the body. There is too a vital mind which lives by imagination, thoughts of desire, will to act and enjoy from its own impulse and this is able to seize on the reason itself and make it its auxiliary and its justifying counsel and supplier of pleas and excuses. There is also the sheer force of Desire in man which is the vital's principal support and strong enough to sweep off the reason as the Gita says, "like a boat in stormy waters", *nāvam ivāmbhasi*.

Finally, the body obeys the mind automatically in those

things in which it is formed or trained to obey it, but the relation of the body to the mind is not in all things that of an automatic perfect instrument. The body also has a consciousness of its own and, though it is a submental instrument or servant consciousness, it can disobey or fail to obey as well. In many things, in matters of health and illness for instance, in all automatic functionings, the body acts on its own and is not a servant of the mind. If it is fatigued, it can offer a passive resistance to the mind's will. It can cloud the mind with tamas, inertia, dullness, fumes of the subconscious so that the mind cannot act. The arm lifts itself no doubt when it gets the suggestion, but at first the legs do not obey when they are asked to walk; they have to learn how to leave the crawling attitude and movement and take up the erect and ambulatory habit. When you first ask the hand to draw a straight line or to play music, it can't do it and won't do it. It has to be schooled, trained, taught, and afterwards it does automatically what is required of it. All this proves that there is a body consciousness different from the mind consciousness which can do things at the mind's order but has to be awakened, trained, made a good and conscious instrument. It can even be so trained that a mental will or suggestion can cure the illnesses of the body. But all these things, these relations of mind and body, stand on the same footing in essence as the relation of mind to vital and it is not so easy or primary a matter as Augustine would have it.

This puts the problem on another footing with the causes more clear and, if we are prepared to go far enough, it suggests the way out, the way of Yoga.

P.S. All this is quite apart from the contributing and very important factor of plural personality of which psychological enquiry is just beginning rather obscurely to take account. That is a more complex affair.

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The non-materialistic European idea [*of the true soul or person*] makes a distinction between soul and body—the body is perishable, the mental-vital consciousness is the immortal soul and

remains always the same (horrible idea!) in heaven as on earth or if there is rebirth it is also the same damned personality that comes back and makes a similar fool of itself.

The Psychic Mind

When the mind is turned towards the Divine and the Truth and feels and responds to that only or mainly, it can be called a psychic mind — it is something formed by the influence of the psychic being on the mental plane.

*

Psychic mind and mental psychic are the same thing practically. When there is a movement of the mind in which the psychic influence predominates, it is called the psychic in the mind or the psychic mind.

The Mind Proper

Above the physical mind and the vital mind is the mental intelligence, the mind proper. Beyond the ordinary thinking mind or intellect is the higher mind; beyond the higher mind is the illumined mind and beyond that is the intuitive mind. Above the intuitive mind are the Intuition and the Overmind.

*

The Mind proper is divided into three parts — thinking Mind, dynamic Mind, externalising Mind — the former concerned with ideas and knowledge in their own right, the second with the putting out of mental forces for realisation of the idea, the third with the expression of them in life (not only by speech, but by any form it can give). The word “physical mind” is rather ambiguous, because it can mean this externalising mind and the mental in the physical taken together.

Vital mind proper is a sort of mediator between vital emotion, desire, impulsion etc. and the mental proper. It expresses the desires, feelings, emotions, passions, ambitions, possessive

and active tendencies of the vital and throws them into mental forms (the pure imaginations or dreams of greatness, happiness etc. in which men indulge are one peculiar form of the vital mind activity). There is a still lower stage of the mental in the vital which merely expresses the vital stuff without subjecting it to any play of intelligence. It is through this mental vital that the vital passions, impulses, desires rise up and get into the Buddhi and either cloud or distort it.

As the vital Mind is limited by the vital view and feeling of things (while the dynamic Intelligence is not, for it acts by the idea and reason), so the mind in the physical or mental physical is limited by the physical view and experience of things, it mentalises the experience brought by the contacts of outward life and things and does not go beyond that (though it can do that much very cleverly), unlike the externalising mind which deals with them more from the reason and its higher intelligence. But in practice these two usually get mixed together. The mechanical mind is a much lower action of the mental physical which, left to itself, would only repeat customary ideas and record the natural reflexes of the physical consciousness to the contacts of outward life and things.

The lower vital as distinguished from the higher is concerned only with the small贪欲, small desires, small passions etc. which make up the daily stuff of life for the ordinary sensational man—while the vital physical proper is the nervous being giving vital reflexes to contacts of things with the physical consciousness.

*

It is quite usual for the dynamic and formative part of the mind to be more quick to action than the reflective and discriminative part to control it. It is a question of getting a kind of balance and harmony between them.

The Thinking Mind and the Vital Mind

The thinking mind does not lead men, does not influence them

the most — it is the vital propensities and the vital mind that predominate. The thinking mind with most men is, in matters of life, only an instrument of the vital.

*

Vital thought expresses vital movements, the play of vital forces. It does not think freely and independently of them as the thinking mind can do. The true thinking mind can stand above the vital movements, watch and observe and judge them freely as it would observe and judge outside things. In most men however the thinking mind (reason) is invaded by the vital mind and not free.

The Thinking Mind and the Physical Mind

The true thinking mind does not belong to the physical, it is a separate power. The physical mind is that part of the mind which is concerned with the physical things only — it depends on the sense mind, sees only objects, external actions, draws its ideas from the data given by external things, infers from them only and knows no other Truth — until it is enlightened from above.

*

The physical mind can deal only with outward things. One has to think and decide in other things with the mind itself (*buddhi*), not with the physical part of it.

The Vital Mind

There is a part of the nature which I have called the vital mind; the function of this mind is not to think and reason, to perceive, consider and find out or value things, for that is the function of the thinking mind proper, *buddhi*, — but to plan or dream or imagine what can be done. It makes formations for the future which the will can try to carry out if opportunity and circumstances become favourable or even it can work to make them favourable. In men of action this faculty is prominent and a leader of their nature; great men of action always have it in a very

high measure. But even if one is not a man of action or practical realisation or if circumstances are not favourable or one can do only small and ordinary things, this vital mind is there. It acts in them on a small scale, or if it needs some sense of largeness, what it does very often is to plan in the void knowing that it cannot realise its plans or else to imagine big things, stories, adventures, great doings in which oneself is the hero or the creator. What you describe as happening in you is the rush of this vital mind or imagination making its formations; its action is not peculiar to you but works pretty much in the same way in most people — but in each according to his turn of fancy, interest, favourite ideas or desires. You have to become master of its action and not to allow it to seize your mind and carry it away when and where it wants. In sadhana when the experiences begin to come, it is exceedingly important not to allow this power to do what it likes with you; for it then creates false experiences according to its nature and persuades the sadhak that these experiences are true or it builds unreal formations and persuades him that this is what he has to do. Some have been taken away by this misleading force used by powers of Falsehood who persuaded them through it that they had a great spiritual, political or social work to do in the world and led them away to disappointment and failure. It is rising in you in order that you may understand what it is and reject it. For there are several things you had to get out of the vital plane before the deeper or greater spiritual experiences could safely begin or safely continue.

The descent of the peace is often one of the first major positive experiences of the sadhana. In this state of peace the normal thought-mind (*buddhi*) is apt to fall silent or abate most of its activity and, when it does, very often either this vital mind can rush in, if one is not on one's guard, or else a kind of mechanical physical or random subconscious mind can begin to come up and act; these are the chief disturbers of the silence. Or else the lower vital mind can try to disturb; that brings up the ego and passions and their play. All these are signs of elements that have to be got rid of, because if they remain and other of the higher powers begin to descend, Power and Force, Knowledge, Love or

Ananda, those lower things may come across with the result that either the higher consciousness retires or its descent is covered up and the stimulation it gives is misused for the purposes of the lower nature. This is the reason why many sadhaks after having big experiences fall into the clutch of a magnified ego, upheavals, ambition, exaggerated sex or other vital passions or distortions. It is always well therefore if a complete purification of the vital can either precede or keep pace with the positive experience — at least in natures in which the vital is strongly active.²

The Physical Mind

It [*the true physical mind*] is the instrument of understanding and ordered action on physical things. Only instead of being obscure and ignorant and fumbling as now or else guided only by an external knowledge it has to become conscious of the Divine and to act in accordance with an inner light, will and knowledge putting itself into contact and an understanding unity with the physical world.

*

It [*the true physical mind*] can press upon it [*the physical vital*] the true attitude and feeling, make the incoming of the wrong suggestions and impulsions more difficult and give full force to the true movements. This action of the physical mind is indispensable for the change of the whole physical consciousness even to the most material, though for that the enlightening of the subconscious is indispensable.

*

It is the function of the outward physical mind to deal with external things — that is why it wants always to be busy with them. What it has to learn is to be quiet and to act only when the Will wants to use it, when it is really needed — and also to act only

² Other letters on the vital mind have been placed under the heading "The Mental Vital or Vital Mind" on pages 189–92.—Ed.

on what the Will wants to deal with, not run about in a random manner. When it becomes quiet, it can then go inside and come into contact and unity with the inner physical consciousness. The wideness and peace as it grows can do much to quiet the physical mind and give it an inward source of deeper action.

*

In the human physical mind there is always a tendency not to understand or to misunderstand and to interpret according to its own notions. That can only be removed by the Light in the mind and the power everywhere which refuses to accept suggestions of disturbance.

*

It is the physical mind that finds it difficult to believe in the reality of supraphysical things—that is due to its ignorance and its belief that only physical things are real.

*

Yes, it [*the physical mind*] reasons, but on the basis of external data mostly—on things as they appear to the outer mind and senses or the habitual ideas to which it is accustomed or to a purely external knowledge.

*

That part of the being [*the physical mind*] has no reason except its whims, its habits or an inclination to be tamasic.

*

The physical mind is in the habit of observing things with or without use.

The Physical Mental or Physical Mind and the Mental Physical or Mechanical Mind

The physical mental or externalising mind is part of the mental consciousness, not part of the physical consciousness. But it is

closely connected with the mental physical—so that the two usually act together.

*

The automatic or mechanical mind is called by us the mental physical—and distinguished from the physical mind which is that which deals intelligently with physical things. The other simply stores, associates, repeats, gives reflexes and reactions etc.

*

Repetition is the habit of the mental physical—it is not the true thinking mind that behaves like this, it is the mental physical or else the lowest part of the physical mind.

*

But the main error here is in your description of the physical part of the mind—what you have described there is the mechanical mental physical or body-mind which when left to itself simply goes on repeating the past customary thoughts and movements or at the most adds to them such further mechanical reactions to things and reflexes as are in the round of life. The true physical mind is the receiving and externalising intelligence which has two functions—first, to work upon external things and give them a mental order with a way of practically dealing with them and, secondly, to be the channel of materialising and putting into effect whatever the thinking and dynamic mind sends down to it for the purpose.

*

The vital mind is usually energetic and creative even in its more mechanical rounds, so it must be the physical that is turning. It is that and the mechanical that last longest, but these too fall silent when the peace and silence become massive and complete. Afterwards knowledge begins to come from the higher planes—the Higher Mind to begin with, and this creates a new action of thought and perception which replaces the ordinary mental.

It does that first in the thinking mind, but afterwards also in the vital mind and physical mind, so that all these begin to go through a transformation. This kind of thought is not random and restless, but precise and purposeful—it comes only when needed or called for and does not disturb the silence. Moreover the element of what we call thought there is secondary and what might be called a seeing perception (intuition) takes its place. But so long as the mind does not become capable of a complete silence, this higher knowledge, thought, perception either does not come down or, if partially it does, it is liable to get mixed up with or imitated by the lower, and that is a bother and a hindrance. So the silence is necessary.

*

The automatic mind is a part of the lower action, it can only stop by the acquirement of mental silence or the descent of a higher consciousness.

The Mental World of the Individual

As he [*the human being*] lives in a separative consciousness, he makes a mental world of his own out of his experience of the common world in which all here live. It is built in the same way as that of others and he receives into it the thoughts, feelings of others, without knowing it most often, and uses that too as material for his separate world.

Chapter Seven

The Vital Being and Vital Consciousness

The Vital

Mind and vital are two different processes of one consciousness.

*

It [*vital*] means *prāṇa* — it is the life-force and desire-force in a man and the part of the being that responds to desire and is the instrument of the life-forces.

The True Vital Being and Consciousness

There is behind all the vital nature in man his true vital being concealed and immobile which is quite different from the surface vital nature. The surface vital is narrow, ignorant, limited, full of obscure desires, passions, cravings, revolts, pleasures and pains, transient joys and griefs, exultations and depressions. The true vital being on the contrary is wide, vast, calm, strong, without limitations, firm and immovable, capable of all power, all knowledge, all Ananda. It is moreover without ego, for it knows itself to be a projection and instrument of the Divine; it is the divine Warrior, pure and perfect; in it is an instrumental Force for all divine realisations. It is the true vital being that has become awake and come in front within you. In the same way there is too a true mental being, a true physical being. When these are manifest, then you are aware of a double existence in you; that behind is always calm and strong, that on the surface alone is troubled and obscure. But if the true being behind remains stable and you live in it, then the trouble and obscurity remain only on the surface; in this condition the exterior parts can be dealt

with more potently and they also made free and perfect.

*

The true vital is in the inner consciousness, the external is that which is instrumental for the present play of Prakriti in the surface personality. When the change comes, the true vital rejects what is out of tune with its own truth from the external and makes it a true instrument for its expression, a means of expression of its inner will, not a thing of responses to the suggestions of the lower Nature. The strong distinction between the two practically disappears.

*

The higher and lower [*vital*] are divisions of the ordinary vital and equally ignorant. It is the true vital that is in contact with the Divine.

*

The true vital consciousness is one in which the vital makes full surrender, converts itself into an instrument of the Divine, making no demand, insisting on no desire, answering to the Mother's force and to no other, calm, unegoistic, giving an absolute loyalty and obedience, with no personal vanity or ambition, only willing to be a pure and perfect instrument, desiring nothing for itself but that the Truth may prevail within itself and everywhere and the Divine Victory take place and the Divine Work be done.

*

It [*the true vital*] is capable of receiving the movements of the higher consciousness, and afterwards it can be capable of receiving the still greater supramental power and Ananda. If it is not, then the descent of the higher consciousness would be impossible and supramentalisation would be impossible. It is not meant that it possesses these things itself in its own right and that as soon as one is aware of the true vital, one gets all these things as inherent in the true vital.

*

It is as I told you—only by losing ego and having the sense of the Infinite can one experience the true vital. So you got the experience of the loss of ego and the sense of a true vital existence. But there are all those parts of the human vital nature that are not the true vital and these are full of impurities which have to be thrown in the fire of aspiration burning in the true vital being.

*

It [*the illumined vital*] is in contact with the Divine Power or the higher Truth and seeks to transform itself and become a true instrument—it rejects the ordinary vital movements.

Parts of the Vital Being

There are four parts of the vital being—first, the mental vital which gives a mental expression by thought, speech or otherwise to the emotions, desires, passions, sensations and other movements of the vital being; the emotional vital which is the seat of various feelings such as love, joy, sorrow, hatred, and the rest; the central vital which is the seat of the stronger vital longings and reactions, e.g. ambition, pride, fear, love of fame, attractions and repulsions, desires and passions of various kinds and the field of many vital energies; last, the lower vital which is occupied with small desires and feelings, such as make the greater part of daily life, e.g. food desire, sexual desire, small likings, dislikings, vanity, quarrels, love of praise, anger at blame, little wishes of all kinds—and a numberless host of other things. Their respective seats are (1) the region from the throat to the heart, (2) the heart (it is a double centre, belonging in front to the emotional and vital and behind to the psychic), (3) from the heart to the navel, (4) below the navel.

*

The point about the emotional and the higher vital is a rather difficult one. In one classification in which mind is taken as something more than the thinking, perceiving and willing intelligence,

the emotional can be reckoned as part of the mind, the vital in the mental. In another classification it is rather the most mentalised part of the vital nature. In the first case, the term higher vital is confined to that larger movement of the conscious life-force which is concerned with creation, with power and force and conquest, with giving and self-giving and gathering from the world for farther action and expenditure of power, throwing itself out in the wider movements of life, responsive to the greater objects of Nature. In the second arrangement, the emotional being stands at the top of the vital nature and the two together make the higher vital. As against them stands the lower vital which is concerned with the pettier movements of action and desire and stretches down into the vital physical where it supports the life of the more external activities and all physical sensations, hungers, cravings, satisfactions. The term lower must not be considered in a pejorative sense; it refers only to the position in the hierarchy of the planes. For although this part of the nature in earthly beings tends to be very obscure and is full of perversions,—lust, greed of all kinds, vanity, small ambitions, petty anger, envy, jealousy are its ordinary guests,—still there is another side to it which makes it an indispensable mediator between the inner being and the outer life.

It is not a fact that every psychic experience embodies itself in a purified and rightly directed vital current; it does that when it has to externalise itself in action. Psychic experience is in itself a quite independent thing and has its own characteristic forms. The psychic being stands behind all the others; its force is the true soul-power. But if it comes to the front, it can suffuse all the rest; mind, vital, the physical consciousness can take its stamp and be transformed by its influence. When the nature is properly developed, there is a psychic in the mental, a psychic in the vital, a psychic in the physical. It is when that is there and strong, that we can say of someone that he evidently has a soul. But there are some in whom this element is so lacking that we have to use faith in order to believe that they have a soul at all. The centre of the psychic being is behind the centre of the emotional being; it is the emotional that is nearest dynamically to the psychic and

in most men it is through the emotional centre that the psychic can be most easily reached and through the psychicised emotion that it can be most easily expressed. Many therefore mistake the one for the other; but there is a world of difference between the two. The emotions normally are vital in their character and not part of the psychic nature.

It must be remembered that while this classification is indispensable for psychological self-knowledge and discipline and practice, it can be used best when it is not made too rigid and cutting a formula. For things run very much into each other and a synthetical sense of these powers is as necessary as the analysis. Mind for instance is everywhere. The physical mind is technically placed below the vital and yet it is a prolongation of the mind proper and can act in its own sphere by direct touch with the higher mental intelligence. And there is too an obscure mind of the body, of the very cells, molecules, corpuscles. Haeckel, the German materialist, spoke somewhere of the will in the atom, and recent Science, dealing with the incalculable individual variation in the activity of the electrons, comes near to perceiving that this is not a figure but the shadow thrown by a secret reality. This body-mind is a very tangible truth; owing to its obscurity and mechanical clinging to past movements and facile oblivion and rejection of the new, we find in it one of the chief obstacles to permeation by the supermind force and the transformation of the functioning of the body. On the other hand, once effectively converted, it will be one of the most precious instruments for the stabilisation of the supramental light and force in material Nature.

The Mental Vital or Vital Mind

It is the mental part of the vital that is there between the throat and the heart. The place of the mind is from the crown of the head to the throat (where is the physical mind); from below the throat to the heart is the emotional heart or the [*higher*] vital (mental emotional, emotional feelings); the navel and abdomen [*are the seats of*] the middle and lower vital.

*

It is not possible to say with any precision what the resistance in the higher vital parts will be, what form it takes, because it may take different forms with different natures. It is quite normal that there should be some resistance almost at every point to the descent of the higher consciousness; for the different parts of the present nature are each more or less attached to their own established way of seeing, acting, feeling, reacting to things and to the habitual movements and formations of their own domain which each individual has made for himself in the past or in his present life. What is needed is a general plasticity of the mind, the vital, the physical consciousness, a readiness to give up all attachment to these things, to accept whatever the higher consciousness brings down with it however contrary to one's own received ideas, feelings, habits of nature. The greater the plasticity in any part of the nature, the less the resistance there.

By the higher vital parts of the nature I mean the vital mind, the emotional nature, the life-force dynamis in the being. The vital mind is that part of the vital being which builds, plans, imagines, arranges things and thoughts according to the life-pushes, desires, will to power or possession, will to action, emotions, vital ego reactions of the nature. It must be distinguished from the reasoning will which plans and arranges things according to the dictates of the thinking mind proper, the discriminating reason or according to the mental intuition or a direct insight and judgment. The vital mind uses thought for the service not of reason but of life-push and life-power and when it calls in reasoning it uses that for justifying the dictates of these powers, imposes their dictates on the reason instead of governing by a discriminating will the action of the life-forces. This higher vital with all its parts is situated in the chest and has the cardiac centre as its main stronghold governing all this part down to the navel. I need not say anything about the emotional nature, for its character and movements are known to all. From the navel downwards is the reign of the vital passions and sensations and all the small life-impulses that constitute the bulk of the ordinary human life and character. This is what we call the lower vital nature. The Muladhara is the main support of the physical

consciousness and the material parts of the nature.

*

It [*the vital mind*] is a mind of dynamic (not rationalising) will, action, desire — occupied with force and achievement and satisfaction and possession, enjoyment and suffering, giving and taking, growth, expansion, success and failure, good fortune and ill fortune etc. etc.

*

That [*repetitive imaginative thinking*] is the ordinary activity of the vital mind which is always imagining and thinking and planning what to do about this and how to arrange about that. It has obviously its utility in human nature and human action, but acts in a random and excessive way without discipline, economy of its powers or concentration on the things that have really to be done.

*

The things which come to you in this way in sleep or waking are of the nature of vital mind imaginations and activities about things and work and whatever presents itself to the mind. On all things that present themselves to the mind, the vital imagination in man is able to work, imagining, speculating, building ideas or plans for the future etc. etc. It has its utility for the consciousness in ordinary life, but must quiet down and be replaced by a higher action in Yoga. In sleep it is also the vital plane into which you enter. If properly seen and coordinated, what is experienced in the vital plane has its value and gives knowledge which is useful and control over the vital self and vital plane. But all that is coming to you through the subconscious in an incoherent way — this is the cause of the trouble. The whole thing has to be quieted down and we shall try to get that done. When I spoke of your opening yourself, I meant simply that you should fix it in your mind that the help is coming and have the will to receive it — not necessarily that you should open yourself by an effort.

*

The source from which these imaginations¹ come has nothing to do with the reason and does not care for any rational objections. They come either from the vital mind, the same source from which come all the fine imaginations and long stories which men tell themselves in which they are the heroes and do great things or they come from little entities attached to the physical mind which pick up any random suggestion anywhere and present it to the mind just to see whether it will be accepted. If one watches oneself closely one can find the most queer and extraordinary or nonsensical things crossing the mind or peeping in on it in this way. Usually one laughs or hardly notices and the thing falls back to the world of incoherent thought from which it came.

*

It is again the vital mind. It has no sense of proportion or measure and is eager to be or achieve something big at once.

*

All that [*pleasurable imaginations*] is the vital mind—it has in everybody the habit of such imaginations. It is not very important, but of course it has to be got rid of, as the basis is ego.

*

The vital mind in the ordinary nature cannot get on without these imaginations—so the habit remains for a long time. To be detached and indifferent is the best, then after a time it may get disgusted and drop the habit.

*

That kind of talking [*in one's mind to another person*] is very common with the vital mind. It is a way it has of acting on the subtle plane on things in which it is interested, especially if the physical action is stopped or restricted.

¹ *The disciple had imagined that he was the Buddha.—Ed.*

The Emotional Being or Heart

The emotional being is itself a part of the vital.

*

The heart is the centre of the emotional being and the emotions are vital movements. When the heart is purified, the vital emotions change into psychic feelings or else psychised vital movements.

*

The heart is part of the vital—it has to be controlled in the same way as the rest, by rejection of the wrong movements, by acceptance of the true psychic surrender which prevents all demand and clamour, by calling in the higher light and knowledge. It is not usually however the heart that bothers about mental questions and the answer to them.

*

Pure and true thoughts and emotions and impulsions can rise from the human mind, heart and vital, because all is not evil there. The heart may be unpurified, but that does not mean that everything in it is impure.

*

I make the distinction [*between emotions and lower vital movements*] by noting where these things rise from. Anger, fear, jealousy touch the heart no doubt just as they touch the mind but they rise from the navel region and entrails (i.e. the lower or at highest the middle vital). Stevenson has a striking passage in *Kidnapped* where the hero notes that his fear is felt primarily not in the heart but the stomach. Love, hope have their primary seat in the heart, so with pity etc.

The Central Vital or Vital Proper

Above the heart is the vital mind—sense and the rising of

sensation is lower than the emotion, not higher.

Sensation is much nearer the physical than emotion.

The place of desire is below the heart in the central vital (navel) and in the lower vital, but it invades the emotion and the vital mind.

*

A mistake [*to think that all men seek after happiness*]; many men are not after happiness and do not believe it is the true aim of life. It is the physical vital that seeks after happiness, the bigger vital is ready to sacrifice it in order to satisfy its passions, search for power, ambition, fame or any other motive. If you say it is because of the happiness power, fame etc. gives, that again is not universally true. Power can give anything else, but not happiness; it is something in its very nature arduous and full of difficulty to get, to keep or to use—I speak of course of power in the ordinary sense. A man may know he can never have fame in this life but yet work in the hope of posthumous fame or in the chance of it. He may know that the satisfaction of his passion will bring him everything rather than happiness—suffering, torture, destruction—yet he will follow his impulse. So also the mind as well as the larger vital is not bound by the pursuit of happiness. It can seek Truth rather or the victory of a cause. To reduce all to a single hedonistic strain seems to me very poor psychology. Neither Nature nor the vast Spirit in things are so limited and one-tracked as that.

*

The nervous part of the being is a portion of the vital—it is the vital physical, the life-force closely enmeshed in the reactions, desires, needs, sensations of the body. The vital proper is the life-force acting in its own nature, impulses, emotions, feelings, desires, ambitions etc. having as their highest centre what we may call the outer heart of emotion, while there is an inner heart where are the higher or psychic feelings and sensibilities, the emotions and intuitive yearnings and impulses of the soul. The vital part of us is, of course, necessary to our completeness, but

it is a true instrument only when its feelings and tendencies have been purified by the psychic touch and taken up and governed by the spiritual light and power.

The Lower Vital, the Physical Vital and the Material Vital

Below the navel is the lower vital plane, which is ignorant and obscure, the seat of small desires, greeds, passions and enjoyments.

*

As there is a physical mind, so there is a physical vital — a vital turned entirely upon physical things, full of desires and greeds and seekings for pleasure on the physical plane.

*

That [*seeking enjoyment*] is the attitude not of the whole vital but of the physical vital, the animal part of the human being. Of course it cannot be convinced by mental reasoning of any kind. In most men it is the natural and accepted attitude towards life varnished over with some conventional moralism and idealism as a concession to the mind and higher vital. In a few this part of the being is gripped and subordinated to the mental or the higher vital aim, forced to take a subordinate place so that the mind may absorb itself persistently in mental pursuits or idealisms or great political or personal ambitions (Lenin, Hitler, Stalin, Mussolini). The ascetic and the Puritan try to suppress it mostly or altogether. In our Yoga the principle is that all must become an instrument of the Spirit and the parts of enjoyment taste the Ananda in things, not the animal enjoyment of the surface. But the Ananda will not come or will not stay so long as this part is not converted and insists on its own way of satisfaction.

*

Yes — they [*the lower vital, the physical vital and the material vital*] become very clear to the increasing consciousness. And the distinctions are necessary — otherwise one may influence or

control the lower vital or a part of the physical vital and then be astonished to find that something intangible but apparently invincible still resists — it is the material vital with so much of the rest as it can influence by its resistance.

*

I don't know about subtle vital. One says subtle physical to distinguish from gross material physical — because to our normal experience all physical is gross, *sthūla*. But the vital is in its nature non-material, so the adjective is superfluous. By material vital, we mean the vital so involved in matter as to be bound by its movements and gross physical character. The action is to support and energise the body and keep in it the capacity of life, growth, movement etc., also of sensitiveness to outer impacts.

A Strong Vital

A strong vital is one that is full of life-force, has ambition, courage, great energy, a force for action or for creation, a large expansive movement whether for generosity in giving or for possession and lead and domination, a power to fulfil and materialise — many other forms of vital strength there are also. It is often difficult for such a vital to surrender itself because of this sense of its own powers — but if it can do so, it becomes an admirable instrument for the Divine Work.

*

No, a weak vital has not the strength to turn spiritually — and being weak more easily falls under a wrong influence and even when it wants, finds it difficult to accept anything beyond its own habitual nature. The strong vital when the will is there can do it much more easily — its one central difficulty is the pride of its ego and the attraction of its powers.

The chest has more connection with the psychic than the vital. A strong vital may have a good physique, but as often it has not — it draws too much on the physical, eats it up as it were.

*

In a mere vampire there is no psychic, for the vampire is a vital being—but in all humans (even if dominated by a vital being or vampire force), there is a psychic veiled behind it all.

The Vital Body

The physical life cannot last without the body nor can the body live without the life force, but the life in itself has a separate existence and a separate body of its own, the vital body, just as the mind has a separate existence and can exist on its own plane. All the organisation is held together by the psychic which is the support of all.

The Vital Nature

It was not your own vital that you saw, but the general vital Nature in the Ignorance that took form and spoke. The battle you saw was the struggle between the Powers of the Light and the Powers of the Darkness for possession of the vital Nature on earth.

Your vital cannot be destroyed, because it is needed as an instrument for the manifestation of the Divine element in you. There can be no life and no manifestation here on earth without the vital. It has not to be destroyed, but purified and changed into the true Vital.

The Vital Plane and the Physical Plane

Things do happen on the vital plane—but they are not *more* important than what happens here because it is here we have to realise and what happens in the vital is only a help.

*

Most things happen in the vital before they happen in the physical, but all that happens in the vital does not realise itself in the physical or not in the same way. There is always or at least

usually a change in the form, time, circumstances due to the different conditions of the physical plane.

The Life Heavens

Where do you find in “The Life Heavens”² that I say or anybody says the conditions on the earth are glorious and suited to the Divine Life? There is not a word to that effect there! The Life Heavens are the heavens of the vital gods and there is there a perfect harmony but a harmony of the sublimated satisfied senses and vital desires only. If there is to be a Harmony, it must be of all the powers raised to their highest and harmonised together. All the non-evolutionary worlds are worlds of a type limited to its own harmony like the Life Heavens. The Earth on the other hand is an evolutionary world, not at all glorious or harmonious even as a material world (except in certain appearances), but rather most sorrowful, disharmonious, imperfect. Yet in that imperfection is the urge towards a higher and more many-sided perfection. It contains the last finite which yet yearns to the supreme infinite (it is not to be satisfied by sense-joys precisely because in the conditions of earth it is able to see their limitations). God is pent in the mire (mire is not glorious, so there is no claim to glory or beauty here) but that very fact imposes a necessity to break through that prison to a consciousness which is ever rising towards the heights. And so on. That is “a deeper power”, not a greater actual glory or perfection. All that may be true or not to the mind, but it is the traditional attitude of Indian spiritual experience. Ask any Yогin, he will tell you that the Life Heavens are childish things; even the gods, says the Purana, must come down to earth and be embodied there if they want *mukti*, giving up the pride of their limited perfection — they must enter into the last finite if they want to reach the last infinite. A poem is not a philosophical treatise or a profession of religious faith — it is the expression of a vision or an experience of some kind,

² A poem by Sri Aurobindo. See Collected Poems, volume 2 of THE COMPLETE WORKS OF SRI AUROBINDO, p. 549. — Ed.

mundane or spiritual. Here it is the vision of the Life Heavens, its perfection, its limitations and the counterclaim of the Earth or rather the Spirit or Power behind the earth consciousness. It has to be taken at that, as an expression of a certain aspect of things, an expression of a certain kind of experience, not of a mental dogma. There is a deep truth behind it, though it may not be the whole truth of the matter. In the poem, also, there is no question of a Divine Life here, though that is hinted at as the unexpressed possible result of the ascent—because the Earth is not put aside (“Earth’s heart was felt beating below me still”); nevertheless the poem expresses only the ascent towards the Highest, far beyond the Life Heavens, and the Earth-Spirit claims that power and does not speak of any descent of a Divine Life. I say so much in order to get rid of that misconception so as not to have to go back to it when dealing with Earth’s disharmonies.

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They wouldn’t be heavens if they were not immune [*from attacks by hostile powers*]—a heaven with fear in it would be no heaven. The Life Heavens have an influence on earth and so have the Life Hells, but it does not follow that they influence each other in their own domain. Overmind can influence earth, so can the hostile Powers, but it does not follow that hostile Powers can penetrate the Overmind—they can’t: they can only spoil what it sends to the earth. Each power of the Divine (life like mind and matter are powers of the Divine) has its own harmony inherent in the purity of its own principle—it is only if it is disturbed or perverted that it produces disorder. That is another reason why the evolution could have been a progressing harmony, not a series of discords through which harmony of a precarious and wounded kind has to be struggled for at each step: for the Divine Principle is there within. Each plane therefore has its heavens; there are the subtle physical heavens, the vital heavens, the mental heavens. If Powers of disharmony got in, they would cease to be heavens.

Chapter Eight

The Physical Consciousness

The Physical Consciousness and Its Parts

The physical consciousness is that part which directly responds to physical things and physical Nature, sees the outer only as real, is occupied with it—not like the thinking mind with thought and knowledge, or like the vital with emotion, passion, subtler satisfaction of desire. If this part is obscure, then it is difficult to bring into it the consciousness of deeper or spiritual things, feelings etc. even when the mind or the vital are after these deeper things.

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You ask whether the mind and vital do not come in the way as well as the physical. Yes, but when I speak of the physical consciousness, I mean the physical mind and the physical vital as well as the body consciousness proper. This physical mind and physical vital are concerned with the small ordinary movements of life and are governed by a very external view of things and by habitual small reactions and do not respond at once to the inner consciousness not because they are in active opposition to it, as the vital mind and vital proper can be, but because they find it difficult to change their habitual movements. It is this now that you feel and that makes you think you have a poor responsiveness to the inner experience. But that is not a fact; in your mind and in a great part of your vital there is a considerable capacity of response. As for the physical its difficulty is universal in everybody and not peculiar to you. It has come up because it always comes up in the sadhana when the physical consciousness has to be worked upon for the necessary change. As soon as that is done, the difficulty you feel will first diminish and then go.

It is this work that is going on and when you felt the white light in meditation and the result which lasted even after opening

the eyes, the head and eyes cool and all vast and wide, it was this working taking place in your physical mind to change it. The rest of the physical consciousness was still undergoing another kind of working and so felt heat and not this release and wideness. But afterwards the working can go down first to the heart and then still lower and to all the body and the same release and wideness come there. Naturally, at present these results are not permanent but only for a time, they come as experiences, not lasting realisations. But it cannot be otherwise at the present stage. These experiences, however passing, are meant to prepare and do prepare the different parts of the nature.

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They [*the physical mind and vital physical*] are very near to it [*the Inconscient*]—except that part of the physical mind which is trained to deal with physical objects and affairs. But that is agile and active and competent only in its own limits. When it has to deal with supraphysical things it becomes incompetent, often imbecile and yet positive and arrogant and dogmatic in its ignorance. The rest of the physical consciousness is near to the inconscient. Here again in its own field it can have accurate perceptions and instincts if it is able to act spontaneously; but usually in the human being it is not allowed to do so, for the mind and vital intervene. The vital physical is entirely irrational in its action—even when it is right, it cannot explain why; for it is made more of automatic or habitual instincts, impulses, sensations and feelings than anything else. It is the mind that gives reasons and justifications to its movements and if the mind stands back and judges and questions, the vital physical can only answer “I want”, “I like”, “I dislike”, “I feel like that”.

*

Each plane of our being — mental, vital, physical — has its own consciousness, separate though interconnected and interacting; but to our outer mind and sense, in our waking experience, they are all confused together. The body, for instance, has its own consciousness and acts from it, even without any conscious

mental will of our own or even against that will, and our surface mind knows very little about this body consciousness, feels it only in an imperfect way, sees only its results and has the greatest difficulty in finding out their causes. It is part of the Yoga to become aware of this separate consciousness of the body, to see and feel its movements and the forces that act upon it from inside or outside and to learn how to control and direct it even in its most hidden and (to us) subconscious processes. But the body consciousness itself is only part of the individualised physical consciousness in us which we gather and build out of the secretly conscious forces of universal physical Nature.

There is the universal physical consciousness of Nature and there is our own which is a part of it, moved by it, and used by the central being for the support of its expression in the physical world and for a direct dealing with all these external objects and movements and forces. This physical consciousness-plane receives from the other planes their powers and influences and makes formations of them in its own province. Therefore we have a physical mind as well as a vital mind and the mind proper; we have a vital physical part in us — the nervous being — as well as the vital proper; and both are largely conditioned by the gross material bodily part which is almost entirely subconscious to our experience.

The physical mind is that which is fixed on physical objects and happenings, sees and understands these only, and deals with them according to their own nature, but can with difficulty respond to the higher forces. Left to itself, it is sceptical of the existence of supraphysical things, of which it has no direct experience and to which it can find no clue; even when it has spiritual experiences, it forgets them easily, loses the impression and result and finds it difficult to believe. To enlighten the physical mind by the consciousness of the higher spiritual and supramental planes is one object of this Yoga, just as to enlighten it by the power of the higher vital and higher mental elements of the being is the greatest part of human self-development, civilisation and culture.

The vital physical on the other hand is the vehicle of the

nervous responses of our physical nature; it is the field and instrument of the smaller sensations, desires, reactions of all kinds to the impacts of the outer physical and gross material life. This vital physical part (supported by the lowest part of the vital proper) is therefore the agent of most of the lesser movements of our external life; its habitual reactions and obstinate pettinesses are the chief stumbling-block in the way of the transformation of the outer consciousness by the Yoga. It is also largely responsible for most of the suffering and disease of mind or body to which the physical being is subject in Nature.

As to the gross material part it is not necessary to specify its place, for that is obvious, but it must be remembered that this too has a consciousness of its own, the obscure consciousness proper to the limbs, cells, tissues, glands, organs. To make this obscurity luminous and directly instrumental to the higher planes and to the divine movement is what we mean in our Yoga by making the body conscious,—that is to say, full of a true, awake and responsive awareness instead of its own obscure, limited half-subconscious.

There is an inner as well as an outer consciousness all through our being, upon all its levels. The ordinary man is aware only of his surface self and quite unaware of all that is concealed by the surface. And yet what is on the surface, what we know or think we know of ourselves and even believe that that is all we are, is only a small part of our being and far the larger part of us is below the surface, the frontal consciousness. Or, more accurately, it is behind the frontal consciousness, behind the veil, occult and known only by an occult knowledge. Modern psychology and psychic science have begun to perceive this truth just a little. Materialistic psychology calls this hidden part the Inconscient, although practically admitting that it is far greater, more powerful and profound than the surface conscious self,—very much as the Upanishads called the superconscious in us the Sleep self, although this Sleep self is said to be an infinitely greater Intelligence, omniscient, omnipotent, Prajna, the Ishwara. Psychic science calls this hidden consciousness the subliminal self, and, here too, it is seen that this subliminal self

has more powers, more knowledge, a freer field of movement than the smaller self that is on the surface. But the truth is that all this that is behind, this sea of which our waking consciousness is only a wave or series of waves, cannot be described by any one term, for it is very complex. Part of it is subconscious, lower than our waking consciousness; part of it is on a level with it but behind and much larger than it; part is above and superconscious to us. What we call our mind is only an outer mind, a surface mental action, instrumental for the partial expression of a larger mind behind of which we are not ordinarily aware and can only know by going inside ourselves. So too what we know of the vital in us is only the outer vital, a surface activity partially expressing a larger secret vital which we can only know by going within. Equally, what we call our physical being is only a visible projection of a greater and subtler invisible physical consciousness which is much more complex, much more aware, much wider in its receptiveness, much more open and plastic and free.

If you understand and experience this truth, then only you will be able to realise what is meant by the inner mental, the inner vital, the inner physical consciousness. But it must be noted that this term "inner" is used in two different senses. Sometimes it denotes the consciousness behind the veil of the outer being, the mental or vital or physical within, which is in direct touch with the universal mind, the universal life forces, the universal physical forces. Sometimes, on the other hand, we mean an inmost mental, vital, physical, more specifically called the true mind, the true vital, the true physical consciousness which is nearest to the soul and can most easily and directly respond to the Divine Light and Power. There is no real Yoga possible, still less any integral Yoga, if we do not go back from the outer self and become aware of all this inner being and inner nature. For then alone can we break the limitations of the ignorant external self which receives consciously only the outer touches and knows things indirectly through the outer mind and senses, and become directly aware of the universal consciousness and the universal forces that play through us and around us. And

then only too can we hope to be directly aware of the Divine in us and directly in touch with the Divine Light and the Divine Force. Otherwise we can feel the Divine only through external signs and external results and that is a difficult and uncertain way and very occasional and inconstant, and it leads only to belief and not to knowledge, not to the direct consciousness and awareness of the constant presence.

As for instances of the difference, I may give you two from the opposite poles of experience, one from the most external phenomena showing how the inward opens to the awareness of universal forces, one of spiritual experience indicating how the inward opens to the Divine. Take illness. If we live only in the outward physical consciousness, we do not usually know that we are going to be ill until the symptoms of the malady declare themselves in the body. But if we develop the inward physical consciousness, we become aware of a subtle environmental physical atmosphere and can feel the forces of illness coming towards us through it, feel them even at a distance and, if we have learned how to do it, we can stop them by the will or otherwise. We sense too around us a vital physical or nervous envelope which radiates from the body and protects it, and we can feel the adverse forces trying to break through it and can interfere, stop them or reinforce the nervous envelope. Or we can feel the symptoms of illness, fever or cold for instance, in the subtle physical sheath before they are manifest in the gross body and destroy them there, preventing them from manifesting in the body. Take now the call for the Divine Power, Light, Ananda. If we live only in the outward physical consciousness, it may descend and work behind the veil but we shall feel nothing and only see certain results after a long time. Or at most we feel a certain clarity and peace in the mind, a joy in the vital, a happy state in the physical and infer the touch of the Divine. But if we are awake in the inward physical, we shall feel the light, power or Ananda flowing through the body, the limbs, nerves, blood, breath and, through the subtle body, affecting the most material cells and making them conscious and blissful and we shall sense directly the Divine Power and Presence. These are

only two instances out of a thousand that are possible and can be constantly experienced by the sadhaka.

Living in the Physical Consciousness

So far as it [*living in the physical consciousness*] can be said to be distinguishable by outward signs, it is a state of fundamental passivity in which one is and does what the forces of the physical plane make one be and do. When one lives in the mind, there is an active mental intelligence and mental will that tries to control and shape action and experience and life and everything else. When one is in the vital one is full of energy and enthusiasm and passion and force which may be right or wrong, but is very much alive. These things in the physical inertia either disappear or become weak or are forces that act upon the system occasionally but are not possessed by it. This condition may not be absolute, for one has a mind and a vital, but it is what predominates. There are two ways of getting out of this—one is to rise above in the self and see the physical from there as an instrument, not oneself, the other is to bring down the divine Force from above and make the physical the instrument of that Force.

*

The forces of the physical mind, vital physical, material consciousness [*are the forces of the physical plane*]. Of course, as I said, the statement must be taken with a qualification, for the true mind and vital are also there, but in this condition [*of passivity and inertia*] it is the forces of the physical consciousness that predominate and determine the general condition which is a proneness to *aprakāśa* and sometimes *apravṛtti*.

The Opening of the Physical Consciousness

The physical consciousness? It opens just like the rest, receives a new consciousness, obeys the Force, feels a change even in the cells, aspires to and seeks self-giving and union with the Divine.

The True Activity of the Senses

It [*the true activity of the senses*] is to record the divine or true appearance of things and return to them the reaction of an equal Ananda without dislike or desire.

The Physical Parts of the Mind and Emotional Being

Everything has a physical part—even the mind has a physical part; there is a mental physical, a mind of the body and the material. So the emotional being has a physical part. It has no location separate from the rest of the emotional. One can only distinguish it when the consciousness becomes sufficiently subtle to do so.

The Mental Physical or Mechanical Mind

That is the nature of the mental physical to go on repeating without use the movement that has happened. It is what we call the mechanical mind—it is strong in childhood because the thinking mind is not developed and has besides a narrow range of interests. Afterwards it becomes an undercurrent in the mental activities. It must now have risen up with the other characteristics of the mental physical because it is in the physical that the action has come down. Sometimes also when there is silence of the mind, these things come up till they also are quieted down.

*

The mechanical mind is a sort of engine—whatever comes to it it puts into the machine and goes on turning it round and round—no matter what it is.

*

From what you describe it seems that you have got into contact with the mechanical mind whose nature is to go on turning

round in a circle on the thoughts that come into it. This sometimes happens when the thinking mind is quiet. This is part of the physical mind and you should not be disturbed or alarmed by its rising up, but see what it is and quiet it down or get control of its movements.

*

What is called the mechanical mind is necessary for the maintenance (in the physical) of things gained—it is by conservation and repetition that Nature does that. The subconscious is the basis of conservation and the mechanical mind is the means of repetition. Only they have to be enlightened and change and conserve and repeat the new divine things and not the old undivine ones.

*

If there is a strong activity of the higher parts of the consciousness, the possibility of the mechanical mind working is very much diminished. It may come up in moments of relaxation or fatigue but usually it is active only in a subordinate way that does not attract notice.

*

When the higher consciousness takes hold of the mechanical mind, it ceases to be mechanical.

The Vital Physical

The physical vital is the being of small desires and greeds etc.—the vital physical is the nervous being; they are closely connected together.

*

The vital physical governs all the small daily reactions to outward things—reactions of the nerves and the body consciousness and the reflex reactions and sensations; it motives much of the ordinary actions of man and joins with the lower parts of

the vital proper in producing lust, jealousy, anger, violence etc. In its lowest parts (vital-material) it is the agent of pain, physical illness etc.

*

The vital physical forces can be received from anywhere by the body, from around, below or above. The order of the planes is in reference to each other, not in reference to the body. In reference to each other, the vital physical is below the physical mind, but above the material: but at the same time these powers interpenetrate each other.

*

The body energy is a manifestation of material forces supported by a vital-physical energy which is the vital energy precipitated into matter and conditioned by it.

The Material Consciousness or Body Consciousness

By material is meant the body consciousness, the consciousness of Matter etc. Physical is a wider term. There is for instance a physical mind (which cannot be called material) dealing with outside earthly things.

*

A great part of the body consciousness is subconscious and the body consciousness and the subconscious are closely bound together. The body and the physical do not coincide—the body consciousness is only part of the whole physical consciousness.

*

What you describe is the material consciousness; it is mostly subconscious, but the part of it that is conscious, is mechanical, inertly moved by habits or by the forces of the lower nature. Always repeating the same unintelligent and unenlightened movements, it is attached to the routine and established rule of what already exists, unwilling to change, unwilling to

receive the Light or obey the higher Force. Or, if it is willing, then it is unable. Or if it is able, then it turns the action given to it by the Light or the Force into a new mechanical routine and so takes out of it all soul or life. It is obscure, stupid, indolent, full of ignorance and inertia, darkness and slowness of tamas.

It is this material consciousness into which we are seeking to bring first the higher (divine or spiritual) Light and Power and Ananda, and then the supramental Truth which is the object of our Yoga. But there is an obstinate dark and inert resistance both from material Nature and from the physical consciousness of the sadhaks — of which the lower vital and the material consciousness, both of them still unregenerated, are the cause.

*

It [*the material*] is the most physical grade of the physical — there is the mental physical, the vital physical, the material physical.

*

Yes — or at least it [*the material consciousness*] is a separate part of the physical consciousness. Physical mind for instance is narrow and limited and often stupid, but not inert. Matter consciousness is on the contrary inert as well as largely subconscious — active only when driven by an energy, otherwise inactive and immobile. When one first falls into direct contact with this level, the feeling in the body is that of inertia and immobility, in the vital physical exhaustion or lassitude, in the physical mind absence of *prakāṣa* and *pravṛtti* or only the most ordinary thoughts and impulses. It took me a long time to get down any kind of light or power into this level. But when once it is illumined, the advantage is that the subconscious becomes conscious and this removes a very fundamental obstacle from the sadhana.

The Gross Physical and the Subtle Physical

By the gross physical is meant the earthly and bodily physical

—as experienced by the outward sense mind and senses. But that is not the whole of Matter. There is a subtle physical also with a subtler consciousness in it which can (for instance) go to a distance from the body and yet feel and be aware of things in a not merely mental or vital way. As for mind and vital they are everywhere—there is an obscure mind and life even in the cells of the body, the stones or in molecules and atoms.

*

It [*the subtle physical*] is difficult to realise without definite experience, e.g. as when light or ananda or force come into the body and one feels it working as if in the cells, yet with a little attention it becomes clear that it is not the material cells, but something more subtle that feels it.

*

There is what is called the nervous envelope surrounding the body—you are probably seeing the *sūkṣma* and the nervous envelope in one view. The *sūkṣma deha* contains the *sthūla deha*. Only it is not bound to itself and can contract or expand unlike the material body.

The Physical Nerves and the Subtle Nerves

The physical nerves are part of the material body, but they are extended into subtle nerves in the subtle body and there is a connection between the two.

*

Yes, there are nerves in the subtle body.

*

The physical nerves have many centres or plexuses. The nervous being proper is part of the physical—and it starts from the physical centre, the Muladhara.

*

The nerves are distributed all over the body—but the vital-physical action is concentrated in its origin between the Mula-dhara and the centre just above it.

The Sheaths of the Indian Tradition

Yes [*the inner being is made up of sheaths*]. Sheaths is simply a term for bodies, because each is superimposed on the other and acts as a covering and can be cast off. Thus the physical body itself is called the food sheath and its throwing off is what is called death.

*

You can only distinguish [*the different sheaths*] either by intuition or by experience and then you have established direct knowledge of the different sheaths.

Chapter Nine

The Environmental Consciousness

The Environmental Consciousness around the Individual

Everyone carries around him an environmental consciousness or atmosphere through which he is in relation with others or with the universal forces. It is through this that these forces or the thoughts or feelings of others enter.

*

The environmental is not a world — it is an individual thing.

*

The individual is not limited to the physical body — it is only the external consciousness which feels like that. As soon as one gets over this feeling of limitation, one can feel first the inner consciousness which is connected with the body but does not belong to it, afterwards the planes of consciousness above the body — also a consciousness surrounding the body, but part of oneself, part of the individual being, through which one is in contact with the cosmic forces and with other beings. This last is what I have called the environmental consciousness.

*

Each man has his own personal consciousness entrenched in his body and gets into touch with his surroundings only through his body and senses and the mind using the senses.

Yet all the time the universal forces are pouring into him without his knowing it. He is aware only of thoughts, feelings etc. that rise to the surface and these he takes for his own. Really they come from outside in mind waves, vital waves, waves of feeling and sensation etc. which take particular forms in him and rise to the surface after they have got inside.

But they do not get into his body at once. He carries

about with him an environmental consciousness (called by the Theosophists the aura) into which they first enter. If you can become conscious of this environmental self of yours, then you can catch the thought, passion, suggestion or force of illness, or whatever it may be, before it enters and prevent it from entering into you. If things in you are thrown out, they often do not go altogether but take refuge in this environmental atmosphere and from there try to get in again or they go to a distance outside but linger on the outskirts or even perhaps far off, waiting till they get an opportunity to attempt entrance.

*

It [*the environmental consciousness*] can become silent when there is the wideness. One can become conscious of it and deal with what passes through it. A man without it would be without contact with the rest of the world.

The Environmental Consciousness and the Movements of the Lower Nature

These things [*self-esteem, depression, etc.*] usually hide in recesses of the vital or the physical in which there is not yet the full force of the Peace and Light. When they are quite driven out from there, they may lodge in the subconscious and send up suggestions from there. Thrown out altogether they remain in the environmental consciousness and try to act from there, but then they are no longer part of one's own consciousness and are not felt as such but as something trying to come in from outside.

*

One can be free [*from lower vital movements*], but one cannot say that the freedom has been made absolutely complete or secure until the complete transformation takes place. For these things always remain in the environmental consciousness or even at a distance in the universal itself and take any opportunity to come in from there.

*

These [*forces of depression, dullness of mind, etc.*] are things that wander about in the atmosphere and jump upon one without notice. It is often difficult to see where precisely they come from and often there is no reason at all or any inviting cause in oneself. They have simply to be thrown off as when something falls on the body.

*

There is no mystery [*about the power of lower forces to attack*]. These things were violent and obstinate in you for a long time and you were indulging them — hence they acquired a great force to return even after you began rejecting them, first because of habit, secondly because of their belief that they have acquired a right over you, thirdly because of the habit of assent and passive response to them or endurance of them that has been stamped on the physical consciousness. This physical consciousness is not as yet liberated, it has not begun to be as responsive to the higher force as the vital, so it cannot resist their invasion. So these forces when thrown out retreat into the environmental consciousness and remain there concealed and at any opportunity make an attack on the centres accustomed to receive them (external mind and the external emotional) and get in. This happens with most sadhaks. Two things are necessary — (1) to open fully the physical to the higher forces, (2) to reach the stage when even if the forces attack, they cannot come fully in, the inner being remaining calm and free. Then even if there is still a surface difficulty, there will not be these overpowerings.

The Environmental Consciousness and the Subconscious

They [*the environmental consciousness and the subconscious*] are two quite different things. What is stored in the subconscious — impressions, memories, rise up from there into the conscious parts. In the environmental things are not stored up and fixed, although they move about there. It is full of mobility, a field of vibration or passage of forces.

Chapter Ten

The Subconscious and the Inconscient

The Subconscious in the Integral Yoga

In our Yoga we mean by the subconscious that quite submerged part of our being in which there is no wakingly conscious and coherent thought, will or feeling or organised reaction, but which yet receives obscurely the impressions of all things and stores them up in itself and from it too all sorts of stimuli, of persistent habitual movements, crudely repeated or disguised in strange forms can surge up into dream or into the waking nature. For if these impressions rise up most in dream in an incoherent and disorganised manner, they can also and do rise up into our waking consciousness as a mechanical repetition of old thoughts, old mental, vital and physical habits or an obscure stimulus to sensations, actions, emotions which do not originate in or from our conscious thought or will and are even often opposed to its perceptions, choice or dictates. In the subconscious there is an obscure mind full of obstinate sanskaras, impressions, associations, fixed notions, habitual reactions formed by our past, an obscure vital full of the seeds of habitual desires, sensations and nervous reactions, a most obscure material which governs much that has to do with the condition of the body. It is largely responsible for our illnesses; chronic or repeated illnesses are indeed mainly due to the subconscious and its obstinate memory and habit of repetition of whatever has impressed itself upon the body consciousness. But this subconscious must be clearly distinguished from the subliminal parts of our being such as the inner or subtle physical consciousness, the inner vital or inner mental; for these are not at all obscure or incoherent or ill-organised, but only veiled from our surface consciousness. Our surface constantly receives something, inner touches, communications

or influences, from these sources but does not know for the most part whence they come.

*

The subconscient is below the waking physical consciousness — it is an automatic, obscure, incoherent, half-unconscious realm into which light and awareness can with difficulty come. The inner vital and physical are quite different — they have a larger, plastic, subtler, freer and richer consciousness than the surface vital and physical, much more open to the Truth and in direct touch with the universal.

*

The subconscient is not the whole foundation of our nature; it is only the lower basis of the Ignorance and governs mostly the lower vital and physical exterior consciousness and these again affect the higher parts of the nature. While it is necessary to see what it is and how it acts, one must not be too preoccupied with this dark side or this apparent aspect of the instrumental being. One should rather regard it as something not oneself, a mask of false nature imposed on the true being by the Ignorance. The true being is the inner with all its vast possibilities of reaching and expressing the Divine and especially the inmost, the soul, the psychic Purusha which is always in its essence pure, divine, turned to all that is good and true and beautiful. The exterior being has to be taken hold of by the inner being and turned into an instrument no longer of the upsurgings of the ignorant subconscient Nature, but of the Divine. It is by remembering always that and opening the nature upwards that the Divine Consciousness can be reached and descend from above into the whole inner and outer existence, mental, vital, physical, the subconscient, the subliminal, all that we overtly or secretly are. This should be the main preoccupation. To dwell solely on the subconscient and the aspect of imperfection creates depression and should be avoided. One has to keep a right balance and stress on the positive side most, recognising the other but only to reject and change it. This and a constant faith and reliance on

the Mother are what is needed for the transformation to come.

*

The Subconscious is the basis of much of the lower activities—that is now generally admitted.

*

The subconscious is the evolutionary basis in us, it is not the whole of our hidden nature, nor is it the whole origin of what we are. But things can rise from the subconscious and take shape in the conscious part and much of our smaller vital and physical instincts, movements, habits, character-forms has this source.

There are three occult sources of our action—the superconscious, the subliminal, the subconscious, but of none of them are we in control or even aware. What we are aware of is the surface being which is only an instrumental arrangement. The source of all is the general Nature,—universal Nature individualising itself in each person; for this general Nature deposits certain habits of movement, personality, character, faculties, dispositions, tendencies in us, and that, whether formed now or before our birth, is what we usually call ourselves. A good deal of this is in habitual movement and use in our known conscious part on the surface, a great deal more is concealed in the other unknown three which are below or behind the surface.

But what we are on the surface is being constantly set in motion, changed, developed or repeated by the waves of the general Nature coming in on us either directly or else indirectly through others, through circumstances, through various agencies or channels. Some of this flows straight into the conscious part and acts there, but our mind ignores its source, appropriates it and regards all that as its own; a part comes secretly into the subconscious or sinks into it and waits for an opportunity of rising up into the conscious surface; a good deal goes into the subliminal and may at any time come out—or may not, may rather rest there as unused matter. Part passes through and is rejected, thrown back or thrown out or spilt into the universal sea. Our nature is a constant activity of forces supplied to us out

of which (or rather out of a small amount of it) we make what we will or can. What we make seems fixed and formed for good, but in reality it is all a play of forces, a flux, nothing fixed or stable; the appearance of stability is given by constant repetition and recurrence of the same vibrations and formations. That is why our nature can be changed in spite of Vivekananda's saying and Horace's adage and in spite of the conservative resistance of the subconscious, but it is a difficult job because the master mode of Nature is this obstinate repetition and recurrence.

As for the things in our nature that are thrown away from us by rejection but come back, it depends on where you throw them. Very often there is a sort of procedure about it. The mind rejects its mentalities, the vital its vitalities, the physical its physicalities—these usually go back into the corresponding domain of general Nature. It all stays at first, when that happens, in the environmental consciousness which we carry about with us, by which we communicate with the outside Nature, and often it persistently rushes back from there—until it is so absolutely rejected, or thrown far away as it were, that it cannot return upon us any more. But when what the thinking and willing mind rejects is strongly supported by the vital, it leaves the mind indeed but sinks down into the vital, rages there and tries to rush up again and reoccupy the mind and compel or capture our mental acceptance. When the higher vital too—the heart or the larger vital dynamis rejects it, it sinks from there and takes refuge in the lower vital with its mass of small current movements that make up our daily littleness. When the lower vital too rejects it, it sinks into the physical consciousness and tries to stick by inertia or mechanical repetition. Rejected even from there it goes into the subconscious and comes up in dreams, in passivity, in extreme tamas. The Inconscient is the last resort of the Ignorance.

As for the waves that recur from the general Nature, it is the natural tendency of the inferior forces there to try and perpetuate their action in the individual, to rebuild what he has unbuilt of their deposits in him, so they return on him, often with an increased force, even with a stupendous violence, when they

find their influence rejected. But they cannot last long once the environmental consciousness is cleared—unless the “Hostiles” take a hand. Even then they can indeed attack, but if the sadhak has established his position in the inner self, they can only attack and retire.

It is true that we bring most of ourselves—or rather most of our predispositions, tendencies of reaction to the universal Nature—from past lives. Heredity only affects strongly the external being; besides, all the effects of heredity are not accepted even there, only those that are in consonance with what we are to be or not preventive of it at least.

*

The subconscious is a concealed and unexpressed inarticulate consciousness which works below all our conscious physical activities. Just as what we call the superconscious is really a higher consciousness above from which things descend into the being, so the subconscious is below the body consciousness and things come up into the physical, the vital and the mind-nature from there.

Just as the higher consciousness is superconscious to us and supports all our spiritual possibilities and nature, so the subconscious is the basis of our material being and supports all that comes up in the physical nature.

Men are not ordinarily conscious of either of these planes of their own being, but by sadhana they can become aware.

The subconscious retains the impressions of all our past experiences of life and they can come up from there in dream forms. Most dreams in ordinary sleep are formations made from subconscious impressions.

The habit of strong recurrence of the same things in our physical consciousness, so that it is difficult to get rid of its habits, is largely due to a subconscious support. The subconscious is full of irrational habits.

When things are rejected from all other parts of the nature, they go either into the environmental consciousness around us through which we communicate with others and with universal

Nature and try to return from there or they sink into the subconscious and can come up from there even after lying long quiescent so that we think they are gone.

When the physical consciousness is being changed, the chief resistance comes from the subconscious. It is constantly maintaining or bringing back the inertia, weakness, obscurity, lack of intelligence which afflict the physical mind and vital or the obscure fears, desires, angers, lusts of the physical vital, or the illnesses, dullnesses, pains, incapabilities to which the body-nature is prone.

If light, strength, the Mother's consciousness is brought down into the body it can penetrate the subconscious also and convert its obscurity and resistance.

When something is erased from the subconscious so completely that it leaves no seed and thrown out of the circumconscious so completely that it can return no more, then only can we be sure that we have finished with it for ever.

*

About the subconscious — it is the submaterial base of the being and is made up of impressions, instincts, habitual movements that are stored there. Whatever movement is impressed on it, it keeps. If one impresses the right movement on it, it will keep and send up that. That is why it has to be cleared of old movements before there can be a permanent and total change in the nature. When the higher consciousness is once established in the waking parts, it goes down into the subconscious and changes that also, makes a bedrock of itself there also. Then no farther trouble from the subconscious will be possible. But even before that one can minimise the trouble by putting the right will and the right habit of reaction on the subconscious parts.

*

All that one does and thinks leaves its trace in the subconscious.

*

Yes, the subconscious is a cosmic as well as an individual plane.

The Subconscious in Traditional Indian Terminology

I don't know that there is any [*term corresponding to the subconscious in Patanjali or the Sankhya*]—this plane was spoken of more as inconscient than subconscious—it is practically the indiscriminate or *jada prakṛti*, perhaps—or the seed state. In the Veda it is symbolised by the cave of the Panis. Perhaps by looking through books like the Yogavasishtha one could find something about the subconscious in fact though not in express terms.

*

You had asked the other day about the subconscious, what it was. In the vision you describe you were shown the universal subconscious in the figure of Patala, a place without light of consciousness and, because universal, therefore without bounds or end—the dark unconscious infinite out of which this material universe has arisen—it is walled with darkness on all sides, it seems also to have no bottom. The Light comes from above from the higher consciousness and coming down through the mind and heart and vital and physical has to pour down into this subconscious and make it luminous.

*

“Patala” [*in an experience described by the correspondent*] is a name for the subconscious—the beings there had no heads, that is to say, there is there no mental consciousness; men have all of them such a subconscious plane in their own being and from there rise all sorts of irrational and ignorant (headless) instincts, impulsions, memories etc. which have an effect upon their acts and feelings without their detecting the real source. At night many incoherent dreams come from this world or plane. The world above is the superconscious plane of being—above the human consciousness—there are many worlds of that kind; they are divine worlds.

The Subconscious and the Superconscious

Below the feet is the subconscious, just as above the head is the superconscious.

The Subconscious and the Subliminal

Subliminal is a general term used for all the parts of the being which are not on the waking surface. Subconscious is very often used in the same sense by European psychologists because they do not know the difference. But when I use the word, I mean always what is *below* the ordinary physical consciousness, not what is behind it. The inner mental, vital, physical, the psychic are not subconscious in this sense, but they can be spoken of as subliminal.

*

What he [*a correspondent*] has written about the subconscious and the outer nature is true. But the role of subliminal forces cannot be said to be small, since from there come all the greater aspirations, ideals, strivings towards a better self and better humanity without which man would be only a thinking animal—as also most of the art, poetry, philosophy, thirst for knowledge which relieve if they do not yet dispel the ignorance.

The role of the superconscious has been to evolve slowly the spiritual man out of the mental half-animal. That also cannot be called an insignificant role.

The Subconscious Memory and Conscious Memory

Exact images are retained by the subliminal memory. All that is subliminal is described by ordinary psychology as subconscious; but in our psychology that cannot be done, for the consciousness that holds them is as precise and far wider and fuller than our waking or surface consciousness, so how can it be called subconscious? Conscious memory is that which can bring up at

any moment we like the memory of a thing, it is under our control. Subliminal memory can hold all things, even those which the mind cannot understand, e.g. if you hear somebody talking Hebrew, the subliminal memory can hold that and bring it up accurately in some abnormal state, e.g. the hypnotic. Subconscious memory is a memory of impressions; when they come up as in dream, either the result is something incoherent or fancifully rearranged or it is only the essence of the thing, its psychological deposit that comes up, e.g. sex, fear, some particular libido as the psychoanalysts call it, but the expression given to the latter need not be the same as memory would give; it may repeat the same forms if it gets hold of the mechanical mind in the physical to help its expression, but also it may be quite different from anything in real life.

*

The clear memory of words, images and thoughts is an action of the conscious mind, not the unconscious. Of course the memory goes behind, so to speak, in the back part of the mind, but it can be brought out. Also the memory can be lost or defaced, so that one remembers wrongly or forgets altogether, but that is still an imperfect action of the conscious mind, not an action of the subconscious. What the subconscious keeps is a mass of impressions, not of clear or exact images and these can come up as in dreams in an incoherent jumble distorted altogether or else in the waking state as a mechanical recurrence or repetition of the same suggestions, impulses (subconscious vital) or sensations. There is a recognisable difference between the two functionings.

*

It [*the memory of things*] is not in the mind alone; it is stored in the subconscious (mind, vital and physical) as impressions—also in the inner being all is present but held back as a store of past experience.

*

All that our consciousness meets in day-to-day experience is

registered in subconscious memory and from there can be brought up to the mind or come of itself. But what we call memory is when the thing registered is kept in the conscious mind at its back and brought forward at will — that is conscious memory.

*

No — that [*the record of Chitragupta*] is quite different [*from the cosmic subconscious*], since it belongs to something where the records are precise and accurate. The subconscious is a suppressed and obscure seed state where things are emerging out of the indeterminate inconscience of original Nature but are yet fluent and imprecise, having all the potentiality of determination in them, but not yet determinate. The past things fall back into it not as memories, but as impressions which is a quite different thing. When they come up from there it is in all sorts of queer forms with variations and mixtures.

*

There is very often a complaint of this kind [*weakening of memory*] made during the course of the sadhana. I suppose that the usual action of memory is for a time suspended by the mental silence or else by the physical tamas.

*

By the change of consciousness there can be a more conscious and perfect functioning of the memory replacing the old mechanism.

The Subconscious and the Inconscient

The subconscious is universal as well as individual like all the other main parts of the nature. But there are different parts or planes of the subconscious. All upon earth is based on the Inconscient as it is called, though it is not really inconscient at all, but rather a complete “sub”-conscience, a suppressed or involved consciousness, in which there is everything but nothing

is formulated or expressed. The subconscious lies in between this Inconscient and the conscious mind, life and body. It contains the potentiality of all the primitive reactions to life which struggle out to the surface from the dull and inert obscurity of Matter and form by a constant development a slowly evolving and self-formulating consciousness; it contains them not as ideas or perceptions or conscious reactions but as the fluid substance of these things. But also all that is consciously experienced sinks down into the subconscious, not as precise though submerged memories but as obscure yet obstinate impressions of experience, and these can come up at any time as dreams, as mechanical repetitions of past thought, feelings, action etc., as "complexes" exploding into action and event etc. etc. The subconscious is the main cause why all things repeat themselves and nothing ever gets changed except in appearances. It is the cause why people say character cannot be changed, the cause also of the constant return of things one hoped to have got rid of for ever. All seeds are there and all the sanskaras of the mind and vital and body,—it is the main support of death and disease and the last fortress (seemingly impregnable) of the Ignorance. All too that is suppressed without being wholly got rid of sinks down there and remains in seed ready to surge up or sprout up at any moment.

Section Four
The Chakras
or Centres of Consciousness

Chapter One

The System of the Chakras

The Functions of the Chakras or Centres

The centres or Chakras are seven in number —

- (1) The thousand-petalled lotus on the top of the head.
- (2) In the middle of the forehead — the Ajna Chakra — (will, vision, dynamic thought).
- (3) Throat centre — externalising mind.
- (4) Heart-lotus — emotional centre. The psychic is behind it.
- (5) Navel — higher vital (proper).
- (6) Below navel — lower vital.
- (7) Muladhara — physical.

All these centres are in the middle of the body; they are supposed to be attached to the spinal cord; but in fact all these things are in the subtle body, *sūkṣma deha*, though one has the feeling of their activities as if in the physical body when the consciousness is awake.

*

Chakras

The thousand-petalled (head) lotus	Chakra or centre of the higher will and knowledge
The lotus in the forehead	Will, vision, mental dynamism
The lotus in the throat	Expression — external mind
The lotus of the heart	Emotion, dynamic vital feeling (behind the heart is the seat of the psychic being)
The lotus of the navel	Higher vital
The lotus of the abdomen	Lower vital
The lotus at the end of the spine (Muladhara)	Physical consciousness

*

In the process of our Yoga the centres have each a fixed psychological use and general function which base all their special powers and functionings. The *mūlādhāra* governs the physical down to the subconscious; the abdominal centre—*svādhiṣṭhāna*—governs the lower vital; the navel centre—*nābhipadma* or *manipūra*—governs the larger vital; the heart centre—*hṛtpadma* or *anāhata*—governs the emotional being; the throat centre—*viśuddha*—governs the expressive and externalising mind; the centre between the eyebrows—*ājñācakra*—governs the dynamic mind, will, vision, mental formation; the thousand-petalled lotus—*sahasradala*—above commands the higher thinking mind, houses the still higher illumined mind and at its highest opens to the intuition through which or else by an overflowing directness the overmind can have with the rest communication or an immediate contact.¹

*

I never heard of two lotuses in the heart centre; but it is the seat of two powers, in front the higher vital or emotional being, behind and concealed the soul or psychic being.

The colours of the lotuses and the numbers of petals are respectively, from bottom to top:—(1) the Muladhara or physical consciousness centre, four petals, red; (2) the abdominal centre, six petals, deeper purple red; (3) the navel centre, ten petals, violet; (4) the heart centre, twelve petals, golden pink; (5) the throat centre, sixteen petals, grey; (6) the forehead centre between the eyebrows, two petals, white; (7) the thousand-petalled lotus above the head, blue with gold light around. The functions are, according to our Yoga,—(1) commanding the physical consciousness and the subconscious; (2) commanding the small vital movements, the little greeds, lusts, desires, the small sense-movements; (3) commanding the larger life-forces and the passions and larger desire-movements; (4) commanding

¹ In a draft of this letter Sri Aurobindo wrote in the opening paragraph: "I have often written of the centres—but without using the Sanskrit names which are intelligible only to Hindus. They are the same but our interpretation and application is not quite identical. We relate them to the psychological levels or planes." —Ed.

the higher emotional being with the psychic deep behind it; (5) commanding expression and all externalisation of the mind-movements and mental forces; (6) commanding thought, will, vision; (7) commanding the higher thinking mind and the illumined mind and opening upwards to the intuition and overmind. The seventh is sometimes confused with the brain, but that is an error — the brain is only a channel of communication situated between the thousand-petalled and the forehead centre. The former is sometimes called the void centre, *śūnya*, either because it is not in the body, but in the apparent void above or because rising above the head one enters first into the silence of the self or spiritual being.

*

There is one centre below the navel (lower vital), another at the navel (central vital), another in the chest (emotional vital, heart centre), another in the throat (physical mind), another above the head (higher consciousness); besides these there is the centre in the forehead (mind, will, vision) and one at the bottom of the spine (muladhara, physical centre). The working in each will be according to the nature of the centre.

The Chakras in Reference to Yoga

One can speak of the chakras only in reference to Yoga. In ordinary people the chakras are not open, it is only when they do sadhana that they open. For the chakras are the centres of the inner consciousness and belong organically to the subtle body. So much as is active in ordinary people is very little — for in them it is the outer consciousness that is active.

*

The centres of consciousness [*are meant by the term “centres”*], the chakras. It is by their opening that the Yogic or inner consciousness develops — otherwise you are bound to the ordinary outer consciousness.

*

One does not pass through the psychic centre or any centre [*during the sadhana*]. The centres open under the pressure of the sadhana. You can say that the Force descends or ascends into a centre.

*

The spine is the support of the centres and it is through the spine that in the Tantric sadhana the Kundalini rises.

*

Allow me to state my difficulty [*with the idea that the “spirit entity” is lodged in the pineal gland*]. How the devil can a spirit entity be enclosed in a material gland? So far as I know the self or spirit is not enclosed in the body, rather the body is in the Self. When we have the full experience of the Self, we feel it as a wide consciousness in which the body is a very small thing, an adjunct, or a thing contained, not a container. What then is this spirit entity? There can be a small formation which stands for the Self or Spirit, like the Upanishad's Purusha no bigger than a man's thumb. Is this the spirit entity? But even then in which sense, in what relativity of space can it be said to be *in* the very material pineal gland? A spirit confined in a gland and dislodged from it by a pistol shot is a kind of language which I buck at. A spirit touching grey brain matter and so entering into contact with universal mind and touching white matter and so entering into contact with loftier spiritual realities is also too weird a conception for my intelligence. What happens to it when it has no matter to touch? Dissolution? laya?

When we speak of the Purusha in the head, heart etc., we are using a figure. The Muladhara from which the Kundalini rises is not in the physical body, but in the subtle body (the subtle body is that in which the being goes out in deep trance or more radically, at the time of death); so also are all the centres. But as the subtle body penetrates and is interfused with the gross body, there is a certain correspondence between these chakras and certain centres in the physical proper. So figuratively we speak of the Purusha in this or that centre of the body. Owing to this correspondence, again, when the Ananda or anything else

comes down into the being, it is the subtle body that it pervades, but it communicates itself through it to the gross body and its consciousness, so that it is felt as if pervading the body. But all that is very different from saying that the spirit is lodged in a gland. The gross body is an engine, a means of communication and action of the spirit upon the world and it is only a small part of the instrumentation. It is absurd to make so much of it as all that. It is a sort of false materialism intended to placate minds that have a scanty knowledge of science. But what is the use of that? Everybody now knows that science is not a statement of the truth of things, but only a language expressing a certain experience of objects, their structure, their mathematics, a coordinated and utilisable impression of their processes — it is nothing more. Matter itself is something (a formation of energy perhaps?) of which we know superficially the structure as it appears to our mind and senses and to certain examining instruments (about which it is now suspected that they largely determine their own results, Nature adapting its replies to the instrument used), but more than that no scientist knows or can know. If the Radhasoami affirmations [*mentioned by the correspondent*] are meant to be another kind of language expressing certain psycho-physical experiences, I have no objection. But why all this pineal glandism and talk about entities and bullets?

N.B. If I say the Purusha is in the heart, do I mean it is there in the physical heart, tumbling about in the flow of the blood or stuck in the valves or muscular portions and when a bullet is lodged in the heart it jumps with an Ooah! and tumbles down dead or goes off skating and swimming into some grey or white matter worlds beyond? Certainly not. I am using a significant language which expresses certain relations between the psychic consciousness and the physical of which we become aware by Yoga.

The Centres and the Planes

Each centre of the system (*cakra, padma*) represents or centralises a plane of experience and each is supported on the spine

which is the support of the nervous energies. When the serpent Energy from above and below have free passage through the centres (which is represented by the spine appearing like a serpent) then they open and there is the free wideness of the universal or infinite consciousness on all these planes.

*

All the centres above the Muladhara are connected with the higher worlds above the physical, with the vital, mental, psychic and still higher worlds—the Muladhara and below with the physical and subconscious worlds (subconscious physical and sub-physical). The whole physical body of course belongs to the earth-world, but it is connected through these centres with the other worlds.

*

According to our system the three lower centres are the vital, the lower vital and the physical—but the planes are quite different. The three lower planes are mind, life and matter and it is true that the human mind confines itself to these three activities. But it is not true that its activities are confined to the vital and physical things.

*

What is the fourth centre? In our system the fourth centre is the heart and the Divine is there in the psychic, behind the heart. But the fourth of our seven planes is the supramental which is far above the head, but can be communicated with through the seventh centre, the Sahasradala padma.

The Mind Centres

This must be the psychised higher mental being—the position above the head points to that. In other words, you have become aware of your higher mental being which is in contact at once with the Divine above and with the psychic behind the heart and is aware of the Truth and has the psychic and spiritual insight and view into things.

Above the head extends the higher consciousness centre, sahasradala padma. But usually there is partial working of the forehead centre also when the sahasradala opens.

The ordinary mind is at the highest the free intelligence, receiving perhaps intuitions and intimations from above which it intellectualises. It is on the surface and sees things from outside except in so far as it is helped by intuition and other powers to see a little deeper. When this ordinary mind opens within to inner mind and psychic and above to higher mind and higher consciousness generally, then it begins to be spiritualised and its highest ranges merge into the spiritual mind-consciousness of which this higher mind can be a beginning. This merging is part of the spiritual transformation.

For the mind there are many centres: (1) the sahasradala which centralises spiritual mind, higher mind, intuitive mind and acts as a receiving station for the intuition proper and overmind, (2) the centre in the forehead for inner thought, will and vision, (3) the throat centre for the externalising or physical mind.

The Sahasradala or Sahasrara or Crown Centre

The thousand-petalled lotus is above the head. It is the seventh and highest centre.

Usually those who take the centres in the body only, count six centres, the Sahasrara being excluded.

*

It is evidently the sahasradala padma through which the higher intuition, illumined mind and overmind all pass their rays.

*

The sahasradala commands all between the ordinary mind and the supermind — therefore its opening necessarily takes long. But opening by itself only creates a connection or communication — to dwell in that centre, one needs to have overpassed the mind and be able to live mainly in the spiritual self.

*

The Supramental is not organised in the body so there is no separate centre for it; but all that comes from above the Mind uses the Sahasrara for its transit and so opens something there.

*

The centre at the crown must be part of the *sahasradala*, the centre of communication direct between the individual being and the Infinite Consciousness above. There is not supposed to be any other main centre of dynamism between that and the Ajna Chakra. But there can be many nerve-centres in various parts of the body, apart from the six or rather seven main centres.

*

The crown centre open removes the difficulty of the lid between the ordinary mind and the higher consciousness above. If the ajnachakra also is open, then it is possible to have a clear communication between the higher consciousness and the inner mind and the outer mind (throat centre) also. That is the condition for the realisation of knowledge and the mental illumination and transformation. The heart centre commands the psychic and vital—that opening enables the psychic influence to work in the vital and ends in the coming forward of the psychic being.

*

It [*the opening at the top of the head*] is the Brahmarandhra through which there is the communication between the higher consciousness and the lower in the body. It is a passage, not a centre. The centre is the thousand-petalled lotus just above the head, at that part.

*

The crown is the place of passage between the body consciousness with all it contains of mind and life and the higher being above the body. It is there that the two consciousnesses begin to meet.

*

The brain is only a centre of the physical consciousness. One feels stationed there so long as one dwells in the physical mind or is identified with the body consciousness, then one receives through the sahasradala into the brain. When one ceases to be stationed in the body, then the brain is not a station but only a passive and silent transmitting channel.

The Ajnachakra or Forehead Centre

There are different centres in the body which are represented in vision by these lotuses — one is between the eyebrows in the forehead, a centre of inner consciousness, will and visions — that is opening in you.

*

If the forehead centre opens, it is fairly certain that the crown centre must have opened sufficiently at least to allow the passage of the higher force which is above it. The psychic is a different matter — it stands behind the centres and the time of its opening varies with different people — in fact it is not so much the opening of a centre as the coming forward of the psychic being.

The usual rule in this Yoga is from above downwards. There may be variations in the preparatory stage. There may for instance be a partial opening first of the heart centre. The higher vital centre may become active first also, but that means much struggle and difficulty.

*

The psychic being is behind the heart-centre — the centre between the eyes is that of inner (occult) thought, will and vision. This inner or occult vision is called by ordinary people psychic vision.

*

It [*the centre between the eyebrows*] is the centre of the inner mind — therefore also of the inner mental will and inner mental vision.

*

The centre of vision is between the eyebrows in the centre of the forehead. When it opens one gets the inner vision, sees the inner forms and images of things and people and begins to understand things and people from within and not only from outside, develops a power of will which also acts in the inner (Yogic) way on things and people etc. Its opening is often the beginning of the Yogic as opposed to the ordinary mental consciousness.

*

In the forehead between the eyes but a little above is the Ajna-chakra, the centre of the inner will, also of the inner vision, the dynamic mind etc. (This is not the ordinary outer mental will and sight, but something more powerful, belonging to the inner being.) When this centre opens and the Force there is active, then there is the opening of a greater will, power of decision, formation, effectiveness beyond what the ordinary mind can achieve.

*

The centre Ajnachakra is in the place I indicated [*in the previous letter*], but the pressure can be felt in all the forehead and the eyebrows also or anywhere there. It radiates from the centre.

*

The forehead centre is that of inner mind and vision. It is really through that inner vision that one sees the lights — the open eyes are only a channel for seeing them outside as well as within.

*

The pressure from within upon the forehead centre begins very often after the pressure from above on the forehead — something of the Force has come in sufficiently to exercise this second pressure. That on the back must be a direct pressure on the psychic region (if it is in or near the middle of the back) mainly to prepare the action in the heart. When the centres begin to open, inner experiences such as the seeing of light or images through the subtle vision in the forehead centre or psychic experiences

and perceptions in the heart, become frequent — gradually one becomes aware of one's inner being as separate from the outer and what can be called a Yogic consciousness with all its deeper movements develops in the place of the ordinary superficial mental and vital movements.

*

A third eye does open there [*in the centre of the forehead*] — it represents the occult vision and the occult power which goes with that vision — it is connected with the Ajnachakra.

The Throat Centre

The throat centre is the centre of the physical mind, the external will and the expression.

*

Yes [*the throat centre is the physical mind centre*]. It is the centre of externalisation, — speech, expression, the power to deal mentally with physical things etc. Its opening brings the power to open the physical mind to the light of the divine consciousness instead of remaining in the ordinary outward-going mentality.

*

Yes, it is so — it is the physical mind that acts like that [*rising up from the throat centre to cover the mind*]. The centre of the physical mind or externalising mind is in the subtle body in the throat and connected strongly with the speech — but it acts by connection with the brain. All forces that want to cover the consciousness rise up to do it, covering and acting on the mind centres if they can — because otherwise the covering is not complete.

*

Speech comes from the throat centre, but it is associated with whatever is the governing centre or level of the consciousness — wherever one thinks from. If one rises above the head, then

thought takes place above the head and one can speak from there, that is to say, the direction of the speech is from there.

The Throat Centre and the Lower Centres

The throat centre is the externalising (physical) mind, the heart is the emotional mind and beginning of the higher vital. If the heart centre is dominated by the physical mind to any extent, it will necessarily be open to the outer attacks that affect the physical and nervous consciousness. The heart has to be in connection with the psychic and the higher consciousness.

*

The centre in the throat is that of the physical mind and all between it and the centre in the heart is the joining place of the mind and the vital-emotional being. If the pain is of the nerves, then there must be some resistance and difficulty there which should go with the full opening.

*

The heart is the centre of the emotional being, the highest part of the vital. The navel is the centre of the dynamic and sensational vital (this is the source of pride, sense of possession, ambition, anger and other passions—but it expresses them often through the heart centre). The centre between the navel and the Muladhara commands the lower vital (physical desires, small贪欲, passions etc.). The throat centre is not the vital—it is the physical mind, the expressive externalising consciousness. What you feel may be the vital taking hold of the physical mind and using it for expression.

*

The physical mind centre is in the throat and mouth—the vital physical is between the two lowest centres—the material consciousness is in the *mūlādhāra*.

The Heart Centre

The heart is the centre of the being and commands the rest, as the psychic being or chaitya purusha is there. It is only in that sense that all flows from it, for it is the psychic being who each time creates a new mind, vital and body for himself.

*

There is one centre for the heart, although it is a double centre, in front the emotional, behind the psychic.

*

The apex of the psychic and emotional centre (like the apex of all centres) is in the backbone, the base in front in the middle of the sternum.

*

The physical heart is in the left side, but the heart centre of Yoga is in the middle of the chest — the cardiac centre.

*

I do not quite understand what you mean by soul. The psychic being (which is the soul) does not make centres for itself in the Adhar — the centres are there. The psychic being can take control of the centres that are already there — the heart and the navel centre and the two below the navel. Also the mind and vital are not abolished — they are brought under the psychic influence and psychised, or they are occupied by the higher consciousness from above and transformed into its instruments.

*

The heart-centre is the emotional centre. The navel is the main vital centre. In the abdomen is the lower vital centre. It is in these two that there is the origination of desire — but desire rises and becomes emotional in the heart and mental in the higher centres above.

The Navel and Abdominal Centres

The navel is the chief vital centre below the emotional—there is another centre of small vital movements below it, between the navel and Muladhara.

*

The navel is the vital centre in the physical body but the natural seat of the vital is in the vital sheath of the subtle body, which sheath it pervades; but for action through the gross body it is centred at the navel and below it.

*

A centre may be opened and still there may be resistances in that part of the nature. If the vital were clear of all difficulties one would be on the point of Yogic perfection. Below the navel is the physical vital.

*

The navel is the seat of the central vital, below it is the lower vital. It must have been the resistance of the lower vital to the fire that you felt.

*

The feeling you have of coming down to the navel corresponds to the actual fact of a change of the centre of consciousness, which one speaks of as a lowering of the consciousness. In this stage of sadhana one must keep always above until one is seated for good in the above-head position and the higher consciousness has pervaded the lower centres and fields down to the Muladhara and the whole body.

The Muladhara

The Muladhara is the centre of the physical consciousness proper, and all below in the body is the sheer physical, which as it goes downward becomes increasingly subconscious, but the real seat of the subconscious is below the body as the real seat

of the higher consciousness (superconscious) is above the body. At the same time, the subconscious can be felt anywhere, felt as something below the movement of the consciousness and, in a way, supporting it from beneath or else drawing the consciousness down towards itself. The subconscious is the main support of all habitual movements, especially the physical and lower vital movements. When something is thrown out of the vital or physical, it very usually goes down into the subconscious and remains there as if in seed and comes up again when it can. That is the reason why it is so difficult to get rid of habitual vital movements or to change the character; for, supported or refreshed from this source, preserved in this matrix your vital movements, even when suppressed or repressed, surge up again and recur. The action of the subconscious is irrational, mechanical, repetitive. It does not listen to reason or the mental will. It is only by bringing the higher light and force into it that it can change.

*

The Muladhara is the centre of the physical consciousness, but the legs below represent the special field governed by it — as distinct from the mental and vital parts in the body. So when there is working there, it means a working in the physical proper itself. Of course the physical is half-subconscious, but the field of the subconscious proper is below the feet, just as the field of the superconscious is above the head.

*

The lowest centre at the bottom of the spine [*is the sex centre*]. It contains many other things, but also it is in its front the support of the sexual movements.

*

It [*the end of the spine*] is the place of the physical centre which is also the sex-centre. The apex of it is at the end of the spine and it projects forward from there — commanding the organ and its action.

*

The sex centre is the physical centre—it [*the physical centre*] happens to be the centre for sex and physical propagation also, but it is not separately and solely the centre of sex. If that were so, there would be no centre governing the physical consciousness, but only a centre governing the sex organ.

No Subconscious Centre

There is no subconscious centre. Its plane is below the feet as that of the superconscious is above the head.

*

No, the subconscious is too vague to have a centre. It has a level — below the feet as the superconscious is above, but from there it can surge up anywhere.

Chapter Two

The Parts of the Body and the Centres

The Parts of the Body in Yoga

Different parts of the body indicate for this purpose different parts of the nature. The head is the seat of the mind (buddhi) and the lower part of the mouth, chin, neck are the seat of the external or physical mind. It indicates that the force is working there to change and prepare this part of the mind and get rid of resistance and wrong mental habits.

The Cerebellum

Yes, it [*the cerebellum*] has some connection with the subconscious.

The Ear, Nose, Face and Throat

It cannot be anything physical but only a subtle physical sensation. The ear is the passage of communion between the inner mind centre and the thought-forces or thought-waves of the universal Nature. It sounds like a sensation of opening and enlarging of this passage.

*

The nose is connected with the vital dynamic part of the mental — a man with a strong nose is supposed to have a strong will or a strong mental personality,— though I don't know whether it is invariably true. But the vital physical? Of course the nose is the passage of the Prana and the Prana is the support of the vital physical.

*

The working on the lower part of the face always indicates an action on the externalising mind (physical mental) whose centre is in the throat.

*

The neck and throat and the lower part of the face belong to the externalising mind, the physical mental. The forehead to the inner Mind. Above the head are the higher planes of Mind.

*

The organ of speech is an instrument of the physical mental or expressive externalising mind.

The Chest, Stomach and Abdomen

It is because the centre of your difficulties has been there [*in the chest and stomach*]. The chest = the emotional nature exposed to wrong feelings; the stomach = the dynamic vital centre, exposed to wrong desires, ambitions, sense of possession and vital ego etc. But all that will progressively become things of the past, when the Peace, the Presence, the inner happiness increase and take possession of the external nature.

*

Yogically, psycho-physically etc. etc. stomach, heart and intestine lodge the vital movements, *not* the physical consciousness — it is there that anger, fear, love, hate and all the other psychological privileges of the animal tumble about and upset the physical and moral digestion. The Muladhara is the seat of the physical consciousness proper.

*

As for the lower part of the body, it is the physical and external vital that it represents at present and that has still to be penetrated and held by the Force. But the conditions under which it can be done are growing more complete. The physical opening needs a great quietude which replaces the tamasic inertia of body

nature by a true peace. Then all else can be done.

The Legs and Feet

It is the material consciousness that is indicated by the legs and feet. Below the feet is the subconscious. There is no big centre below the Muladhara in the body, but there are minor centres everywhere.

*

The leg indicates the physical (material) consciousness. All below the Muladhara is the range of the physical consciousness proper including the mental physical, vital physical, material physical. This [*aspiration rising from the legs*] would indicate therefore an aspiration from Matter (bodily Matter).

The Sides of the Body

The two sides of the body are supposed to represent two different sides of the being, the side of consciousness and knowledge and the side of force and action. The feeling you had at meditation may have been the sense of the removal of some veil of obscurity covering the mind — the head from the crown to the throat being the seat of the thinking mind.

*

It is usually supposed that the left is the side of power, the right of knowledge.

The ascent from below [*the left foot*] means of course the material and subconscious calling down the higher power — and it is true that there is a correspondence between the depth from which the ascension goes and the height from which the power from above comes.

Part Three

The Evolutionary Process and the Supermind

Section One

The Supramental Evolution

Chapter One

The Problem of Suffering and Evil

The Riddle of This World

It is not to be denied, no spiritual experience will deny that this is an unideal and unsatisfactory world, strongly marked with the stamp of inadequacy, suffering, evil. Indeed this perception is in a way almost the starting-point of the spiritual urge — except for the few to whom the greater experience comes spontaneously without being forced to seek it by the strong or overwhelming, the afflicting and detaching sense of the Shadow overhanging the whole range of this manifested existence. But still the question remains whether this is indeed, as is contended, the essential character of all manifestation or so long at least as there is a physical world it must be of this nature, so that the desire of birth, the will to manifest or create has to be regarded as the original sin and withdrawal from birth or manifestation as the sole possible way of salvation. For those who perceive it so or with some kindred look — and these have been the majority — there are well-known ways of issue, a straight-cut to spiritual deliverance. But equally it may not be so but only seem so to our ignorance or to a partial knowledge — the imperfection, the evil, the suffering may be a besetting circumstance or a dolorous passage, but not the very condition of manifestation, not the very essence of birth in Nature. And if so, the highest wisdom will lie not in escape, but in the urge towards a victory here, in a consenting association with the Will behind the world, in a discovery of the spiritual gate to perfection which will be at the same time an opening for the entire descent of the Divine Light, Knowledge, Power, Beatitude.

All spiritual experience affirms that there is a Permanent above the transience of this manifested world we live in and this limited consciousness in whose narrow borders we grope and struggle, and that its characters are infinity, self-existence,

freedom, absolute Light, absolute Beatitude. Is there then an unbridgeable gulf between that which is beyond and that which is here or are they two perpetual opposites and only by leaving this adventure in Time behind, by overleaping the gulf can men reach the Eternal? That is what seems to be at the end of one line of experience which has been followed to its rigorous conclusion by Buddhism and a little less rigorously by a certain type of Monistic spirituality which admits some connection of the world with the Divine, but still opposes them in the last resort to each other as truth and illusion. But there is also this other and indubitable experience that the Divine is here in everything as well as above and behind everything, that all is in That and is That when we go back from its appearance to its Reality. It is a significant and illuminating fact that the knower of Brahman even moving and acting in this world, even bearing all its shocks, can live in some absolute peace, light and beatitude of the Divine. There is then something here other than that mere trenchant opposition,—there is a mystery, a problem which one would think must admit of some less desperate solution. This spiritual possibility points beyond itself and brings a ray of hope into the darkness of our fallen existence.

And at once a first question arises—is this world an unchanging succession of the same phenomena always or is there in it an evolutionary urge, an evolutionary fact, a ladder of ascension somewhere from an original apparent Inconscience to a more and more developed consciousness, from each development still ascending, emerging on highest heights not yet within our normal reach? If so, what is the sense, the fundamental principle, the logical issue of that progression? Everything seems to point to such a progression as a fact—to a spiritual and not merely a physical evolution. Here too there is a justifying line of spiritual experience in which we discover that the Inconscience from which all starts is apparent only, for in it there is an involved Consciousness with endless possibilities, a consciousness not limited but cosmic and infinite, a concealed and self-imprisoned Divine, imprisoned in Matter but with every potentiality held in its secret depths. Out of this

apparent Inconscience each potentiality is revealed in its turn, first organised Matter concealing the indwelling Spirit, then Life emerging in the plant and associated in the animal with a growing Mind, then Mind itself evolved and organised in Man. This evolution, this spiritual progression — does it stop short here in the imperfect mental being called Man? Or is the secret of it simply a succession of rebirths whose only purpose or issue is to labour towards the point at which it can learn its own futility, renounce itself and take its leap into some original unborn Existence or Non-Existence? There is at least the possibility, there comes at a certain point the certitude that there is a far greater consciousness than what we call Mind, and that by ascending the ladder still farther we can find a point at which the hold of the material Inconscience, the vital and mental Ignorance ceases; a principle of consciousness becomes capable of manifestation which liberates not partially, not imperfectly, but radically and wholly this imprisoned Divine. In this vision each stage of evolution appears as due to the descent of a higher and higher Power of consciousness, raising the terrestrial level, creating a new stratum, but the highest yet remain to descend and it is by their descent that the riddle of terrestrial existence will receive its solution and not only the soul but Nature herself find her deliverance. This is the Truth which has been seen in flashes, in more and more entirety of its terms by the line of seers whom the Tantra would call the hero-seekers and the divine seekers and which may now be nearing the point of readiness for its full revelation and experience. Then whatever be the heavy weight of strife and suffering and darkness in the world, yet if there is this as its high result awaiting us, all that has gone before may not be counted too great a price by the strong and adventurous for the glory that is to come. At any rate the shadow lifts; there is a Divine Light that leans over the world and is not only a far-off incommunicable Lustre.

It is true that the problem still remains why all this that yet is should have been necessary — those crude beginnings, this long, dark and stormy passage — why should the heavy and tedious price be demanded, why should evil and suffering ever have been

there? For to the how of the fall into the Ignorance as opposed to the why, as to the effective cause, there is a substantial agreement in all spiritual experience. It is the division, the separation, the principle of isolation from the Permanent and One that brought it about; it is because the ego set up for itself in the world affirming its own desire and self-affirmation in preference to its unity with the Divine and its oneness with all; it is because instead of the one supreme Force, Wisdom, Light determining the harmony of all forces each Idea, Force, Form of things was allowed to work itself out as far as it could in the mass of infinite possibilities by its separate will and inevitably in the end by conflict with others. Division, ego, the imperfect consciousness and groping and struggle of a separate self-affirmation are the effective cause of the suffering and ignorance of this world. Once consciousnesses separated from the One Consciousness, they fell inevitably into ignorance and the last result of ignorance was Inconscience; from a dark immense Inconscient this material world arises and out of it a soul that by evolution is struggling into consciousness, attracted towards the hidden Light, ascending but still blindly towards the lost Divinity from which it came.

But why should this have happened at all? One common way of putting the question and answering it ought to be eliminated from the first,—the human way and its ethical revolt and reprobation, its emotional outcry. For it is not, as some religions suppose, a supra-cosmic, arbitrary, personal Deity himself altogether uninvolved in the fall who has imposed evil and suffering on creatures made capriciously by his fiat. The Divine we know is an Infinite Being in whose infinite manifestation these things have come—it is the Divine itself that is here, behind us, pervading the manifestation, supporting the world with its oneness; it is the Divine that is in us upholding itself the burden of the fall and its dark consequence. If above it stands for ever in its perfect Light, Bliss and Peace, it is also here; its Light, Bliss and Peace are secretly here supporting all; in ourselves there is a spirit, a central presence greater than the series of surface personalities which, like the supreme Divine itself, is not overborne by the

fate they endure. If we find out this Divine within us, if we know ourselves as this spirit which is of one essence and being with the Divine, that is our gate of deliverance and in it we can remain ourselves even in the midst of this world's disharmonies, luminous, blissful and free. That much is the age-old testimony of spiritual experience.

But still what is the purpose and origin of the disharmony — why came this division and ego, this world of a painful evolution? Why must this evil and sorrow enter into the divine Good, Bliss and Peace? It is hard to answer to the human intelligence on its own level, for the consciousness to which the origin of this phenomenon belongs and to which it stands as it were automatically justified in a supra-intellectual knowledge, is a cosmic and not an individualised human intelligence; it sees in larger spaces, it has another vision and cognition, other terms of consciousness than human reason and feeling. To the human mind one might answer that while in itself the Infinite might be free from those perturbations, yet once manifestation began infinite possibility also began and among the infinite possibilities which it is the function of the universal manifestation to work out, the negation, the apparent effective negation — with all its consequences — of the Power, Light, Peace, Bliss was very evidently one. If it is asked why even if possible it should have been accepted, the answer nearest to the Cosmic Truth which the human intelligence can make is that in the relations or in the transition of the Divine in the Oneness to the Divine in the Many, this ominous possible became at a certain point an inevitable. For once it appears it acquires for the Soul descending into evolutionary manifestation an irresistible attraction which creates the inevitability — an attraction which in human terms on the terrestrial level might be interpreted as the call of the unknown, the joy of danger and difficulty and adventure, the will to attempt the impossible, to work out the incalculable, the will to create the new and uncreated with one's own self and life as the material, the fascination of contradictions and their difficult harmonisation — these things translated into another supraphysical, superhuman consciousness, higher and wider than the mental, were the temptation that

led to the fall. For to the original being of light on the verge of the descent the one thing unknown was the depths of the abyss, the possibilities of the Divine in the Ignorance and Inconscience. On the other side from the Divine Oneness a vast acquiescence, compassionate, consenting, helpful, a supreme knowledge that this thing must be, that having appeared it must be worked out, that its appearance is in a certain sense part of an incalculable infinite wisdom, that if the plunge into Night was inevitable the emergence into a new unprecedented Day was also a certitude, and that only so could a certain manifestation of the Supreme Truth be effected — by a working out with its phenomenal opposites as the starting-point of the evolution, as the condition laid down for a transforming emergence. In this acquiescence was embraced too the will of the great Sacrifice, the descent of the Divine itself into the Inconscience to take up the burden of the Ignorance and its consequences, to intervene as the Avatar and the Vibhuti walking between the double sign of the Cross and the victory towards the fulfilment and deliverance. A too imaged rendering of the inexpressible Truth? but without images how to present to the intellect a mystery far beyond it? It is only when one has crossed the barrier of the limited intelligence and shared in the cosmic experience and the knowledge which sees things from identity that the supreme realities which lie behind these images — images corresponding to the terrestrial fact — assume their divine forms and are felt as simple, natural, implied in the essence of things. It is by entering into that greater consciousness alone that one can grasp the inevitability of its self-creation and its purpose.

This is indeed only the Truth of the manifestation as it presents itself to the consciousness when it stands on the border line between Eternity and the descent into Time where the relation between the One and the Many in the evolution is self-determined, a zone where all that is to be is implied but not yet in action. But the liberated consciousness can rise higher where the problem exists no longer and from there see it in the light of a supreme identity where all is predetermined in the automatic self-existent truth of things and self-justified to an absolute

consciousness and wisdom and absolute Delight which is behind all creation and non-creation and the affirmation and negation are both seen with the eyes of the ineffable Reality that delivers and reconciles them. But that knowledge is not expressible to the human mind; its language of light is too undecipherable, the light itself too bright for a consciousness accustomed to the stress and obscurity of the cosmic riddle and too entangled in it to follow the clue or to grasp the secret. In any case, it is only when we rise in the spirit beyond the zone of the darkness and the struggle that we enter into the full significance of it and there is a deliverance of the soul from its enigma. To rise to that height of liberation is the true way out and the only means of the indubitable knowledge.

But that liberation and transcendence need not necessarily impose a disappearance, a sheer dissolving cut from the manifestation; it can prepare a liberation into action of the highest Knowledge and an intensity of Power that can transform the world and fulfil the evolutionary urge. It is an ascent from which the return is no longer a fall but a winged or self-sustained descent of light, force and Ananda.

It is what is inherent in force of being that manifests as becoming; but what the manifestation shall be, its terms, its balance of energies, its arrangement of principles depends on the consciousness which acts in the creative force, on the power of consciousness which being delivers from itself for manifestation. It is in the nature of being to be able to grade and vary its powers of consciousness and determine according to the grade and variation its world or its degree and scope of self-revelation. The manifested creation is limited by the power to which it belongs and sees and lives according to it and can only see more, live more powerfully, change its world by opening or rising towards or making descend a greater power of consciousness that was above it. This is what is happening in the evolution of consciousness in our world, a world of inanimate matter producing under the stress of this necessity a power of life, a power of mind which bring into it new forms of creation and still labouring to produce, to make descend into it some

supramental power. It is farther an operation of creative force which moves between two poles of consciousness. On one side there is a secret consciousness within and above which contains in it all potentialities — there eternally manifest, here awaiting delivery — of light, peace, power and bliss. On the other side there is another outward on the surface and below that starts from the apparent opposite of unconsciousness, inertia, blind stress, possibility of suffering and grows by receiving into itself higher and higher powers which make it always recreate its manifestation in larger terms, each new-creation of this kind bringing out something of the inner potentiality, making it more and more possible to bring down the Perfection that waits above. At last the line will be crossed that will make possible the entire reversion and the manifestation in the terms of ensouled Matter of That which is above. As long as the outward personality we call ourselves is centred in the lower powers of consciousness, the riddle of its own existence, its purpose, its necessity is to it an insoluble enigma; if something of the truth is at all conveyed to this outward mental man, he but imperfectly grasps it and perhaps misinterprets and misuses and mislives it. His true staff of walking is made more of a fire of faith than any ascertained and indubitable light of knowledge. It is only by rising toward a higher consciousness beyond the line and therefore superconscious now to him that he can emerge from his inability and his ignorance. His full liberation and enlightenment will come when he crosses the line into the light of a new superconscious existence. That is the transcendence which was the object of aspiration of the mystics and the spiritual seekers.

But in itself this would change nothing in the creation here; the evasion of a liberated soul from the world makes to that world no difference. But this crossing of the line if turned not only to an ascending but to a descending purpose would mean the transformation of the line from what it now is, a lid, a barrier, into a passage for the higher powers of consciousness of the Being now above it. It would mean a new creation on earth, a bringing in of the ultimate powers which would reverse the conditions here, in as much as that would produce a creation

raised into the full flood of spiritual and supramental light in place of one emerging into a half-light of mind out of a darkness of material unconsciousness. It is only in such a full flood of the realised spirit that the embodied being could know, in the sense of all that was involved in it, the meaning and temporary necessity of his descent into the darkness and its conditions and at the same time dissolve them by a luminous transmutation into a manifestation here of the revealed and no longer of the veiled and disguised or apparently deformed Divine.

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I suppose you have not read my “Riddle of This World”,¹ but it is a similar solution I put there. X’s way of putting it is a trifle too “Vedantic-Theistic”—in my view it is a transaction between the One and the Many. In the beginning it was you (not the human you who is now complaining but the central being) which accepted or even invited the adventure of the Ignorance; sorrow and struggle are a necessary consequence of the plunge into the Inconscience and the evolutionary emergence out of it. The explanation is that it had an object, the eventual play of the Divine Consciousness and Ananda not in its original transcendence but under conditions for which the plunge into the Inconscience was necessary. It is fundamentally a cosmic problem and can be understood only from the cosmic consciousness. If you want a solution which will be agreeable to the human mind and feelings, I am afraid there is none. No doubt if human beings had made the universe, they would have done much better; but they were not there to be consulted when they were made. Only your central being was there and that was much nearer in its temerarious foolhardiness to Vivekananda’s or X’s than to the repining prudence of your murmuring and trembling human mentality of the present moment—otherwise it would never have come down into the adventure. Or perhaps it did not realise what it was in for? It is the same with the wallowers

¹ *The preceding letter was published under the heading “The Riddle of This World” in a book of the same name in 1933.—Ed.*

under their cross. Even now they wallow because something in them likes the wallowing and bears the cross because something in them chooses to suffer. So?

The Disharmonies of Earth

That brings me to your second question² about the missing Harmony and the actual disharmonies of earth, a dissonance out of which like most people you build a justification for a saving flight towards Nirvana,— although in the true theory of Mayavada harmony and disharmony are of equal value or rather equal non-value: for the glory of Heaven and the joy of the gods are as much an illusion and, if anything, a greater illusion than any ugliness of life or redundancy of human suffering. But I agree with you that disharmony is what is the matter with the world here and it is harmony that is the one thing desirable. Then the whole question is whether harmony is intended to be found or not or whether the very nature and condition and grain of life is a disharmony that, because the very root of life is ego and division, is incurable. The Mayavadin contends that it is; Buddha also decided that the only way out of suffering and disharmony was out of life into the permanence or perhaps the nothingness of Nirvana. But the question is whether what is now is the base of existence or only a temporary phase of existence here. Is life radically just an expression of ego and division? and is there nothing else, is there not behind it the unity of the Divine? and cannot it be brought out,— cannot we get rid in the end of the little things on the surface and express these greater things behind it? If, as spiritual experience shows us, the unity of the Divine is there at the very base and if as both ancient and modern knowledge declare, there has been a spiritual evolution from down upwards,— though the modern speaks only of an evolution of the body with the consciousness

² *The first question of the correspondent concerned “the results of the manifestation of a new supramental principle in the earth-consciousness”. See Sri Aurobindo’s letters beginning “There is not much profit” and “As I have said” on pages 280–84.—Ed.*

depending on it and the ancient, as in the Tantras, only of a spiritual evolution of the soul from vegetable life-form to the human mind-life,—then there is no reason why this spiritual evolution should not arrive beyond its present incomplete and therefore still disharmonious consciousness in man to its logical consummation, an expression of the Divine. There is not only no reason why it should not, but such an arrival is inevitably pointed to both by the logic of reason and the gaze of intuition. Not only so, but the first step towards solution has been taken by the Yogan's extension of consciousness beyond ego and division; spiritual experience has shown that the embodied soul can arrive beyond ego and division to consciousness governed by the unity of the one Self or the Divine; and the existence of the Jivanmukta proves that one can thus exceed ego and division and yet live and act, so that life in the Divine is not an imagination or a fable.

The ascension above ego and division is no doubt only a first step achieved in rare individuals, but in evolution it is the first step which counts and makes all the rest possible. Also, no doubt, to stand above an egoistic and divided world and act on it from the egoless heights of the spirit is not enough—a power is needed and a process,—the descent of a power that can bring harmony because in its nature it is at once superior, fundamental and comprehensive and a discovery of the process that fits the power. All achievement in embodied life has been made possible by the discovery of the necessary power and the effective process. It must so also be done in the achievement of harmony in a still discordant earth-nature.

Is there any conclusive reason for declaring such an achievement or spiritual evolution impossible? The only argument you advance amounts to this only that it has not been done yet and that shows that it cannot be done. That reasoning has not much value. It is the usual logic of the physical intellect which is bound by what is and believes that to be definitive. It has been used against all new or yet unaccomplished ideas or achievements and, when they have been accomplished, still urged against their successors. The physical mind always comes in with its fixed line

of the present and “No farther” and when the fixed line of the present is unfixed and overpassed, it again erects a new line and cries “No farther”. If an “elemental” who had attained to the physical mind had been present at the different stages of the earth-history he would have argued like that. When only matter was there and there was no life, if told that there would soon be life on earth embodied in matter, he would have cried out, “What is that? It is impossible, it cannot be done. Life is possible only in a subtle body. It has never been and never will be embodied in gross matter. What, this mass of electrons, gases, chemical elements, this heap of mud and water and stones and inert metals, how are you going to get life in that? Will the metal walk? can the stone live? will you take mud and water and make out of it a body that can move, feel, act, desire?” But life came in spite of the impossibility and living forms were developed—plant and tree and living bodies were built out of the protoplasm and molecule; some ingenious force or being evolved slowly out of that through millions of years with an amazing patience, using chemical and biological elements alike, gene and gland and heart and brain and nerve and cell and living tissue and the animal walked and bounded and man arose evolving through tens of thousands, perhaps millions of years in the body of an erect two-footed animal. There again the physical-minded elemental would have intervened and cried out, “What is this that is being attempted? No, no, impossible. Such a thing has never been done. Reflexes, memories, associations, instinctive combinations of life and action, these things of course are possible; but reason, intelligent will, conscious planning and creation, art, poetry, philosophy in this savage shambling creature? An animal cannot evolve powers and activities which have never been possessed except by the gods and the Asuras. How can this material animal organism ever be capable of such a [*incomplete*]

Chapter Two

Spiritual Evolution and the Supramental

Human History and Spiritual Evolution

There have been times when the seeking for spiritual attainment was, at least in certain civilisations, more intense and widespread than now or rather than it has been in the world in general during the past few centuries. For now the curve seems to be the beginning of a new turn of seeking which takes its start from what was achieved in the past and projects itself towards a greater future. But always, even in the age of the Vedas or in Egypt, the spiritual achievement or the occult knowledge was confined to a few; it was not spread in the whole mass of humanity. The mass of humanity evolves slowly, containing in itself all stages of the evolution from the material and the vital man to the mental man. A small minority has pushed beyond the barriers, opening the doors to occult and spiritual knowledge and preparing the ascent of the evolution beyond mental man into spiritual and supramental being. Sometimes this minority has exercised an enormous influence as in Vedic India, Egypt or, according to tradition, in Atlantis, and determined the civilisation of the race, giving it a strong stamp of the spiritual or the occult; sometimes they have stood apart in their secret schools or orders, not directly influencing a civilisation which was sunk in material ignorance or in chaos and darkness or in the hard external enlightenment which rejects spiritual knowledge.

The cycles of evolution tend always upward, but they are cycles and do not ascend in a straight line. The process therefore gives the impression of a series of ascents and descents, but what is essential in the gains of the evolution is kept or, even if eclipsed for a time, reemerges in new forms suitable to the new ages.

The Creation has descended all the degrees of being from

the Supermind to Matter and in each degree it has created a world, reign, plane or order proper to that degree. In the creating of the material world there was a plunge of this descending Consciousness into an apparent Inconscience and an emergence of it out of that Inconscience, degree by degree, until it recovers its own highest spiritual and supramental summits and manifests their powers here in Matter. But even in the Inconscience there is a secret Consciousness which works, one may say, by an involved and hidden Intuition proper to itself. In each stage of Matter, in each stage of Life, this Intuition assumes a working proper to that stage and acts from behind the veil, supporting and enforcing the immediate necessities of the creative Force. There is an intuition in Matter which holds the action of the material Energy together and dictates the organisation of the material world from the electron to the sun and planet and their contents. There is an intuition in Life which similarly supports and guides the play and development of life in matter till it is ready for the mental evolution of which man is the vehicle. In man also the creation follows the same upward process,— the intuition within develops according to the stage he has reached in his progress. Even the precise intellect of the scientist, who is inclined to deny the separate existence or the superiority of intuition, yet cannot really move forward unless there is behind him a mental intuition which enables him to take a forward step or to divine what has to be done. Intuition therefore is present at the beginning of things and in their middle as well as at their consummation.

But Intuition takes its proper form only when one goes beyond the mental into the spiritual domain, for there only it comes fully forward from behind the veil and reveals its true and complete nature. Along with the mental evolution of man there has been going forward the early process of another evolution which prepares the spiritual and supramental being. This has had two lines, one the discovery of the occult forces secret in Nature and of the hidden planes and worlds concealed from us by the world of Matter and the other the discovery of man's soul and spiritual self. If the tradition of Atlantis is correct, it is that

of a progress which went to the extreme of occult knowledge but could go no farther. In the India of Vedic times we have the record left of the other line of achievement, that of spiritual self-discovery; occult knowledge was there but kept subordinate. We may say that here in India the reign of Intuition came first, intellectual Mind developing afterwards in the later philosophy and science. But in fact the mass of men at the time, it is quite evident, lived entirely on the material plane, worshipped the Godheads of material nature, sought from them entirely material objects. The effort of the Vedic mystics revealed to them the things behind through a power of inner sight and hearing and experience which was confined to a limited number of seers and sages and kept carefully secret from the mass of humanity — secrecy was always insisted on by the mystics. We may very well attribute this flowering of intuition on the spiritual plane to a rapid reemergence of the essential gains brought down from a previous cycle. If we analyse the spiritual history of India we shall find that after reaching this height there was a descent which attempted to take up each lower degree of the already evolved consciousness and link it to the spiritual at the summit. The Vedic age was followed by a great outburst of intellectual philosophy which yet took spiritual truth as its basis and tried to reach it anew, not through a direct intuitive or occult process as did the Vedic seers, but by the power of the mind's reflective, speculative, logical thought; at the same time processes of Yoga were developed which used the thinking mind as a means of arriving at spiritual realisation, spiritualising this mind itself at the same time. Then followed an era of the development of philosophies and Yoga processes which more and more used the emotional and aesthetic being as the means of spiritual realisation and spiritualised the emotional level in man through the heart and feeling. This was accompanied by Tantric and other processes which took up the mental will, the life-will, the life of sensations and made them at once the instruments and the field of spiritualisation. In Hathayoga and in the various attempts at divinisation of the body there is also a line of endeavour which attempted to arrive at the same achievement with regard

to living matter; but this still awaits the discovery of the true characteristic method and power of spirit in the body. We may say therefore that the universal Consciousness after its descent into Matter has conducted the evolution there along two lines, one of ascent to the discovery of the self and spirit, the other of descent through the already evolved levels of mind, life and body so as to bring down the spiritual consciousness into these also and to fulfil thereby some secret intention in the creation of the material universe. Our Yoga is in its principle a taking up and summarising and completing of this process, an endeavour to rise to the highest possible supramental level and bring down its consciousness and powers into mind, life and body.

The condition of present-day civilisation, materialistic with an externalised intellect and life-endeavour, which you find so painful, is an episode, but one which was perhaps inevitable. For if the spiritualisation of mind, life and body is the thing to be achieved, the conscious presence of the Spirit even in the physical consciousness and material body, an age which puts Matter and the physical life in the forefront and devotes itself to the effort of the intellect to discover the truth of material existence, had perhaps to come. On one side, by materialising everything up to intellect itself it has created the extreme difficulty of which you speak for the spiritual seeker; but on the other hand it has given the life in Matter an importance which the spirituality of the past was inclined to deny to it. In a way it has made the spiritualisation of it a necessity for spiritual seeking and so aided the descent movement of the evolving spiritual Consciousness in the earth-nature. More than that we cannot claim for it; its conscious effect has been rather to stifle and almost extinguish the spiritual element in humanity; it is only by the divine use of the pressure of contraries and an intervention from above that there will be the greater spiritual outcome.

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All the phases of human history may be regarded as a working out of the earth-consciousness in which each phase has its place and significance, so this materialistic-intellectual phase had to

come and has had, no doubt, its purpose and significance. One may also hold that one of its uses was as an experiment to see how far and whither the human consciousness would go through an intellectual and external control of Nature with physical and intellectual means only and without the intervention of any higher consciousness and knowledge—or that it may help by resistance to draw the spiritual consciousness that is growing behind all vicissitudes to attempt the control of Matter and turn it towards the Divine, as the Tantriks and Vaishnavas tried to do with the emotional and lower vital nature, not contenting themselves with the Vedantic turning of the mind towards the Supreme. But it is difficult to go farther than that or to hold that this materialism is itself a spiritual thing or that the dark, confused and violent state of contemporary Europe was an indispensable preparation for the descent of the Spirit. This darkness and violence which seems bent on destroying such light of mental idealism and desire of harmony as had succeeded in establishing itself in the mind of humanity, is obviously due to a descent of fierce and dark vital Powers which seek to possess the human world for their own, not for a spiritual purpose. It is true that such a precipitation of Asuric forces from the darker vital worlds has been predicted by some occultists as one first result of the pressure of the Divine Descent on their vital domain, but it was regarded as a circumstance of the battle, not as something helping towards the Divine Victory. The churning of Matter by the attempt of the human intellect to conquer material Nature and use it for its purposes may break something in the passivity and inertia, but it is done for material ends, in a rajasic spirit, with a denial of spirituality as its mental basis. Such an attempt may end, seems to be ending indeed in chaos and a disintegration, while the new attempts at creation and reintegration seem to combine the obscure rigidity of material Nature with a resurgence of the barbaric brutality and violence of a half animal vital Nature. How are the spiritual Forces to deal with all that or make use of such a churning of the energies of the material universe? The way of the Spirit is the way of peace and light and harmony; if it has to battle it is precisely because of the presence

of such forces which seek either to extinguish or to pervert the spiritual light. In the spiritual change inertia has to be replaced by the divine peace and calm, the rajasic troubled energy by a tranquil and potent, pure and liberated dynamis, while the mind must be kept plastic for the workings of a higher Light of Knowledge. How will the activity of Materialism lend itself to that change?

Materialism can hardly be spiritual in its basis because its basic method is just the opposite of the spiritual way of doing things. The spiritual works from within outward, the way of materialism is to work from out inwards. It makes the inner a result of the outer, fundamentally a phenomenon of Matter and it works upon that view of things. It seeks to "perfect" humanity by outward means and one of its main efforts is to construct a perfect social machine which will train and oblige men to be what they ought to be. The loss of the ego in the Divine is the spiritual ideal; here it is replaced by the immolation of the individual to the military and industrial State. Where is there any spirituality in all that? Spirituality can only come by opening of the mind, vital and physical to the inmost soul, to the higher Self, to the Divine, and their subordination to the spiritual forces and instrumentation as channels of the inner light, the higher Knowledge and Power. Other things, mental, aesthetic, vital, are often misnamed spirituality, but they lack that essential character without which the word loses its true significance.

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All that you say only amounts, on the general issue, to the fact that this is a world of slow evolution in which man has emerged out of the beast and is still not out of it, light out of darkness, a higher consciousness out of first a dead and then a struggling and troubled unconsciousness. A spiritual consciousness is emerging and it is through this spiritual consciousness that one can meet the Divine. Religions, full of mental and vital mixed, troubled and ignorant stuff, can only get glimpses of the Divine; positivist reason with its questioning based upon things as they are and refusing to believe in anything that may or will be cannot get

any vision of it at all. The spiritual is a new consciousness that has to evolve and has been evolving. It is quite natural that at first and for a long time only a few should get the full light, while a greater number but still only a few compared with the mass of humanity, should get it partially. But what has been gained by the few can at a stage of the evolution be completed and more generalised and that is the attempt which we are making. But if this greater consciousness of light, peace and joy is to be gained, it cannot be by questioning and scepticism which can only fall back on what is and say, "It is impossible, impossible — what has not been in the past cannot be in the future; what is so imperfectly realised as yet, cannot be better realised in the future." A faith, a will or at least a persistent demand and aspiration are needed — a feeling that with this and this alone I can be satisfied and a push towards it that will not cease till it is done. That is why a spirit of denial and scepticism stands in the way, because they stand against the creation of the conditions under which spiritual experience can unroll itself. In the absence of faith and firm will to achieve, the Divine has to manifest in conditions which are the most adverse to that manifestation. It can be done, but you cannot expect it to be easily done.

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I do not know what Mahatma Gandhi means by complete realisation.¹ If he means a realisation with nothing more to realise, no farther development possible, then I agree — I have myself spoken of farther divine progression, an infinite development. But the question is not that; the question is whether the Ignorance can be transcended, whether a complete essential realisation turning the consciousness from darkness to light, from an instrument of the Ignorance seeking for Knowledge into an instrument or rather a manifestation of Knowledge proceeding to greater

¹ These observations were made with regard to a statement by Mahatma Gandhi: "I hold that complete realisation is impossible in this embodied life. Nor is it necessary. A living immovable faith is all that is required for reaching the full spiritual height attainable by human beings." This statement appeared in an article submitted to Sri Aurobindo by the correspondent.—Ed.

Knowledge, Light enlarging, heightening into greater Light, is or is not possible. My view is that this conversion is not only possible, but inevitable in the spiritual evolution of the being here. The embodiment of life has nothing to do with it. This embodiment is not of life, but of consciousness and its energy, of which life is only one phase or force. As life has developed mind, and the embodiment has modified itself to suit this development (mind is precisely the main instrument of ignorance seeking for knowledge), so mind can develop supermind which is in its nature knowledge not seeking for itself, but manifesting itself by its own automatic power, and the embodiment can again modify itself or be modified from above so as to suit this development. Faith is a necessary means for arriving at realisation because we are ignorant and do not yet know that which we are seeking to realise; faith is indeed knowledge giving the ignorance an intimation of itself previous to its own manifestation, it is the gleam sent before by the yet unrisen Sun. When the Sun shall rise there will be no longer any need of the gleam. The supramental knowledge supports itself, it does not need to be supported by faith; it lives by its own certitude. You may say that farther progression, farther development will need faith. No, for the farther development will proceed on a basis of knowledge, not of Ignorance. We shall walk in the light of knowledge towards its own wider vistas of self-fulfilment.

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I do not see what answer you can give to your uncle that would satisfy him, as he is evidently living in the mentality of the past and would not readily understand anything about spiritual evolution, the supermind and the Divine Manifestation in life and matter. You can perhaps tell him casually that it is not our hope to transform suddenly the whole human race. Your object is precisely to lead a higher life away from the ordinary world, only it is not solitary; there is a collective side to it and a side, not only of meditation, but of work, action and creation. There is nothing in this that is impossible.

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It is quite possible that there have been periods of harmony on different levels, not supramental, which were afterwards disturbed—but those could only be a stage or resting place in a world of spiritual evolution out of the Ignorance.

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This is a world of evolution in Matter. If everything were supramental from the beginning, there would be no place for evolution.

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The evolution I speak of is not the evolution of the Darwinian theory.

Spiritual and Supramental

Spiritual and supramental are not the same thing. The spiritual planes from higher mind to Overmind are accessible to the old sadhanas so there is no difficulty about that. If they were not accessible there would have been no Yoga at all and no Yogis in the past in India.

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If spiritual and supramental were the same thing, as you say my readers imagine, then all the sages and devotees and Yogis and sadhaks throughout the ages would have been supramental beings and all I have written about the supermind would be so much superfluous stuff, useless and otiose. Anybody who had spiritual experiences would then be a supramental being; the Asram would be chock-full of supramental beings and every other Asram in India also. Spiritual experiences can fix themselves in the inner consciousness and alter it, transform it, if you like; one can realise the Divine everywhere, the Self in all and all in the Self, the universal Shakti doing all things; one can feel merged in the Cosmic Self or full of ecstatic bhakti or Ananda. But one may and usually does still go on in the outer active parts of Nature thinking with the intellect or at best

the intuitive mind, willing with a mental will, feeling joy and sorrow on the vital surface, undergoing physical afflictions and suffering the struggle of life in the body with death and disease. The change then only will be that the inner self will watch all that without getting disturbed or bewildered, with a perfect equality, taking it as an inevitable part of Nature, inevitable at least so long as one does not withdraw to the Self out of Nature. That is not the transformation I envisage. It is quite another power of knowledge, another kind of will, another luminous nature of emotion and aesthesis, another constitution of the physical consciousness that must come in by the supramental change.

*

Spiritual realisation can be had on any plane by contact with the Divine (who is everywhere) or by perception of the Self within, which is pure and untouched by the outer movements. The Supermind is something transcendent—a dynamic Truth consciousness which is not here yet and has to be brought down from above.

The Overmind and the Supramental

There are many aspects of the Divine and of existence manifested as separate by the Overmind. Different minds are drawn by different aspects and each follows its own path to its own goal. Each is free to follow its own path and is not bound by another.

As for the Supramental, it is by definition a consciousness above the Overmind in which all aspects are infused in the integral Divine. But none is bound to seek after the Supramental consciousness if his tendency is elsewhere.

The manifestation is complex and there are beings in it who belong to various levels. If a soul wishes to plunge into the Divine through Nirvana or seeks spiritual fulfilment in a world of the Gods, such as Vaikuntha or Goloka, it has the freedom to do so, to follow its own tendency.

The discovery of the Supramental is especially important for the spiritual evolution on the earth. If the souls here have to reach

it eventually, no doubt the Divine will evolve them to seek it. There is nothing compelling all to reach it by a progress towards it in direct line or by the same path and stages. It is possible for them to be satisfied with another path and intermediary partial fulfilment. If it is their destiny, they may return afterwards to pursue the further ascent to the Supramental level.

The Gita accepted the current belief that freedom from birth was the consequence of reaching the highest state. It is a natural deduction from the belief that this is not only a world of Ignorance but cannot be ever anything else.

*

Yes, there has been some progress in that respect [*psychicisation*] and all progress in the psychic or spiritual consciousness of the sadhaks makes the descent more easy. But the main cause [*of the descent of Light and Power*] is that the Overmind principle which is the immediate secret support of the present earth-nature with all its limitations is more and more undergoing the pressure of the Supramental and letting through a greater Light and Power. For so long as the Overmind intervenes (the principle of the Overmind being a play of forces, each trying to realise itself as the Truth) the law of struggle remains and with it the opportunity for the adverse Forces.

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It is not immortality *of* the body, but the consciousness of immortality *in* the body that can come with the descent of Overmind into Matter or even into the physical mind or with the touch of the modified Supramental Light on the physical mind-consciousness. These are preliminary openings, but they are not the supramental fulfilment in Matter.

Involution and Evolution

The involution is of the Divine in the Inconscience and it is done by the interposition of intermediate planes (Overmind etc., mind, vital)—then the plunge into the Inconscient which is the

origin of matter. But all that is not a process answering to the evolution in the inverse sense—for there is no need for that, but a gradation of consciousness which is intended to make the evolution upwards possible.

*

Man has evolved from Matter—or rather Nature has evolved first the plant, then the animal, then Man in a regular succession out of Matter. What is involved is not Man, but mind and life and spirit. “Involved” means that they are there even though there seems to be no mental activity (as in the tree) and no mental or vital activity (as in the stone); as the evolution goes on the involved life appears and begins to organise itself and the plants appear and then the animals; next mind, first in the animal, and then man appears.

*

Everything here that belongs strictly to the earth plane is evolved out of the Inconscient, out of Matter—but the essential mental being exists already, not involved on the mental plane. It is only the personal mental that is evolved here by something rising out of the Inconscient and developing under a pressure from above.

*

What is meant here² is the Divine in its essential manifestation which reveals itself to us as Light and Consciousness, Power, Love and Beauty. But in its actual cosmic manifestation the Supreme, being the Infinite and not bound by any limitation, can manifest in itself, in its consciousness of innumerable possibilities, something that seems to be the opposite of itself, something in which there can be Darkness, Inconscience, Inertia, Insensibility, Disharmony and Disintegration. It is this that we see at the basis of the material world and speak of nowadays as the Inconscient—the inconscient Ocean of the Rigveda in which the One was hidden and arose in the form of this Universe,—

² *The statement is not available.—Ed.*

or, as it is sometimes called, the non-being, Asat. The Ignorance which is the characteristic of our mind and life is the result of this origin in the Inconscience. Moreover, in the evolution out of inconscient existence there rise up naturally powers and beings which are interested in the maintenance of all negations of the Divine, error and unconsciousness, pain, suffering, obscurity, death, weakness, illness, disharmony, evil. Hence the perversion of the manifestation here, its inability to reveal the true essence of the Divine. Yet in the very base of this evolution all that is divine is there involved and pressing to evolve, Light, Consciousness, Power, Perfection, Beauty, Love. For in the Inconscient itself and behind the perversions of the Ignorance Divine Consciousness lies concealed and works and must more and more appear, throwing off in the end its disguises. That is why it is said that the world is called to express the Divine.

Your statement about the supramental evolution is correct except that it does not follow that humanity as a whole will become supramental. What is more likely to happen is that the supramental principle will be established in the evolution by the descent just as the mental principle was established by the appearance of thinking Mind and Man in earthly life. There will be a race of supramental beings on the earth just as now there is a race of mental beings. Man himself will find a greater possibility of rising to the planes intermediary between his mind and supermind and making their powers effective in his life, which will mean a great change in humanity on earth, but it is not likely that the mental stage will disappear from the ascending ladder and, if so, the continued existence of a mental race will be necessary so as to form a stage between the vital and the supramental in the evolutionary movement of the spirit.

Such a descent of higher beings as you suggest may be envisaged as a part of the process of the change. But the main part of the change will be the appearance of the supramental being and the organisation of a supramental nature here, as a mental being has appeared and a mental nature organised itself during the last stage of the evolution. I prefer nowadays not to speak of the descent of the higher beings because my experience is that

it leads in the minds of the sadhaks to a vain and often egoistic romanticism which distracts the attention from the real work, that of the realisation of the Divine and the transformation of the nature.

*

In the descent it [*falsehood*] begins with Mind, in the evolutionary ascent it is difficult to say where it begins—for here the beginning is Inconscience and Ignorance; but I suppose we may say that conscious falsehood begins with the beginnings of mind still involved in Life or appearing out of it.

*

An evolution from the Inconscient need not be a painful one if there is no resistance; it can be a deliberately slow and beautiful efflorescence of the Divine. One ought to be able to see how beautiful outward Nature can be and usually is, although it is itself apparently “inconscient”. Why should the growth of consciousness in inward Nature be attended by so much ugliness and evil spoiling the beauty of the outward creation? Because of a *perversity* born from the Ignorance, which came in with Life and increased in Mind—that is the Falsehood, the Evil that was born because of the starkness of the Inconscient’s sleep separating its action from the luminosity of the secret Conscient that was all the time within it. But it need not have been so except for the overriding Will of the Supreme which meant that the possibility of Perversion by inconscience and ignorance should be manifested in order to be eliminated through being given their chance, since all possibility has to manifest somewhere: once it is eliminated, the Divine Manifestation in Matter will be greater than it otherwise could be because it will gather all the possibilities involved in this difficult creation and not some of them as in an easier and less strenuous creation might naturally be.

“From beauty to greater beauty, from joy to intenser joy, by an especial adjustment of the senses”—yes, that would be the normal course of a divine manifestation, however gradual, in

Matter. “Discordant sound and offensive odour” are creations of a disharmony between consciousness and Nature and do not exist in themselves; they would not be present to a liberated and harmonised consciousness for they would be foreign to its being, nor would they afflict a rightly developing harmonised soul and Nature. Even the “belching volcano, crashing thunderstorm and whirling typhoon” are in themselves grandiose and beautiful things and only harmful or horrible to a consciousness unable to meet or deal with them or make a pact with the spirits of the Wind and Fire. You are assuming that the manifestation from the Inconscient must be what it is now and here and that no other kind of world of Matter was possible, but the harmony of material Nature in itself shows that it need not necessarily be a discordant, evil, furiously perturbed and painful creation — the psychic being, if allowed to manifest from the first in Life and lead the evolution instead of being relegated behind the veil, would have been the principle of a harmonious outflowering; everyone who has felt the psychic at work within him, freed from the vital intervention, can at once see that this would be its effect because of its unerring perception, true choice, harmonic action. If it has not been so, it is because the dark Powers have made Life a claimant instead of an instrument. The reality of the Hostiles and the nature of their role and trend of their endeavour cannot be doubted by anyone who has had his inner vision unsealed and made their unpleasant acquaintance.

The Supermind and the Lower Creation

It [*the Supermind*] can act directly on everything if it is brought down into the material consciousness — at present in the arrangement of things here it is latent behind and acts through other media.

*

No, one can't say that [*there is a direct supramental action at work in plants*]. It is the vital force that works, but there is a sort of underlying Intuition in this Life-Force which is behind

the whole action and that is what one might call a reflection or delegated Power at the back of which is latent Supermind.

*

There is no reason why the vegetable, animal and human life should not evolve in the Truth and not in the Ignorance—if once the Knowledge is there in the earth-plane.

Speculations about the Supramental Descent

It is not perhaps very useful to forecast by the mind what will be the precise results of the descent of a supramental consciousness into a world in which up to now the mental intelligence has been the highest evolutionary product and leading power. For the supermind is a consciousness which will work in a very different way from the mind and the lines laid down for it by the latter are not likely to be respected by the greater energy in its self-organisation and operation here.

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There is not much profit in mental and intellectual speculations about what precisely the results would be of the introduction of a supramental principle and a supramental organisation and order in the earth-consciousness and the earth-life. In all probability the speculations would be quite beside the mark or, even where they hit on some broad lines, would draw them wrong and all awry and out of proportion; for the intellectual mind is a different and inferior power of consciousness; it is analytical and synthetic, pulling things to pieces and putting them together in order to understand and deal with them, proceeding by representation and abstraction and formulas and schematic figures; it imposes a rigid logic on an illogical world in order to bring about a fixed and mechanical order; it cuts up, divides, compares, contrasts, confronts one element of existence contradictorily with another; classifies according to similarity and difference. In the end it produces a system of things explained and intelligible; but each such system is only a segment of truth dried up into

a formula. Life compelled into these systems either escapes and flows through its hard set lines and undermines and slowly or quickly upsets or transmogrifies the system till it is no longer what it pretends to be or else it remains fossilised and cramped within until it dies or until an explosion of its suppressed forces liberates it into a new order. Supermind is a totally different power. It has a whole-vision and an essential vision; it reposes on an all-seeing authority of Truth which spontaneously produces harmony according to the inner truth of the One and the inner truth of the Many in the One. Out of things that to the mind are opposites and incompatible contrasts it takes in each its essence and joins them harmoniously into a single piece. This it does by raising them beyond their separated appearances and putting them in the light of the one Truth where they can find their reality and their reconciling principle. The things that in the mind are in constant conflict or with only a patched-up truce between them, liberty and order, commonality and individuality and the rest will in supermind find their natural harmony because they are not only indispensable aspects of the essential whole, but themselves one. But for this our existing materials mind, life, body must be supramentalised; otherwise the discordances and oppositions of mind will remain oppositions and discords, the confusions and conflicts of life will remain confused and conflicting, the cramps and limits of form will prevent plastic change, perfection, fulfilment. Mind has failed to liberate and perfect life, because it has imperfectly mentalised life and form, without finding their secret by which they can find themselves and their perfection through a higher light than their own half-conscious self-feeling. Supermind will supramentalise fully mind, life and body and in the very doing of it liberate their own perfection because it is in supermind that the full and perfect secret of mind, life and form are treasured and await their time of descent into terrestrial nature.

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As I have said [*in the preceding letter*], speculation on the results of the manifestation of a new supramental principle in the earth-

consciousness organising itself there as mind, life and matter have already organised themselves—for that is what it comes to—is a little perilous and premature, because we must do it with the mind and the mind has not the capacity to forecast the action of what is above itself—just as a merely animal or vital perception of things could not have forecast what would be the workings of Mind and a mentalised race of beings here. The supermind is a different order of consciousness far removed from the mental—there are in fact several grades of higher consciousness between the human mind and the supramental. If the earth were not evolutionary but a typal world, then indeed one could predict that the descent of a higher type of consciousness would swallow up or abolish the existing type. Ignorance would end and the creation in the ignorance disappear either by transmutation or by annihilation and replacement. The human mental kingdom would be transformed into the supramental; the vital and subhuman, if it existed in the typal world, would also be changed and become supramental. But, earth being an evolutionary world, the supramental descent is not likely to have such a devastating completeness. It would be only the establishment of a new principle of consciousness and a new order of conscious beings and this new principle would evolve its own forms and powers in the terrestrial order. Even the whole human kingdom need not and would not be transformed at once or to the whole supramental extent. But at the same time the beginning of a supramental creation on earth is bound to have a powerful effect on the rest of terrestrial existence. Its first effect on mankind would be to open a way between the order of the Truth-light and the orders of the Ignorance here on earth itself, a sort of realised gradation by which it would be possible for mental man to evolve more easily and surely from the Ignorance towards the Light and, as he went, organise his existence according to these steps. For at present the grades of consciousness between mind and supermind act only as influences (the highest of them very indirect influences) on human mind and consciousness and cannot do more. This would change. An organised higher human consciousness could appear or several degrees

of it, with the supermind-organised consciousness as the leader at the top influencing the others and drawing them towards itself. It is likely that as the supramental principle evolved itself the evolution would more and more take on another aspect — the Daivic nature would predominate, the Asuro-Rakshaso-Pishachic prakriti which now holds so large a place would more and more recede and lose its power. A principle of greater unity, harmony and light would emerge everywhere. It is not that the creation in the Ignorance would be altogether abolished, but it would begin to lose much of its elements of pain and falsehood and would be more a progression from lesser to higher Truth, from a lesser to a higher harmony, from a lesser to a higher Light, than the reign of chaos and struggle, of darkness and error that we now perceive. For according to all occult teaching the evolutionary creation could have been such but for the intervention of the Powers of Darkness — all traditions including that of the Veda and Upanishads point under different figures to the same thing. In the Upanishads it is the Daityas that smite with evil all that the gods create, in the Zoroastrian tradition it is Ahriman coming across the work of Ahura Mazda, the Chaldean tradition uses a different figure. But the significance is the same; it is the perception of something that has struck across the harmonious development of creation and brought in the principle of darkness and disorder. The occult tradition also foresees the elimination of this disturbing element by the descent of a divine Principle or Power on earth, but gives to it usually a sudden and dramatic form. I conceive that the supramental descent would effect the same event by a progressive elimination of the darkness and evolution of the Light, but with what rate of rapidity it would be rash to try to forecast or prefigure.

This is a very general statement, but perhaps it is a sufficient answer to your first question. I need only add that there is nothing to prevent the supramental creation, the creation in the higher Truth-Light from being evolutionary, a continuous efflorescence of the Divine Truth and Harmony in a manifold variety, not a final and decisive creation in a single fixed type. What would be decisive would be the crossing of the border

between twilight and Light, the transference of the base of development from the consciousness in the Ignorance to the Truth-consciousness. That would be, on this level, final. The transition into a world of spirits would only effectuate itself, first, if the whole earth-consciousness became thoroughly supramentalised, secondly, if after that the turn were to a realisation here of the principle of those worlds of Sachchidananda where determination disappears in the interpenetration of All-in-All. But that would be to look too far into the potentialities of the future. In short, if the supramental principle came down it would not be in order to reproduce Heaven here under celestial conditions but to “create a new Heaven and a new earth” in the earth-consciousness itself, completing and transmuting but not abolishing the earth order.

It is evident that the creative process here could be greatly modified and transmuted by the appearance of the supramental principle. What would be its exact forms is a more difficult question, for the principle of a supramental creation is obvious but the possibilities of its manifestation are many and it is only the dynamic Truth itself that can choose and determine.

Section Two

The Supramental Descent and Transformation

Chapter One

The Descent of the Supermind

Inevitability of the Descent

The descent of the supramental is an inevitable necessity in the logic of things and is therefore sure. It is because people do not understand what the supermind is or realise the significance of the emergence of consciousness in a world of “inconscient” Matter that they are unable to realise this inevitability. I suppose a matter-of-fact observer if there had been one at the time of the unrelieved reign of inanimate Matter in the earth’s beginning would have criticised any promise of the emergence of life in a world of dead earth and rock and mineral as an absurdity and a chimaera; so too afterwards he would have repeated his mistake and regarded the emergence of thought and reason in an animal world as an absurdity and a chimaera. It is the same now with the appearance of supermind in the stumbling mentality of this world of human consciousness and its reasoning ignorance.

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If the supramental descent is decreed, nothing can prevent it; but all things are worked out here through a play of forces, and an unfavourable atmosphere or conditions can delay even when they cannot prevent. Even when the thing is destined, it does not present itself as a certitude in the consciousness here (Overmind-mind-vital-physical) till the play of forces has been worked out up to a certain point at which the descent not only is, but appears as inevitable.

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The descent of the supermind is a long process or at least a process with a long preparation and one can only say that the work is going on sometimes with a strong pressure for completion, sometimes retarded by the things that rise from below

and have to be dealt with before farther progress can be made. The process is a (spiritual) evolutionary process concentrated into a brief period—it could be done otherwise (by what men would regard as a miraculous intervention) only if the human mind were more flexible and less attached to its ignorance than it is. As we envisage it, it must manifest in a few first and then spread, but it is not likely to sweep over the earth in a moment. It is not advisable to discuss too much what it will do and how it will do it, because these are things the Supermind itself will fix, acting out of that Divine Truth in it, and the mind must not try to fix for it grooves in which it will run. Naturally, the release from subconscious ignorance and from disease, duration of life at will, and a change in the functioning of the body must be among the ultimate results of a supramental change; but the details of these things must be left for the supramental Energy to work out according to the truth of its own nature.

A Beginning, Not a Completion

What we are doing, if and when we succeed, will be a beginning, not a completion. It is the foundation of a new consciousness on earth—a consciousness with infinite possibilities of manifestation. The eternal progression is in the manifestation and beyond it there is no progression.

If the redemption of the soul from the physical vesture be the object, then there is no need of supramentalisation. Spiritual Mukti and Nirvana are sufficient. If the object is to rise to supra-physical planes, then also there is no need of supramentalisation. One can enter into some heaven above by devotion to the Lord of that heaven. But that is no progression. The other worlds are typal worlds, each fixed in its own kind and type and law. Evolution takes place on the earth and therefore the earth is the proper field for progression. The beings of the other worlds do not progress from one world to another. They remain fixed to their own type.

The purely monistic Vedantist says, all is Brahman, life is a dream, an unreality, only Brahman exists. One has Nirvana or

Mukti, then one lives only till the body falls — after that there is no such thing as life.

They do not believe in transformation, because mind, life and body are an ignorance, an illusion — the only reality is the featureless, relationless Self or Brahman. Life is a thing of relations; in the pure Self, all life and relations disappear. What would be the use or the possibility of transforming an illusion that can never be anything else (however transformed) than an illusion? There is no such thing for them as a “Nirvanic life”.

It is only some Yogas that aim at a transformation of any kind except that of ignorance into knowledge. The idea varies, — sometimes a divine knowledge or power or else a divine purity or an ethical perfection or a divine love.

What has to be overcome is the opposition of the Ignorance that does not want the transformation of the nature. If that can be overcome, then old spiritual ideas will not form an obstacle.

It is not intended to supramentalise humanity at large, but to establish the principle of the supramental consciousness in the earth-evolution. If that is done, all that is needed will be evolved by the supramental Power itself. It is not therefore important that the mission should be widespread. What is important is that the thing should be done at all in however small a number; that is the only difficulty.

If the transformation of the body is complete, that means no subjection to death — it does not mean that one will be bound to keep the same body for all time. One creates a new body for oneself when one wants to change, but how it will be done cannot be said now. The present method is by physical birth — some occultists suppose that a time will come when that is not necessary — but the question must be left for the supramental evolution to decide.

The questions about the supermind cannot be answered profitably now. Supermind cannot be described in terms that the mind will understand, because the terms will be mental and mind will understand them in a mental way and mental sense and miss their true import. It would therefore be a waste of time and energy which should be devoted to the preliminary work

—psychicisation and spiritualisation of the being and nature without which no supramentalisation is possible. Let the whole dynamic nature led by the psychic make itself full of the dynamic spiritual light, peace, purity, knowledge, force; let it afterwards get experience of the intermediate spiritual planes and know, feel and act in their sense; then it will be possible to speak last of the supramental transformation.

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All that [*ideas such as “everything will soon be spiritualised”*] is absurd. The descent of the supramental means only that the Power will be there in the earth consciousness as a living force just as the thinking mental and the higher mental are already there. But an animal cannot take advantage of the presence of the thinking mental Power or an undeveloped man of the presence of the higher mental Power — so too everybody will not be able to take advantage of the presence of the supramental Power. I have also often enough said that it will be at first for the few, not for the whole earth, — only there will be a growing influence of it on the earth life.

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It [*the world*] wants and it does not want something that it has not got. All that the supramental could give, the inner mind of the world would like to have, but its outer mind, its vital and physical do not like to pay the price. But after all I am not trying to change the world all at once but only to bring down centrally something into it it has not yet, a new consciousness and power.

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Not in their entirety [*will cosmic Mind, Life and Matter be transformed*] — for that is not our business. It is ourselves that we have to transform and change the earth consciousness by bringing in the supramental principle into the evolution there. Once there it will necessarily have a powerful influence on the whole earth-life — as mind has had through the evolution of men, but much greater.

*

It is not possible for a force like the Supramental to come down without making a large change in earth conditions. It does not follow that all will become supramentalised and it is not necessary—but mind itself will be influenced as life has been influenced by the development of mind on earth.

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Nothing permanent can be done without the real Supramental Force. But the result of its descent would be that in human life intuition would become a greater and more developed force than it now is and the other intermediate powers between Mind and Supermind would become also more common and develop an organised action.

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It is not for considerations of gain or loss that the Divine Consciousness acts—that is a human standpoint necessary for human development. The Divine, as the Gita says, has nothing to gain and nothing that it has not, yet it puts forth its power of action in the manifestation. It is the earth-consciousness, not the supramental world that has to gain by the descent of the supramental principle—that is sufficient reason for it to descend. The supramental worlds remain as they are and are in no way affected by the descent.

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It [*the descent of the Supermind*] would not necessarily be known by everybody beforehand. Besides even if the descent were here one would have to be ready before one could get the final change.

*

It is the supermind we have to bring down, manifest, realise. Anything higher than that is impossible at this stage of the evolution except as a reflection in the consciousness or a power delegated and modified in its descent.

*

The descent of the Supramental can hasten things, but it is not going to act as a patent universal medicine or change everything in the twinkle of an eye.

Clarifications about the Supramental Descent

But what will happen when the supramental comes down is a matter for the supramental to decide — no use laying down laws for it beforehand with the mind. It is the Truth-consciousness, sir — it will act according to the divine Truth behind things.

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It is the very principle of this Yoga that only by the supramentalisation of the consciousness which means rising above mind to supermind and the descent of the supermind into the nature can the final transformation be made. So if nobody can rise above mind to supermind or obtain the descent of the supermind, then logically this Yoga becomes impossible. Every being is in essence one with the Divine and in his individual being a portion of the Divine, so there is no insuperable bar to his becoming supramental. It is no doubt impossible for the human nature being mental in its basis to overcome the Ignorance and rise to or obtain the descent of the Supermind by its own unaided effort, but by surrender to the Divine it can be done. One brings it down into the earth Nature through his own consciousness and so opens the way for the others, but the change has to be repeated in each consciousness to become individually effective.

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There need not be [*catastrophes when the Supramental descends*]. There will necessarily be great changes but they are not bound to be catastrophic. When there is a strong pressure from Overmind forces for change, then there are likely to be catastrophes because of the resistance and clash of forces. The supramental has a greater, in its fullness a complete mastery of things and power of harmonisation which can

overcome resistance by other means than dramatic struggle and violence.

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There are three powers of the cosmos to which all things are subject—creation, preservation and destruction; whatever is created lasts for a time, then begins to crumble down. The taking away of the power of destruction implies a creation that will not be destroyed but last and develop always. In the Ignorance destruction is necessary for progress—in the Knowledge, the Truth-creation, the law is that of a constant unfolding without any Pralaya.

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It is not by a general descent that people come out of the physical mind. If one chooses to remain in the physical mind, one million descents can come down and make no difference to him.

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The Supermind coming down on earth will change nothing in a man if he clings to the ego.

Chapter Two

Descent and Transformation

A World-Changing Yoga

What is a perfect technique of Yoga or rather of a world-changing and Nature-changing Yoga? Not one that takes a man by a little bit of him somewhere, attaches a hook and pulls him up by a pulley into Nirvana or Paradise. The technique of a world-changing Yoga has to be as multiform, sinuous, patient, all-including as the world itself. If it does not deal with all the difficulties or possibilities and carefully deal with each necessary element, has it any chance of success? And can a perfect technique which everybody can understand do that? It is not like writing a small poem in a fixed metre with a limited number of modulations. If you take the poem simile, it is the Mahabharata of a Mahabharata that has to be done. And what, compared with the limited Greek perfection, is the technique of the Mahabharata?

Next, what is the use of *vicārabuddhi* in such a case? If one has to get to a new consciousness which surpasses the reasoning intellect, can one do it on lines which are to be judged and understood by the reasoning intellect, controlled at every step by it, told by the intellect what it is to do, what is the measure of its achievements, what its steps must be and what their value? If one does that, will one ever get out of the range of the reasoning intelligence into what is beyond it? And if one does, how shall others judge what one is doing by the intellectual measure? How can one judge what is beyond the ordinary consciousness when one is oneself in the ordinary consciousness? Is it not only by exceeding yourself that you can feel, experience, judge what exceeds you? What is the value of a judgment without the feeling and experience?

What the Supramental will do the mind cannot foresee or lay down. The mind is Ignorance seeking for the Truth, the

Supramental by its very definition is Truth Consciousness, Truth in possession of itself and fulfilling itself by its own power. In a supramental world imperfection and disharmony are bound to disappear. But what we propose just now is not to make the earth a supramental world but to bring down the Supramental as a power and established consciousness in the midst of the rest — to let it work there and fulfil itself as Mind descended into Life and Matter and has worked as a Power there to fulfil itself in the midst of the rest. This will be enough to change the world and to change Nature by breaking down her present limits. But what, how, by what degrees it will do it is a thing that ought not to be said now — when the Light is there, the Light will itself do its work — when the Supramental Will stands on earth, that Will will decide. It will establish a perfection, a harmony, a Truth-creation — for the rest, well, it will be the rest — that is all.

*

I certainly hope to bring down an effective power of the Truth which will replace eventually the Falsehood that has governed the minds and hearts of men for so long. The liberation of a few individuals is a thing that is always possible and has always been done — but, to my seeing, it cannot be the sole aim of existence. Whatever the struggles and sufferings and blunders of humanity, there is still in it an urge towards the Light, an impulse towards a greater Truth not only of the soul but the life. If it has not been done yet, it is surely because those who reached the Light and the greater Truth, rested there and saw in it more a means of escape for the soul than a means of transformation for the life. The liberation of the spirit is necessary, nothing can be done without it — but the transformation is also possible.

*

You have missed altogether the qualifying words which I put with great care and prominent emphasis¹ — if you don't read

¹ In a letter published in Letters on Himself and the Ashram, volume 35 of THE COMPLETE WORKS OF SRI AUROBINDO, p. 649. — Ed.

carefully, you will necessarily misunderstand what I write. I said "*This transformation* cannot be done individually *in a solitary way only.*" No individual solitary transformation apart from the work for the earth (which means more than any individual transformation) would be either possible or useful. (Also no individual human being can by his own power alone work out the transformation, nor is it the object of the Yoga to create an individual superman here and there.) The object of the Yoga is to bring down the supramental consciousness on earth, to fix it there, to create a new race with the principle of the supramental consciousness governing the inner and outer individual and collective life. Therefore the existence of the Asram, whatever difficulties it created for ourselves or for the individual, was inevitable. The method was the preparation of the earth consciousness in the human being as represented by the members of the Asram and others (with also a certain working in the general earth consciousness) so as to make the descent of the supramental Force possible. That Force accepted by individual after individual according to their preparation would establish the supramental consciousness in the physical world and so create a nucleus for its own expansion.

*

As far as I can see, once the supramental is established in Matter, the transformation will be possible under much less troublesome conditions than now are there. These bad conditions are due to the fact that the Ignorance is in possession and the hostile Powers an established authority, as it were, who do not care to give up their hold and there is no full force of Light established in the earth consciousness which would not only meet but outweigh their full force of darkness.

*

It is the darkest nights that prepare the greatest dawns—and it is so because it is into the deep unconsciousness of material life that we have to bring, not an intermediate glimmer, but the full glory of the divine Light.

The Vital World and the Supramental Descent

When there is a pressure on the vital world due to the preparing Descent from above, that world usually precipitates something of itself into the human. The vital world is very large and far exceeds the human in extent. But usually it dominates by influence not by descent. Of course the effort of this part of the vital world is always to maintain humanity under its sway and prevent the higher Light.

*

The vital descent cannot prevent the supramental—still less can the possessed nations do it by their material power, since the supramental descent is primarily a spiritual fact which will bear its necessary outward consequences. What previous vital descents have done is to falsify the Light that came down as in the history of Christianity where it took possession of the teaching and distorted it and deprived it of any widespread fulfilment. But the supermind is by definition a Light that cannot be distorted if it acts in its own right and by its own presence. It is only when it holds itself back and allows inferior Powers of consciousness to use a diminished and already deflected Truth that the knowledge can be seized by the vital Forces and made to serve their own purpose.

The Nature and Scope of the Transformation

When the mind, life and body are entirely divine and supramentalised, that is the perfect transformation and the true transformation is the process that leads towards it.

*

It is not a question of “can” or “cannot” [*the Divine Force transform someone*]—it is a question of what is necessary for the true transformation. Theoretically the Force can transform you in one hundredth of a second from an animal to a god, but that would not be transformation or the working out of a spiritual evolution, it would be mere thaumaturgy, i.e. miracle

working without a significance or purpose.

*

The whole of humanity cannot be changed at once. What has to be done is to bring the Higher Consciousness down into the earth-consciousness and establish it there as a constant realised force, just as mind and life have been established and embodied in Matter, so to establish and embody the Supramental Force.

*

It would not be possible to change all that [*ordinary life on earth*] in a moment—we have always said that the whole of humanity will not change the moment there is the Descent. But what can be done is to establish the higher principle in the earth consciousness in such a way that it will remain and go on strengthening and spreading itself in the earth-life. That is how a new principle in the evolution must necessarily work.

*

There is no proposal to transform the whole earth consciousness—it is simply to introduce the supramental principle there which will transform those who can receive and embody it.

The Earth, the Earth Consciousness and the Supramental Creation

The earth is the place of evolution in which all these [*universal*] forces meet and try to manifest and out of their working something has to develop. On the other planes (the mental, vital etc.) there is not the evolution—there each acts separately according to its own law.

*

It [*the earth*] contains all the potentialities which come out in the beings of earth and also much that is unexpressed.

*

It is first through the individual that it [*the supramental activity*] becomes part of the earth consciousness and afterwards it spreads from the first centres and takes up more and more of the global consciousness till it becomes an established force there.

*

The consciousness of this Earth alone [*is the earth consciousness*.]. There is a separate global consciousness of the earth (as of other worlds) which evolves with the evolution of life on the planet.

*

Yes, all that [*humans, animals, vegetables, minerals*] is the earth consciousness — mineral = matter, vegetable = the vital-physical creation, animal = the vital creation, man = the mental creation. Into the earth consciousness so limited to mind, vital, matter has to come the supramental creation. Necessarily *at first* it cannot be in a great number — but even if it is only in a few at first, that does not mean that it will have no effect on the rest or will not change the whole balance of the earth-nature.

The Supramental Change and the Ananda Plane

The supramental change is the ultimate stage of siddhi and it is not likely to come so soon; but there are many levels between the normal mind and the supermind and it is easy to mistake an ascent into one of them or a descent of their consciousness or influence for a supramental change.

It is quite impossible to ascend to the real Ananda *plane* (except in a profound trance), until after the supramental consciousness has been entered, realised and possessed; but it is quite possible and normal to feel some form of Ananda *consciousness* on any level. This consciousness wherever it is felt is a derivation from the Ananda plane, but it is very much diminished in power and modified to suit the lesser power of receptivity of the inferior levels.

*

I presume it is the development of the Truth Power and the Ananda Power in the overmind consciousness that is being pursued. The transcendent Ananda in itself could descend only after the complete Supramentalisation of the being and would mean a stupendous change in the earth consciousness. It is the divine Truth in the overmind and the divine Ananda in the overmind that can now prepare their manifestation and it is that which is being indicated in these experiences.

Chapter Three

The Supramental Transformation

Preparatory Steps towards the Supramental Change

It is not possible to have the direct supramental working now. The Adhar is not yet ready. First one must accept an indirect working which prepares the lower planes for the supramental change.

*

The gate of the supramental cannot be smashed open like that. The Adhar has to be steadily prepared, changed, made fit for the supramental Descent. There are several powers between the ordinary mind and the supramental and these must be opened up and absorbed by the consciousness — only then is the supramental change possible.

*

To speak of “receiving power from the supramental when we are not conscious” is strange. When one is not conscious, one can still receive a *higher* force; the Divine Shakti works often from behind the veil, otherwise in the ignorant and unconscious condition of the human being she would not be able to work at all. But the nature of the force or action is modified to suit the condition of the sadhak. One must develop a very full consciousness before one can receive anything from the direct supramental Power and one must be very advanced in consciousness even to receive something of it modified through the Overmind or other intermediate region.

The Supramental Influence and Supramentalisation

Who told you that it [*the supermind*] was descending on the physical consciousness without touching the mind and vital?

Certainly no part of the Nature has been supramentalised — that is not possible, until the whole being has been put under the supramental influence. The supramental influence must come first, the supramental transformation can only come afterwards.

*

A touch or influence of the supramental is not the same thing as supramentalisation. To suppose that the physical can be supramentalised before the mental and vital is an absolute absurdity. What I said was that the mind and vital could not be supramentalised so long as the physical was left as it was, untouched by the supramental descent.

*

It is quite impossible for the supramental to take up the body before there has been the full supramental change in the mind and the vital. X and others seem always to expect some kind of unintelligible miracle — they do not understand that it is a concentrated evolution, rapid but following the law of creation, that has to take place. A miracle can be only a moment's wonder. A change according to the Divine Law can alone endure.

*

If the supramental can stand in the mind and vital, then it must stand in the physical also. If it does not stand in the physical, it cannot stand in the mind and vital also; it will be something else, not the supramental.

*

It [*the supermind*] cannot be brought down into the mind and vital without being brought down into the physical also. One can feel its influence or get something from it, but bringing down means much more than that.

*

The supermind is a harmonious whole — it is not a mixture of light and ignorance. If the physical mind is not supramentalised,

then there will be in mind a mixture of ignorance, but then it will not be supermind there, but something else. So also with the vital. All that can manifest in the mind separately is a partly supramentalised overmind.

*

There can be no conquest of the other planes by the supermind, but only an influence, so long as the physical is not ready.

*

Aspiration is necessary in all spiritual aims from whatever part of the consciousness. The supermind can descend into the physical only if there is brought down into it the power of higher and higher levels till the supramental intensity is possible.

Premature Claims of Possession of the Supermind

It is very unwise for anyone to claim prematurely to have possession of the supermind or even a taste of it. The claim is usually accompanied by an outburst of superegoism, some radical blunder of perception or a gross fall into wrong condition and wrong movement. A certain spiritual humility, a serious un-arrogant look at oneself and quiet perception of the imperfections of one's present nature and, instead of self-esteem and self-assertion, a sense of the necessity of exceeding one's present self, not from egoistic ambition, but from an urge towards the Divine would be, it seems to me, for this frail terrestrial and human composition far better conditions for proceeding towards its supramental change.

*

He is using the word supermind too easily. What he describes as supermind is a higher illumined consciousness; a modified supramental light may touch it, but not the full power of the supermind; and, in any case, it is not the supermind. He speaks of a supramental part which is unreceptive,—that is impossible, the supramental cannot be unreceptive. The supermind is the

Truth-consciousness itself; it already possesses the Truth and does not even need to receive it. The word *vijnāna* is sometimes used for the higher illumined Intelligence in communication with the Truth, and this must be the part in himself which he felt—but this is not the supermind. One can enter into supermind only at the very end of the sadhana, when all difficulties have disappeared and there is no obstacle any longer in the way of the realisation.

*

The question arose and always arises because of an eagerness in the vital to take any stage of strong experience as the final stage, even to take it for the overmind, supermind, full siddhi. The supermind or the overmind either is not so easy to reach as that, even on the side of Knowledge or inner experience only. What you are experiencing belongs to the spiritualised and liberated mind. At this stage there may be intimations from the higher mind levels, but these intimations are merely isolated experiences, not a full change of consciousness. The supermind is not part of mind or a higher level of mind—it is something entirely different. No sadhak can reach the supermind by his own efforts and the effort to do it by personal tapasya has been the source of many mishaps. One has to go quietly stage by stage until the being is ready and even then it is only the Grace that can bring the real supramental change.

*

The action that took place was not supramental; the fact that you were aware of a centre in the brain shows that it was through the mind that it was done. The force that acted was the Divine Power which can work in this way on any plane, supramental, mental, vital or physical or on all the planes together. The supramental action can only be achieved after a long discipline of Yoga directed towards that end; it cannot be an initial experience.

That there was no mental expectation was all to the good; if there had been an expectation, the mind might have been active and interfered and either prevented the experience or else stood in the way of its being pure and complete.

Chapter Four

Transformation and the Body

The Transformation of the Body

It is quite true that the surrender and the consequent transformation of the whole being is the aim of the Yoga — the body is not excluded, but at the same time this part of the endeavour is the most difficult and doubtful — the rest, though not facile, is comparatively less difficult to accomplish. One must start with an inner control of the consciousness over the body, a power to make it obey more and more the will or the force transmitted to it. In the end as a higher and higher Force descends and the plasticity of the body increases, the transformation becomes possible.

*

It is absolutely idle to think of transforming the body when other things that are so much easier to do — though of course none is easy — are not done. The inner must change before the outermost can follow. So what is the use of such a concentration — unless one thinks that everything else is perfect, which would be a rather astonishing claim. What has to be done with the body at first is to make it open to the Force, so as to receive strength against illness and fatigue — when they come, there must be the power to react and throw them off and to keep a constant flow of force into the body. If that is done, the rest of the bodily change can wait for its proper time.

*

The supramental perfection means that the body becomes conscious, is filled with consciousness and that as this is the Truth consciousness all its actions, functionings etc. become by the power of the consciousness within it harmonious, luminous, right and true — without ignorance or disorder.

The Hathayogic method is to bring an immense vital force into the body and by this and by certain processes keep it strong and in good health and a capable instrument.

The Transformation of the Body in Other Traditions

It [*a body of light seen by the correspondent in a vision*] is the luminous body spoken of in the Veda as possessed by the beings of the higher planes. It is supposed by certain schools of Yoga in the East and West that in the final transformation on earth man will develop a body having these qualities. It was called the *corps glorieux*, “body of glory”, by the Mother’s first spiritual instructor.

*

It has been the idea of many who have speculated on the subject that the body of the future race will be a luminous body (*corps glorieux*) and that might mean radio-active.¹ But also it has to be considered (1) that a supramental body must necessarily be one in which the consciousness determines even the physical action and reaction to the most material and these therefore are not wholly dependent on material conditions or laws as now known, (2) that the subtle process will be more powerful than the gross, so that a subtle action of Agni will be able to do the action which would now need a physical change such as increased temperature.

*

I did not intend to evade anything, except that in so far as I do not yet know what will be the chemical constitution of the changed body, I could not answer anything to that. That was why I said it needed investigation.

I was simply putting my idea on the matter which has always been that it is the supramental which will create its own

¹ *The correspondent asked whether the chemicals in a transformed body would become “more Peace-active, Light-active, Force-active (as we say, radio-active)”*. — Ed.

physical basis. If you mean that the supramental cannot *fulfil itself* in the present body with its present processes that is true. The processes will obviously have to be altered. How far the constitution of the body will be changed and in what direction is another question. As I said it may become as you suggest radio-active: Théon (Mother's teacher in occultism) spoke of it as luminous, *le corps glorieux*. But all that does not make it impossible for the supramental to act in the present body for change. It is what I am looking forward to at present.

Of course a certain preliminary transformation is necessary, just as the psychic and spiritual transformation precedes the supramental. But this is a change of the physical consciousness down to the submerged consciousness of the cells so that they may respond to higher forces and admit them and to a certain extent a change or at least a greater plasticity in the processes. The rules of food etc. are meant to help that by minimising obstacles. How far this involves a change of the chemical constitution of the body I cannot say. It seems to me still that whatever preparatory changes there may be, it is only the action of the supramental Force that can confirm and complete them.

*

If the consciousness cannot determine the physical action and reaction in the present body, if it needs a different basis, then that means this different basis must be prepared by different means. By what means? Physical? The old Yogis tried to do it by physical tapasya; others by seeking the elixir of life etc. According to this Yoga, the action of the higher Force and consciousness which includes the subtle action of Agni has to open and prepare the body and make it more responsive to Consciousness-Force instead of being rigid in its present habits (called laws). But a different basis can only be created by the supramental action itself. What else but the supermind can determine its own basis?

*

I read the Bible,—very assiduously at one time. When I have looked at it, it has always given me a sense of imprecision in the

thought-substance, in spite of the vividness of the expression, and that makes it very difficult to be sure about these things. This passage about the body, for instance—although St. Paul had remarkable mystic experiences and, certainly, much profound spiritual knowledge (profound rather than wide, I think)—I would not swear to it that he is referring to the supramentalised body (*physical body*). Perhaps to the supramental body or to some other luminous body in its own space and substance, which he found sometimes as if enveloping him and abolishing this body of death which he felt the material envelope to be. This verse like many others is capable of several interpretations and might refer to a quite supraphysical experience. The idea of a transformation of the body occurs in different traditions, but I have never been quite sure that it meant the change in this very matter. There was a Yogi some time ago in this region who taught it, but he hoped when the change was complete, to disappear in light. The Vaishnavas speak of a divine body which will replace this one when there is the complete siddhi. But, again, is this a divine physical or supraphysical body? At the same time there is no obstacle in the way of supposing that all these ideas, intuitions, experiences point to, if they do not exactly denote, the physical transformation.

*

The physical Nature does not mean the body alone but the phrase includes the transformation of the whole physical mind, vital, material nature—not by imposing siddhis on them, but by creating a new physical nature which is to be the habitation of the supramental being in a new evolution. I am not aware that this has been done by any Hathayogic or other process. Mental or vital occult power can only bring siddhis of the higher plane into the individual life—like the Sannyasi who could take any poison without harm, but he died of a poison after all when he forgot to observe the conditions of the siddhi. The working of the supramental power envisaged is not an influence on the physical giving it abnormal faculties, but an entrance and permeation changing it wholly into a supramentalised physical. I did not

learn the idea from Veda or Upanishad, and I do not know if there is anything of the kind there. What I received about the supermind was a direct, not a derived knowledge given to me; it was only afterwards that I found certain confirmatory revelations in the Upanishad and Veda.

Transforming the Body Consciousness

That [*stopping at each stage of transformation in order to deal with the body*] is hardly possible. The body consciousness is there and cannot be ignored, so that one can neither transform the higher parts completely leaving the body for later dealing nor make each stage complete in all its parts before going to the next. I tried that method but it never worked. A predominant overmentalisation of mind and vital is the first step, for instance, when overmentalising, but the body consciousness retains all the lower movements unovermentalised and until these can be pulled up to the overmental standard, there is no overmental perfection, always the body consciousness brings in flaws and limitations. To perfect the overmind one has to call in the supramental force and it is only when the overmind has been partially supramentalised that the body begins to be more and more overmental. I do not see any way of avoiding this process, though it is what makes the thing so long.

*

The fallacy of the argument [*that after supramentalisation severe attacks on the body will still be possible*] lies in the premiss laid down in the beginning that even after supramentalisation difficulties and attacks will continue. In the supramental consciousness such attacks are not possible — the coexistence of the supramental and the lower darkness in the same being and body is not possible. It is precisely for that reason that the supramentalisation of the body consciousness is laid down as the condition of the successful transformation. If attacks continue and can come in successfully, it means that the body consciousness is not yet supramentalised.

Death and the Supramental Transformation

The change of the consciousness is the necessary thing and without it there can be no physical siddhi. But the fullness of the supramental change is not possible if the body remains as it is, a slave of death, disease, decay, pain, unconsciousness and all the other results of the ignorance. If these are to remain the descent of the supramental is hardly necessary—for a change of consciousness which would bring mental-spiritual union with the Divine, the Overmind is sufficient, even the Higher Mind is sufficient. The supramental descent is necessary for a dynamic action of the Truth in mind, vital and body. This would imply as a final result the disappearance of the unconsciousness of the body; it would no longer be subject to decay and disease. That would mean that it would not be subject to the ordinary processes by which death comes. If a change of body had to be made, it would have to be by the will of the inhabitant. This (not an obligation to live 3000 years, for that too would be a bondage) would be the essence of physical immortality. Still, if one wanted to live 1000 years or more, then supposing one had the complete siddhi, it should not be impossible.

*

Death is necessary in the evolution, because the body can progress no longer—cannot suffice any longer as an instrument for the progress or evolution of the consciousness—it has to change its physical instrument and get a new one. If something can be brought into the body that will make it a plastic instrument for the soul, then only death is no longer necessary. If the supramental transformation is complete that is what should happen.

*

It [*death*] has no separate existence by itself, it is only a result of the principle of decay in the body and that principle is there already—it is part of the physical nature. At the same time it is not inevitable; if one could have the necessary consciousness

and force, decay and death is not inevitable. But to bring that consciousness and force into the whole of the material nature is the most difficult thing of all — at any rate in such a way as to annul the decay principle.

*

Immunity from death by anything but one's own will to leave the body, immunity from illness are things that can be achieved only by a complete change of consciousness which each man has to develop in himself, — there can be no automatic immunity without that achievement.

*

That² is the argument of the Mayavadin to whom all manifestation is useless and unreal because it is temporary — even the life of the gods is no use because it is in Time, not in the Timeless. But if manifestation is of any use, then it is worthwhile having a perfect manifestation rather than an imperfect one. "Have to be left willingly" is a contradiction in terms. One keeps the body as long as one wills, with an illumined will, leaves it or changes it according to the same will. That is a very different thing from a body assailed constantly by desire and suffering and death brought on by decay or illness. Always assuming that the divine manifestation or any manifestation is worthwhile.

As for the second argument,³ change and progress are not excluded from the supramental life. I do not see why the change of cells, supposing it continues in the supramentalised body, takes away from the value of the transformation, if it is a change to something equally or more conscious and luminous.

*

Well, don't you know that old men sometimes get a new or third set of teeth in their old age? And if monkey glands can renew

² *The correspondent asked, "What is the need of transformation if the body will have to be left willingly or unwillingly?" — Ed.*

³ *The correspondent asked, "Since the body cells undergo changes from second to second, what value has the transformation of the body?" — Ed.*

functionings and forces and can make hair grow on a bald head, as Voronoff has proved by living examples,—well? And mark that Science is only at the beginning of these experiments [*to prolong life*]. If these possibilities are opening before Science, why should one declare their absolute impossibility by other means?

*

There is no ambiguity that I can see.⁴ “*En fait*” and “*attachée*” do not convey any sense of inevitability. “*En fait*” means simply that in fact, actually, as things are at present all life (on earth) has death attached to it as its end; but it does not in the least convey the idea that it can never be otherwise or that this is the unalterable law of all existence. It is at present a fact for certain reasons which are stated,—due to certain mental and physical circumstances—if these are changed, death is not inevitable any longer. Obviously the alteration can only come “if” certain conditions are satisfied—all progress and change by evolution depends upon an “if” which gets satisfied. If the animal mind had not been pushed to develop speech and reason, mental man would never have come into existence,—but the “if”, a stupendous and formidable one, was satisfied. So with the ifs that condition a farther progress.

The Conquest of Death

As for the conquest of death, it is only one of the sequelae of supramentalisation—and I am not aware that I have forsworn my views about the supramental descent. But I never said or thought that the supramental descent would automatically make everybody immortal. The supramental descent can only make the best conditions for anybody who can open to it then or thereafter attaining to the supramental consciousness and its

⁴ Sri Aurobindo is referring to the ambiguity seen by the correspondent in two statements of the Mother: “If this belief [in the necessity of death] could be cast out . . . death would no longer be inevitable” and “Death as a fact has been attached to all life upon earth. . . .” (*The Mother, Questions and Answers 1929-1931*, 2003 ed., p. 36) The correspondent read these statements in French.—Ed.

consequences. But it would not dispense with the necessity of sadhana. If it did, the logical consequence would be that the whole earth, men, dogs and worms, would suddenly wake up to find themselves supramental. There would be no need of an Asram or of Yoga.

What is vital is the supramental change of consciousness — conquest of death is something minor and, as I have always said, the last physical result of it, not the first result of all or the most important — a thing to be added to complete the whole, not the one thing needed and essential. To put it first is to reverse all spiritual values — it would mean that the seeker was actuated not by any high spiritual aim but by a vital clinging to life or a selfish and timid seeking for the security of the body — such a spirit could not bring the supramental change.

Certainly, everything depends on my success. The only thing that could prevent it, so far as I can see, would be my own death or the Mother's. But did you imagine that that [*my success*] would mean the cessation of death on this planet, and that sadhana would cease to be necessary for anybody?

*

There can be no immortality of the body without supramentalisation; the potentiality is there in the Yogic force and Yogis can live for 200 or 300 years or more, but there can be no real principle of it without the Supramental.

Even Science believes that one day death may be conquered by physical means and its reasonings are perfectly sound. There is no reason why the Supramental Force should not do it. Forms on earth do not last (they do in other planes) because these forms are too rigid to grow expressing the progress of the spirit. If they become plastic enough to do that, there is no reason why they should not last.

*

Death is there because the being in the body is not yet developed enough to go on growing in the same body without the need of change and the body itself is not sufficiently conscious. If

the mind and vital and the body itself were more conscious and plastic, death would not be necessary.

*

As for immortality, it cannot come if there is attachment to the body,—for it is only by living in the immortal part of oneself which is unidentified with the body and bringing down its consciousness and force into the cells that it can come. I speak of course of Yogic means. The scientists now hold that it is (theoretically at least) possible to discover physical means by which death can be overcome, but that would mean only a prolongation of the present consciousness in the present body. Unless there is a change of consciousness and change of functioning, it would be a very small gain.

*

Immortality is one of the possible results of supramentalisation, but it is not an obligatory result and it does not mean that there will be an eternal or indefinite prolongation of life as it is. That is what many think it will be, that they will remain what they are with all their human desires and the only difference will be that they will satisfy them endlessly; but such an immortality would not be worth having and it would not be long before people are tired of it. To live in the Divine and have the divine consciousness is itself immortality and to be able to divinise the body also and make it a fit instrument for divine works and divine life would be its material expression only.

*

It depends on the consciousness [*whether one wants to live a long life*]. As it is, at present, most people do not get tired of life; they die because they must, not because they want to—at least, that is true of the vital; it is only a minority that tire of life and for many of these it is due to the discomforts of old age, continued ill-health, misfortune. Supposing a consciousness descended in the body that got rid of these discomforts, would people get tired of life in the same way merely because of its

length or would they have some source of perpetual interest within as well as without that would keep them on—that is the question. Of course physical immortality would not mean that one is tied down to the body, but that one is not subject to disease and death, but can keep or leave the body at will. I don't know whether Ashwatthaman lives on because he cannot die or because he won't die—whether it is for him a doom or a privilege. There are by the way animals that live for many centuries, but as they have not the philosophic mind the question for them does not arise—probably they take it as a matter of course.

*

What you say about being tired of life, is true. Edison's family was very long lived but his grandfather after a century found it too long and died because he wanted to. On the other hand there are men who are strongly vital and do not get tired of life, like the Turk who died recently at 150, I think, but was still eager to live.

*

The ideal would be not to be subject to Death, but to change the body whenever it is necessary with full consciousness.

The Reproductive Method of the Supramental

The [*reproductive*] method of the supramental is more likely to be psychological than material. But these are things that we leave to the Supermind to arrange when it is there.

*

It is not at all certain that the hereditary method will be used for the reproduction of supermen. If it were used, the seed would have to be very different from what it is now—and the question would not arise.

Part Four

Problems of Philosophy, Science, Religion and Society

Section One

Thought, Philosophy, Science and Yoga

Chapter One

The Intellect and Yoga

Intellectual Truth and Spiritual Experience

Intellectual truths? Do you think that the intellectual truth of the Divine is its real truth? In that case there is no need of Yoga. Philosophy is enough.

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Philosophy knows nothing about peace and silence or the inner and outer vital. These things are discovered only by Yoga.

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Yoga is not a thing of ideas but of inner spiritual experience. Merely to be attracted to any set of religious or spiritual ideas does not bring with it any realisation. Yoga means a change of consciousness; a mere mental activity will not bring a change of consciousness, it can only bring a change of mind. And if your mind is sufficiently mobile, it will go on changing from one thing to another till the end without arriving at any sure way or any spiritual harbour. The mind can think and doubt and question and accept and withdraw its acceptance, make formations and unmake them, pass decisions and revoke them, judging always on the surface and by surface indications and therefore never coming to any deep and firm experience of Truth, but by itself it can do no more. There are only three ways by which it can make itself a channel or instrument of Truth. Either it must fall silent in the Self and give room for a wider and greater consciousness; or it must make itself passive to an inner Light and allow that Light to use it as a means of expression; or else it must itself change from the questioning intellectual superficial mind it now is to an intuitive intelligence, a mind of vision fit for the direct perception of the divine Truth.

If you want to do anything in the path of Yoga, you must fix

once for all what way you mean to follow. It is no use setting your face towards the future and then always looking back towards the past; in this way you will arrive nowhere. If you are tied to your past, return to it and follow the way you then choose; but if you choose this way instead, you must give yourself to it single-mindedly and not look back at every moment.

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My reason for wanting you to get rid of the mental concepts is that they are rigid and keep you tied to the idea and feeling of your incapacity and the impossibility of the sadhana. Get rid of that and a great obstacle disappears.

You would then see that there is no reason for the constant sense of grief and despair that reacts upon your effort and makes it sterile. I simply want you to put yourself, if it is possible, in that state of quietude and openness which is favourable to the higher consciousness and its action; if it is not possible at present, I have still said that I will do my utmost to help you to the experience. That does not mean that the utmost has been yet done or that it can be done in a few days. But (although people are not giving me the freedom of mind and disposal of time which I had asked for), it will be done.

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The point about the intellect's misrepresentation of the "formless" (the result of a merely negative expression of something that is inexpressibly intimate and positive) is very well made and hits the truth in the centre. No one who has had the Ananda of the Brahman can do anything but smile at the charge of coldness; there is an absoluteness of immutable ecstasy in it, a concentrated intensity of silent and inalienable rapture that it is quite impossible even to suggest to anyone who has not had the experience. The eternal Reality is neither cold nor dry nor empty — you might just as well talk of the midsummer sunlight as cold or the ocean as dry or perfect fullness as empty. Even when you enter into it by elimination of form and everything else, it seizes as a miraculous fullness that is truly the Purnam — when it is

entered affirmatively as well as by negation, there can obviously be no question of emptiness or dryness. All is there and more than one could ever dream of as the all. That is why one has to object to the intellect thrusting itself in as the *sabjāntā* judge — if it kept to its own limits, there would be no objection to it. But it makes constructions of words and ideas which have no application to the Truth, babbles foolish things in its ignorance and makes its constructions a wall which refuses to let in the Truth that surpasses its own capacities or scope.

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You can tell him Mother does not discuss these mental problems [*such as the existence of evil in the world*] even with the disciples. It is quite useless trying to reconcile these things with the intellect. For there are two things: the Ignorance from which the struggle and discord come and the secret Light, Unity, Bliss and Harmony. The intellect belongs to the Ignorance. It is only by getting into another consciousness that one can live in the Light and Bliss and Unity and not be touched by the outward discord and struggle. That change of consciousness therefore is the only thing that matters; to reconcile with the intellect could make no difference.

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Yes, you need not listen to the “common sense” of others at least; usually there is much that is common in it but very little that is sense. What your inner being feels is rather to be followed than the superficial reasonings of the outer intelligence.

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How can Reason be the sole arbiter [*in the quest for Truth*]? Whose reason? The reason in different men comes to different, opposite or incompatible conclusions. We cannot say that Reason is infallible, any more than feeling is infallible or the senses are infallible.

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Russell has the doubts because he has no spiritual experience, Rolland because he takes his emotional intellectuality for spirituality, Tagore—

If one is blind, it is quite natural—for the human intelligence which is rather an asinine thing at its best—to deny light; if one's highest natural vision is that of glimmering mists, it is equally natural to believe that all high vision is only a mist or a glimmer. But Light exists for all that—and for all that, spiritual Truth is more than a mist and a glimmer.

Intellectual Arguments against Spirituality

I have read Leonard Woolf's article,¹ but I do not propose to deal with it in my comments on Professor Sorley's letter²—for apart from the ignorant denunciation and cheap satire in which it deals, there is nothing much in its statement of the case against spiritual thought or experience; its reasoning is superficial and springs from an entire misunderstanding of the case for the mystic. There are four main arguments he sets against it and none of them have any value.

Argument number one. Mysticism and mystics have always risen in times of decadence, of the ebb of life and their loud quacking is a symptom of the decadence. This argument is absolutely untrue. In the East the great spiritual movements have arisen in the full flood of a people's life and culture or on a rising tide and they have themselves given a powerful impulse of expansion and richness to its thought and art and life; in Greece the mystics and the mysteries were there at the prehistoric beginning and in the middle (Pythagoras was one of the greatest of mystics) and not only in the ebb and decline; the mystic cults flourished in Rome too when its culture was at high tide; many great spiritual personalities of Italy, France, Spain sprang up

¹ Leonard Woolf, "Quack, Quack! or Having it Both Ways" [a review of C. E. M. Joad, Counterattack from the East: The Philosophy of Radhakrishnan (London: Allen and Unwin, 1932)]. "New Statesman and Nation", vol. 6, no. 145 (2 December 1933): pp. 702–4.

² See the letters on pages 357–68.—Ed.

in a life that was rich, vivid and not in the least touched with decadence. This hasty and inept generalisation has no truth in it and therefore no value.

Argument number two. A spiritual experience cannot be taken as a truth (it is a chimaera) unless it is proved just as the presence of a chair in the next room can be proved by showing it to the eye. Of course, a spiritual experience cannot be proved in that way, for it does not belong to the order of physical facts and is not physically visible or touchable. The writer's position would amount to this that only what is or can easily be made evident to everybody without any need of training, development, equipment or personal discovery, is to be taken as true. This is a position which, if accepted, would confine knowledge or truth within very narrow limits and get rid of a great deal of human culture. A spiritual peace, for example,—the peace that passeth all understanding—is a common experience of the mystics all over the world—it is a fact but a spiritual fact, a fact of the invisible; when one enters it or it enters into one, one knows that it is a truth of existence and is there all the time behind life and visible things. But how am I to "prove" these invisible facts to Mr. Leonard Woolf? he will turn away saying that this is the usual decadent quack quack and pass contemptuously on—perhaps to write another cleverly shallow article on some subject of which he has no personal knowledge or experience.

Argument number three. The generalisations based on spiritual experience are irrational as well as unproven. Irrational in what way? Are they merely foolish and inconceivable—infrarational—or do they belong to a suprarational order of experience to which the ordinary intellectual canons do not apply because these are founded on phenomena as they appear to the external mind and sense and not to an inner realisation which surpasses these phenomena? That is the contention of the mystics and it cannot be dismissed by merely saying that as they do not agree with ordinary experience, therefore they are nonsense and false. I would not undertake to defend as unimpeachable all that Joad or Radhakrishnan may have written—such as the formula that "the universe is good",—but for

many or most of the statements marshalled for condemnation by the writer one can surely say that they are not irrational at all. “Integrating the personality” may have no meaning to him, it has a very clear meaning to many, for it is a truth of experience—and, if modern psychology is to be believed, it is not irrational since there is in our being not only a conscious but an unconscious or subconscious or concealed subliminal part and it is not impossible to become aware of both and make some kind of integration. To “transcend both consciousness and unconsciousness” gets at once a rational meaning if we admit that as there is a subconscious so there may be a superconscious part of our being. To reconcile disparate parts of our nature or our perception or experience of things is also not such a ridiculous or meaningless phrase. It is not absurd to say that the doctrine of Karma reconciles determinism and free-willism, since this doctrine supposes that our own past action and therefore our past will determined to a great extent the present results but not so as to exclude a present will modifying them and creating a fresh determinism of our existence yet to be. The phrase about the value of the world is quite intelligible once we see that it refers to a progressive value not determined by the good or bad experience of the moment, a value of existence developing through time and taken as a whole. As for the statement about God, it may have little or no meaning if it is taken in connection with the superficial idea of the Divine current in popular religion, but it is a perfectly logical result of the premiss that there is an Infinite and Eternal which is manifesting in itself Time and things that are phenomenally finite. One may accept or reject this complex idea of the Divine which is founded on a coordination of the data of long spiritual experience passed through by thousands of seekers in all times, but I fail to see why it should be considered unreasonable. If it is because that would mean “to have it not only in both ways but in every way”, I do not see why this should be so reprehensible or a complex manifestation of a single Essence, Consciousness or Force should be considered *prima facie* inadmissible. There can be after all a synthetic and global view and consciousness of things which is

not bound by the oppositions and divisions of a more analytical and selective or dissecting intelligence.

Argument number four. The plea of intuition is only a facile cover for an inability to explain or establish by the use of reason — Joad and Radhakrishnan reason, but take refuge in intuition because their reasoning fails. Can the issue be settled in so easy and trenchant a way? The fact is that the mystic stands on an inner knowledge, an inner experience — but if he philosophises, he must try to explain to the reason, though not necessarily always by the abstract reason alone, what he has seen to be the Truth. He cannot but say, "I am explaining a truth which is beyond outer phenomena and the intelligence which depends on phenomena; it is really the outcome of a certain kind of direct experience and the intuitive knowledge which arises from that experience, so it cannot be adequately communicated by symbols appropriate to the world of outer phenomena — yet I am obliged to do as well as I can with these to help me towards some statement which will be intellectually acceptable to you." There is no wickedness or deceitful cunning therefore in using metaphors and symbols with a cautionary "as it were", — so objected to by Mr. Woolf in the simile of the focus, which is surely not intended as an argument but as a suggestive image. I may observe that the writer himself takes refuge in metaphor, beginning with the famous "quack quack", and an adversary might well reply that he does so in order to damn the opposite side while avoiding the necessity of a sound philosophical reply to the ideas he dislikes and repudiates. An intensity of belief is not the measure of truth, but neither is an intensity of unbelief the right measure.

As to the real nature of intuition and its relation to the intellectual mind, that is quite another and very large and complex question which cannot be dealt with in a short space. I have confined myself to pointing out that this article is a quite inadequate and superficial criticism. A case can be made against spiritual experience and spiritual philosophy and its positions, but to deserve a serious reply it must be put forward by a better advocate and it must touch the real centre of the problem which

lies here. As there is a category of facts to which our senses are our best available but very imperfect guide, as there is a category of truths which we seek by the keen but still imperfect light of our reason, so according to the mystic, there is a category of more subtle truths which surpass the reach both of the senses and the reason but can be ascertained by an inner direct knowledge and direct experience. These truths are supersensuous but not the less real for that—they have immense results upon the consciousness changing its substance and movement, bringing especially deep peace and abiding joy, a great light of vision and knowledge, a possibility of the overcoming of the lower animal nature, vistas of a spiritual self-development which without them do not exist. A new outlook on things arises which brings with it, if fully pursued into its consequences, a great liberation, inner harmony, unification—many other possibilities besides. These things have been experienced, it is true, by a small minority of the human race, but still there has been a host of independent witnesses to them in all times, climes and conditions and numbered among them are some of the greatest intelligences of the past, some of the world's most remarkable figures. Must these possibilities be immediately condemned as chimaeras because they are not only beyond the average man in the street but also not easily seizable even by many cultivated intellects or because their method is more difficult than that of the ordinary sense or reason? If there is any truth in them, is not this possibility opened by them worth pursuing as opening a highest range to self-discovery and world-discovery by the human soul? At its best, taken as true, it must be that—at its lowest, taken as only a possibility, as all things attained by man have been only a possibility in their earlier stages, it is a great and may well be a most fruitful adventure.

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I know it is the Russian explanation of the recent trend to spirituality and mysticism that it is a phenomenon of capitalist society in its decadence. But to read an economic cause, conscious or unconscious, into all phenomena of man's history is part of the

Bolshevik gospel born of the fallacy of Karl Marx. Man's nature is not so simple and one-chorded as all that—it has many lines and each line produces a need of his life. The spiritual or mystic line is one of them and man tries to satisfy it in various ways, by superstitions of all kinds, by ignorant religionism, by spiritism, demonism and what not, in his more enlightened parts by spiritual philosophy, the higher occultism and the rest, at his highest by the union with the All, the Eternal or the Divine. The tendency towards the search for spirituality began in Europe with a recoil from the nineteenth century's scientific materialism, a dissatisfaction with the pretended all-sufficiency of the reason and the intellect and a feeling out for something deeper. That was a pre-war phenomenon, and began when there was no menace of Communism and the capitalistic world was at its height of insolent success and triumph, and it came rather as a revolt against the materialistic bourgeois life and its ideals, not as an attempt to serve or sanctify it. It has been at once served and opposed by the post-war disillusionment—opposed because the post-war world has fallen back either on cynicism and the life of the senses or on movements like Fascism and Communism; served because with the deeper minds the dissatisfaction with the ideals of the past or the present, with all mental or vital or material solutions of the problem of life has increased and only the spiritual path is left. It is true that the European mind having little light on these things dallies with vital will-o'-the-wisps like spiritism or theosophy or falls back upon the old religionism; but the deeper minds of which I speak either pass by them or pass through them in search of a greater Light. I have had contact with many and the above tendencies are very clear. They come from all countries and it was only a minority who hailed from England or America. Russia is different—unlike the others it had lingered in mediaeval religionism and not passed through any period of revolt—so when the revolt came it was naturally anti-religious and atheistic. It is only when this phase is exhausted that Russian mysticism can revive and take not a narrow religious but the spiritual direction. It is true that mysticism *à revers*, turned upside down, has made Bolshevism

and its endeavour a creed rather than a political theme and a search for the paradisal secret millennium on earth rather than the building of a purely social structure. But for the most part Russia is trying to do on the communistic basis all that nineteenth-century idealism hoped to get at—and failed—in the midst of or against an industrial competitive environment. Whether it will really succeed any better is for the future to decide—for at present it only keeps what it has got by a tension and violent control which is not over.

The Valley of the False Glimmer

One feels here [*in the letters of Krishnaprem*] a stream from the direct sources of Truth that one does not meet so often as one could desire. Here is a mind that can not only think but see—and not merely see the surfaces of things with which most intellectual thought goes on wrestling without end or definite issue and as if there were nothing else, but look into the core. The Tantriks have a phrase *paśyantī vāk* to describe one level of the Vak-Shakti, the seeing Word; here is *paśyantī buddhi*, a seeing Intelligence. It might be because the seer within has passed beyond thought into experience, but there are many who have a considerable wealth of experience without its clarifying their eye of thought to this extent; the soul feels, but the mind goes on with mixed and imperfect transcriptions, blurs and confusions in the idea. There must have been the gift of right vision lying ready in this nature.

It is an achievement to have got rid so rapidly and decisively of the shimmering mists and fogs which modern intellectualism takes for Light of Truth. The modern mind has so long and persistently wandered—and we with it—in that Valley of the False Glimmer that it is not easy for anyone to disperse its mists with the sunlight of clear vision so soon and entirely as has here been done. All that is said here about modern humanism and humanitarianism, the vain efforts of the sentimental idealist and the ineffective intellectual, about synthetic eclecticism and other kindred things is admirably clear-minded, it hits the target. It is not by

these means that humanity can get that radical change of its ways of life which is yet becoming so imperative, but only by reaching the bedrock of Reality behind,—not through mere ideas and mental formations, but by a change of the consciousness, an inner and spiritual conversion. But that is a truth for which it would be difficult to get a hearing in the present noise of all kinds of many-voiced clamour and confusion and catastrophe.

A distinction, the distinction very keenly made here, between the plane of phenomenal process, of externalised Prakriti, and the plane of Divine Reality ranks among the first words of the inner wisdom. The turn given to it in these pages is not merely an ingenious explanation; it expresses very soundly one of the clear certainties you meet when you step across the border and look at the outer world from the standing-ground of the inner spiritual experience. The more you go inward or upward, the more the view of things changes and the outer knowledge Science organises takes its real and very limited place. Science, like most mental and external knowledge, gives you only truth of process. I would add that it cannot give you even the whole truth of process; for you seize some of the ponderables, but miss the all-important imponderables; you get, hardly even the how, but the conditions under which things happen in Nature. After all the triumphs and marvels of Science the explaining principle, the rationale, the significance of the whole is left as dark, as mysterious and even more mysterious than ever. The scheme it has built up of the evolution not only of this rich and vast and variegated material world, but of life and consciousness and mind and their workings out of a brute mass of electrons, identical and varied only in arrangement and number, is an irrational magic more baffling than any the most mystic imagination could conceive. Science in the end lands us in a paradox effectuated, an organised and rigidly determined accident, an impossibility that has somehow happened,—it has shown us a new, a material Maya, *aghaṭana-ghaṭana-patiyasi*, very clever at bringing about the impossible, a miracle that cannot logically be and yet somehow is there actual, irresistibly organised, but still irrational and inexplicable. And this is evidently because Science

has missed something essential; it has seen and scrutinised what has happened and in a way how it happened, but it has shut its eyes to something that made this impossible possible, something that it is there to express. There is no fundamental significance in things if you miss the Divine Reality; for you remain embedded in a huge surface crust of manageable and utilisable appearance. It is the magic of the Magician you are trying to analyse, but only when you enter into the consciousness of the Magician himself can you begin to experience the true origination, significance and circles of the Lila. I say "begin" because the Divine Reality is not so simple that at the first touch you can know all of it or put it into a single formula; it is Infinite and opens before you an Infinite Knowledge to which all Science put together is a bagatelle. But still you do touch the essential, the eternal behind things and in the light of That all begins to be profoundly luminous, intimately intelligible.

I have once before told you what I think of the ineffective peckings of certain well-intentioned scientific minds on the surface—or apparent surface—of the spiritual Reality behind things and I need not elaborate it. More important is the prognostic of a greater danger coming in the new attack by the adversary, the sceptics, against the validity of spiritual and supraphysical experience, their new strategy of destruction by admitting and explaining it in their own sense. There may well be a strong ground for the apprehension; but I doubt whether, if these things are once admitted to scrutiny, the mind of humanity will long remain satisfied with explanations so ineptly superficial and external, explanations that explain nothing. If the defenders of religion take up an unsound position, easily capturable, when they affirm only the subjective validity of spiritual experience, the opponents also seem to me to be giving away without knowing it the gates of the materialistic stronghold by their consent at all to admit and examine spiritual and supraphysical experience. Their entrenchment in the physical field, their refusal to admit or even examine supraphysical things was their tower of strong safety; once it is abandoned, the human mind pressing towards something less negative, more helpfully positive will pass to it

over the dead bodies of their theories and the broken debris of their annulling explanations and ingenious psychological labels. Another danger may then arise,—not of a final denial of the Truth, but the repetition in old or new forms of a past mistake, on one side some revival of blind fanatical obscurantist sectarian religionism, on the other a stumbling into the pits and quagmires of the vitalistic occult and the pseudo-spiritual—mistakes that made the whole real strength of the materialistic attack on the past and its credos. But these are phantasms that meet us always on the border line or in the intervening country between the material darkness and the perfect Splendour. In spite of all, the victory of the supreme Light even in the darkened earth-consciousness stands firm beyond as the one ultimate certitude.

Art, poetry, music are not Yoga, not in themselves things spiritual any more than philosophy either is a thing spiritual or science. There lurks here another curious incapacity of the modern intellect—its inability to distinguish between mind and spirit, its readiness to mistake mental, moral and aesthetic idealisms for spirituality and their inferior degrees for spiritual values. It is mere truth that the mental intuitions of the metaphysician or the poet for the most part fall far short of a concrete spiritual experience; they are distant flickers, shadowy reflections, not rays from the centre of Light. It is not less true that, looked at from the peaks, there is not much difference between the high mental eminences and the lower climbings of this external existence. All the energies of the Lila are equal in the sight from above, all are disguises of the Divine. But one has to add that all can be turned into a first means towards the realisation of the Divine. A philosophic statement about the Atman is a mental formula, not knowledge, not experience: yet sometimes the Divine takes it as a channel of touch; strangely, a barrier in the mind breaks down, something is seen, a profound change operated in some inner part, there enters into the ground of the nature something calm, equal, ineffable. One stands upon a mountain ridge and glimpses or mentally feels a wideness, a pervasiveness, a nameless Vast in Nature; then suddenly there comes the touch, a revelation, a flooding, the mental loses itself

in the spiritual, one bears the first invasion of the Infinite. Or you stand before a temple of Kali beside a sacred river and see what? — a sculpture, a gracious piece of architecture, but in a moment mysteriously, unexpectedly there is instead a Presence, a Power, a Face that looks into yours, an inner sight in you has regarded the World-Mother. Similar touches can come too through art, music, poetry to their creator or to one who feels the shock of the word, the hidden significance of a form, a message in the sound that carries more perhaps than was consciously meant by the composer. All things in the Lila can turn into windows that open on the hidden Reality. Still so long as one is satisfied with looking through windows, the gain is only initial; one day one will have to take up the pilgrim's staff and start out to journey there where the Reality is for ever manifest and present. Still less can it be spiritually satisfying to remain with shadowy reflections; a search imposes itself for the Light which they strive to figure. But since this Reality and this Light are in ourselves no less than in some high region above the mortal plane, we can in the seeking for it use many of the figures and activities of Life; as one offers a flower, a prayer, an act to the Divine, one can offer too a created form of beauty, a song, a poem, an image, a strain of music, and gain through it a contact, a response or an experience. And when that divine Consciousness has been entered or when it grows within, then too its expression in life through these things is not excluded from Yoga; these creative activities can still have their place, though not intrinsically a greater place than any other that can be put to divine use and service. Art, poetry, music, as they are in their ordinary functioning, create mental and vital, not spiritual values; but they can be turned to a higher end, and then, like all things that are capable of linking our consciousness to the Divine, they are transmuted and become spiritual and can be admitted as part of a life of Yoga. All takes new values not from itself, but from the consciousness that uses it; for there is only one thing essential, needful, indispensable, to grow conscious of the Divine Reality and live in it and live it always.

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It seems to me that Krishnaprem has seen very clearly with his usual accuracy and his mind of sight, *paśyanti buddhi*, the truth about yourself and your sadhana. I think that you could not do better than accept his diagnosis and follow entirely his suggested treatment. Especially you should accept his assurance about the final result and give no room in your mind to any doubt on that point or any disposition to give up your own case as hopeless. To my eyes you seem to have been making very good progress in several directions and I have no doubt about your emerging from your difficulties into the light.

I do not think there is any real impasse, I mean no inescapable hold-up on the road from which you cannot get out; it only seems to be to you like that because of the difficulties created for you by your intellect. It is because of its preconceptions and fixed judgments that you cannot make the equation he considers needful for you. The intellect is full of things like that and cannot by itself see truly the things that reveal their meaning fully only in the light of psychic or spiritual truth; the equation he speaks of belongs to that order. The intellect is of use for perceiving material facts and their relations but even these it cannot be relied on to see rightly in their total reality; it may see rightly, but as often wrongly and always only partly and imperfectly. Moreover, as the modern psychologists have discovered, it sees them coloured by the hues supplied from its own individual temperament, its own psychological personality and from its own peculiar angle. It thinks it is seeing quite objectively and impersonally but it does not so see and cannot so see; a dog might as well try to escape from its own pursuing tail: the human intellect's thought and sight cannot escape from its own subjectivity and colouring personality. The deeper and more accurate view of things can be more easily attained by the mind of sight which Krishnaprem has so much developed, *paśyanti buddhi*. You may say that you have got only your intellect to help you with its judgments and opinions: but mental judgments and opinions — well, they are always personal things and one can never be perfectly sure that one's own are correct and the judgments and opinions of others which differ

widely or even diametrically from one's own are mistaken. But you need not be always solely dependent on this fallible and limited instrument; for, although you have not developed the mind of sight as Krishnaprem has done, it is certainly there. I have always seen that when you have been in a psychic condition with bhakti or the higher part of the mind and the vital uppermost in you this mind of sight has come out and your ideas, feelings and judgments have become remarkably clear, right and often luminous. This has only to develop, you will then be able to see more clearly what Krishnaprem sees and many of your difficulties will disappear and the equation you want to make may become clear to you.

As for surrender, you already have it initially in your will to serve for the sake of service without claiming reward or success and without attachment to wealth or fame. If you extend that attitude into your whole sadhana, then realisation is sure. In any case, you should throw away all obsession of the sense of failure or the impossibility of success in your sadhana. Krishnaprem is surely right in telling you, when the Grace is on you and what he names as the Radhashakti is there to give you its unseen help, that the success of your sadhana is sure and the realisation will come. The impasse is a temporary block; your trust will become complete and the road to realisation clear.

Chapter Two

Doubt and Faith

Doubt and Yoga

As to doubts and argumentative answers to them I have long given up the practice as I found it perfectly useless. Yoga is not a field for intellectual argument or dissertation. It is not by the exercise of the logical or the debating mind that one can arrive at a true understanding of Yoga or follow it. A doubting spirit, "honest doubt" and the claim that the intellect shall be satisfied and be made the judge on every point is all very well in the field of mental action outside. But Yoga is not a mental field, the consciousness which has to be established is not a mental, logical or debating consciousness—it is even laid down by Yoga that unless and until the mind is stilled, including the intellectual or logical mind, and opens itself in quietude or silence to a higher and deeper consciousness, vision and knowledge, sadhana cannot reach its goal. For the same reason an unquestioning openness to the Guru is demanded in the Indian spiritual tradition; as for blame, criticism and attack on the Guru, it was considered reprehensible and the surest possible obstacle to sadhana.

If the spirit of doubt could be overcome by meeting it with arguments, there might be something in the demand for its removal by satisfaction through logic. But the spirit of doubt doubts for its own sake, for the sake of doubt; it simply uses the mind as its instrument for its particular dharma and this not the least when that mind thinks it is seeking sincerely for a solution of its honest and irrepressible doubts. Mental positions always differ, moreover, and it is well known that people can argue for ever without one convincing the other. To go on perpetually answering persistent and always recurring doubts such as for long have filled this Asram and obstructed the sadhana, is merely to frustrate the aim of the Yoga and go against its central

principle with no spiritual or other gain whatever. If anybody gets over his fundamental doubts, it is by the growth of the psychic in him or by an enlargement of his consciousness, not otherwise. Questions which arise from the spirit of enquiry, not aggressive or self-assertive, but as a part of a hunger for knowledge can be answered, but the “spirit of doubt” is insatiable and unappeasable.

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I have started writing about Doubt, but even in doing so I am afflicted by the “doubt” whether any amount of writing or of anything else can ever persuade the eternal doubt in man which is the penalty of his native ignorance. In the first place, to write adequately would mean anything from 60 to 600 pages, but not even 6000 convincing pages would convince Doubt. For Doubt exists for its own sake; its very function is to doubt always and, even when convinced, to go on doubting still; it is only to persuade its entertainer to give it board and lodging that it pretends to be an honest truth-seeker. This is a lesson I have learnt from the experience both of my own mind and of the minds of others; the only way to get rid of Doubt is to take Discrimination as one’s detector of truth and falsehood and under its guard to open the door freely and courageously to experience.

All the same I have started writing, but I will begin not with Doubt but with the demand for the Divine as a concrete certitude, quite as concrete as any physical phenomenon caught by the senses. Now, certainly, the Divine must be such a certitude not only as concrete but more concrete than anything sensed by ear or eye or touch in the world of Matter; but it is a certitude not of mental thought but of essential experience. When the Peace of God descends on you, when the Divine Presence is there within you, when the Ananda rushes on you like a sea, when you are driven like a leaf before the wind by the breath of the Divine Force, when Love flows out from you on all creation, when Divine Knowledge floods you with a Light which illumines and transforms in a moment all that was before dark, sorrowful and obscure, when all that is becomes part of the One Reality, when

the Reality is all around you, you feel at once by the spiritual contact, by the inner vision, by the illumined and seeing thought, by the vital sensation and even by the very physical sense, everywhere you see, hear, touch only the Divine. Then you can much less doubt it or deny it than you can deny or doubt daylight or air or the sun in heaven — for of these physical things you cannot be sure that they are what your senses represent them to be; but in the concrete experience of the Divine, doubt is impossible.

As to permanence, you cannot expect permanence of the initial spiritual experiences from the beginning — only a few have that and even for them the high intensity is not always there; for most the experience comes and then draws back behind the veil waiting for the human parts to be prepared and made ready to bear and hold, first, its increase and then its permanence. But to doubt it on that account would be irrational in the extreme. One does not doubt the existence of air because a strong wind is not always blowing or of sunlight because night intervenes between dawn and dusk. The difficulty lies in the normal human consciousness to which spiritual experience comes as something abnormal and is in fact supernormal. This weak limited normality finds it difficult at first even to get any touch of that greater and intenser supernormal or it gets it diluted into its own duller stuff of mental or vital experience, and, when the spiritual does come in its own overwhelming power, very often it cannot bear or, if it bears, cannot hold and keep it. Still once a decisive breach has been made in the walls built by the mind against the Infinite, the breach widens, sometimes slowly, sometimes swiftly, until there is no wall any longer, and then there is the Permanence.

But the decisive experiences cannot be brought, the permanence of a new state of consciousness in which they will be normal cannot be secured if the mind is always interposing its own reservations, prejudgments, ignorant formulas or if it insists on arriving at the Divine certitude as it would at the quite relative truth of a mental conclusion, by reasoning, doubt, enquiry and all the other paraphernalia of Ignorance feeling and fumbling around after Knowledge; these greater things can only be brought by the progressive opening of a consciousness

quieted and turned steadily towards spiritual experience. If you ask why the Divine has so disposed it on this highly inconvenient basis, it is a futile question,—for this is nothing else than a psychological necessity imposed by the very nature of things. It is so because these experiences of the Divine are not mental constructions, not vital movements; they are essential things, not things merely thought but realities, not mentally felt but felt in our very underlying substance and essence. No doubt, the mind is always there and can intervene; it can and does have its own type of mentalisings about the Divine, thoughts, beliefs, emotions, mental reflections of spiritual Truth, even a kind of mental realisation which repeats as well as it can some kind of figure of the higher Truth, and all this is not without value, but it is not concrete, intimate and indubitable. Mind by itself is incapable of ultimate certitude; whatever it believes, it can doubt; whatever it can affirm, it can deny; whatever it gets hold of, it can and does let go. That, if you like, is its freedom, noble right, privilege; it may be all you can say in its praise, but by these methods of mind you cannot hope (outside the realm of physical phenomena and hardly even there) to arrive at anything you can call an ultimate certitude. It is for this very compelling reason that mentalising or enquiring about the Divine cannot by its own right bring the Divine. If the consciousness is always busy with small mental movements,—especially accompanied, as they usually are, by a host of vital movements, desires, pre-possessions and all else that vitiates human thinking, even apart from the native insufficiency of reason,—what room can there be for a new order of knowledge, for fundamental experiences or for those deep and stupendous upsurgings or descents of the Spirit? It is indeed possible for the mind in the midst of its activities to be suddenly taken by surprise, overwhelmed, swept aside while all is flooded with a sudden inrush of spiritual experience. But if afterwards it begins questioning, doubting, theorising, surmising what this might be and whether it is true or not, what else can the spiritual Power do but retire and wait for the bubbles of the mind to cease?

I would ask one simple question of those who would make

the intellectual mind the standard and judge of spiritual experience. Is the Divine something less than Mind or is It something greater? Is mental consciousness with its groping enquiry, endless argument, unquenchable doubt, stiff and unplastic logic something superior or even equal to the Divine Consciousness or is it something inferior in its action and status? If it is greater, then there is no reason to seek after the Divine. If it is equal, then spiritual experience is quite superfluous. But if it is inferior, how can it challenge, judge, make the Divine stand as an accused or a witness before its tribunal, summon It to appear as a candidate for admission before a Board of Examiners or pin It like an insect under its examining microscope? Can the vital animal hold up as infallible the standard of its vital instincts, associations and impulses and judge, interpret and fathom by it the mind of man? It cannot because man's mind is a greater power working in a wider, more complex way which the animal vital consciousness cannot follow. Is it so difficult to see similarly that the Divine Consciousness must be something infinitely wider, more complex than human mind, filled with greater powers and lights, moving in a way which mere Mind cannot judge, interpret or fathom by the standard of its fallible Reason and limited mental half-knowledge? The simple fact is there that spirit and mind are not the same thing and that it is the spiritual consciousness into which the Yогin has to enter (in all this I am not in the least speaking of the supermind) if he wants to be in permanent contact or union with the Divine. It is not then a freak of the Divine or a tyranny to insist on the mind recognising its limitations, quieting itself, giving up its demands and opening and surrendering to a greater Light than it can find on its own obscurer level.

This does not mean that the Mind has no place at all in the spiritual life; but it means that it cannot be even the main instrument, much less the authority to whose judgment all must submit itself, including the Divine. Mind must learn from the greater Consciousness it is approaching and not impose its own standards on it; it has to receive illumination, open to a higher Truth, admit a greater Power that does not work according

to mental canons, surrender itself and allow its half-light half-darkness to be flooded from above till where it was blind it can see, where it was deaf it can hear, where it was insensible it can feel, and where it was baffled, uncertain, questioning, disappointed it can have joy, fulfilment, certitude and peace.

This is the position on which Yoga stands, a position based upon constant experience since men began to seek after the Divine. If it is not true, then there is no truth in Yoga and no necessity for Yoga. If it is true, then it is on that basis, from the standpoint of the necessity of this greater consciousness that we can see whether Doubt is of any utility for the spiritual life. To believe anything and everything is certainly not demanded of the spiritual seeker; such a promiscuous and imbecile credulity would be not only unintellectual, but in the last degree unspiritual. At every moment of the spiritual life until one has got fully into that higher Light, one has to be on one's guard and to be able to distinguish spiritual truth from pseudo-spiritual imitations of it or substitutes for it set up by the mind and by vital desire. A power to distinguish between truth of the Divine and the lies of the Asura is a cardinal necessity for Yoga. The question is whether that can best be done by the negative and destructive method of doubt, which often kills falsehood but rejects truth too with the same impartial blow, or a more positive, helpful and luminously searching power can be found which is not compelled by its inherent ignorance to meet truth and falsehood alike with the stiletto of doubt and the bludgeon of denial. An indiscriminateness of mental belief is not the teaching of spirituality or of Yoga; the faith of which it speaks is not a crude mental belief but the fidelity of the soul to the guiding light within it, a fidelity which has to remain firm till the light leads it into knowledge.

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As for the doubts of which you have written, I cannot write much today for obvious reasons and in any case writing is not the remedy, though it may help and encourage—for these doubts rise not from the intellect but from the vital mind which sees things

according to its condition and mood and needs something else than what the mind asks for to satisfy it. It is perfectly true that these reasonings have no force when the vital is in its true poise of love or joy or active and creative power, and when the vital is depressed then it is hard and seems sometimes impossible, so long as the depression is there, to surmount the trouble. But still the clouds do not last for ever—and even one has a certain power in the mind to shorten the period of these clouds, to reject and dissipate them and not to allow them to remain until they disappear in the course of nature.

By all means use the method of japa and bhakti. I have never insisted on your using the method of dry or hard tapasya—it was some idea or feeling in your own mind that made you lay so much stress on it. There are some to whom it is natural and necessary for a time, but each ought to move in his own way and there is no one rule for all—even if the objective is and must be the same, contact and union and opening to the Divine.

In the end these doubts and depressions and despairs must cease. Where the call of the soul perseveres, the response of the Divine must come.

Na hi kalyānakṛt kaścid durgatim tāta gacchati.¹

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There is no reason why your present condition should be more than a passing phase, unless you yourself choose that it should be otherwise. If it is the “imposition” of the rule of Karmayoga on you that is the cause of your doubts, it is unjustified, because there is no imposition or compulsion, and you need only work if you wish to do so; if you think that by sitting in meditation only you will best progress, you are free to do it.

I did not answer to your statement of your doubts, because they seem to repose on certain statements and suppositions about myself (which are quite inaccurate) and I do not usually care to enter into personal matters. I do not know who gave you this information, e.g. that I have not done my sadhana in full

¹ “Never does anyone who practises good, O beloved one, come to woe.” Gita 6.40.
—Ed.

heat of work but have had to lead a very quiet and extremely retired life all the time. I am afraid, whoever he is, he knows nothing about either my past life or my present life or my Yoga. As for the ground put forward that there is no precedent for progress during work or for such a method, nor have people in the past been able to do it, it amounts to a statement that there has never been any such thing as Karmayoga or a Karmayogi, that the Gita was never written or was not founded on any truth of experience and that no Yogi ever did works as part of his sadhana. There seems to be some exaggeration in these statements from whatever quarter they may have been breathed into your mind. I have never said that the Supermind is working in the sadhaks here; I have said the contrary in many letters.

I say so much however only to indicate the quite gratuitous character of the affirmations on which these doubts are founded — from wherever they may come. But a detailed answer is hardly necessary; for meditation is not forbidden in this sadhana. Except for those who prefer to go through work alone, meditation and works and bhakti each in its place make up the foundations of the sadhana. But you are free to follow the way of meditation alone, as some others do, if you think that better.

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I agree with most of what Krishnaprem says, though one or two things I would put from a different angle. Your reasonings about faith and doubt have been of a rather extravagant kind because they came to this that one must either doubt everything or believe everything however absurd that anybody says. I have repeatedly told you that there is not only room for discrimination in Yoga, but a need for it at every step — otherwise you will get lost in the jungle of things that are not spiritual — as for instance the tangle of what I call the intermediate zone. I have also told you that you are not asked to believe everything told you by anybody and that there is no call to put faith in all the miraculous things narrated about Bijoykrishna or another. That, I have said, is a question not of faith but of mental belief — and faith is not mental belief in outward facts, but an intuition of

the inner being about spiritual things. Krishnaprem means the same thing when he says that faith is the light sent down by the higher to the lower personality. As for the epithet “blind” used by Ramakrishna, it means as I said, not ignorantly credulous, but untroubled by the questionings of the intellect and unshaken by outward appearances of fact. E.g. one has faith in the Divine even though the fact seems to be that the world here or at least the human world is driven by undivine forces. One has faith in the Guru even when he uses methods that your intellect cannot grasp or approves things as true of which you have yet no experience (for if his knowledge and experience are not greater than yours, why did you choose him as a Guru?). One has faith in the Path leading to the goal even when the goal is very far off and the way covered by mist and cloud and smitten repeatedly by the thunderbolt. And so on. Even in worldly things man can do nothing great if he has not faith — in the spiritual realm it is still more indispensable. But this faith depends not on ignorant credulity, but on a light that burns inside though not seen by the eyes of the outward mind, a knowledge within that has not yet taken the form of an outer knowledge.

One thing however — I make a distinction between doubt and discrimination. If doubt meant a discriminant questioning as to what might be truth of this or that matter, it would be a part of discrimination and quite admissible; but what is usually meant now by doubt is a negation positive and peremptory which does not stop to investigate, to consider in the light, to try, to inquire, but says at once, “Oh, no, I am never going to take that as possibly true.” That kind of doubt may be very useful in ordinary life, it may be practically useful in battering down established things or established ideas or in certain kinds of external controversy to undermine a position that is too dogmatically positive; but I do not think it is of any positive use in matters even of intellectual inquiry. There is nothing it can do there that impartial discrimination cannot do much better. In spiritual matters discrimination has a huge place, but negating doubt simply stops the path to Truth with its placard “No entry” or its dogmatic “This far and no farther.”

As for the intellect it is indispensable to man up to a certain point; after that it becomes an inferior instrument and often misleading and obstructive. It is what I meant when I wrote, “Reason was the helper; reason is the bar.”² Intellect has done many things for man; it has helped to raise him high above the animal; at its best it has opened a first view on all great fields of knowledge. But it cannot go beyond that; it cannot get at Truth itself, only at some reflections, forms, representations of it. I myself cannot remember to have ever arrived at anything in the spiritual field by the power of the intellect—I have used it only to help the expression of what I have known and experienced, but even there it is only certain forms that it provided, they were used by another Light and a larger Mind than the intellect. When the intellect tried to decide things in this field, it always delayed matters. I suppose what it can do sometimes is to stir up the mind, plough it or prepare—but the knowledge comes only when one gets another higher than intellectual opening. Even in Mind itself there are things higher than the intellect, ranges of activity that exceed it. Spiritual knowledge is easier to those than to the reasoning intelligence.

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The abnormal abounds in this physical world; the supernormal is there also. In these matters, apart from any question of faith, any truly rational man with a free mind (not tied up like the rationalist's or so-called freethinker's at every point with triple cords of *a priori* irrational disbelief) must not cry out at once, “Humbug! falsehood!”, but suspend judgment until he has the necessary experience and knowledge. To deny in ignorance is no better than to affirm in ignorance.

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As for the faith-doubt question you evidently give to the word faith a sense and a scope I do not attach to it. I will have to

² Sri Aurobindo, Essays in Philosophy and Yoga, volume 13 of THE COMPLETE WORKS OF SRI AUROBINDO, p. 199.

write not one but several letters to clear up the position. It seems to me that you mean by faith a mental belief in an alleged fact put before the mind and senses in the doubtful form of an unsupported asseveration. I mean by it a dynamic intuitive conviction in the inner being of the truth of supersensible things which cannot be proved by any physical evidence but which are a subject of experience. My point is that this faith is a most desirable preliminary (if not absolutely indispensable—for there can be cases of experience not preceded by faith) to the desired experience. If I insist so much on faith—but even less on positive faith than on the throwing away of *a priori* doubt and denial—it is because I find that this doubt and denial have become an instrument in the hands of the obstructive forces and clog your steps whenever I try to push you to an advance. If you can't or won't get rid of it, ("won't" out of respect for the reason and fear of being led into believing things that are not true, "can't" because of contrary experience) then I shall have to manage for you without it, only it makes a difficult instead of a straight and comparatively easy process.

Why I call the materialist's denial an *a priori* denial is because he refuses even to consider or examine what he denies, but *starts* by denying it, like Leonard Woolf with his "quack quack", on the ground that it contradicts his own theories, so it can't be true. On the other hand the belief in the Divine and the Grace and Yoga and the Guru etc. is not *a priori*, because it rests on a great mass of human experience which has been accumulating through the centuries and millenniums as well as the personal intuitive perception. Therefore it is an intuitive perception which has been confirmed by the experience of hundreds and thousands of those who have tested it before me.

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Go on the path of Yoga without doubt of the ultimate success—surely you cannot fail! Doubts—they are nothing; keep the fire of aspiration burning, it is that that conquers.

Faith in Spiritual Things

I do not ask “undiscriminating faith” from anyone, all I ask is fundamental faith, safeguarded by a patient and quiet discrimination — because it is these that are proper to the consciousness of a spiritual seeker and it is these that I have myself used and found that they removed all necessity for the quite gratuitous dilemma of “either you must doubt everything supraphysical or be entirely credulous”, which is the stock-in-trade of the materialist argument. Your doubt, I see, constantly returns to the charge with a repetition of this formula in spite of my denial — which supports my assertion that Doubt cannot be convinced, because by its very nature it does not want to be convinced; it keeps repeating the old ground always.

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X upbraids you for losing your reason in blind faith, but what is his view of things except a reasoned faith; you believe according to your faith, which is quite natural, he believes according to his opinion, which is natural also but no better so far as the likelihood of getting at the true truth of things is in question. . . . Each reasons according to his view of things, his opinion, that is, his mental constitution and mental preference. So what's the use of running down faith which after all gives something to hold on to amidst the contradictions of an enigmatic universe? If one can get at a knowledge that knows, it is another matter; but so long as we have only an ignorance that argues, well, there is a place still left for faith — even, faith may be a glint from the knowledge that knows, however far off, and meanwhile there is not the slightest doubt that it helps to get things done. There's a bit of reasoning for you! just like all other reasoning too, convincing to the convinced, but not to the unconvincible, i.e., who don't agree with the ground upon which the reasoning dances. Logic after all is only a measured dance of the mind, nothing else.

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Your dream was certainly not moonshine; it was an inner experience and can be given its full value. As for the other questions, they are full of complications and I do not feel armed to cut the Gordian knot with a sentence. Certainly, you are right to follow directly the truth for yourself and need not accept X's or anybody else's proposition or solution. Man needs both faith and reason so long as he has not reached a surer insight and greater knowledge. Without faith he cannot walk certainly on any road, and without reason he might very well be walking, even with the staff of faith to support him, in the darkness. X himself founds his faith, if not on reason, yet on reasons; and the rationalist, the rationaliser or the reasoner must have some faith even if it be faith only in reason itself as sufficient and authoritative, just as the believer has faith in his faith as sufficient and authoritative. Yet both are capable of error, as they must be since both are instruments of the human mind whose nature is to err, and they share that mind's limitations. Each must walk by the light he has even though there are dark spots in which he stumbles.

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The faith in spiritual things that is asked of the sadhak is not an ignorant but a luminous faith, a faith in light and not in darkness. It is called blind by the sceptical intellect because it refuses to be guided by outer appearances or seeming facts,—for it looks to the truth behind,—and does not walk on the crutches of proof and evidence. It is an intuition,—an intuition not only waiting for experience to justify it, but leading towards experience. If I believe in self-healing, I shall after a time find out the way to heal myself—if I have faith in transformation, I can end by laying my hand on and unravelling the whole process of transformation. But if I begin with doubt and go on with more doubt, how far am I likely to go on the journey?

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The faith is there, not in your mind, not in your vital, but in your psychic being. It was this faith that flung you out of the world and brought you to Pondicherry; it is this faith that keeps

you to what the soul wills and refuses to go back on what it has decided. Even the mind's questionings have been a groping after some justification by which it can get an excuse for believing in spite of its difficulties. The vital's eagerness and its vairagya are shadows of this faith, forms which it has taken in order to keep the vital from giving up in spite of the pressure of despondency and struggle. Even in the mind and vital of the man of strongest mental and vital faith there are periods when the knowledge in the psychic gets covered up—but it persists behind the veil. In you the eclipse has been strong and long because, owing to certain mental and vital formations, the assent of the mind and vital got clouded over and could only take negative forms. But there is always the knowledge or intuition in the soul that started you on the way. I have been pressing on you the need of faith because the assent has again to take a positive form so as to give free way to the Divine Force; but the persistent drive in the soul (which is a hidden and externally suppressed faith) is itself sufficient to warrant the expectation of the Grace to come.

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The sense of calm and light and divine guidance can never be an illusion. It is the dark state which is the state of Ignorance, of Maya—if faith fails then, it is because the darkness of the Ignorance shuts the mind to the Truth, obscuring the buddhi. What is thought when the buddhi is obscured cannot be the Truth; it is not darkness but the Light that brings Truth. Therefore you must take what you feel when you are in the light to be true, not what you feel when you are in the darkness.

Chapter Three

Philosophical Thought and Yoga

Metaphysical Thinkers, East and West

European metaphysical thought — even in those thinkers who try to prove or explain the existence and nature of God or of the Absolute — does not in its method and result go beyond the intellect. But the intellect is incapable of knowing the supreme Truth; it can only range about seeking for Truth and catching fragmentary representations of it, not the thing itself, and trying to piece them together. Mind cannot arrive at Truth; it can only make some constructed figure that tries to represent it or a combination of figures. At the end of European thought, therefore, there must always be Agnosticism, declared or implicit. Intellect, if it goes sincerely to its own end, has to return and give this report: “I cannot know; there is or at least it seems to me that there may be or even must be Something beyond, some ultimate Reality, but about its truth I can only speculate; it is either unknowable or cannot be known by me.” Or, if it has received some light on the way from what is beyond it, it can say too: “There is perhaps a consciousness beyond Mind, for I seem to catch glimpses of it and even to get intimations from it. If that is in touch with the Beyond or if it is itself the consciousness of the Beyond and you can find some way to reach it, then this Something can be known but not otherwise.”

Any seeking of the supreme Truth through intellect alone must end either in Agnosticism of this kind or else in some intellectual system or mind-constructed formula. There have been hundreds of these systems and formulas and there can be hundreds more, but none can be definitive. Each may have its value for the mind, and different systems with their contrary conclusions can have an equal appeal to intelligences of equal power and competence. All this labour of speculation has its utility in training the human mind and helping to keep before

it the idea of Something beyond and Ultimate towards which it must turn. But the intellectual Reason can only point vaguely or feel gropingly towards it or try to indicate partial and even conflicting aspects of its manifestation here; it cannot enter into and know it. As long as we remain in the domain of the intellect only, an impartial pondering over all that has been thought and sought after, a constant throwing up of ideas, of all the possible ideas, and the formation of this or that philosophical belief, opinion or conclusion is all that can be done. This kind of disinterested search after Truth would be the only possible attitude for any wide and plastic intelligence. But any conclusion so arrived at would be only speculative; it could have no spiritual value; it would not give the decisive experience or the spiritual certitude for which the soul is seeking. If the intellect is our highest possible instrument and there is no other means of arriving at supraphysical Truth, then a wise and large Agnosticism must be our ultimate attitude. Things in the manifestation may be known to some degree, but the Supreme and all that is beyond the Mind must remain for ever unknowable.

It is only if there is a greater consciousness beyond Mind and that consciousness is accessible to us that we can know and enter into the ultimate Reality. Intellectual speculation, logical reasoning as to whether there is or is not such a greater consciousness cannot carry us very far. What we need is a way to get the experience of it, to reach it, enter into it, live in it. If we can get that, intellectual speculation and reasoning must fall necessarily into a very secondary place and even lose their reason for existence. Philosophy, intellectual expression of the Truth may remain, but mainly as a means of expressing this greater discovery and as much of its contents as can at all be expressed in mental terms to those who still live in the mental intelligence.

This, you will see, answers your point about the Western thinkers, Bradley and others, who have arrived through intellectual thinking at the idea of an “Other beyond Thought” or have even, like Bradley, tried to express their conclusions about it in terms that recall some of the expressions in the *Arya*. The idea in

itself is not new; it is as old as the Vedas. It was repeated in other forms in Buddhism, Christian Gnosticism, Sufism. Originally, it was not discovered by intellectual speculation, but by the mystics following an inner spiritual discipline. When, somewhere between the seventh and fifth centuries B.C., men began both in the East and West to intellectualise knowledge, this Truth survived in the East; in the West, where the intellect began to be accepted as the sole or highest instrument for the discovery of Truth, it began to fade. But still it has there too tried constantly to return; the Neo-Platonists brought it back, and now, it appears, the Neo-Hegelians and others (e.g., the Russian Ouspensky and one or two German thinkers, I believe) seem to be reaching after it. But still there is a difference.

In the East, especially in India, the metaphysical thinkers have tried, as in the West, to determine the nature of the highest Truth by the intellect. But, in the first place, they have not given mental thinking the supreme rank as an instrument in the discovery of Truth, but only a secondary status. The first rank has always been given to spiritual intuition and illumination and spiritual experience; an intellectual conclusion that contradicts this supreme authority is held invalid. Secondly, each philosophy has armed itself with a practical way of reaching to the supreme state of consciousness, so that even when one begins with Thought, the aim is to arrive at a consciousness beyond mental thinking. Each philosophical founder (as also those who continued his work or school) has been a metaphysical thinker doubled with a Yogi. Those who were only philosophic intellectuals were respected for their learning but never took rank as truth discoverers. And the philosophies that lacked a sufficiently powerful means of spiritual experience died out and became things of the past because they were not dynamic for spiritual discovery and realisation.

In the West it was just the opposite that came to pass. Thought, intellect, the logical reason came to be regarded more and more as the highest means and even the highest end; in philosophy, Thought is the be-all and the end-all. It is by intellectual thinking and speculation that the truth is to be discovered; even

spiritual experience has been summoned to pass the tests of the intellect, if it is to be held valid—just the reverse of the Indian position. Even those who see that mental Thought must be overpassed and admit a supramental “Other”, do not seem to escape from the feeling that it must be through mental Thought, sublimating and transmuting itself, that this other Truth must be reached and made to take the place of the mental limitation and ignorance. And again Western thought has ceased to be dynamic; it has sought after a theory of things, not after realisation. It was still dynamic amongst the ancient Greeks, but for moral and aesthetic rather than spiritual ends. Later on, it became yet more purely intellectual and academic; it became intellectual speculation only without any practical ways and means for the attainment of the Truth by spiritual experiment, spiritual discovery, a spiritual transformation. If there were not this difference, there would be no reason for seekers like yourself to turn to the East for guidance; for in the purely intellectual field, the Western thinkers are as competent as any Eastern sage. It is the spiritual way, the road that leads beyond the intellectual levels, the passage from the outer being to the inmost Self, which has been lost by the over-intellectuality of the mind of Europe.

In the extracts you have sent me from Bradley and Joachim, it is still the intellect thinking about what is beyond itself and coming to an intellectual, a reasoned speculative conclusion about it. It is not dynamic for the change which it attempts to describe. If these writers were expressing in mental terms some realisation, even mental, some intuitive experience of this “Other than Thought”, then one ready for it might feel it through the veil of the language they use and himself draw near to the same experience. Or if, having reached the intellectual conclusion, they had passed on to the spiritual realisation, finding the way or following one already found, then in pursuing their thought, one might be preparing oneself for the same transition. But there is nothing of the kind in all this strenuous thinking. It remains in the domain of the intellect and in that domain it is no doubt admirable; but it does not become dynamic for spiritual experience.

It is not by “thinking out” the entire reality, but by a change of consciousness that one can pass from the ignorance to the Knowledge—the Knowledge by which we become what we know. To pass from the external to a direct and intimate inner consciousness; to widen consciousness out of the limits of the ego and the body; to heighten it by an inner will and aspiration and opening to the Light till it passes in its ascent beyond Mind; to bring down a descent of the supramental Divine through self-giving and surrender with a consequent transformation of mind, life and body—this is the *integral* way to the Truth.¹ It is this that we call the Truth here and aim at in our Yoga.

World-Circumstances and the Divine

The whole world knows, spiritual thinker and materialist alike, that this world for the created or naturally evolved being in the ignorance or the inconscience of Nature is neither a bed of roses nor a path of joyous Light. It is a difficult journey, a battle and struggle, an often painful and chequered growth, a life besieged by obscurity, falsehood and suffering. It has its mental, vital, physical joys and pleasures, but these bring only a transient taste—which yet the vital self is unwilling to forego—and they end in distaste, fatigue or disillusionment. What then? To say the Divine does not exist is easy, but it leads nowhere—it leaves you where you are with no prospect or issue—neither Russell nor any materialist can tell you where you are going or even where you ought to go. The Divine does not manifest himself so as to be recognised in the external world-circumstances—admittedly so. These are not the works of an irresponsible autocrat somewhere—they are the circumstances of a working out of Forces according to a certain nature of being, one might say a certain proposition or problem of being into which we have all really consented to enter and cooperate. The work is painful,

¹ I have said that the idea of the Supermind was already in existence from ancient times. There was in India and elsewhere the attempt to reach it by rising to it; but what was missed was the way to make it integral for the life and to bring it down for transformation of the whole nature, even of the physical nature.

dubious, its vicissitudes impossible to forecast? There are either of two possibilities then,—to get out of it into Nirvana by the Buddhist or illusionist way or to get inside oneself and find the Divine there since he is not discoverable on the surface. For those who have made the attempt, and there were not a few but hundreds and thousands, have testified through the ages that he is there and that is why there exists the Yoga. It takes long? The Divine is concealed behind a thick veil of his Maya and does not answer at once or at any early stage to our call? Or he gives only a glimpse uncertain and passing and then withdraws and waits for us to be ready? But if the Divine has any value, is it not worth some trouble, time and labour to follow after him and must we insist on having him without any training or sacrifice or suffering or trouble? It is surely irrational to make a demand of such a nature. It is positive that we have to get inside, behind the veil, to find him,—it is only then that we can see him outside and the intellect be not so much convinced as forced to admit his presence by experience—just as when a man sees what he has denied and can no longer deny it. But for that the means must be accepted and the persistence in the will and patience in the labour.

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I cannot very well answer the strictures of Russell or Vivekananda (in one of his moods), for the conception of the Divine as an external omnipotent Power who has created the world and governs it like an absolute and arbitrary monarch, the Christian or Semitic conception, the popular religious notion, has never been mine; it contradicts too much my seeing and experience during thirty years of sadhana. When I speak of the Divine Will I mean something different,—something that has descended here into an evolutionary world of Ignorance, standing at the back of things, pressing on the Darkness with its Light, leading things presently towards the best possible in the conditions of a world of Ignorance and leading it eventually towards a descent of a greater Power of the Divine which will be not an omnipotence held back and conditioned by the Law of the world as

it is, but a full action and therefore bringing the reign of light, peace, harmony, joy, love, beauty and Ananda, for these are the Divine Nature. The Divine Grace is there, ready to act at every moment, but it manifests as one grows out of the Law of the Ignorance into the Law of Light and it is meant, not as an arbitrary caprice, however miraculous often its intervention, but as a help in that growth and a Light that leads and eventually delivers. If we take the facts of the world as they are and the facts of spiritual experience as a whole, neither of which can be denied or neglected, then I do not see what other Divine there can be. This Divine may lead us often through darkness, because the darkness is there in us and around us, but it is to the Light he is leading and not to anything else.

Intellectual Expression of Spiritual Experience

In reference to what Prof. Sorley has written on *The Riddle of This World*,² the book of course was not meant as a full or direct statement of my thought and, as it was written to sadhaks mostly, many things were taken for granted there. Most of the major ideas—e.g. Overmind—were left without elucidation. To make the ideas implied clear to the intellect, they must be put with precision in an intellectual form—so far as that is possible with supra-intellectual things. What is written in the book can be clear to those who have gone far enough in experience, but for most it can only be suggestive.

I do not think, however, that the statement of supra-intellectual things necessarily involves a making of distinctions in the terms of the intellect. For, fundamentally, it is not an expression of ideas arrived at by speculative thinking. One has to arrive at spiritual knowledge through experience and a consciousness of things which arises directly out of that experience or else underlies or is involved in it. This kind of knowledge, then, is fundamentally a consciousness and not a

² A small book of letters by Sri Aurobindo in which he discusses various questions of philosophy and spiritual experience. It was first published in 1933.—Ed.

thought or formulated idea. For instance, my first major experience—radical and overwhelming, though not, as it turned out, final and exhaustive—came after and by the exclusion and silencing of all thought—there was, first, what might be called a spiritually substantial or concrete consciousness of stillness and silence, then the awareness of some sole and supreme Reality in whose presence things existed only as forms, but forms not at all substantial or real or concrete; but this was all apparent to a spiritual perception and essential and impersonal sense and there was not the least concept or idea of reality or unreality or any other notion, for all concept or idea was hushed or rather entirely absent in the absolute stillness. These things were known directly through the pure consciousness and not through the mind, so there was no need of concepts or words or names. At the same time this fundamental character of spiritual experience is not absolutely limitative; it can do without thought, but it can do with thought also. Of course, the first idea of the mind would be that the resort to thought brings one back at once to the domain of the intellect—and at first and for a long time it may be so; but it is not my experience that this is unavoidable. It happens so when one tries to make an intellectual statement of what one has experienced; but there is another kind of thought that springs out as if it were a body or form of the experience or of the consciousness involved in it—or of a part of that consciousness—and this does not seem to me to be intellectual in its character. It has another light, another power in it, a sense within the sense. It is very clearly so with those thoughts that come without the need of words to embody them, thoughts that are of the nature of a direct seeing in the consciousness, even a kind of intimate sense or contact formulating itself into a precise expression of its awareness (I hope this is not too mystic or unintelligible); but it might be said that directly the thoughts turn into words they belong to the kingdom of intellect—for words are a coinage of the intellect. But is it so really—or inevitably? It has always seemed to me that words came originally from somewhere else than the thinking mind, although the thinking mind secured hold

of them, turned them to its use and coined them freely for its purposes. But even otherwise, is it not possible to use words for the expression of something that is not intellectual? Housman contends that poetry is perfectly poetical only when it is non-intellectual, when it is nonsense. That is too paradoxical, but I suppose what he means is that if it is put to the strict test of the intellect it appears extravagant because it conveys something that expresses and is real to some other kind of seeing than that which intellectual thought brings to us. Is it not possible that words may spring from, that language may be used to express — at least up to a certain point and in a certain way — the supra-intellectual consciousness which is the essential power of spiritual experience? This however is by the way — when one tries to explain spiritual experience to the intellect itself, then it is a different matter.

The interpenetration of the planes is indeed for me a capital and fundamental part of spiritual experience without which Yoga as I practise it and its aim could not exist. For that aim is to manifest, reach or embody a higher consciousness upon earth and not to get away from earth into a higher world or some supreme Absolute. The old Yogas (not quite all of them) tended the other way — but that was, I think, because they found the earth as it is a rather impossible place for any spiritual being and the resistance to change too obstinate to be borne; earth-nature looked to them in Vivekananda's simile like the dog's tail which every time you straighten it goes back to its original curl. But the fundamental proposition in this matter was proclaimed very definitely in the Upanishads which went so far as to say that the Earth is the foundation and all the worlds are on the earth and to imagine a clean-cut or irreconcilable difference between them is ignorance: here and not elsewhere, not by going to some other world, the divine realisation must come. This statement was used to justify a purely individual realisation, but it can equally be the basis of a wider endeavour.

About polytheism, I certainly accept the truth of the many forms and personalities of the One which since the Vedic times has been the spiritual essence of Indian polytheism —

a secondary aspect in the seeking for the one and only Divine. But the passage referred to by Professor Sorley³ is concerned with something else—the little godlings and Titans spoken of there are supraphysical beings of other planes. It is not meant to be suggested that they are real Godheads and entitled to worship—on the contrary it is indicated that to accept their influence is to move towards error and confusion or a deviation from the true spiritual way. No doubt they have some power to create, they are makers of forms in their own way and in their limited domain, but so are men too creators of outward and of inward things in their own domain and limits—and even man's creative powers can have a repercussion on the supraphysical levels.

I agree that asceticism can be overdone. It has its place as one means—not the only one—of self-mastery; but asceticism that cuts away life is an exaggeration, though one that had many remarkable results which perhaps could hardly have come otherwise. The play of forces in this world is enigmatic, escaping from any rigid rule of the reason, and even an exaggeration like that is often employed to bring about something needed for the full development of human achievement and knowledge and experience. But it was an exaggeration all the same and not, as it claimed to be, the indispensable path to the true goal.

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I find nothing either to add or to object to in Prof. Sorley's comment on the still, bright and clear mind; it adequately indicates the process by which the mind makes itself ready for the reflection of the higher Truth in its undisturbed surface or substance. But one thing perhaps needs to be kept in view—that this pure stillness of the mind is indeed always the required condition, the desideratum, but for bringing it about there are more ways than one. It is not, for instance, only by an effort of the mind itself to get clear of all intrusive emotion or passion, to quiet its own

³ “for these intermediate planes are full of little Gods or strong Daityas . . .”. The Riddle of This World (1973), p. 38.

characteristic vibrations, to resist the obscuring fumes of a physical inertia which brings about a sleep or a torpor of the mind instead of its wakeful silence, that the thing can be done. This is indeed an ordinary process of the Yogic path of knowledge; but the same end can be brought about or automatically happen by other processes—for instance, by the descent from above of a great spiritual stillness imposing silence on the mind and heart, on the life stimuli, on the physical reflexes. A sudden descent of this kind or a series of descents accumulative in force and efficacy is a well-known phenomenon of spiritual experience. Or again one may start a mental process of one kind or another for the purpose which would normally mean a long labour and yet may pull down or be seized midway, or even at the outset, by an overmind influx, a rapid intervention or manifestation of the higher Silence, with an effect sudden, instantaneous, out of all proportion to the means used at the beginning. One commences with a method, but the work is taken up by a Grace from above, by a response from That to which one aspires or by an irruption of the infinitudes of the Spirit. It was in this last way that I myself came by the mind's absolute silence, unimaginable to me before I had the actual experience.

There is another question of some importance—what is the exact nature of this brightness, clearness, stillness, of what is it constituted, more precisely, is it merely a psychological condition or something more? Professor Sorley says these epithets are after all metaphors and he wants to express and succeeds in expressing—though not without the use of metaphor—the same thing in a more abstract language. But I was not conscious of using metaphors when I wrote the phrase though I am aware that the words could to others have that appearance. I think even that they would seem to one who had gone through the same experience, not only a more vivid, but a more realistic and accurate description of this inner state than any abstract language could give. It is true that metaphors, symbols, images are constant auxiliaries summoned by the mystic for the expression of his vision or his experience. It is inevitable because he has to express in a language made or at least developed and manipulated

by the mind the phenomena of a consciousness other than the mental and at once more complex and more subtly concrete. It is this subtly concrete, this supersensuously sensible reality of the phenomena of the spiritual—or the occult—consciousness to which the mystic arrives that justifies the use of metaphor and image as a more living and accurate transcription than the abstract terms which intellectual reflection employs for its own characteristic process. If the images used are misleading or not descriptively accurate, it is because the writer has a paucity, looseness or vagueness of language inadequate to the intensity of his experience. Apart from that, all new phenomenon, new discovery, new creation calls for the aid of metaphor and image. The scientist speaks of light waves or of sound waves and in doing so he uses a metaphor, but one which corresponds to the physical fact and is perfectly applicable—for there is no reason why there should not be a wave, a limited flowing movement of light or of sound as well as of water.

But still when I speak of the mind's brightness, clearness, stillness, I have no idea of calling metaphor to my aid; it is meant to be a description quite precise and positive—as precise, as positive as if I were describing in the same way an expanse of air or a sheet of water. For the mystic's experience of mind, especially when it falls still, is not that of an abstract condition or impalpable activity of the consciousness; it is rather an experience of a substance—an extended subtle substance in which there can be and are waves, currents, vibrations not physically material but still as definite, as perceptible, as tangible and controllable by an inner sense as any movement of material energy or substance by the physical senses. The stillness of the mind means, first, the falling to rest of the habitual thought movements, thought formations, thought currents which agitate this mind-substance. That repose, vacancy of movement, is for many a sufficient mental silence. But, even in this repose of all thought movements and all movements of feeling, one sees, when one looks more closely at it, that the mind-substance is still in a constant state of very subtle formless but potentially formative vibration—not at first easily observable, but afterwards quite

evident — and that state of constant vibration may be as harmful to the exact reflection or reception of the descending Truth as any formed thought movement or emotional movement; for these vibrations are the source of a mentalisation which can diminish or distort the authenticity of the higher Truth or break it up into mental refractions. When I speak of a still mind, I mean then one in which these subtler disturbances too are no longer there. As they fall quiet one can feel an increasing stillness which is not the lesser quietude of repose and also a resultant clearness as palpable as the stillness and clearness of a physical atmosphere.

This positiveness of experience is my justification for these epithets "still, clear"; but the other epithet, "bright", links itself to a still more sensible phenomenon of the subtly concrete. For in the brightness I describe there is another additional element that is connected with the phenomenon of Light well known and common to mystic experience. That inner Light of which the mystics speak is not a metaphor, as when Goethe called for more light in his last moments; it presents itself as a very positive illumination actually seen and felt by the inner sense. The brightness of the still and clear mind is a reflection of this Light that comes even before the Light itself manifests — and, even without any actual manifestation of the Light, is sufficient for the mind's openness to the greater consciousness beyond mind — just as we can see by the dawn-light before the sunrise; for it brings to the still mind, which might otherwise remain just still and at peace and nothing more, a capacity of penetrability to the Truth it has to receive and harbour. I have emphasised this point at a little length because it helps to bring out the difference between the abstract mental and the concrete mystic perception of supraphysical things which is the source of much misunderstanding between the spiritual seeker and the intellectual thinker. Even when they speak the same language it is a different order of perceptions to which the language refers. The same word in their mouths may denote the products of two different grades of consciousness. This ambiguity in the expression is a cause of much non-understanding and disagreement, while even a surface

agreement may be a thin bridge or crust over a gulf of difference.

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I come now to the question raised by Professor Sorley, what is the relation—or rather the position—of the intellect in regard to mystic or spiritual experience. Is it true as it is often contended that the mystic must, whether as to the validity of his experience itself or the validity of his expression of it, accept the intellect as the judge? It ought to be very plain that in the search, the discovery, the getting of the experience itself the intellect cannot claim to put its limits or its law on an endeavour whose very aim, first principle, constant method is to go beyond the domain of the ordinary earth-ruled and sense-ruled mental intelligence. It would be as if you were to ask me to climb a mountain with a rope around me attaching me to the terrestrial level—or as if I were permitted to fly but only on condition that I kept my feet on the earth or near enough to the safety of the ground while I do it. It may indeed be the securest thing to walk on earth, to be on the firm ground of terrestrial reason always; to attempt to ascend on wings to the Beyond-Mind ether may be to risk mental confusion and collapse and all possible accidents of error, illusion, extravagance, hallucination or what not—the usual charges of the positive earth-walking intellect against mystic experience; but I have to take the risk if I want to do it at all. The reasoning intellect bases itself on man's normal consciousness, it proceeds by the workings of a mental perception and conception of things; it is at its ease only when founded on a logical basis formed by terrestrial experience and its accumulated data. The mystic goes beyond into a region where the everyday mental basis falls away; the terrestrial data on which the reason finds itself are exceeded, there is even another law and canon of perception and knowledge. His entire business is to break out or upward or widen into a new consciousness which looks at things in a very different way, and if this new consciousness may include, though viewed with quite another vision, the data of the ordinary external intelligence, yet it cannot be limited by them, cannot bind itself to see from the intellectual standpoint or

conform to its manner of conceiving, reasoning, its established interpretation of experience. A mystic entering the domain of the occult or of the spirit with the intellect as his only or his supreme light or guide would risk to see nothing, or see according to his preconceived mental idea of things or else he would arrive only at a subtly "positive" mental realisation of perceptions already laid down for him by the abstract speculations of the intellectual thinker.

There is a strain of spiritual thought in India which compromises with the modern intellectual demand and admits Reason as a supreme judge,—but it must be a Reason which in its turn is prepared to compromise and accept the data of spiritual experience as valid *per se*. That is to do what the Indian philosophers have always done; for they have tried to establish by the light of metaphysical reasoning generalisations drawn from spiritual experience; and it was always on the basis of that experience that they proceeded and with the evidence of the spiritual seekers as a supreme proof ranking higher than intellectual speculation or inference. In that way they preserved the freedom of spiritual and mystic experience and allowed the reasoning intellect to come in only on the second line as a judge of the generalised metaphysical statements drawn from the experience, but not of the experience itself. This is, I presume, something akin to Professor Sorley's own position—for he concedes that the experience itself is of the domain of the ineffable, but he suggests that as soon as I begin to interpret it, to state it, I fall back inevitably into the domain of the thinking mind; I am using its terms and ways of thought and expression and must accept the intellect as judge. If I do not, I knock away the ladder by which I have climbed—through mind to Beyond-Mind—and I am left unsupported in the air. It is not quite clear whether the truth of my experience itself is supposed to be invalidated by this unsustained position, but at any rate it remains something aloof and incommunicable without support or any consequences for thought or life. There are three propositions, I suppose, which I can take as laid down or admitted in this contention and joined together. First, the spiritual experience is itself of the Beyond-Mind, ineffable and,

it should be presumed, unthinkable. Next,—in the expression, the interpretation of the experience, you are obliged to fall back into the domain of the consciousness you have left and so you must abide by its judgments, accept the terms and the canons of its law, submit to its verdict; for you have abandoned the freedom of the Ineffable and are no longer your own master. Last, spiritual truth may be true in itself, in its own self-experience, but any statement of it is liable to error and here the intellect is the sole possible arbiter.

I do not think I am prepared to accept any of these affirmations completely just as they are. It is true that spiritual and mystic experience carries one first into domains of Other-Mind or All-Mind (and also Other-Life and All-Life and I would add Other-Substance and All-Substance) and then emerges into the Beyond-Mind; it is true also that the ultimate Truth has been described as unthinkable, ineffable, unknowable—"speech cannot reach there, mind cannot arrive to it." But I may observe that it is so to human mind, but not to itself, since it is not an abstraction, but a superconscious (not unconscious) Existence,—for it is described as to itself self-evident and self-luminous,—therefore in some direct supramental or at least overmind way knowable and known, eternally self-aware. But here the question is not of an ultimate realisation of the ultimate Ineffable which according to many can only be reached in a supreme trance withdrawn from all outer mental or other awareness; we are speaking rather of an experience in a luminous silence of the mind and any such experience presupposes that before there is any last unspeakable experience of the Ultimate or disappearance into it, there is possible a reflection or descent of at least some Power or Presence of the identical Reality into the mind-substance. Along with it there is a modification of mind-substance, an illumination of it,—and of this experience an expression of some kind, a rendering into thought ought to be possible. Moreover an immense mass of well-established spiritual experience would have been impossible unless we suppose that the Ineffable and Unknowable has truths of itself, aspects, revealing presentations of it to our consciousness which are not utterly unthinkable and ineffable.

If it were not so, indeed, all account of spiritual truth and experience would be impossible. At most one could speculate about it, but that would be an activity very much indeed in the air and even a movement in a void, without support or data. At best, there could be a mere manipulation of all the possible ideas of what conceivably might be the Supreme and Ultimate. For we would have nothing before us to go upon other than the bare fact of a certain unaccountable translation by one way or another from consciousness to an incommunicable Supraconsciousness. That is indeed what much mystical seeking actually held up as the one thing essential both in Europe and India. Many Christian mystics spoke of a total darkness through which one must pass into the Ineffable Light and Rapture, a falling away of all mental lights and all that belongs to the ordinary activity of the nature; they aimed not only at a silence but a darkness of the mind protecting an inexpressible illumination. The Indian Sannyasins sought by silence, by concentration inwards, to shed mind altogether and pass into a thought-free trance from which, if one returns, no communication or expression could be brought back of what was there except a remembrance of ineffable existence and bliss. But still even here there were previous glimpses or contacts and results of contact of That which is Beyond; there were contacts of the Highest or of the occult universal Existence, which were held to be spiritual truths and on the basis of which the seers and mystics did not hesitate to formulate their experience and the thinkers to build on it numberless philosophies, theologies, books of exegesis or of creed and dogma. All then is not ineffable; there is a possibility of communication and expression, and the only question is of the nature of this transmission of the facts of a different order of consciousness to the mind and whether it is feasible for the intellect or must be left for something else than intellect to determine the validity of the expression or, even, of the original experience. If no valid account were possible there could be no question of the judgment of the intellect — only the violent contradiction of mind sitting down to judge a Beyond-Mind of which it can know nothing, starting to speak of the Ineffable,

think of the Unthinkable, comprehend the Incommunicable.

Comments on Thoughts of J. M. E. McTaggart

I have heard of McTaggart as a philosopher but am totally unacquainted with his thought and his writings, so it is a little difficult for me to answer you with any certitude. Isolated thoughts or sentences may easily be misunderstood if they are not read against the background of the thinker's way of looking at things taken as a whole. There is always, too, the difference of standpoint and approach between the spiritual seeker or mystic who (sometimes) philosophises and the intellectual thinker who (sometimes or partly) mysticises. The one starts from a spiritual or mystic experience or at the least an intuitive realisation and tries to express it and its connection with other spiritual or intuitive truth in the inadequate and too abstract language of the mind; he looks behind thought and expression for some spiritual or intuitive experience to which it may point and, if he finds none, he is apt to feel the thought, however intellectually fine, or the expression, however intellectually significant, as something unsubstantial because without spiritual substance. The intellectual thinker starts from ideas and mentalised feelings and other mental or external phenomena and tries to reach the essential truth in or behind them; generally, he stops short at a mental abstraction or only a derivative mental realisation of something that is in its own nature other than mental. But if he has the true mystic somewhere in him, he will sometimes get beyond to at least flashes and glimpses. Is it not the compulsion of this approach (I mean the inadequacy of the method of intellectual philosophy, its fixation to the word and idea, while to the complete mystic word and idea are useful symbols only or significative flashlights) that kept McTaggart, as it keeps many, from the unfolding of the mystic within him? If the reviewer is right, that would be why he is abstract and dry, while what is beautiful and moving in his thought might be some light that shines through in spite of the inadequate means of expression to which philosophical thinking condemns us. However, subject to

this rather lengthy caveat, I will try to deal with the extracted sentences or summarised thoughts you have placed before me in your letter.

"Love the main occupation of the selves in absolute reality." This seems to me a little excessive. If instead of "the main occupation" it were said "an essential power", that might pass. I would myself say that bliss and oneness are the essential condition of the absolute reality and love as the most characteristic dynamic power of bliss and oneness must support fundamentally and colour their activities; but the activities themselves may be not of one main kind but manifold in character.

Benevolence and sympathy. In mental experience benevolence and sympathy have to be distinguished from love; but it seems to me that beyond the dividing mind, where the true sense of oneness begins, these become at a higher intensity of their movement characteristic values of love. Benevolence becomes an intense compulsion imposed by love to seek always the good of the loved, sympathy becomes the feeling out of love to contain, participate in and take as part of one's own existence all the movements of the loved and all that concerns him.

"Love is authentic and justifies itself completely whether its cause be great or trivial." That is not often true in human practice; for there the destiny of love and its justification depend very much as a rule (though not always) on the nature of the cause or object. For if the object of love is trivial in the sense of his being an inadequate instrument for the dynamic realisation of the sense of oneness which McTaggart says is the essence of love, then love is likely to be baulked of its fulfilment. Unless, of course, it is satisfied with existing, with spending itself in its own fundamental way on the loved without expecting any return for its self-expenditure, any mutual unification. Still, of Love in its essence the statement may be true; but then it would point to the fact that Love at its origin is a self-existent force, an absolute, a transcendent (as I have put it), which does not depend upon the objects,— it depends only on itself or only on the Divine,— for it is a self-existent power of the Divine. If it were not self-existent, it would hardly be independent of the nature or reaction of its

object. It is partly what I mean when I speak of transcendent Love — though this is only one aspect of its transcendence. That self-existent transcendent Love spreading itself over all, turning everywhere to contain, embrace, unite, help, upraise towards love and bliss and oneness, becomes cosmic divine Love; intensely fixing itself on one or others to find itself, to achieve a dynamic unification or to reach here towards the union of the soul with the Divine, it becomes the individual divine Love. But there are unhappily its diminutions in the human mind, human vital, human physical; there the divine essence of Love may easily become mixed with counterfeits, dimmed, concealed or lost in the twisted movements born of division and ignorance.

Love and self-reverence. It sounds very high, but also rather dry; this “emotion” in the lover does not seem to be very emotional, it is a hill-top syllogising far above the flow of any emotional urges. Self-reverence in this sense or in a deeper sense can come from Love, but it *can* come equally from a participation in Knowledge, in Power or anything else that one feels to be the highest good or else of the essence of the Highest. But the passion of love, the adoration of love, can bring in a quite different, even an opposite emotion. Especially in love for the Divine or for one whom one feels to be divine, the Bhakta feels an intense reverence for the Loved, a sense of something of immense greatness, beauty or value and for himself a strong impression of his own comparative unworthiness and a passionate desire to *grow* into likeness with that which one adores. What does come very often with the inrush of Love is an exaltation, a feeling of a greatening within, of new powers and high or beautiful possibilities in one’s nature or of an intensification of the nature; but that is not exactly self-reverence. There is a deeper self-reverence possible, a true emotion, a sense of the value and even the sacredness of the soul, even the mind, life, body as an offering or itself the temple for the inner presence of the Beloved.

These reactions are intimately connected with the fact that Love, when it is worthy of the name, is always a seeking for union, for oneness, but also in its secret foundation it is a seeking, if sometimes only a dim groping for the Divine. Love

in its depths is a contact of the Divine Possibility or Reality in oneself with the Divine Possibility or Reality in the loved. It is the inability to affirm or keep this character that makes human love either transient or baulked of its full significance or condemned to sink into a less exalted movement diminished to the capacity of the human receptacle. But there McTaggart brings in his saving clause, "When I love, I see the other not as he is now (and therefore really is not), but as he really is (that is, as he will be)." The rest of it, that "the other with all his faults is somehow infinitely good—at least for his friend", seems to me too mental to convey anything very definite from the standpoint of the spiritual inner values. But the formula quoted also is not overclear. It means, I suppose, something like Vivekananda's distinction between the apparent Man and the real Man; or it coincides up to a point with the saying of one of the early teachers of Vedanta, Yajnavalkya, "Not for the sake of the wife is the wife dear" (or, the friend—for the wife is only the first of a list), "but for the sake of the Self (the greater Self, the Spirit within) is she dear." But Yajnavalkya, a seeker of the one (not the plural) Absolute, would not have accepted the implication in McTaggart's phrase; he would have said that one must go beyond and eventually seek the Self not in the wife or friend—even though sought or glimpsed there for a time, but in its own self-existence. In any case there seems to be here an avowal that it is not the human being (what he now is), but the Divine or a portion of the Divine within (call it God if you will or call it Absolute) that is the object of the love. But the mystic would not be satisfied like McTaggart with that "will be",—would not consent to remain in love with the finite for the sake of an unrealised Infinite. He would insist on pushing on towards full realisation, towards finding the Divine in Itself or the Divine Manifest; he would not rest satisfied with the Divine unconscious of itself, unmanifested or only distantly *in posse*.

There is where the parallel with the Ishta Devata which you suggest would not hold; for the Ishta Devata on whom the seeker concentrates is a *conscious* Personality of the Divine answering to the needs of his own personality and showing to

him as in a representative image what the Divine is or at least pointing him through itself to the Absolute. On the other side, when I spoke of the self-absorption of the Divine Force in its energising, I was trying to explain the possibility in a Divine or cosmic manifestation of this apparently inconscient Matter. I said that in the frontal movement there was something of the Divine that had thrown itself into material form with so much concentration that it became the motion and the form which the motion of Force creates and put all that was not that behind it,—even, but in a greater degree and more permanently, as a man can concentrate and forget his own existence in what he is doing, seeing or making. In man himself, who is not inconscient, this appears in a different way; his frontal being is unaware of what is behind the surface personality and action, like the part of the actor's being which becomes the role and forgets entirely the other more enduring self behind the actor. But in either case there is a larger self behind, "a Conscient in things inconscient", which is aware both of itself and of the self-forgetting frontal form seen as the creature. Does McTaggart recognise this conscious Divine within? He makes too little of this Absolute or Real Self which, as he yet sees, is within the unreal or less real appearance. His denial of the Divine comes from the insistence of his mind and vital temperament on the friend as he is, even though his higher mind may try to escape from that by the idea of what his friend will be; otherwise it is difficult to understand the stupendous exaggeration of his thesis that the love for friends is the *only* real thing in life and his unwillingness to give God a chance, lest that should take away the friend and leave the Divine in his place.

I do not quite seize what is his conception of the Absolute. How can it be said that a society (?) of distinct selves are collectively the Absolute? If it is meant that where there is a union of conscious liberated selves there is the presence of the Divine and a certain manifestation is possible,—that is intelligible. Or if by society is meant only that the sum or totality of all distinct selves is the Divine and these distinct individual selves are portions of the Divine, that would be an intelligible (pantheistic) solution.

Only, it would be a Divine All or some kind of Cosmic Self or Spirit rather than the Absolute. For if there is an Absolute — which intellectually one is not bound to believe, except that something in the higher mind seems imperatively to ask for it or feel that it is there, — it must surely exist in its own absolute right, not constituted, not dependent for its being on a collectivity of distinct selves, but self-existent. To the intellect such an Absolute may seem an indefinable *x* which it cannot grasp; but mystic or spiritual experience pushed far enough ultimately leads to it, and whatever may be the gate of experience through which one gets the first glimpse of it, it is there even though not fully grasped in that opening experience.

Your own experience of it was, you say, that of an irruption of the Infinite into the finite — of a greater Power descending upon you or uplifting you to itself. That indeed is what it is always to the spiritual experience — and that is why I speak of it as the Transcendent. It reveals itself as such a descending and uplifting Power or a descending and uplifting Love — or Light, Peace, Bliss, Consciousness, Presence; it is not limited by its manifestation in the finite, — one feels it, the Peace, the Power, Love, Light or Bliss or the Presence in which all these are, to be a self-existent infinity, not something constituted by or limited to our first sight of it here. McTaggart's love of friends remained the *only* real thing for him; I must suppose that he had not this glimpse. But once this irruption has taken place, this descent and uplifting, that is bound to become in the end the one thing real, for by that alone can the rest find its own lasting greater reality. It is the descent of the Divine Consciousness and the ascent or uplifting into it of which we speak in our Yoga. All else can only hold, make good, fulfil itself if it can lift itself to be a part of this divine realisation or of its manifestation, and, to do that, it must accept a great transformation and perfection. But the central realisation must be the one central aim, and it is that realisation only which will make other things, all that is intended to be made part of it, divinely possible.

Comments on Terms Used by Henri Bergson⁴

I have not read him [Bergson] sufficiently to pronounce. So far as I know, he seems to have some perception of the dynamic creative intuition involved in Life, but none of the truly suprarational intuition above. If so, his Intuition which he takes to be the sole secret of things is only a secondary manifestation of something transcendent which is itself only the “rays of the Sun”.

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Instinct and intuition as described by him [Bergson] are vital, but it is possible to develop a corresponding mental intuition, and that is probably what he suggests — and which depends not on thought but a sort of mental direct contact with things. This is not exactly mysticism, though it is a first step towards it.

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No, it [Bergson's élan vital] is not the Supramental. But Bergson's “intuition” seems to be a Life Intuition which is of course the Supramental fragmented and modified to act as a Knowledge in “Life-in-Matter”. I can't say definitively yet, but that is the impression it gave me.

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[Bergson's élan vital:] Not Sachchidananda but Chit-shakti in the disguise of Pranashakti. Bergson is, I believe, a vitalist (as opposed to a materialist on one side and an idealist on the other) with a strong perception of Time (in Upanishadic times they speculated whether Time was not the Brahman and some schools held that idea). So for him Brahman = Consciousness-Force = Time-Force = Life-Force. But the last two he sees vividly, while the first which is the real thing behind creation he sees very dimly.

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⁴ The six replies in this group were written to a correspondent who quoted sentences from Bergson's writings, commented on them and then asked Sri Aurobindo for his views.—Ed.

He [Bergson] sees Consciousness (Chit) not in its essential truth but as a creative Force = a sort of transcendent Life-Energy descending into Matter and acting there.

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I suppose Bergson must already know what the “mystics” say about the matter and has put his own interpretation or value upon it. So he would not at all be impressed by your suggestion.⁵ He would say, “I know all about that already.”

Metaphysics, Science and Spiritual Experience

I do not find it easy to answer the few brief and casual sentences in X's letter,—precisely because they are so brief and casual.⁶ Not knowing him or the turns of his mind, I do not exactly seize what is behind this passage in his letter. It would be easier to reply if I had some notion of the kind of thought or experience on which he takes his stand when he dismisses so cavalierly the statement of spiritual truth put forward in the *Arya*. As it is, I am obliged to answer to what *may* be behind his sentences and, as there is much that possibly stands behind them, the reply becomes long and elaborate and is in danger of seeming long and discursive. I could of course answer easily myself by a few brief and trenchant sentences of the same calibre, but in that kind of discussion there is no profit.

Let me say that he makes an initial mistake—quite natural for him, since he has not read the *Arya*,—when he describes the extract sent to him as a “theological fragment”. I must insist that there is no theology in the *Arya*. Nothing there is written to support or to develop any kind of religious belief or dogma or to confirm or enunciate the credo of any old or new religion. No less does he miss the mark when he describes as a scholastic distinction the substance of the passage. The teaching there is not

⁵ The correspondent asked whether he should write to Bergson in order to explain the true meaning of intuition and how to develop it.—Ed.

⁶ The paragraphs that follow are from the draft of a letter that was not revised or sent in this form to the correspondent.—Ed.

taken from books, nor, although put in philosophic language, is it based upon abstract thought or any formal logic. It expresses a fundamental spiritual experience, dynamic for the growth of the being, confirmed and enlarged and filled with detail by almost thirty years of continuous sadhana, and, as such, it cannot be seriously challenged or invalidated by mere intellectual question or reasoning, but, if at all, then only by a greater and wider spiritual experience. Moreover, it coincides (not in expression, it may be, but in substance) with the experience of hundreds of spiritual seekers in many paths and in all parts of the world since the days of the Upanishads—and of Plotinus and the Gnostics and Sufis—to the present time. It is hardly admissible then to put it aside as the thought of a tyro or beginner in spiritual knowledge making his first clumsy potshots at a solution of the crossword enigma of the universe. That description seems to show that he has missed the point of the passage altogether and that also makes it difficult to reply; for where there is no meeting point of minds, discussion is likely to be sterile.

I was a little surprised at first by this entire lack of understanding, shown still more in his cavil at the two Divines—for I had somehow got the impression that X was a Christian and the recognition of “two Divines”—the Divine Transcendent and the Divine Immanent—is, I have read, perfectly familiar to Christian ideas and to Christian experience. The words themselves in fact—transcendent and cosmic—are taken from the West. I do not know that there is anything exactly corresponding to them in the language of Indian spiritual thinking, although the experiences on which the distinction rests are quite familiar. On another side, Christianity insists not only on a double but a triple Divine. It even strikes me that this triple Godhead or Trinity is not very far off at bottom from my trinity of the individual, cosmic and transcendent Divine—as far at least as one can judge who has not himself followed the Christian discipline. Christ, whether as the human Incarnation or the Christos in men or the Godhead proceeding from the Father, seems to me to be quite my individual Divine. The Father has very much the appearance of the One who overstands and is immanent in the cosmos. And

although this is more obscure, yet if one can be guided by the indications in the Scripture, the Holy Ghost looks very much like a rather mysterious and inexpressible Transcendence and its descent very much like what I would call the descent of Light, Purity, Peace—that passeth all understanding—or Power of the supramental Spirit. In any case these Christian and Western ideas show surely that my affirmation of a double or a triple Divine is not anything new and ought not to be found startling or upsetting and I do not see why it should be treated as (in itself) obscure and unintelligible.

Again, are these or similar distinctions very positively made in the Christian, Sufi or other teachings mere theoretical abstractions, scholastic distinctions, theological cobwebs, or metaphysical puzzles? I had always supposed that they corresponded to very living, very dynamic, almost—for the paths to which they relate—indispensable experiences. No doubt, for those who follow other ways or no way at all or for those who have not yet had the illuminating and vivifying experience, they may seem at first a little difficult or unseizable. But that is true of most spiritual truth—and not of spiritual truth alone. There are many very highly intelligent and cultured people to whom a scientific explanation of even so patent and common a fact as electricity and electric light (this is a reminiscence of an article by Y. Y. in the *New Statesman and Nation*) seems equally difficult to seize by the mind or to fix either in the memory or the intelligence. And yet the distinction between positive and negative electricity, both necessary for the existence of the light,—like that of the passive and active Brahman (another scholastic distinction?) both necessary for the existence of the universe,—cannot be dismissed for that reason as something academic or scholastic, but is a very pertinent statement of things quite dynamic and real. No doubt the non-scientific man does not and perhaps need not trouble about these things and can be content to enjoy the electric light (when he is allowed to do so by the grace of the Pondicherry Municipality), without enquiring into the play of the forces behind it: but for the seeker after scientific truth or for the practical electrician it is a different matter. Now these

distinctions in the spiritual field are a parallel case; they seem theoretical or abstract only so long as experience has not made them concrete, but once experienced they become living stuff of the consciousness and, after a certain stage, even the basis of action and growth in the spiritual life.

Here I am driven to a rather lengthy digression from the main theme—for I am met by X's rather baffling appeal to Whitham's History of Science. What has Whitham or Science to do with spiritual truth or spiritual experience? I can only suppose that he condemns all intrusion of anything like metaphysical thought into the spiritual field—a position excessive but not altogether untenable—and even perhaps proposes to bring the scientific method and the scientific mentality into spiritual experience as the sole true way of arriving at or judging the truth of things. I should like to make my view clear as to that point, because here much confusion has been created about it, and more is possible. And the first thing I would say is that if metaphysics has no right to intervene in spiritual experience, neither has Science. There are here three different domains of knowledge and experience each with its own instrumentation, its own way of approach and seeing, suited for its own task, but not to be imposed or substituted in these other fields of knowledge,—at least unless and until they meet by some kind of supreme reconciling transmutation in something that is at the source of all knowledge. For knowledge may be essentially one, but like the one Divine, it manifests differently in different fields of its play and to abolish their distinctions is not the way to arrive at true understanding of experience.

Science deals effectively with phenomena and process and the apparent play of forces which determine the process. It cannot deal even intellectually in any adequate way with ultimate truths, that is the province of the higher, less external mind—represented up till now by metaphysics, though metaphysics is not its only possible power. If Science tries to fix metaphysical truth by forcing on this domain its own generalisations in the physical field, as people have been doing for almost the last century, it makes a mess of thought by illegitimately extended

conclusions and has in the end to retire from this usurpation as it is now beginning to retire. Its discoveries may be used by philosophy, but on the grounds proper to philosophy and not on the grounds proper to Science. The philosopher must judge the scientific conceptions of relativity or discontinuity or space-time, for instance, by his own processes and standards of evidence. So too, Science has no instrumentation or process of knowledge which can enable it to discover spiritual truth or to judge or determine the results of spiritual experience. There is a field of knowledge of process in the spiritual and the occult domain, in the discovery of a world of inner forces and their way of action and even of their objective dynamisation in the mind and life and the functioning of the body. But the mathematical exactitudes and rigid formulas of physical Science do not apply here and the mentality created by them would hamper spiritual experience.

Chapter Four

Science and Yoga

Science, Yoga and the Agnostic

I do not think anything can be said that would convince one who starts from exactly the opposite viewpoint to the spiritual, the way of looking at things of a Victorian agnostic. His points of doubt about the value — other than subjective and purely individual — of Yoga experience are that it does not aim at scientific truth and cannot be said to achieve ultimate truth because the experiences are coloured by the individuality of the seer. One might ask whether Science itself has arrived at any ultimate truth; on the contrary, ultimate truth even on the physical plane seems to recede as Science advances. Science started on the assumption that the ultimate truth must be physical and objective — and the objective Ultimate (or even less than that) would explain all subjective phenomena. Yoga proceeds on the opposite view that the ultimate Truth is spiritual and subjective and it is in that ultimate Light that we must view objective phenomena. It is the two opposite poles and the gulf is as wide as it can be.

Yoga, however, is scientific to this extent that it proceeds by subjective experiment and bases all its findings on experience; mental intuitions are admitted only as a first step and are not considered as realisation — they must be confirmed by being translated into and justified by experience. As to the value of the experience itself, it is doubted by the physical mind because it is subjective, not objective. But has the distinction much value? Is not all knowledge and experience subjective at bottom? Objective external physical things are seen very much in the same way by human beings because of the construction of the mind and senses; with another construction of mind and sense quite another account of the physical world would be given — Science itself has made that very clear. But your friend's point is that the Yoga experience is individual, coloured by the individuality of

the seer. It may be true to a certain extent of the precise form or transcription given to the experience in certain domains; but even here the difference is superficial. It is a fact that Yogic experience runs everywhere on the same lines. Certainly, there are, not one line, but many; for, admittedly, we are dealing with a many-sided Infinite to which there are and must be many ways of approach; but yet the broad lines are the same everywhere and the intuitions, experiences, phenomena are the same in ages and countries far apart from each other and systems practised quite independently from each other. The experiences of the mediaeval European bhakta or mystic are precisely the same in substance, however differing in names, forms, religious colouring etc., as those of the mediaeval Indian bhakta or mystic — yet these people were not corresponding with one another or aware of each other's experiences and results as are modern scientists from New York to Yokohama. That would seem to show that there is something there identical, universal and presumably true — however the colour of the translation may differ because of the difference of mental language.

As for ultimate Truth, I suppose both the Victorian agnostic and, let us say, the Indian Vedantin may agree that it is veiled but there. Both speak of it as the Unknowable; the only difference is that the Vedantin says it is unknowable by the mind and inexpressible by speech, but still attainable by something deeper or higher than the mental perception, while even mind can reflect and speech express the thousand aspects it presents to the mind's outward and inward experience. The Victorian agnostic would, I suppose, cancel this qualification; he would pronounce for the doubtful existence and, if existent, for the absolute unknowability of this Unknowable.

Science and Spirituality

I do not think the two questions you put are of much importance from the viewpoint of spiritual sadhana.

The question about science and spirituality would have been of some moment some twenty years ago and it filled the minds

of men in the earlier years of the twentieth century, but it is now out of date. Science itself has come to the conclusion that it cannot, as it once hoped, determine what is the truth of things or their real nature or what is behind physical phenomena; it can only deal with the process of physical things and how they come about or on what lines men can deal with and make use of them. In other words, the field of physical science has been now definitely marked off and limited and questions about God or the ultimate reality or other metaphysical or spiritual problems are outside it. This is at least the case all over continental Europe and it is only in England and America that there is still some attempt to reason about these things on the basis of physical science. The so-called sciences which try to deal with the mind and men (psychology etc.) are so much dependent on physical science that they cannot go beyond narrow limits. If science is to turn her face towards the Divine it must be a new science not yet developed which deals directly with the forces of the Life-world and of Mind and so arrives at what is beyond Mind, but present-day science cannot do that.

From the spiritual point of view such temporary phenomena as the turn of educated Hindus towards materialism are of little importance. There have always been periods when the mind of nations, continents, cultures turned towards materialism and away from all spiritual belief. Such periods came in ancient Europe in the first century A.D., in western Europe in the nineteenth century, but they are usually of short duration. Western Europe has already lost its faith in materialism and is seeking for something else, either turning back to old religion or groping for something new. Russia and Asia are now going through the same materialistic wave. These waves come because of a certain necessity in human development—to destroy the bondage of old forms and leave a free field for new truth and new forms of truth and action in life as well as of what is behind life.

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You ask me whether you have to give up your predilection for testing before accepting and to accept everything in *Yoga a priori*

— and by testing you mean testing by the ordinary reason. The only answer I can give to that is that the experiences of Yoga belong to an inner domain and go according to a law of their own, have their own method of perception, criteria and all the rest of it which are neither those of the domain of the physical senses nor of the domain of rational or scientific enquiry. Just as scientific enquiry passes beyond that of the physical senses and enters the domain of the infinite and the infinitesimal about which the senses can say nothing and test nothing — for one cannot see or touch an electron or know by the evidence of the sense-mind whether it exists or not or decide by that evidence whether the earth really turns round the sun and not rather the sun round the earth as our senses and all our physical experience daily tell us — so the spiritual search passes beyond the domain of scientific or rational enquiry and it is impossible by the aid of the ordinary positive reason to test the data of spiritual experience and decide whether those things exist or not or what is their law and nature. As in science, so here you have to accumulate experience on experience following faithfully the methods laid down by the Guru or by the systems of the past, you have to develop an intuitive discrimination which compares the experiences, see what they mean, how far and in what field each is valid, what is the place of each in the whole, how it can be reconciled or related with others that at first sight seem to contradict it, etc. etc. until you can move with a secure knowledge in the vast field of spiritual phenomena. That is the only way to test spiritual experience. I have myself tried the other method and found it absolutely incapable and inapplicable. On the other hand if you are not prepared to go through all that yourself — as few can do except those of extraordinary spiritual stature — you have to accept the leading of a Master, as in science you accept a teacher instead of going through the whole field of science and its experimentation all by yourself — at least until you have accumulated sufficient experience and knowledge. If that is accepting things *a priori*, well, you have to accept *a priori*. For I am unable to see by what valid tests you propose to make the ordinary reason the judge of what is beyond it.

You quote the sayings of Vivekananda and Kobiraj Gopinath. Is this Kobiraj the disciple of the Jewel Sannyasi or is he another? In any case, I would like to know before assigning a value to these utterances what they actually did for the testing of their spiritual perceptions and experiences. How did Vivekananda test the value of his spiritual experiences—some of them not more credible to the ordinary mind than the translation through the air of Bijoy Goswami's wife to Lake Manas or of Bijoy Goswami himself by a similar method to Benares? I know nothing of Kobiraj Gopinath, but what were his tests and how did he apply them? What were his methods? his criteria? It seems to me that no ordinary mind could accept the apparition of Buddha out of a wall or the half hour's talk with Hayagriva as valid facts by any kind of testing. It would either have to accept them *a priori* or on the sole evidence of Vivekananda which comes to the same thing or to reject them *a priori* as hallucinations or mere mental images accompanied in one case by an auditive hallucination. I fail to see how it could "test" them. Or how was I to test by the ordinary mind my experience of Nirvana? To what conclusion could I come about it by the aid of the ordinary positive reason? How could I test its validity? I am at a loss to imagine. I did the only thing I could—to accept it as a strong and valid truth of experience, let it have its full play and produce its full experiential consequences until I had sufficient Yogic knowledge to put it in its place. Finally, how without inner knowledge or experience can you or anyone else test the inner knowledge and experience of others?

I have often said that discrimination is not only perfectly admissible but indispensable in spiritual experience. But it must be a discrimination founded on knowledge, not a reasoning founded on ignorance. Otherwise you tie up your mind and hamper experience by preconceived ideas which are as much *a priori* as any acceptance of a spiritual truth or experience can be. Your idea that surrender can only come by love is a point in instance. It is perfectly true in Yogic experience that surrender by true love which means psychic and spiritual love is the most powerful, simple and effective of all, but one cannot, putting

that forward as a dictum arrived at by the ordinary reason, shut up the whole of possible experience of true surrender into that formula or announce on its strength that one must wait till one loves perfectly before one can surrender. Yogic experience shows that surrender can also be made by the mind and will, a clear and sincere mind seeing the necessity of surrender and a clear and sincere will enforcing it on the recalcitrant members. Also experience shows that not only can surrender come by love, but love also can come by surrender or grow with it from an imperfect to a perfect love. One starts by an intense idea and will to know or reach the Divine and surrenders more and more one's ordinary personal ideas, desires, attachments, urges to action or habits of action so that the Divine may take up everything. Surrender means that, to give up our little mind and its mental ideas and preferences into a divine Light and a greater knowledge, our petty personal troubled blind stumbling will into a great calm tranquil luminous Will and Force, our little restless tormented feelings into a wide intense divine Love and Ananda, our small suffering personality into the one Person of which it is an obscure outcome. If one insists on one's own ideas and reasonings, the greater Light and Knowledge cannot come or else is marred and obstructed in the coming at every step by a lower interference; if one insists on one's own desires and fancies, that great luminous Will and Force cannot act in its own true power—for you ask it to be the servant of your desires; if one refuses to give up one's petty ways of feeling, eternal Love and supreme Ananda cannot descend or is mixed and is spilt from the effervescent crude emotional vessel. No amount of ordinary reasoning can get rid of that necessity of surmounting the lower in order that the higher may be there.

Science and the Supernormal

Scientific laws only give a schematic account of material processes of Nature—as a valid scheme they can be used for reproducing or extending at will a material process, but obviously they cannot give an account of the thing itself. Water

for instance is not merely so much oxygen and hydrogen put together—the combination is simply a process or device for enabling the materialisation of a new thing called water; what that new thing really is is quite another matter. In fact there are different planes of substance, gross, subtle and more subtle going back to what is called causal (*kāraṇa*) substance. What is more gross can be reduced to the subtle state and the subtle brought into the gross state; that accounts for dematerialisation and materialisation and rematerialisation. These are occult processes and are vulgarly regarded as magic. Ordinarily the magician knows nothing of the why and wherefore of what he is doing, he has simply learned the formula or process or else controls elemental beings of the subtler states (planes or worlds) who do the thing for him. The Tibetans indulge widely in occult processes; if you see the books of Madame David-Neel who has lived in Tibet you will get an idea of their expertness in these things. But also the Tibetan Lamas know something of the laws of occult (mental and vital) energy and how it can be made to act on physical things. That is something which goes beyond mere magic. The direct power of mind-force or life-force upon Matter can be extended to an almost illimitable degree. It must be remembered that Energy is fundamentally one in all the planes, only taking more and more dense forms, so there is nothing *a priori* impossible in mind-energy or life-energy acting directly on material energy and substance; if they do they can make a material object do things or rather can do things with a material object which would be to that object in its ordinary poise or “law” unhabitual and therefore apparently impossible.

I do not see how cosmic rays can explain the origination of Matter; it is like Sir Oliver Lodge's explanation of life on earth that it comes from another planet; it only pushes the problem one step farther back—for how do the cosmic rays come into existence? But it is a fact that Agni is the basis of forms as the Sankhya pointed out long ago, i.e. the fiery principle in its three powers radiant, electric and gaseous (the Vedic trinity of Agni) is the agent in producing liquid and solid forms of what is called matter.

Obviously a layman can't do these things, unless he has a native "psychic" (that is, occult) faculty and even then he will have to learn the law of the thing before he can use it at will. It is always possible to use spiritual force or mind-power or will-power or a certain kind of vital energy to produce effects in men, things and happenings; but knowledge and much practice is needed before this possibility ceases to be occasional and haphazard and can be used quite consciously, at will or to perfection. Even then to have "a control over the whole material world" is too big a proposition; a local and partial control is more possible or, more widely, certain kinds of control over matter.

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The desire [*of occultists and spiritists*] to satisfy the physical scientists is absurd and illogical. The physical scientists have their own field with its own instruments and standards. To apply the same tests to phenomena of a different kind is as foolish as to apply physical tests to spiritual truth. One can't dissect God or see the soul under a microscope. So also the subjection of disembodied spirits or even of psycho-physical phenomena to tests and standards valid only for material phenomena is a most false and unsatisfactory method. Moreover the physical scientist is for the most part resolved not to admit what cannot be neatly packed and labelled and docketed in his own system and its formulas. Dr. Jules Romains, himself a scientist as well as a great writer, makes experiments to prove that men can see and read with the eyes blindfolded, the scientists refuse even to admit or record the results. Khuda Baksh comes along and proves it patently, indubitably, under all legitimate tests, the scientists are quite unwilling to cede and record the fact even though his results are undeniable. He walks on fire unhurt and disproves all hitherto suggested explanations,—they simply cast about for another and still more silly explanation! What is the use of trying to convince people who are determined not to believe?

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These theosophic and other modern attempts to square physical

Science with Yoga (Yogis formerly did not bother to differentiate spiritual functions from grey matter and white matter) make me always suspicious. It looks like manufacture of the mind, pseudo-science.

Science and Superstition

It is quite true that the word “superstition” has been habitually used as a convenient club to beat down any belief that does not agree with the ideas of the materialistic reason, that is to say, of the physical mind dealing with the apparent law of physical process and seeing no farther. It has also been used to dismiss ideas and beliefs not in agreement with one’s own idea of what is the rational norm of supraphysical truths as well. For many ages man cherished beliefs that implied a force behind which acted on principles unknown to the physical mind and beyond the witness of the outward reason and the senses. Science came in with a method of knowledge which extended the evidence of this outer field of consciousness and thought that by this method all existence would become explicable. It swept away at once without examination all the ancient beliefs as so many “superstitions”—true, half true or false, all went into the dust-bin in one impartial sweep, because they did not rely on the method of physical Science and lay outside its data or were or seemed incompatible with its standpoint. Even in the field of supraphysical experience only so much was admitted as could give a mentally rational explanation of itself according to a certain range of ideas—all the rest, everything that seemed to demand an occult, mystic or below-the-surface origin to explain it, was put aside as so much superstition. Popular beliefs that were the fruit sometimes of imagination but sometimes also of a traditional empirical knowledge or of a right instinct shared naturally the same fate. That all this was a hasty and illegitimate operation, itself based on the “superstition” of the all-sufficiency of the new method which really applies only to a limited field, is now becoming more and more evident. I agree with you that the word superstition is one which should be used either not at

all or with great caution. It is evidently an anachronism to apply it to beliefs not accepted by the form of religion one happens oneself to follow or favour.

The growing reversal of opinion with regard to many things that were then condemned but are now coming into favour once more, is very striking. In addition to the instances you quote a hundred others might be added. One does not quite know why a belief in graphology should be condemned as irrational or superstitious; it seems to me quite rational to believe that a man's handwriting is the result of or consistent with his temperament and nature and, if so, it may very well prove on examination to be an index of character. It is now a known fact that each man is an individual by himself with his own peculiar formation different from others and made by minute variations in the general human plan,— this is true of small physical characteristics, it is evidently equally true of psychological characteristics; it is not unreasonable to suppose a correlation between the two. On that basis cheiromancy too may very well have a truth in it, for it is a known fact that the lines in an individual hand are different from the lines in others and that this as well as differences of physiognomy may carry in it psychological indications is not impossible. The difficulty for minds trained under rationalistic influences becomes greater when these lines or the data of astrology are interpreted as signs of destiny, because modern rationalism resolutely refused to admit that the future was determined or could be determinable. But this looks more and more like one of the "superstitions" of the modern mind, a belief curiously contradictory of the fundamental notions of Science. For Science has believed, at least until yesterday, that everything is determined in Nature and it attempts to find the law of that determination and to predict future physical happenings on that basis. If so, it is reasonable to suppose that there are unseen connections determining human events in the world and that future events may therefore be predictable. Whether it can be done on the lines of astrology or cheiromancy is a matter for enquiry and one does not get any farther by dismissing the possibility with a summary denial. The case for astrology is fairly

strong; a case seems to exist for cheiromancy also.

On the other hand it is not safe to go too hastily in the other direction. There is the opposite tendency to believe everything in these fields and not keep one's eyes open to the element of limitation or error in these difficult branches of knowledge — it was this excess of belief that helped to discredit them, because their errors were patent. It does not seem to me established that the stars determine the future — though that is possible, but it does look as if they indicate it — or rather some certitudes and many potentialities of the future. Even the astrologers admit that there is another element of determination in man himself which limits the field of astrological prediction and may even alter many of its ascertained results. There is a very tangled and difficult complex of forces making up any determination of things in the world and when we have disentangled one thread of the skein and follow it we may get many striking results, but we cannot rely on it as the one wholly reliable clue. The mind's methods are too rigid and conveniently simple to unravel the true or whole truth whether of the Reality or of its separate phenomena.

I would accept your statement about the possibility of knowing much about a man from an observation of a small part of his being, physical or psychological, but I think it is to go too far to say that one can reconstruct a whole man from one minute particle of a hair. I should say from my knowledge of the complexity and multiplicity of elements in the human being that such a procedure would be hazardous and would leave a large part of the Unknown overshadowing the excessive certitude of this inferential structure.

I suppose we cannot go so far as to deny that there is such a thing as superstition — a fixed blind belief without any ground in something that is quite unsound and does not hang together. The human mind readily claps on such beliefs to things which can be or are in themselves true, and this is a mixture which very badly confuses the search for knowledge. But precisely because of that mixture, because somewhere behind the superstition or not far off from it there is very usually some real truth, one ought to be cautious in using the word or sweeping away with it as a

convenient broom the true, the partly true and the unfounded together and claiming that the bare ground left is the only truth of the matter.

*

When I wrote that sentence [*about a “fixed blind belief”*] I was not thinking really of religious beliefs, but of common popular ideas and beliefs. Your feeling about the matter, in any case, is quite sound. One can and ought to believe and follow one's own path without condemning or looking down on others for having beliefs different from those one thinks or sees to be the best or the largest in truth. The spiritual field is many-sided and full of complexities and there is room for an immense variety of experiences. Besides, all mental egoism,—and spiritual egoism —has to be surmounted and this sense of superiority should therefore not be cherished.

P. S. A sincere, whole-hearted and one-pointed following of this Yoga should lead to a level where these rigid mental divisions do not exist for they are mental walls put round one part of Truth and Knowledge so as to cut it off from the rest, but this view from above the mind is comprehensive and everything falls into its place in the whole.

The Limitations of Science

I think what you write is unexceptionable as a statement of the necessary limitations of physical Science to its own field. It is only in the occult sciences that one can find the necessary connection or bridge between the spiritual and material which X is demanding from the physical sciences. X's attitude is a sort of reaction against the old error of the materialism which used science to discredit not only the mistakes of religion, but all spiritual truth—but that phase is now over and one can be content with recording its passing without trying to reverse the process by using science to support or establish spiritual truth—spiritual truth can exist in itself and needs no such buttressing from outside.

*

I think X bases his ideas on the attempt of Jeans, Eddington and other English scientists to thrust metaphysical conclusions into scientific facts; it is necessary that he should appreciate fully the objections of more austere scientific minds to such a mixture. Moreover, spiritual seeking has its own accumulated knowledge which does not depend in the least on the theories or discoveries of science in the purely physical sphere. X's attempt like that of Jeans and others is a reaction against the illegitimate attempts of some scientific minds in the nineteenth century and of many others who took advantage of the march of scientific discovery to discredit or abolish as far as possible the religious spirit and to discredit also metaphysics as a cloudy verbiage, exalting science as the only clue to the truth of the universe. But I think that attitude is now dead or moribund; the scientists recognise, as you point out, the limits of their sphere. I may observe that the conflict between religion and science never arose in India (until the days of European education) because religion did not interfere with scientific discovery and scientists did not question religious or spiritual truth because the two things were kept on separate but not opposing lines.

*

The defect in what X writes about Science seems to be that he is insisting vehemently on the idea that Science is still materialistic or at least that scientists, Jeans and Eddington excepted, are still fundamentally materialists. This is not the fact. Most continental scientists have now renounced the idea that Science can explain the fundamentals of existence. They hold that Science is only concerned with process and not with fundamentals. They declare that it is not the business of Science nor is it within its means to decide anything about the great questions which concern philosophy and religion. This is the enormous change which the latest developments of Science have brought about. Science itself nowadays is neither materialistic nor idealistic. The rock on which materialism was built and which in the 19th century seemed unshakeable has now been shattered. Materialism has now become a philosophical speculation just like any other

theory; it cannot claim to found itself on a sort of infallible Biblical authority, based on the facts and conclusions of Science. This change can be felt by one like myself who grew up in the heyday of absolute rule of scientific materialism in the 19th century. The way which had been almost entirely barred except by rebellion now lies wide open to spiritual truths, spiritual ideas, spiritual experiences. That is the real revolution. Mentalism is only a halfway house but mentalism and vitalism are now perfectly possible as hypotheses based on the facts of existence, scientific facts as well as any others. The facts of Science do not compel anyone to take any particular philosophical direction. They are now neutral and can even be used on one side or another though most scientists do not consider such a use as admissible. Nobody here ever said that the new discoveries of physics supported the ideas of religion or churches; they merely contended that Science had lost its old materialistic dogmatism and moved away by a revolutionary change from its old moorings.

It is this change which I expected and prophesied in my poems in the first *Ahana* volume, "A Vision of Science" and "In the Moonlight".¹

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Psychologists of course having to deal with mental movements more easily recognise that there can be no real equation between them and physiological processes and at the most mind and body react on each other as is inevitable since they are lodging together. But even a great physical scientist like Huxley recognised that mind was something quite different from matter and could not possibly be explained in the terms of matter. Only since then physical Science became very arrogant and presumptuous and tried to subject everything to itself and its processes. Now in theory it has begun to recognise its limitations in a general way, but the old mentality is still too habitual in most scientists to shake off yet.

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¹ These two poems are currently published in Collected Poems, volume 2 of THE COMPLETE WORKS OF SRI AUROBINDO, pp. 204–6 and 237–44.—Ed.

The minds of these people [*scientists*] are too much accustomed to deal with physical things and things measurable by instruments and figures to be much good for any other provinces. Einstein's views outside his domain are crude and childish, a sort of unsubstantial commonplace idealism without grasp on realities. As a man can be a great scholar and yet simple and foolish, so a man can be a great scientist but his mind and ideas negligible in other things.

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There is nothing superior in the scientist's brain except a faculty of observing and analysing and drawing conclusions. It is the intellectual plane.

*

The scientific mind refuses to leave anything unclassed. Has it not classified the Divine also?

*

How does Sir James Jeans or any other scientist know that it was by a "mere accident" that life came into existence or that there is no life anywhere else in the universe or that life elsewhere must either be exactly the same as life here under the same conditions or not existent at all? These are mere mental speculations without any conclusiveness in them. Life can be an accident only if the whole world also is an accident—a thing created by Chance and governed by Chance. It is not worth while to waste time on this kind of speculation, for it is only the bubble of a moment.

The material universe is only the façade of an immense building which has other structures behind it and it is only if one knows the whole that one can have some knowledge of the truth of the material universe. There are vital, mental and spiritual ranges behind which give the material its significance. If the earth is the only field of the spiritual evolution in Matter —(assuming that)— then it must be as part of the total design. The idea that all the rest must be a waste is a human idea which

would not trouble the vast Cosmic Spirit — whose consciousness and life are everywhere, in the slime and dust as much as in the human intelligence. But this is a speculative question which is quite alien to our practical purpose. For us it is the development of the spiritual consciousness in the human body that matters.

In this development there are stages — the whole truth cannot be known till all are passed and the final stage is there. The stage in which you are is one in which the Self is beginning to be realised, the Self free from all embodiment and not depending on embodiment for its perpetual existence. It is therefore natural that you should feel the embodiment to be something quite subordinate and like the earth-life of Jeans almost accidental. It is because of this stage that the Mayavadins, taking it for final, thought the world to be an illusion. But this is only a stage of the journey. Beyond this Self which is static, separate, formless, there is a greater consciousness in which the Silence and the Cosmic Activity are united but in another knowledge than the walled-in ignorance of the embodied human being. This Self is only one aspect of the Divine Reality. It is when one gets to that greater Consciousness that cosmic existence and form and life and mind no longer appear to be an accident but find their significance. Even there there are two stages, the overmental and the supramental, and it is not till one gets to the last that the full truth of existence can become entirely real to the consciousness. Observe what you experience and know that it has its value and is indispensable as a stage, but do not take the experience as the final knowledge.

Physics and Metaphysics

The difficulty is that you are a non-scientist trying to impose your ideas on the most difficult because most material field of science — physics. It is only if you were a scientist yourself basing your ideas on universally acknowledged scientific facts or else your own discoveries — though even then with much difficulty — that you could get a hearing or your opinion have any weight. Otherwise you open yourself to the accusation of pronouncing in

a field where you have no authority, just as the scientist himself does when he pronounces on the strength of his discoveries that there is no God. When the scientist says that “scientifically speaking God is a hypothesis which is no longer necessary” he is talking arrant nonsense — for the existence of God is not and cannot be and never was a scientific hypothesis or problem at all, it is and always has been a spiritual or a metaphysical problem. You cannot speak scientifically about it at all either pro or con. The metaphysician or the spiritual seeker has a right to point out that it is nonsense; but if you lay down the law to the scientist in the field of science, you run the risk of having the same objection turned against you.

As to the unity of all knowledge, that is a thing *in posse*, not yet *in esse*. The mechanical method of knowledge leads to certain results, the higher method leads to certain others, and they at many points fundamentally disagree. How is the difference to be bridged — for each seems valid in its own field: it is a problem to be solved, but you cannot solve it in the way you propose. Least of all in the field of physics. In psychology one can say that the mechanical or physiological approach takes hold of the thing by the blind end and is the least fruitful of all — for psychology is not primarily a thing of mechanism and measure, it opens to a vast field beyond the physical instrumentalities of the body consciousness. In biology one can get a glimpse of something beyond mechanism, because there is from the beginning a stir of consciousness progressing and organising itself more and more for self-expression. But in physics you are in the very domain of the mechanical law where process is everything and the driving consciousness has chosen to conceal itself with the greatest thoroughness — so that, “scientifically speaking”, it does not exist there. One can discover it there only by occultism and Yoga, but the methods of occult science and of Yoga are not measurable or followable by the means of physical science — so the gulf remains still in existence. It may be bridged one day, but the physicist is not likely to be the bridge builder, so it is no use asking him to try what is beyond his province.

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The Isha Upanishad passage² is of course a much larger statement of the nature of universal existence than the Einstein theory which is confined to the physical universe. You can deduce too a much larger law of relativity from the statement in the verse. What it means from this point of view — for it contains much more in it — is that the absolute Reality exists but it is immovable and always the same, the universal movement is a motion of consciousness in this Reality of which only the Transcendent itself can seize the truth, which is self-evident to It, while the apprehension of it by the Gods (the mind, senses etc.) must necessarily be imperfect and relative since they can try to follow but none can really overtake (apprehend or seize) that Truth, each being limited by its own view-point,³ lesser instrumentality or capacity of consciousness etc. This is the familiar attitude of the Indian or at least the Vedantic mind which held that our knowledge, perception and experience of things in the world and of the world itself must be *vyāvahārika*, relative, practical or pragmatic only, — so declared Shankara, — it is in fact an illusory knowledge, the real Truth of things lying beyond our mental and sensory consciousness. Einstein's relativity is a scientific, not a metaphysical statement. The form and field of it are different — but, I suppose, if one goes back from it and beyond it to its essential significance, the real reason for its being so, one can connect it with the Vedantic conclusion. But to justify that to the intellect, you would have to go through a whole process to show how the connection comes — it does not self-evidently follow.

As for Jeans, many would say that his conclusions are not at all legitimate. Einstein's law is a scientific generalisation based upon certain relations proper to the domain of physics and, if valid, valid there in the limits of that domain, or, if you like, in the general domain of scientific observation and measurement of physical processes and motions; but how can you transform

² "One unmoving that is swifter than Mind, That the Gods reach not, for It progresses ever in front. That, standing, passes beyond others as they run." Isha Upanishad, verse 4. Sri Aurobindo's translation. See Isha Upanishad, volume 17 of THE COMPLETE WORKS OF SRI AUROBINDO, p. 6.

³ The Gods besides are in and subject to Space and Time, part of the motion in Space and Time, not superior to it.

that at once into a metaphysical generalisation? It is a jump over a considerable gulf—or a forceful transformation of one thing into another, of a limited physical result into an unlimited all-embracing formula. I don't quite know what Einstein's law really amounts to, but does it amount to more than this that our scientific measurements of time and other things are, in the conditions under which they have to be made, relative because subject to the unavoidable drawback of these conditions? What metaphysically follows from that—if anything at all does follow—it is for the metaphysicians, not the scientists to determine. The Vedantic position was that the Mind itself (as well as the senses) is a limited power making its own representations, constructions, formations and imposing them on the Reality. That is a much bigger and more intricate affair shooting down into the very roots of our existence. I think myself there are many positions taken by modern Science which tend to be helpful to that view—though in the nature of things they cannot be sufficient to prove it.

I state the objections only; I myself see certain fundamental truths underlying all the domains and the one Reality everywhere. But there is a great difference in the instruments used and the ways of research followed by the seekers in these different ways (the physical, the occult and the spiritual) and for the intellect at least the bridge between them has still to be built. One can point out analogies but it can be maintained very well that Science cannot be used for yielding or buttressing results of spiritual knowledge. The other side can be maintained also and it is best that both should be stated—so this is not meant to discourage your thesis.

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The article [*on metaphysics and science*] reads as if it had been written by a professor rather than a philosopher. What you speak of⁴ is, I suppose, a survival of the nineteenth-century scientific contempt for metaphysics; all thinking must be based on

⁴ *The correspondent said that the author of the article assumed that metaphysics is “one among the experimental sciences and has a darkened séance room for its laboratory”.*
—Ed.

scientific facts and the generalisations of science, often so faulty and ephemeral, must be made the basis for any sound metaphysical thinking. That is to make philosophy the handmaid of science, metaphysics the camp-follower of physics and to deny her her sovereign rights in her own city. It ignores the fact that the philosopher has his own domain and his own instruments; he may use scientific discoveries as material just as he may use any other facts of existence, but whatever generalisations science offers he must judge by his own standards—whether they are valid for transference to the metaphysical plane and, if so, how far. Still in the heyday of physical science before it discovered its own limitations and the shakiness of its scheme of things floating precariously in a huge infinity or boundless Finite of the Unknown, there was perhaps some excuse for such an attitude. But spiritualism glorified under the name of psychical research? That is not a science; it is a mass of obscure and ambiguous documents from which you can draw only a few meagre and doubtful generalisations. Moreover, so far as it belongs to the occult, it touches only the inferior regions of the occult—what we would call the lowest vital worlds—where there is as much falsehood and fake and confused error as upon the earth and even more. What is a philosopher to do with all that obscure and troubled matter? I do not catch the point of many of his remarks. Why should a prediction of a future event alter our conception—at least any philosophic conception—of Time? It can alter one's ideas of the relation of events to each other or of the working out of forces or of the possibilities of consciousness, but Time remains the same as before.

The dream⁵ is, of course, the rendering of an attempt at

⁵ A dream in which the correspondent had a long-distance telephone conversation. He commented: "Is there not something very symbolic about the emergence of telephony and cinematography just at an epoch when human behaviour and relationship is breaking down? Owing to falsehood and callousness and self-centred indifference to others, each person is to every other more and more a meaningless shadow and a deceptive voice." He also spoke about the decline of nobility and tenderness in art: "I fail to see any further need for human beings either as creators or enjoyers of such 'art'; perhaps in an Asuric civilisation, men are anyhow superfluous and only 'incarnated Asuras' are required?" —Ed.

communication on the subtle plane. As for the telephone and cinema, there is something of what you say, but it seems to me that these and other modern things could have taken on a different character if they had been accepted and used in a different spirit. Mankind was not ready for these discoveries, in the spiritual sense, nor even, if the present confusions are a sign, intellectually ready. The aesthetic downfall is perhaps due to other causes, a disappointed idealism in its recoil generating its opposite, a dry and cynical intellectualism which refuses to be duped by the ideal, the romantic or the emotional or anything that is higher than the reason walking by the light of the senses. The Asuras of the past were after all often rather big beings; the trouble about the present ones is that they are not really Asuras, but beings of the lower vital world, violent, brutal and ignoble, but above all narrow-minded, ignorant and obscure. But this kind of cynical narrow intellectualism that is rampant now, does not last—it prepares its own end by increasing dryness—men begin to feel the need of new springs of life.

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I am afraid I have lost all interest in these speculations [*about subjectivism in modern physics*]; things are getting too serious for me to waste time on these inconclusive intellectualities. I do not at all mind your driving your point triumphantly home and replacing a dogmatism from materialistic Science on its throne of half a century ago from which it could victoriously ban all thought surpassing its own narrow bounds as mere wordy metaphysics and mysticism and moonshine. Obviously, if material energies alone can exist in the material world, there can be no possibility of a life divine on the earth. A mere metaphysical “sleight of mind”, as one might call it, could not justify it against the objections of scientific negation and concrete common sense. I had thought that even many scientific minds on the Continent had come to admit that Science could no longer claim to decide what was the reality of things, that it had no means of deciding it and could only discover and describe the how and process of the operations of material Force in the physical front of things.

That left the field open to higher thought and speculation, spiritual experience and even to mysticism, occultism and all those greater things which almost everybody had come to disbelieve as impossible nonsense. That was the condition of things when I was in England. If that is to return or if Russia and her dialectical materialism are to lead the world, well, fate must be obeyed and life divine must remain content to wait perhaps for another millennium. But I do not like the idea of one of our periodicals⁶ being the arena for a wrestle of that kind. That is all. I am writing under the impression of your earlier article on this subject, as I have not gone carefully through the later ones; I dare say these later ones may be entirely convincing and I would find after reading them that my own position was wrong and that only an obstinate mystic could still believe in such a conquest of Matter by the Spirit as I had dared to think possible. But I am just such an obstinate mystic; so, if I allowed your exposition of the matter to be published in one of our own periodicals, I would be under the obligation of returning to the subject in which I have lost interest and therefore the inclination to write, so as to reestablish my position and would have to combat the claim of materialistic Science to pronounce anything on these matters on which it has no means of enquiry nor any possibility of arriving at a valid decision. Perhaps I would have practically to rewrite *The Life Divine* as an answer to the victorious “negation of the materialist”! This is the only explanation which I can give, apart from sheer want of time to tackle the subject, for my long and disappointing silence.

Space and Time

You are reasoning on the analogy of our own very cabined and limited sense-consciousness and its rather clumsy relations with the happenings in material space. What is space after all but an extension of conscious being in which Consciousness-Force builds its own surroundings? In the subtle physical plane there

⁶ Mother India, a journal published in Mumbai at that time.—Ed.

are not one, but many layers of consciousness and each moves in its own being, that is to say, in its own space. I have said that each subtle plane is a conglomeration or series of worlds. Each space may at any point meet, penetrate or coincide with another; accordingly at one point of meeting or coincidence there might be several subtle objects occupying what we might rather arbitrarily call the same space, and yet they may not be in any actual relation with each other. If there is a relation created, it is the multiple consciousness of the seer in which the meeting-place becomes apparent that creates it.

On the other hand, there may be a relation between objects in different regions of space correlated to each other as in the case of the gross physical object and its subtle counterpart. There you can more easily reason of relations between one space and another.

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The objection⁷ is founded on human three-dimensional ideas of Space and division in spaces, which are again founded upon the limited nature of the human senses. To some beings space is one-dimensional, to others two-dimensional, to others three-dimensional — but there are other dimensions also. It is well recognised in metaphysics that the Infinite can be in a point and not only in extension of space — just as there is an eternity of extension in Time but also an Eternity which is independent of Time so that it can be felt in the moment — one has not to think of millions and millions of years in order to realise it. So too the rigid distinction of One against Many, a One that cannot be many or of an All that is made up by addition and not self-existent are crude mental notions of the outer finite mind that cannot be applied to the Infinite. If the All were of this material and unspiritual character, tied down to a primary arithmetic and geometry, the realisation of the universe in oneself, of the

⁷ The correspondent asked: "How can the Divine, who is All or Omnipresent, incarnate in the small space of a human body? I believe it is because this seems impossible to the mind that the Arya Samajists do not accept the possibility of incarnation." — Ed.

all in each and each in all, of the universe in the Bindu would be impossible. Your Arya Samajists are evidently innocent of the elements of metaphysical thinking or they would not make such objections.

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Time and Space are not limited, they are infinite — they are the terms of an extension of consciousness in which things take place or are arranged in a certain relation, succession, order. There are again different orders of Time and Space; that too depends on the consciousness. The Eternal is extended in Time and Space, but he is also beyond all Time and Space. Timelessness and Time are two terms of the eternal existence. The Spaceless Eternal is not one indivisible infinity of Space, there is in it no near or far, no here or there — the Timeless Eternal is not measurable by years or hours or aeons, the experience of it has been described as the eternal moment. But for the mind this state cannot be described except by negatives, — one has to go beyond and to realise it.

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Time is to the Intuition an extension of consciousness in which happenings are arranged and has not the same rigidity that it has to the intellect.

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The idea of time may be a mental construction, but the sense of it may not be. Savages have the idea of time but it is in connection with the sun and stars and the lapse of day and night and the seasons, not perhaps a separate construction — but one is not sure for they have metaphysical conceptions of their own. Animals are not, I think, so limited in their consciousness — they have not only sensations, but an acute memory of certain things, observation, clear associations, an intelligence that plans, a very accurate sense of place and memory of place, an initial power of reasoning (not reflectively as the human mind does, but practically as any vital mind can do). I have seen a young

kitten observing, arriving at a correct conclusion, proceeding to do what was necessary for her purpose, a necessity imposed by that conclusion, just as a human child might do. We cannot therefore say that animals have no ideas. No clear measure of yesterday and tomorrow, perhaps, but the perception of past and future needs is there and of right times and seasons also—all vital, practical, not reflectively mental in the human way.

But it is true that when one gets beyond the mind, this sense of time changes into timelessness, into the eternal present.

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No doubt, the physical regulated time consciousness belongs mainly to the waking state but it can be subliminal as well as of the mental waking consciousness. E.g. sometimes one wills at night to get up at a fixed time in the morning and wakes exactly at that hour and minute—it is something in the subliminal being that recorded the time and vigilantly executed it.

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When one begins to feel the inner being and live in it (the result of the experience of peace and silence) the ordinary time sense disappears or becomes purely external.

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The present is a convention or only a constant movement out of the past into the future.

Matter

As for what you write about your experience and your ideas, it looks as if it were simply the old thoughts and movements rising, as they often do, to interfere with the straight course of the sadhana. Mental realisations and ideas of this kind are at best only half-truths and not always even that; once one has taken up a sadhana that goes beyond the mind, it is a mistake to give them too much importance. They can easily become by misapplication a fruitful ground for error.

If you examine the ideas that have come to you, you will see that they are quite inadequate. For example:

1. Matter is *jada* only in appearance. As even modern Science admits, Matter is only energy in action, and, as we know in India, energy is force of consciousness in action.

2. Prakriti in the material world seems to be *jada*, but this too is only an appearance. Prakriti is in reality the conscious power of the Spirit.

3. A bringing down of the Spirit into Matter cannot lead to a *laya* in *jada prakṛti*. A descent of the Spirit could only mean a descent of light, consciousness and power, not a growth of unconsciousness and inertia which is what is meant by the *jada laya*.

4. The Spirit is there already in Matter as everywhere else; it is only a surface apparent unconsciousness or involved consciousness which veils its presence. What we have to do is to awake Matter to the spiritual consciousness concealed in it.

5. What we aim at bringing down into the material world is the supramental consciousness, light and energy, because it is this alone that can truly transform it.

If there is at any time a growth of unconsciousness and inertia, it is because of the resistance of the ordinary nature to the spiritual change. But this is usually raised up in order to be dealt with and eliminated. If it is allowed to remain concealed and not raised up, the difficulty will never be grappled with and no real transformation will take place.

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If there were no creative power in the material energy, there would be no material universe. Matter is not unconscious or without dynamism—only it is an involved Force and Consciousness that work in it. It is what the psychologists call the Inconscient from which all comes—but it is not really Inconscient.

Animals

The satisfaction of their emotions and desires and their bodily needs [*is what animals desire*]—mostly. Animals are predominantly the vital creation on earth—the mind in them also is a vital mind—they act according to the push of the forces and have a vital but not a mental will.

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Even the animal is more in touch with a certain harmony in things than man. Man's only superiority is a more complex consciousness and capacity (but terribly perverted and twisted by misuse of Mind) and the ability (not much used as yet) of reaching towards higher things.

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Human life and mind are neither in tune with Nature like the animals nor with Spirit—it [*human nature*] is disturbed, incoherent, conflicting with itself, without harmony and balance. We can then regard it as diseased, if not itself a disease.

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Yes, it is a more simple and honest consciousness—that of the animal. Of course it expects something, but even if it does not get, the affection remains. Many animals, even if ill-treated, do not lose their love which means a remarkable psychic development in the vital.

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The emotional being of animals is often much more psychic than that of men who can be very insensitive. There were recently pictures of the tame tigress kept by a family and afterwards given by them to a Zoo. The look of sorrow on the face of the tigress in her cage at once gentle and tragically poignant is so intense as to be heartbreaking.

*

A very strong time sense [*in animals*] — at least some of them — but usually it works only in connection with strong desires or habits, e.g. food.

*

Cats have a very sure vital perception.

*

Most animals do not usually attack unless they are menaced or frightened or somehow made angry — and they can feel the atmosphere of people.

*

There are people who can move the ears without doing Yoga at all or calling upon the resources of the Kundalini. I suppose it is simply a movement that man has lost through disuse, not having had like the animals to prick up his ear at every moment to listen to sounds that might indicate danger. I suppose he could revive the faculty if it were of any use.

*

Yes — to watch the animals with the right perception of their consciousness helps to get out of the human mental limitations and see the Cosmic Consciousness on earth individualising itself in all forms — plant, animal, man and growing towards what is beyond man.

Plants

It is true that the plant world — even the animals if one takes them the right way — can be much better than human beings. It is the mental distortion that makes men worse.

*

The plants are very psychic, but they can express it only by silence and beauty.

*

Form, colour, scent + something else which is indefinable [*constitute the beauty of flowers*].

*

The rose is not the only beautiful flower, there are hundreds of others; most flowers are beautiful. The rose is among the first of flowers because of the richness of its colour, the intensity of sweetness of its scent and the grace and magnificence of its form.

Life on Other Planets

As for the other question, there is no reason to suppose that there is not life in any part of the material cosmic system except earth. No doubt the suns and nebulae cannot harbour material life because there is not the necessary basis, but wherever there is a formed world, Life can exist. It used formerly to be supposed that life could not exist except in conditions identical with the earth, but it is now being discovered that even man and the animals can adapt themselves to atmospheric conditions deficient in oxygen such as exist in the stratosphere — this proves that all depends on adaptation. There are animals that can exist only in the sea, yet sea-animals have become amphibious or turned into land animals — so animals on earth can by habit of the adaptation live only in a certain range of atmosphere and need oxygen, but they could adapt themselves to other conditions — it is a law of habit of Nature, not a law of inevitable necessity of Nature. It is therefore quite possible for life to exist on other planets in our and other systems, though the beings there may not be quite like earthly humanity or life quite the same.

Section Two

Religion, Idealism, Morality and Yoga

Chapter One

Religion and Yoga

Religion and the Truth

The Divine Truth is greater than any religion or creed or scripture or idea or philosophy — so you must not tie yourself to any of these things.

*

I regard the spiritual history of mankind and especially of India as a constant development of a divine purpose, not a book that is closed, the lines of which have to be constantly repeated. Even the Upanishads and the Gita were not final though everything may be there in seed. In this development the recent spiritual history of India is a very important stage and the names I mentioned [*Ramakrishna and Vivekananda*] had a special prominence in my thought at the time — they seemed to me to indicate the lines from which the future spiritual development had most directly to proceed, not staying but passing on. I do not know that I would put my meaning exactly in the language you suggest. I may say that it is far from my purpose to propagate any religion new or old for humanity in the future. A way to be opened that is still blocked, not a religion to be founded, is my conception of the matter.

*

It is news to me that I have excluded Mahomedans from the Yoga. I have not done it any more than I have excluded Europeans or Christians. As for giving up one's past, if that means giving up the outer forms of the old religions, it is done as much by the Hindus here as by the Mahomedans. The Hindus here — even those who were once orthodox Brahmins and have grown old in it, — give up all observance of caste, take food from Pariahs and are served by them, associate and eat with Mahomedans, Christians, Europeans, cease to practise temple worship or

Sandhya (daily prayer and mantras), accept a non-Hindu from Europe as their spiritual director. These are things people who have Hinduism as their aim and object would not do—they do it because they are obliged here to look to a higher ideal in which these things have no value. What is kept of Hinduism is Vedanta and Yoga, in which Hinduism is one with Sufism of Islam and with the Christian mystics. But even here it is not Vedanta and Yoga in their traditional limits (their past), but widened and rid of many ideas that are peculiar to the Hindus. If I have used Sanskrit terms and figures, it is because I know them and do not know Persian and Arabic. I have not the slightest objection to anyone here drawing inspiration from Islamic sources if they agree with the Truth as Sufism agrees with it. On the other hand I have not the slightest objection to Hinduism being broken to pieces and disappearing from the face of the earth, if that is the Divine Will. I have no attachment to past forms; what is Truth will always remain; the Truth alone matters.

Religion in India

Religion is always imperfect because it is a mixture of man's spirituality with the errors that come in trying to sublimate ignorantly his lower nature. Hindu religion appears to me as a cathedral temple half in ruins, noble in the mass, often fantastic in detail, but always fantastic with a significance—crumbled and overgrown in many places, but a cathedral temple in which service is still done to the Unseen and its real presence can be felt by those who enter with the right spirit. The outer social structure which it built for its approach is another matter.

*

If it is meant by the statement [of Mahatma Gandhi]¹ that the

¹ “But religion is not like a house or a cloak, which can be changed at will. It is more an integral part of one's self than of one's body. Religion is the tie that binds one to one's Creator and whilst the body perishes, as it has to, religion persists even after death.” M. K. Gandhi, on a statement by B. R. Ambedkar concerning change of religion, in The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, vol. 62 (New Delhi: The Publications Division, 1975), p. 37.—Ed.

form of religion is something permanent and unchangeable, then that cannot be accepted. But if religion here means one's way of communion with the Divine, then it is true that that is something belonging to the inner being and cannot be changed like a house or a cloak for the sake of some personal, social or worldly convenience. If a change is to be made, it can only be for an inner spiritual reason, because of some development from within. No one can be bound to any form of religion or any particular creed or system, but if he changes the one he has accepted for another, for external reasons, that means he has inwardly no religion at all and both his old and his new religion are only an empty formula. At bottom that is, I suppose, what the statement drives at. Preference for a different approach to the Truth or the desire of inner spiritual self-expression are not the motives of the recommendation of change to which objection is made by the Mahatma here; the object proposed is an enhancement of social status and consideration which is no more a spiritual motive than conversion for the sake of money or marriage. If a man has no religion in himself, he can change his credal profession for any motive; if he has, he cannot; he can only change it in response to an inner spiritual need. If a man has a bhakti for the Divine in the form of Krishna, he can't very well say, "I will swap Krishna for Christ so that I may become socially respectable."

*

You can write to him not to be depressed by his failures but to go on aspiring and trust in the Divine Grace. He should not allow himself to be impeded by narrow caste ideas. Always in India the Brahmins have bowed down before a man of spiritual realisation, who becomes by that very fact of realisation above caste. He should open himself more to the help from here. Man is a mass of imperfections — it is only by the divine Grace that he reaches the Divine.

Religious Ceremonies

It is correct, religions at best modify only the surface of the

nature. Moreover they degenerate very soon into a routine of ceremonial habitual worship and fixed dogmas.

*

If you feel no enthusiasm for the *śrāddha* it is better definitely to stop it. Once on this path there is no meaning in it any longer, — for the reason you yourself give.² The *śrāddha* is, besides, entirely on the vital plane and if help has to be given to those who have passed into other worlds of consciousness, there are better ways of doing it.

*

Replace the *śrāddha* by a long meditation with X on the father praying that he may have all the rest and illumination that the departed can have.

*

I only said what was originally *meant* by the ceremonies — the rites. I was not referring to the feeding of the caste or the Brahmins which is not a rite or ceremony. Whether the *śrāddha* as performed is actually effective is another matter — for those who perform it have not either the knowledge or the occult power.

*

The old traditions [*stotras, homas, aradhanas, recitations, etc.*] are still strong with many — let them satisfy this tendency in this way so long as it does not drop from them.

*

Useless and therefore inadvisable [*to sacrifice animals to Kali*]. External sacrifices of this kind have no longer any meaning — as so many saints have said, sacrifice ego, anger, lust etc. to Kali, not goats or cocks.

² *The correspondent said that a sadhak is expected to forget all conventional family relationships and live only for the Divine. — Ed.*

Religious Fanaticism

There is nothing noble in fanaticism—there is no nobility of motive though there may be a fierce enthusiasm of motive. Religious fanaticism is something psychologically low-born and ignorant—and usually in its action fierce, cruel and base. Religious ardour like that of the martyr who sacrifices himself only is a different thing.

Chapter Two

Idealism and Spirituality

Human Perfection and Spirituality

I would not describe the perfections you describe in your letter, fine though they are, as spiritual in the proper sense of the word — for they lack the essential condition of spirituality. Perfection of all kinds is indeed good, as it is the sign of the pressure of the consciousness in the material world towards full self-expression in this or that limit, on this or that level. In a certain sense it is an urge of the Divine itself hidden in forms that tends in the lesser degrees of consciousness towards its own increasing self-revelation. Perfection of an object or a scene in inanimate Nature, animate perfection of strength, speed, physical beauty, courage or animal fidelity, affection, intelligence, perfection of art, music, poetry, literature,— perfection of the intellect in any kind of mental activity, the perfect statesman, warrior, artist, craftsman,— perfection in vital force and capacity, perfection in ethical qualities, character, temperament,— all have their high value, their place as rungs in the ladder of evolution, the seried steps of the spirit's emergence. If one likes to call that spiritual because of this hidden urge behind it one can do so; it can at least be regarded as a preparation for the secret spirit's emergence. But thought and knowledge can only proceed by making the necessary distinctions. Much confusion is created by neglecting them. This mental idealism, ethical development, religious piety and fervour, occult powers and feats have all been taken as spirituality and the spiritual evolution kept tied to the moorings of the planes of lesser consciousness which do indeed prepare the soul by experience for the spiritual consciousness but are not themselves that. For perfection can only become truly spiritual when it is founded on the awakened spiritual consciousness and takes on its peculiar essence. We are told by Europeans that the lined and ravaged face of the Greek bust of Homer is

far more spiritual than the empty ecstatic smile of the Buddha. We are told often nowadays that to earn for one's family and carry out our domestic duties, to be a good and moral man, a perfect citizen, patriot, worker for the country, is far more spiritual than to sit in idle meditation seeking for a remote and invisible Deity. Philanthropy, altruism, service to mankind are represented as the true spiritual things. Mental idealisms, ethical strivings, aesthetic finesses are put forward by the modern mind as things spiritual. All this is represented as the best and highest we can achieve — though an increasing disillusionment, dissatisfaction, feeling of emptiness in them is also growing at the same time. All this has had its use, for everything has its own value in its own place and those who are satisfied with them are entitled to give them their full value and hold them as the great good and the thing to be done, *kartavyam karma*. But spirituality stands on its own basis and does not depend on these things nor does it even include them so long as they are based on some other than the spiritual consciousness and not transformed on the inner spiritual basis. So also people speak of religious men as spiritual, but one may be a very religious man yet not spiritual. The popular idea confuses great feats of occult power, ascetic feats, miracles, astonishing performances like those of your Jewel Sannyasi as the works of a spiritual achievement and the signs of a great Yogi. But one may be a powerful occultist or do marvels of asceticism and yet be not spiritual at all — for in any true sense of the word, in its proper and native significance it means one who has attained to the spiritual consciousness, the realisation of the inner or higher Self, the contact or union with the Divine or that which is eternal or is striving after and approaching these things. Spiritual perfection can only come by a life based on that search and that achievement.¹

The Collapse of Twentieth-Century Idealism

Tagore, of course, belonged to an age which had faith in its

¹ This is the draft of a letter reproduced in a thoroughly rewritten form on pages 424–27. — Ed.

ideas and whose very denials were creative affirmations. That makes an immense difference. Your strictures on his later development may or may not be correct, but this mixture even was the note of the day and it expressed a tangible hope of a fusion into something new and true—therefore it could create. Now all that idealism has been smashed to pieces by the immense adverse Event and everybody is busy exposing its weakness, but nobody knows what to put in its place. A mixture of scepticism and slogans, "Heil Hitler" and the Fascist salute and Five-Year Plan and the beating of everybody into one amorphous shape, a disabused denial of all ideals on one side and on the other a blind shut-my-eyes and shut-everybody's-eyes plunge into the bog in the hope of finding some firm foundation there, will not carry us very far. And what else is there? Until new spiritual values are discovered, no great enduring creation is possible.

*

It is queer these intellectuals go on talking of creation while all they stand for is collapsing into the *Néant* without their being able to raise a finger to save it. What the devil are they going to create and from what material? and of what use if a Hitler with his cudgel or a Mussolini with his castor oil can come and wash it out or beat it into dust in a moment?

*

If there are such great spiritual men in Europe [*as a book reviewer claimed*], they seem to have the gift of invisibility. Or perhaps he means intellectuals like Romain Rolland or else Roman Catholic priests and cardinals or the Reverend Holmes or pacifists like Lord Robert Cecil or in the past Tolstoy who spent his whole life trying in vain to live according to his ideals. Idealising intellectualism and religionism are all that is left of spirituality in Europe.

Chapter Three

Morality and Yoga

The Spiritual Life and the Ordinary Life

The spiritual life (*adhyātma jīvana*), the religious life (*dharma jīvana*) and the ordinary human life of which morality is a part are three quite different things and one must know which one desires and not confuse the three together. The ordinary life is that of the average human consciousness separated from its own true self and from the Divine and led by the common habits of the mind, life and body which are the laws of the Ignorance. The religious life is a movement of the same ignorant human consciousness, turning or trying to turn away from the earth towards the Divine but as yet without knowledge and led by the dogmatic tenets and rules of some sect or creed which claims to have found the way out of the bonds of the earth-consciousness into some beatific Beyond. The religious life may be the first approach to the spiritual, but very often it is only a turning about in a round of rites, ceremonies and practices or set ideas and forms without any issue. The spiritual life, on the contrary, proceeds directly by a change of consciousness, a change from the ordinary consciousness, ignorant and separated from its true self and from God, to a greater consciousness in which one finds one's true being and comes first into direct and living contact and then into union with the Divine. For the spiritual seeker this change of consciousness is the one thing he seeks and nothing else matters.

Morality is a part of the ordinary life; it is an attempt to govern the outward conduct by certain mental rules or to form the character by these rules in the image of a certain mental ideal. The spiritual life goes beyond the mind; it enters into the deeper consciousness of the Spirit and acts out of the truth of the Spirit. As for the question about the ethical life and the need to realise God, it depends on what is meant by fulfilment of the

objects of life. If an entry into the spiritual consciousness is part of it, then mere morality will not give it to you.

Politics as such has nothing to do with the spiritual life. If the spiritual man does anything for his country, it is in order to do the will of the Divine and as part of a divinely appointed work and not from any other common human motive. In none of his acts does he proceed from the common mental and vital motives which move ordinary men but acts out of the truth of the Spirit and from an inner command of which he knows the source.

The kind of worship (*pūjā*) spoken of in the letter belongs to the religious life. It can, if rightly done in the deepest religious spirit, prepare the mind and heart to some extent but no more. But if worship is done as part of meditation or with a true aspiration to the spiritual reality and the spiritual consciousness and with the yearning for contact and union with the Divine, then it can be spiritually effective.

If you have a sincere aspiration to the spiritual change in your heart and soul, then you will find the way and the Guide. A mere mental seeking and questioning are not enough to open the doors of the Spirit.

*

In the ordinary life, people accept the vital movements, anger, desire, greed, sex etc. as natural, allowable and legitimate things, part of the human nature. Only so far as society discourages them or wishes to keep them within fixed limits or subject to a decent restraint or measure, people try to control them so as to conform to the social standard of morality or rule of conduct. Here on the contrary as in all spiritual life, the conquest and complete mastery of these things is demanded. That is why the struggle is more felt, not because these things rise more strongly in sadhaks than in ordinary men, but because of the intensity of the struggle between the spiritual mind which demands control and the vital movements which rebel and wish to continue in the new as they did in the old life. As for the idea that the sadhana raises up things of the kind, the only truth in that is this that,

first, there are many things in the ordinary man of which he is not conscious because the vital hides them from the mind and gratifies them without the mind realising what is the force that is moving the action — thus things that are done under the plea of altruism, philanthropy, service etc. are largely moved by ego which hides itself behind these justifications; in Yoga the secret motive has to be pulled out from behind the veil, exposed and got rid of. Secondly, some things are suppressed in the ordinary life and remain lying in the nature, suppressed but not eliminated; they may rise up any day or they may express themselves in nervous forms or other disorders of the mind or vital or body without it being evident what is their real cause. This has been recently discovered by European psychologists and much emphasised, even exaggerated in a new science called psycho-analysis. Here again in sadhana one has to become conscious of these suppressed impulses and eliminate them — this may be called raising up, but that does not mean that they have to be raised up into action but only raised up before the consciousness so as to be cleared out of the being.

As for some men being able to control themselves and others being swept away, that is due to difference of temperament. Some men are sattvic and control comes easy to them, up to a certain point at least; others are more rajasic and find control difficult and often impossible. Some have a strong mind and mental will and others are vital men in whom the vital passions are stronger or more on the surface. Some do not think control necessary and let themselves go. In sadhana the mental or moral control has to be replaced by the spiritual mastery — for the mental control is only partial and it controls but does not liberate; it is only the psychic and spiritual that can do that. That is the main difference in this respect between the ordinary and the spiritual life.

*

Everything depends upon the aim you put before you. If for the realisation of one's spiritual aim it is necessary to give up the ordinary life of the Ignorance (*samsara*), it must be done; the

claim of the ordinary life cannot stand against that of the spirit.

If a Yoga of works alone is chosen as the path, then one may remain in the *samsara*, but it will be freely, as a field of action and not from any sense of obligation; for the Yогin must be free inwardly from all ties and attachments. On the other hand there is no necessity to live the family life—one can leave it and take any kind of works as a field of action.

In the Yoga practised here the aim is to rise to a higher consciousness and to live out of the higher consciousness alone, not with the ordinary motives. This means a change of life as well as a change of consciousness. But all are not so circumstanced that they can cut loose from the ordinary life; they accept it therefore as a field of experience and self-training in the earlier stages of the sadhana. But they must take care to look at it as a field of experience only and to get free from the ordinary desires, attachments and ideas which usually go with it; otherwise it becomes a drag and hindrance on their sadhana. When one is not compelled by circumstances there is no necessity to continue the ordinary life.

One becomes tamasic by leaving the ordinary actions and life only if the vital is so accustomed to draw its motives of energy from the ordinary consciousness and its desires and activities that if it loses them, it loses all joy and charm and energy of existence. But if one has a spiritual aim and an inner life and the vital part accepts them, then it draws its energies from within and there is no danger of one's being tamasic.

Morality

The principle of life which I seek to establish is spiritual. Morality is a question of man's mind and vital, it belongs to a lower plane of consciousness. A spiritual life therefore cannot be founded on a moral basis, it must be founded on a spiritual basis. This does not mean that the spiritual man must be immoral—as if there were no other law of conduct than the moral. The law of action of the spiritual consciousness is higher, not lower than the moral—it is founded on union with

the Divine and living in the Divine Consciousness and its action is founded on obedience to the Divine Will.

*

The beliefs you speak of with regard to right and wrong, beauty and ugliness etc. are necessary for the human being and for the guidance of his life. He cannot do without the distinctions they involve. But in a higher consciousness when he enters into the Light or is touched by it, these distinctions disappear, for he is then approaching the eternal and infinite good and right which he reaches perfectly when he is able to enter into the Truth Consciousness or Supermind. The belief in the guidance of God is also justified by spiritual experience and is very necessary for the sadhana; this also rises to its highest and completest truth when one enters into the Light.

*

It [*the reason people remain calm and self-controlled in ordinary life*] is social pressure accompanied by a certain habit of mental control born of the social pressure. It is not from peace at all. Remove the social pressure even partly and as in England and America recently people let themselves go and do according to the vital impulses instead of controlling them — except of course those who stick to the religious and moral ideas of the past even when society drifts away from these ideas.

Vice and Virtue

Vice and virtue have nothing to do with darkness or light, truth and falsehood. The spiritual man rises above vice and virtue, he does not rise above truth and light, unless you mean by truth and light, human truth and mental light. They have to be transcended, just as virtue and vice have to be transcended.

*

Are you in a position to make a judgment as to what will or will not help God's work? You seem to have very elementary

ideas in these matters. What is your idea of divinisation,—to be a virtuous man, a good husband, son, father, a good citizen etc.? In that case I myself am most undivine,—for I have never been these things. Men like X or Y would then be the great Transformed Divine Men.

*

Many sinners are people who are preparing to turn to the Divine and many virtuous people have a long run of lives yet to go through before they will think of it.

*

Vices are simply an overflow of energy in unregulated channels.

The Sattwic Man and the Spiritual Man

The passage through sattwa is the ordinary idea of Yoga, it is the preparation and purification by the yama-niyama of Patanjali or by other means in other Yogas, e.g., saintliness in the bhakti schools, the eightfold path in Buddhism etc., etc. In our Yoga the evolution through sattwa is replaced by the cultivation of equanimity, *samatā*, and by the psychic transformation.

*

It is a very beautiful character that you describe in your letter, a perfect type of the sattwic man, a fine and harmonised ethical nature supported and vivified by a fine and developed psychic being. But still, although it may be regarded as an excellent preparation for the spiritual life, it cannot by itself be called spirituality—unless indeed we reduce the meaning of the word to the connotation ordinarily given to it in the West where mental ideation, ethical striving, a flowering of fine character, altruism, self-sacrifice, self-denial, philanthropy, service to men or mankind are considered the height of spiritual aspiration or spiritual attainment. Obviously if that is to be the last word of earthly achievement, there is no need for anything farther; the close and vivid discovery of soul or self, the straining towards

that which is behind life and above mind, the passion for the Eternal or the Infinite, the hunger for a freedom and wideness of consciousness and existence not limited by the narrow moulds of intellect, character and the past life-aims of humanity, the thirst for union with the Divine or for the pure bliss and beauty of spiritual existence not tied down to mental and vital values must be dismissed as a superfluous dream for which there is neither place nor necessity here. Yet these things have been not only dreamed of and hungered after but reached and tasted by beings born in a mortal and human body. Spirituality lies there; its essence consists in a bursting of the human mental, moral, aesthetic, vital moulds in order to reach beyond them and enter into a consciousness of which these things are the very stuff, to which these experiences are native. Anything less than that, than a striving after it or at least a partial realisation of it is not spirituality. The spiritual man is one who has realised something of it even if only in one aspect out of many; one who is striving after it is the spiritual seeker. All else however magnificently intellectual, ethical, aesthetically beautiful and harmonious, vitally splendid, great and forceful or physically perfect is a valuable achievement on the way, but not yet that, for one has not passed the Rubicon of mind into a new empire.

Owing to the nature of the past evolution of consciousness and of spirituality itself, there has been much confusion on this point and there is still more today because of the present domination of the Western ideal. On one side or another mental idealism, ethical development, altruistic character and action, religious piety and fervour, occult powers, feats of ascetic endurance have been put forward as the essence of spirituality or the test or proof of achievement or the signposts of the journey to spiritual perfection. It is ignored that any of these things may be there and yet there need not be any spiritual life behind it, any rebirth into a new consciousness or any remoulding of either the inner or the outer consciousness no longer in a higher or richer power of mind and life and body only, the instruments, but in the direct light and force of the hitherto veiled user of the instrument, the now revealed and directly active soul, self, spirit or of the

Divine or Eternal whose representatives or aspects they are.

This confusion meets us at every point and in all sorts of forms whose common error is to ignore the essence and core of the matter. The Western intellect presents us with the strivings of the mind, life, emotions, passions, moral will and tells us these are the real spiritual things, man's highest aim and endeavour and all else is vain mysticism, asceticism, evasion of life. It appears that the lined and ravaged face of a Greek bust of Homer is a thousand times more spiritual than the empty calm or the ecstatic smile of the Buddha! We are told by others that to care for the family and carry out our social and domestic duties, to be a good man, a perfect citizen, patriot, worker for the community, to serve mankind are the real things far more spiritual than to sit in idle meditation seeking for some remote and invisible transcendental Reality—or unreality. Philanthropy, altruism, service, selfless labour for humankind, these are the spiritual summits. True selflessness lies there, to sacrifice or offer one's life to the good of others, to the community, to the race. To seek one's own inner spiritual growth, to draw back from ordinary life in order to reach something beyond, to search after the Divine above humanity is mere egoism, not true spirituality, but an aberration, a misdirection of the will and life.

All that might be admirable and true—as certainly all the things thus eulogised have their place in the human evolution, if the premiss on which it were founded were true—that the seeking for something behind, something beyond, something of which the evolution of mind, life and body was only a veil or a preparation is an illusion and a chimaera. But if these things are real, if the seeking is a lasting and major drive in Nature, then all these objections and recommendations are futile. For this drive will fulfil itself, this hidden reality will draw and draw us till we achieve it. Those who feel its call, cannot do otherwise than follow and strive, even if need be leave all else for it, hold all other greatness, splendour, nobility, beauty as cheaper minor things compared with this other Light and Greatness and Beauty of which they have had the vision, the intimation, the formless attraction or else the passing touch or glimpse. Ever since Mind

itself reached a certain development, there has been at first dimly and gropingly, then more and more clearly and intimately this drive in man towards something behind and beyond Man, towards the discovery or the expression of something hidden in his being and a world existence which is more real than his surface self even at its best, greater, fuller, truer, more divine. To arrive at that can come only by a change of consciousness, a reversal of consciousness, a new basis of consciousness which is not the lower instrumental consciousness of mind, life and body.

At each step of evolution we have this change, reversal, new base. Matter is bound in an involved consciousness which is in practice an inconscience; life in the plant in a still involved consciousness struggling for growth, expansion, persistence, seeking after movement and sensation and conscious living without yet reaching them; life in the animal in a vital consciousness possessed of these things, already emotional, possessed of a mind, but a mind still involved in life-movement, not reflective, not subjective and turning upon life to understand, master and control it. Mind is based on a consciousness that has attained this emergence, this reflective and controlling power, this growing understanding, mastery, self-awareness. But mind is still aware only of life and of itself, it is not aware of the person, the reality behind, the user of the instrument; it is seeking for these things and it is this search that constitutes the drive for a new evolution; for mind is a twilight preparing for light, an ignorance seeking after knowledge, a bondage to Nature groping after freedom and mastery over Nature. It is not on mind, on its self-modifying ignorance and bondage or even on its half-light, half-mastery, half-knowledge that the next step can base itself. It must base itself on soul consciousness, consciousness of the spirit and self — for so only can there be the full light, the spontaneous mastery, the intimate and real knowledge.

*

Obviously [*in sadhana*] the rajasic movements are likely to create more trouble than the sattwic ones. The greatest difficulty of the sattwic man is the snare of virtue and self-righteousness, the

ties of philanthropy, mental idealisms, family affections etc., but except the first, these are, though difficult, still not so difficult to overpass or else transform. Sometimes however these things are as sticky as the rajasic difficulties.

Selfishness and Unselfishness

Selfishness and the reaction of unselfishness of which you speak are both of them things that have to be put aside—both are obstacles or movements leading off from the true and straight path. For both these things belong to the mind and vital, they are different forms of the ego. The mind in its attempt to get away from the rajasic selfish ego tries to do just the opposite of what selfishness usually does and serve others, sacrifice itself for others, but in doing so it is only constructing another kind of egoism that prides itself on its own unselfishness and altruism and makes human service its mental ideal instead of spiritual service of the Divine. That it is a misguiding movement you saw yourself; for it wanted to sacrifice your sadhana, that is, your seeking for the Divine to this new ego of altruistic self-righteousness; it was prepared to do things without permission of the Mother or rather avoiding asking for permission. One has to get rid of selfishness and ego, not in this way, but by selfless service of the Divine and by merging the ego in the Divine Consciousness, submitting the personal will to the Divine Will, calling into the being the Divine Peace, Purity, Oneness, Knowledge, Light, Ananda, replacing the ego by the psychic being devoted and surrendered to the Divine. It is the love of the Divine that saves, not a love turned towards human beings. When the Divine Consciousness is there, then there comes based on the love of the Divine a true love and oneness for all beings. But that does not act separately from the Divine but only according to the Divine Mother's will and in her service.

*

Unselfishness is not the only thing to be aimed at—by itself it would be only a moral, not a spiritual attainment.

Humility

A spiritual humility within is very necessary, but I do not think an outward one is very advisable (absence of pride or arrogance or vanity is indispensable of course in one's outer dealings with others) — it often creates pride, becomes formal or becomes ineffective after a time. I have seen people doing it to cure their pride, but I have not found it producing a lasting result.

*

It [*to feel like doing namaskar to everyone*] is a feeling which some have who either want to cultivate humility (X used to do it, but I never saw that it got rid of his innate self-esteem) or who have or are trying to have the realisation of Narayan in all with a Vaishnava turn in it. To feel the One in all is right, but to bow down to the individual who lives still in his ego is good neither for him nor for the one who does it. Especially in this Yoga it tends to diffuse what should be concentrated and turned towards a higher realisation than that of the cosmic feeling which is only a step on the way.

*

It is only this habit of the nature — self-worrying and harping on the sense of deficiency — that prevents you from being quiet. If you threw that out, it would be easy to be quiet. Humility is needful, but constant self-depreciation does not help; excessive self-esteem and self-depreciation are both wrong attitudes. To recognise any defects without exaggerating them is useful but, once recognised, it is no good dwelling on them always; you must have the confidence that the Divine Force can change everything and you must let the Force work.

*

The view taken by the Mahatma in these matters [*of caste*] is Christian rather than Hindu — for the Christian, self-abasement, humility, the acceptance of a low status to serve humanity or the Divine are things which are highly spiritual and the noblest

privilege of the soul. This view does not admit any hierarchy of castes; the Mahatma accepts castes but on the basis that all are equal before the Divine; a Bhangi doing his dharma is as good as the Brahmin doing his, there is division of function but no hierarchy of functions. That is one view of things and the hierarchic view is another, both having a standpoint and logic of their own which the mind takes as wholly valid but which only corresponds to a part of the reality. All kinds of work are equal before the Divine and all men have the same Brahman within them, is one truth, but that development is not equal in all is another. The idea that it needs special punya to be born as a Bhangi is of course one of those forceful exaggerations of an idea which are common with the Mahatma and impress greatly the mind of his hearers. The idea behind is that his function is an indispensable service to the society, quite as much as the Brahmin's, but that being disagreeable it would need a special moral heroism to choose it voluntarily and he thinks as if the soul freely chose it as such a heroic service and as a reward of righteous acts—that is hardly likely. The service of the scavenger is indispensable under certain conditions of society, it is one of those primary necessities without which society can hardly exist and the cultural development of which the Brahmin life is part could not have taken place. But obviously the cultural development is more valuable than the service of the physical needs for the progress of humanity as opposed to its first static condition and that development can even lead to the minimising and perhaps the eventual disappearance by scientific inventions of the need for the functions of the scavenger. But that I suppose the Mahatma would not approve of as it is machinery and a departure from the simple life. In any case it is not true that the Bhangi life is superior to the Brahmin life and the reward of especial righteousness. On the other hand the traditional conception that a man is superior to others because he is born a Brahmin is not rational or justifiable. A spiritual or cultured man of Pariah birth is superior in the divine values to an unspiritual and worldly-minded or a crude and uncultured Brahmin. Birth counts, but the basic value is in the man himself, the soul behind,

and the degree to which it manifests itself in his nature.

*

As for the sense of superiority, that too is a little difficult to avoid when greater horizons open before the consciousness, unless one is already of a saintly and humble disposition. There are men like Nag Mahashoy in whom spiritual experience creates more and more humility, there are others like Vivekananda in whom it erects a giant sense of strength and superiority—European critics have taxed him with it rather severely; there are others in whom it fixes a sense of superiority to men and humility to the Divine. Each position has its value. Take Vivekananda's famous answer to the Madras Pundit who objected to one of his assertions, "But Shankara does not say so." To which Vivekananda replied, "No, Shankara does not say so, but I, Vivekananda, say so", and the Pundit sank back amazed and speechless. That "I, Vivekananda" stands up to the ordinary eye like a Himalaya of self-confident egoism. But there was nothing false or unsound in Vivekananda's spiritual experience. This was not mere egoism, but the sense of what he stood for and the attitude of the fighter who, as the representative of something very great, could not allow himself to be put down or belittled. This is not to deny the necessity of non-egoism and of spiritual humility, but to show that the question is not so easy as it appears at first sight. For if I have to express my spiritual experiences, I must do it with truth—I must record them, their *bhāva*, the thoughts, feelings, extensions of consciousness which accompany them. What can I do with the experience in which one feels the whole world in oneself or the force of the Divine flowing in one's being and nature or the certitude of one's faith against all doubts and doubters or one's oneness with the Divine or the smallness of human thought and life compared with this greater knowledge and existence? And I have to use the word "I"—I cannot take refuge in saying "this body" or "this appearance",—especially as I am not a Mayavadin. Shall I not inevitably fall into expressions which will make X shake his head at my assertions as full of pride and ego? I imagine it would be difficult to avoid it.

Another thing, it seems to me that you identify faith very much with mental belief—but real faith is something spiritual, a knowledge of the soul. The assertions you quote in your letter are the hard assertions of a mental belief leading to a great vehement assertion of one's creed and god because they are one's own and must therefore be greater than those of others—an attitude which is universal in human nature. Even the atheist is not tolerant, but declares his credo of Nature and Matter as the only truth and on all who disbelieve it or believe in other things he pours scorn as unenlightened morons and superstitious half-wits. I bear him no grudge for thinking me that; but I note that this attitude is not confined to religious faith but is equally natural to those who are free from religious faith and do not believe in Gods or Gurus.

*

Perhaps one could say that it [*spiritual humility*] is to be aware of the relativity of what has been done compared with what is still to be done—and also to be conscious of one's being nothing without the Divine Grace.

Sacrifice

Sacrifice has a moral and psychological value always. This value is the same no matter what may be the cause for which the sacrifice is made, provided the one who makes it believes in the truth or justice or other worthiness of his cause. If one makes the sacrifice for a cause one knows to be wrong or unworthy, all depends on the motive and spirit of the sacrifice. Bhishma accepting death in a cause he knew to be unjust, obeyed the call of loyalty to what he felt to be his personal duty. Many have done that in the past, and the moral and psychic value of their act lies, irrespective of the nature of the cause, in the nobility of the motive.

As to the other question, in this sense of the word sacrifice there is none for the man who gives up something which he does not value, except in so far as he undergoes loss, defies social ban

or obloquy or otherwise pays a price for his liberation. I may say, however, that without being cold and unloving a man may be so seized by a spiritual call or the call of a great human cause that the family or other ties count for nothing beside it, and he leaves all joyfully, without a pang, to follow the summoning Voice.

In the spiritual sense, however, sacrifice has a different meaning — it does not so much indicate giving up what is held dear as an offering of oneself, one's being, one's mind, heart, will, body, life, actions to the Divine. It has the original sense of "making sacred" and is used as an equivalent of the word Yajna. When the Gita speaks of the "sacrifice of knowledge", it does not mean a giving up of anything, but a turning of the mind towards the Divine in the search for knowledge and an offering of oneself through it. It is in this sense, too, that one speaks of the offering or sacrifice of works. The Mother has written somewhere that the spiritual sacrifice is joyful and not painful in its nature. On the spiritual path, very commonly, if a seeker still feels the old ties and responsibilities strongly, he is not asked to sever or leave them, but to let the call in him grow till all within is ready. Many, indeed, come away earlier because they feel that to cut loose is their only chance, and these have to go sometimes through a struggle. But the pain, the struggle, is not the essential character of the spiritual self-offering.

*

It [*pain and struggle in offering oneself to the Divine*] simply means that your sacrifice is still mental and has not yet become spiritual in its character. When your vital being consents to give up its desires and enjoyments, when it offers itself to the Divine, then the yajna will have begun. What I meant was that the European sense of the word is not the sense of the word "yajna" or the sense of "sacrifice" in such phrases as "the sacrifice of works". It does not mean that you give up all works for the sake of the Divine — for then there would be no sacrifice of works at all. Similarly the sacrifice of knowledge does not mean that you painfully and resolutely make yourself a fool for the sake of the

Lord. Sacrifice means an inner offering to the Divine and the real spiritual sacrifice is a very joyful thing. Otherwise, one is only trying to make oneself fit and has not yet begun the real yajna. It is because your mind is struggling with your vital, the unwilling animal, and asking it to allow itself to be immolated that there is the pain and struggle. If the spiritual will (or psychic) were more in the front then you would not be lamenting over the loss of the ghee and butter and curds thrown into the Fire or trying to have a last lick at it before casting it. The only difficulty would be about bringing down the gods fully enough (a progressive labour), not about lamentations over the ghee. By the way, do you think that the Mother or myself or others who have taken up the spiritual life had not enjoyed life and that it is therefore that the Mother was able to speak of a joyous sacrifice to the Divine as the true spirit of spiritual sacrifice? Or do you think we spent the preliminary stages in longings for the lost fleshpots of Egypt and that it was only later on we felt the joy of the spiritual sacrifice? Of course we did not; we and many others had no difficulty on the score of giving up anything we thought necessary to give up and no hankerings afterwards. Your rule is as usual a stiff rule that does not at all apply generally.

*

Sacrifice depends on the inner attitude. If one has nothing outward to sacrifice, one has always oneself to give.

Ahimsa, Destruction and Violence

The doctrines of Ahimsa and non-violence and altruism are early steps on the road to spiritual knowledge—but once advanced on the road what is true behind them takes its place, as a thread in the complex weft of spiritual truth and feeling, not as a rigid ethical rule or all-swallowing dogma. The Manifestation here is too complex in its concealed Unity for such mental or emotional formulas to be unerring guides.

*

The impersonal Truth, precisely because it is impersonal, can contain quite opposite things. There is a truth in Ahimsa, there is a truth in Destruction also. I do not teach that you should go on killing everybody every day as a spiritual dharma. I say that destruction can be done when it is part of the Divine work commanded by the Divine. Non-violence is better than violence as a rule, and still sometimes violence may be the right thing. I consider dharma as relative; unity with the Divine and action from the Divine Will the highest way. Buddha did not aim at action in the world, but at cessation from the world-existence. For that he found the eightfold Path a necessary preparatory discipline and so proclaimed it.

It [*Ahimsa*] had nothing to do with the Yuga [*at the time of Buddha*], but with the path towards liberation found by Buddha. There are many paths and all need not be one and the same in their teaching.

*

Destruction in itself is neither good nor evil. It is a fact of Nature, a necessity in the play of forces as things are in this world. The Light destroys the Darkness and the Powers of Darkness, and that is not a movement of Ignorance!

It all depends on the character of the destruction and the forces that enter into it. All dread of fire or other violent forces should be overcome. For dread shows a weakness—the free spirit can stand fearless before even the biggest forces of Nature.

*

This world is so arranged that it is not possible to live without some destruction of life—so for this there need be no remorse. Only one should not destroy life wantonly or inflict needless suffering on animals or any living things.

*

I feel inclined to back out of the arena¹ or take refuge in the

¹ *The correspondent asked whether the violence done to animals by medical researchers was justifiable; their experiments with animals, he said, sometimes led to the saving of human lives.—Ed.*

usual saving formula, "There is much to be said on both sides." Your view is no doubt correct from the common-sense or what might be called the "human" point of view. Krishnaprem takes the standpoint that we must not only consider the temporary good to humanity, but certain inner laws. He thinks the harm, violence or cruelty to other beings is not compensated and cannot be justified by some physical good to a section of humanity or even to humanity as a whole; such methods awake, in his opinion, a sort of Karmic reaction apart from the moral harm to the men who do these things. He is also of the opinion that the cause of disease is psychic, that is to say, subjective and the direction should be towards curing the inner causes much more than patching up by physical means. These are ideas that have their truth also. I fully recognise the psychic law and methods and their preferability, but the ordinary run of humanity is not ready for that rule and, while it is so, doctors and their physical methods will be there. I have also supported justifiable violence on justifiable occasions, e.g., Kurukshetra and the war against Hitler and all he means. The question then, from this middle point of view, about the immediate question is whether this violence is justifiable and the occasion justifiable. I back out.

War and Conquest

War and conquest are part of the economy of vital Nature, it is no use blaming this or that people for doing it—everybody does it who has the power and the chance. China who now complains was herself an imperialist and colonising country through all the centuries in which Japan kept religiously within her own borders. If it were not profitable, I suppose nobody would do it. England has grown rich on the plundered wealth of India. France depends for many things on her African colonies. Japan needs an outlet for her overabundant population and safe economic markets nearby. Each is pushed by forces that use the minds of rulers and peoples to fulfil themselves—unless human nature changes no amount of moralising will prevent it.

*

There has been almost continuous war in the world — it is as in the history of the Roman Republic when the gates of the temple of Janus were closed only once or twice in its many centuries — a sign that the Republic was at peace with all the world. There have been in modern times long intervals between long wars, but small ones have been generally going on somewhere or another. Man is a quarrelling and fighting animal and so long as he is so how can there be peace?

Poverty

It is a world which has emerged from the Inconscient and these things [*poverty and misery*] are results of the imperfect working of the human mind which, being born into the ignorant life and matter, has to learn by effort and experience. Ignorance and ego have to be outgrown before there can be a true utilisation of the resources of Nature.

Natural Calamities

Why should earthquakes occur by some wrong movement of man? When man was not there, did not earthquakes occur? If he were blotted out by poison gas or otherwise, would they cease? Earthquakes are a perturbation in Nature due to some pressure of forces; frequency of earthquakes may coincide with a violence of upheavals in human life but the upheavals of earth and human life are both results of a general clash or pressure of forces, one is not the cause of the other.

Chapter Four

Social Duties and the Divine

Family, Society, Country and the Divine

Family, society, country are a larger ego—they are not the Divine. One can work for them and say that one is working for the Divine only if one is conscious of the Divine Adesh to act for that purpose or of the Divine Force working within one. Otherwise it is only an idea of the mind identifying country etc. with the Divine.

*

I suppose each man makes or tries to make his own organisation of life out of the mass of possibilities the forces present to him. Self (physical self) and family are the building most make—to earn, to create a family and maintain it, perhaps to get some position in the present means of life one chooses, in business, the profession etc., etc. Country or humanity are usually added to that by a minority. A few take up some ideal and follow it as the mainstay of their life. It is only the very religious who try to make God the centre of their life—that too rather imperfectly, except for a few. None of these things are secure or certain, even the last being certain only if it is followed with an absoluteness which only a few are willing to give. The life of the Ignorance is a play of forces through which man seeks his way and all depends on his growth through experience to the point at which he can grow out of it into something else. That something else is in fact a new consciousness—whether a new consciousness beyond the earthly life or a new consciousness within it.

*

I don't remember the context; but I suppose he [*the writer of Yogic Sadhan*] means that when one has to escape from the lower dharma, one has often to break it so as to arrive at a

larger one. E.g. social duties, paying debts, looking after family, helping to serve your country, etc. etc. The man who turns to the spiritual life, has to leave all that behind him often and he is reproached by lots of people for his Adharma. But if he does not do this Adharma, he is bound for ever to the lower life—for there is always some duty there to be done—and cannot take up the spiritual dharma or can do it only when he is old and his faculties impaired.

*

Idealising is a pastime of the mind—except for the few who are passionately determined to make the ideal real. Buddha is in Nirvana and his wife and child are there too perhaps, so it is easy to praise his spiritual greatness and courage—but for living people with living relatives a similar action is monstrous. They ought to be satisfied with praising Buddha and take care not to follow his example.

*

The tendency you speak of, to leave the family and social life for the spiritual life, has been traditional in India for the last 2000 years and more—chiefly among men, it touches only a very small number of women. It must be remembered that Indian social life has subordinated almost entirely the individual to the family. Men and women do not marry according to their free will; their marriages are mostly arranged for them while they are still children. Not only so, but the mould of society has been long of an almost iron fixity putting each individual in his place and expecting him to conform to it. You speak of issues and a courageous solution, but in this life there are no problems and issues and no call for a solution—a courageous solution is only possible where there is freedom of the personal will; but where the only solution (if one remains in this life) is submission to the family will, there can be nothing of that kind. It is a secure life and can be happy if one accommodates oneself to it and has no unusual aspirations beyond it or is fortunate in one's environment; but it has no remedy for or escape from

incompatibilities or any kind of individual frustration; it leaves little room for initiative or free movement or any individualism. The only outlet for the individual is his inner spiritual or religious life and the recognised escape is the abandonment of the *samsāra*, the family life, by some kind of Sannyasa. The Sannyasi, the Vaishnava Vairagi or the Brahmachari are free; they are dead to the family and can live according to the dictates of the inner spirit. Only if they enter into an order or asram, they have to abide by the rules of the order, but that is their own choice, not a responsibility which has been laid on them without their choice. Society recognised this door of escape from itself; religion sanctioned the idea that distaste for the social or worldly life was a legitimate ground for taking up that of the recluse or religious wanderer. But this was mainly for men; women, except in old times among the Buddhists who had their convents and in later times among the Vaishnavas, had little chance of such an escape unless a very strong spiritual impulse drove them which would take no denial. As for the wife and children left behind by the Sannyasi, there was little difficulty, for the joint family was there to take up or rather to continue their maintenance.

At present what has happened is that the old framework remains, but modern ideas have brought a condition of inadaptation, of unrest, the old family system is breaking up and women are seeking in more numbers the same freedom of escape as men have always had in the past. That would account for the cases you have come across—but I don't think the number of such cases can be as yet at all considerable, it is quite a new phenomenon; the admission of women to Asrams is itself a novelty. The extreme unhappiness of a mental and vital growth which does not fit in with the surroundings, of marriages imposed that are unsuitable and where there is no meeting-point between husband and wife, of an environment hostile and intolerant of one's inner life and on the other hand the innate tendency of the Indian mind to seek a refuge in the spiritual or religious escape will sufficiently account for the new development. If society wants to prevent it, it must itself change. As to individuals, each case must be judged on its own merits; there is too much

complexity in the problem and too much variation of nature, position, motives for a general rule.

Philanthropy

Whatever one does must be from the highest spontaneous inner urge in oneself. So long as the urge is towards philanthropy, Gandhism etc., he has to follow that—to follow the way of spiritual endeavour he must have the need, the distinct call in himself—not merely a mental recognition but the soul's call.

*

Perhaps you could write (in Bengali)¹ something to him about the true object of the Yoga—especially on two points:

(1) The object is not philanthropy but to find the Divine, to enter into the Divine Consciousness and find one's true being (which is not the ego) in the Divine. (2) The *ripus* cannot be conquered by *damana*; even if it succeeds to some extent, it only keeps them down but does not destroy them, often compression only increases their force. It is by purification through the Divine Consciousness entering into the egoistic nature and changing it that the thing can be done.

As for accepting him, it depends on his capacity to open himself to the Influence and receive it. If he likes to try, he can, but he will not succeed unless he is entirely in earnest. There is something in him that can turn to the Divine, but there is also much in his nature that may resist. It is only if he gives himself from deep within and is absolutely persevering in the Way that he can succeed.

Give him some idea of the central process of the Yoga, especially opening to the working of the Divine Power and rejection of all that is of the lower nature.

Humanitarianism

The idea of usefulness to humanity is the old confusion due

¹ Sri Aurobindo wrote this reply to his secretary, Nolini Kanta Gupta, who replied to the correspondent.—Ed.

to secondhand ideas imported from the West. Obviously, to be “useful” to humanity there is no need of Yoga; everyone who leads the human life is useful to humanity in one way or another.

Yoga is directed towards God, not towards man. If a divine supramental consciousness and power can be brought down and established in the material world, that obviously would mean an immense change for the earth including humanity and its life. But the effect on humanity would only be one result of the change; it cannot be the object of the sadhana. The object of the sadhana can only be to live in the divine consciousness and to manifest it in life.

*

As to the extract about Vivekananda, the point I make there² does not seem to me humanitarian. You will see that I emphasise there the last sentences of the passage quoted from Vivekananda, not the words about God the poor and sinner and criminal. The point is about the Divine in the World, the All, *sarva-bhūtāni* of the Gita. That is not merely humanity, still less only the poor or the wicked; surely even the rich or the good are part of the All and those also who are neither good nor bad nor rich nor poor. Nor is there any question (I mean in my own remarks) of philanthropic service; so neither *daridra* nor *sevā* is the point. I had formerly not the humanitarian but the humanity view—and something of it may have stuck to my expressions in the *Arya*. But I had already altered my viewpoint from the “Our Yoga for the sake of humanity” to “Our Yoga for the sake of the Divine”. The Divine includes not only the supracosmic but the cosmic and the individual—not only Nirvana or the Beyond but Life and the All. It is that I stress everywhere. But I shall keep the extracts for a day or two and see what there is, if anything, that smacks too much of a too narrow humanistic standpoint. I stop here for today.

*

² In The Synthesis of Yoga Sri Aurobindo wrote: “Often, we see this desire of personal salvation overcome by another attraction which also belongs to the higher turn of our nature and which indicates the essential character of the action the liberated soul

Today a Kanchenjunga of correspondence has fallen on my head, so I could not write about humanity and its progress. Were not the later views of Lowes Dickinson greyed over by the sickly cast of a disappointed idealism? I have not myself an exaggerated respect for humanity and what it is—but to say that there has been no progress is as much an exaggerated pessimism as the rapturous hallelujahs of the nineteenth century to a progressive humanity were an exaggerated optimism.

I shall manage to read through the chapter you sent me, though how I manage to find time for these things is a standing miracle and a signal proof of a Divine Providence.

Yes, the “progress” you are making is of the genuine kind—the signs are recognisable. And after all the best way to make humanity progress is to move on oneself—that may sound either individualistic or egoistic, but it isn’t; it is only common sense.

Yad yad ācarati śreṣṭhas tat tad evetaro janah.³

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It is no use entertaining these feelings. One has to see what the world is without becoming bitter—for the bitterness comes from one’s own ego and its disappointed expectations. If one wants the victory of the Divine, one must achieve it in oneself first.

must pursue. . . . It is that which inspires a remarkable passage in a letter of Swami Vivekananda. ‘I have lost all wish for my salvation,’ wrote the great Vedantin, ‘may I be born again and again and suffer thousands of miseries so that I may worship the only God that exists, the only God I believe in, the sum-total of all souls,—and above all, my God the wicked, my God the miserable, my God the poor of all races, of all species is the special object of my worship. He who is the high and low, the saint and the sinner, the god and the worm, Him worship, the visible, the knowable, the real, the omnipresent; break all other idols. In whom there is neither past life nor future birth, nor death nor going nor coming, in whom we always have been and always will be one, Him worship; break all other idols.’

“The last two sentences contain indeed the whole gist of the matter.” The Synthesis of Yoga, volume 23 of THE COMPLETE WORKS OF SRI AUROBINDO, pp. 269–70.

³ “Whatsoever the Best doeth, that the lower kind of man puts into practice.” Gita 3.21. Sri Aurobindo’s translation. Essays on the Gita, volume 19 of THE COMPLETE WORKS OF SRI AUROBINDO, p. 135.

Social and Political Activism

All this insistence upon action is absurd if one has not the light by which to act. Yoga must include life and not exclude it does not mean that we are bound to accept life as it is with all its stumbling ignorance and misery and the obscure confusion of human will and reason and impulse and instinct which it expresses. The advocates of action think that by human intellect and energy making an always new rush everything can be put right; the present state of the world after a development of the intellect and a stupendous output of energy for which there is no historical parallel is a signal proof of the illusion under which they labour. Yoga takes the stand that it is only by a change of consciousness that the true basis of life can be discovered; from within outward is indeed the rule. But within does not mean some quarter inch behind the surface. One must go deep and find the soul, the self, the Divine Reality within us and only then can life become a true expression of what we can be instead of a blind and always repeated confused blur of the inadequate and imperfect thing we were. The choice is between remaining in the old jumble and groping about in the hope of stumbling on some discovery or standing back and seeking the Light within till we discover and can build the godhead within and without us.

*

I had never a very great confidence in X's yoga-turn getting the better of his activism—he has two strong ties that prevent it, ambition and need to act and lead in the vital and in the mind a mental idealism—these two things are the great fosterers of illusion. The spiritual path needs a certain amount of realism—one has to see the real value of the things that are—which is very little, except as steps in evolution. Then one can either follow the spiritual static path of rest and release or the spiritual dynamic path of a greater truth to be brought down into life. But otherwise—

Part Five

Questions of
Spiritual and Occult Knowledge

Section One

The Divine and the Hostile Powers

Chapter One

Terminology

The Dynamic Divine, the Gods, the Asuras

The dynamic aspect of the Divine is the Supreme Brahman, not the Gods. The Gods are Personalities and Powers of the dynamic Divine. You speak as if the evolution were the sole creation; the creation or manifestation is very vast and contains many planes and worlds that existed before the evolution, all different in character and with different kinds of beings. The fact of being prior to the evolution does not make them undifferentiated. The world of the Asuras is prior to the evolution, so are the worlds of the mental, vital or subtle physical Devas — but these beings are all different from each other. The great Gods belong to the Overmind plane; in the Supermind they are unified as aspects of the Divine, in the Overmind they appear as separate personalities. Any godhead can descend by emanation to the physical plane and associate himself with the evolution of a human being with whose line of manifestation he is in affinity. But these are things which cannot be very easily understood by the mind, because the mind has too rigid an idea of personality — the difficulty only disappears when one enters into a more flexible consciousness above where one is nearer to the experience of One in all and All in one.

The Soul, the Divine, the Gods, the Asuras

The word soul has various meanings according to the context; it may mean the Purusha supporting the formation of Prakriti which we call a being, though the proper word would be rather a becoming; it may mean on the other hand specifically the psychic being in an evolutionary creature like man; it may mean the spark of the Divine which has been put into Matter by the descent of the Divine into the material world and which upholds

all evolving formations here. There is and can be no psychic being in a non-evolutionary creature like the Asura; there can be none in a God who does not need one for his existence. But what the God has is a Purusha and a Prakriti or Energy of nature of that Purusha. If any being of the typal worlds wants to evolve he has to come down to earth and take a human body and accept to share in the evolution. It is because they do not want to do this that the vital beings try to possess men so that they may enjoy the materialities of physical life without bearing the burden of the evolution or the process of conversion in which it culminates. I hope this is clear and solves the difficulty.

*

The three stages you speak of¹ are stages not of evolution but of the involution of the Divine in Matter. The Devas and Asuras are not evolved in Matter; for the typal being only a Purusha with its Prakriti is necessary—this Purusha may put out a mental and vital Purusha to represent it and according as it is centred in one or another it belongs to the mental or vital world. That is all.

There is no essential difference anywhere, for all is fundamentally the essential Divine; the difference is in the manifestation. Practically, we may say that the Jivatman is one of the divine Many and dependent on the One; the Atman is the One supporting the Many. The psychic being does not merge in the Jivatman, it becomes united with it so that there is no difference between the central being supporting the manifestation from above and the same being supporting the manifestation from within it, because the psychic being has become fully aware of the play of the Divine through it. What is called merging takes place in the Divine Consciousness when the Jivatman feels itself so one with the Divine that there is nothing else.

¹ *The correspondent's letter is not available to determine these stages.—Ed.*

Terms in *The Mother***(1) Falsehood and Ignorance**

Ignorance means Avidya, the separative consciousness and the egoistic mind and life that flows from it and all that is natural to the separative consciousness and the egoistic mind and life. This Ignorance is the result of a movement by which the cosmic Intelligence separated itself from the light of Supermind (the divine Gnosis) and lost the Truth,—truth of being, truth of divine consciousness, truth of force and action, truth of Ananda. As a result instead of a world of integral truth and divine harmony created in the light of the divine Gnosis, we have a world founded on the part truths of an inferior cosmic Intelligence in which all is half truth, half error. It is this that some of the ancient thinkers like Shankara, not perceiving the greater Truth-Force behind, stigmatised as Maya and thought to be the highest creative power of the Divine. All in the consciousness of this creation is either limited or else perverted by separation from the integral Light; even the Truth it perceives is only a half knowledge. Therefore it is called the Ignorance.

Falsehood, on the other hand, is not this Avidya, but an extreme result of it. It is created by an Asuric power which intervenes in this creation and is not only separated from the Truth and therefore limited in knowledge and open to error, but in revolt against the Truth or in the habit of seizing the Truth only to pervert it. This Power, the dark Asuric Shakti or Rakshasic Maya, puts forward its own perverted consciousness as true knowledge and its wilful distortions or reversals of the Truth as the verity of things. It is the powers and personalities of this perverted and perverting consciousness that we call hostile beings, hostile forces. Whenever these perversions created by them out of the stuff of the Ignorance are put forward as the truth of things, that is the Falsehood, in the Yogic sense, *mithyā*, *moha*.

(2) Powers and Appearances

These are the forces and beings that are interested in maintaining the falsehoods they have created in the world of the Ignorance and in putting them forward as the Truth which men must follow. In India they are termed Asuras, Rakshasas, Pisachas (beings respectively of the mentalised vital, middle vital and lower vital planes) who are in opposition to the Gods, the Powers of Light. These too are Powers, for they too have their cosmic field in which they exercise their function and authority and some of them were once divine Powers (the former gods, *pūrve devāḥ*, as they are called somewhere in the Mahabharata) who have fallen towards the Darkness by revolt against the divine Will behind the cosmos. The word “Appearances” refers to the forms they take in order to rule the world, forms often false and always incarnating falsehood, sometimes pseudo-divine.

(3) Powers and Personalities

The use of the word Power has already been explained — it can be applied to whatever or whoever exercises a conscious power in the cosmic field and has authority over the world-movement or some part of it or some movement in it. But the Four of whom you speak are also Shaktis, manifestations of different powers of the supreme Consciousness and Force, the Divine Mother, by which she rules or acts in the universe. And they are at the same time divine Personalities; for each is a being who manifests different qualities and personal consciousness-forms of her Godhead. All the greater Gods are in this way personalities of the Divine — one Consciousness playing in many personalities, *ekam sat bahudhā*. Even in the human being there are many personalities and not only one, as used formerly to be imagined; for all consciousness can be at once one and multiple. “Powers and Personalities” simply describe different aspects of the same being; a Power is not necessarily impersonal and certainly it is not *avyaktam*, as you suggest,—on the contrary it is a manifestation acting in the worlds of the divine manifestation.

(4) Emanations

Emanations correspond to your description of the Matrikas of whom you speak in your letter. An emanation of the Mother is something of her consciousness and power put forth from her, which so long as it is in play is held in close connection with her and, when its play is no longer required, is withdrawn back into its source, but can always be put out and brought into play once more. But also the detaining thread of connection can be severed or loosened and that which came forth as an emanation can proceed on its way as an independent divine being with its own play in the world. All the Gods can put forth such emanations from their being, identical with them in essence of consciousness and power though not commensurate. In a certain sense the universe itself can be said to be an emanation from the Supreme. In the consciousness of the sadhaka an emanation of the Mother will ordinarily wear the appearance, form and characteristics with which he is familiar.

In a sense the four Powers of the Mother may be called, because of their origin, her Emanations, just as the Gods may be called Emanations of the Divine, but they have a more permanent and fixed character; they are at once independent beings allowed their play by the Adyā Shakti and yet portions of the Mother, the Mahashakti, and she can always either manifest through them as separate beings or draw them together as her own various Personalities and hold them in herself, sometimes drawn back, sometimes at play, according to her will. In the supramental plane they are always in her and do not act independently but as intimate portions of the original Mahashakti and in close union and harmony with each other.

(5) Gods

These four Powers are the Mother's cosmic godheads, permanent in the world-play; they stand among the greater cosmic Godheads to whom allusion is made when it is said the Mother as the Mahashakti of this triple world "stands there (in the

Overmind plane) above the Gods".² The Gods, as has been already said, are in origin and essence permanent Emanations of the Divine put forth from the Supreme by the Transcendent Mother, the Adyā Shakti; in their cosmic action they are Powers and Personalities of the Divine each with his independent cosmic standing, function and work in the universe. They are not impersonal entities but cosmic Personalities, although they can and do ordinarily veil themselves behind the movement of impersonal forces. But while in the Overmind and the triple world they appear as independent beings, they return in the Supermind into the One and stand there united in a single harmonious action as multiple personalities of the one Person, the divine Purushottama.

(6) *Presence*

It is intended by the word Presence to indicate the sense and perception of the Divine as a Being, felt as present in one's existence and consciousness or in relation with it, without the necessity of any farther qualification or description. Thus of the "ineffable Presence"³ it can only be said that it is there and nothing more can or need be said about it, although at the same time one knows that all is there, personality and impersonality, Power and Light and Ananda and everything else, and that all these flow from that indescribable Presence. The word may be used sometimes in a less absolute sense, but that is always the fundamental significance,—the essential perception of the essential presence supporting everything else.

² "Determining all that shall be in this universe and in the terrestrial evolution by what she sees and feels and pours from her, she stands there above the Gods and all her Powers and Personalities are put out in front of her for the action. . . ." Sri Aurobindo, *The Mother with Letters on the Mother*, volume 32 of THE COMPLETE WORKS OF SRI AUROBINDO, p. 16.

³ "Alone, she harbours the absolute Power and the ineffable Presence." Sri Aurobindo, *The Mother with Letters on the Mother*, p. 14.

(7) The Transcendent Mother

This is what is termed the Adyā Shakti; she is the supreme Consciousness and Power above the universe and it is by her that all the Gods are manifested, and even the supramental Ishwara comes into manifestation through her — the supramental Purushottama of whom the Gods are Powers and Personalities.

Chapter Two

The Gods

The Gods or Divine Powers

The Gods are Personalities or Powers put forth by the Divine — they are therefore in front limited Emanations, although the full Divine is behind each of them.

*

Of course, the gods exist — that is to say, there are Powers that stand above the world and transmit the divine workings. It is the physical mind which believes only in what is physical that denies them. There are also beings of other worlds — gods and Asuras etc.

*

There are Gods everywhere on all the planes.

*

The Gods are in the universal Self — if identified with the universal Self one can feel their presence there.

*

While the Gods cannot be transformed, for they are typal and not evolutionary beings, they can come for conversion — that is to say, to give up their own ideas and outlook on things and conform themselves to the higher Will and supramental Truth of the Divine.

*

The higher beings are not likely to be in disharmony with each other as they are not subject to the lower ignorance.

*

The Gods have their own enjoyments, though they may not be of a material character.

*

There are no planes of manifestation without forms — for without form creation or manifestation cannot be complete. But the supraphysical planes are not bound to the forms like the physical. The forms there are expressive, not determinative. What is important on the vital plane is the force or feeling and the form expresses it. A vital being has a characteristic form but he can vary it or mask his true form under others. What is primary on the mental plane is the perception, the idea, the mental significance and the form expresses that and these mental forms too can vary — there can be many forms expressing an idea in different ways or on different sides of the idea. Form exists but it is more plastic and variable than in physical nature.

As to the Gods, man can build forms which they will accept; but these forms too are inspired into man's mind from the planes to which the God belongs. All creation has the two sides, the formed and the formless; the Gods too are formless and yet have forms, but a Godhead can take many forms, here Maheshwari, there Pallas Athene. Maheshwari herself has many forms in her lesser manifestations, Durga, Uma, Parvati, Chandi etc. The Gods are not limited to human forms — man also has not always seen them in human forms only.

The Gods and the Overmind

The natives of the Overmind are Gods. Naturally the Gods rule the cosmos.

*

The Overmind is the world of the Gods and the Gods are not merely Powers, but have Forms also.

*

In the Overmind the Gods are still separated existences.

*

Beyond the Overmind (in the supramental nearest the Overmind for instance) the Gods are eternal in their principle, but not in their forms and separate activities; they are there simply aspects of the One. If you meet a Godhead there, it is not as a separate Person; you feel only the Divine having a particular face, as it were, and relation with you for a certain purpose.

*

The Formateurs of the Overmind have shaped nothing evil—it is the lower forces that receive from the Overmind and distort its forces.

Vedic Gods of the Indian Tradition

There are many forms of Agni,—the solar fire, the vaidyuta fire and the nether fire are one Trinity—the fivefold fire is part of the Vedic symbolism of sacrifice.

*

Vayu and Indra are cosmic godheads presiding over the action of cosmic principles—they are not the manomaya purusha or pranamaya purusha in each man. You have a mental being or purusha in you and a vital being or purusha, but you cannot say that you are in your mind Indra or in your vital Vayu. The Purusha is an essential being supporting the play of Prakriti—the Godhead (Indra, Vayu) is a dynamic being manifested in Prakriti for the works of the plane to which he belongs. There is an immense difference.

*

Yes, Mitra is rather a combination of the two powers [*Mahalakshmi and Mahasaraswati*].

*

I indicate the psychological powers which they [*six Vedic Gods*] bring with them:

- Mitra — Harmony.
- Varuna — Wideness.
- Aryaman — Power, Tapasya.
- Brihaspati — Wisdom (Word and Knowledge).
- Vishnu — Cosmic Consciousness.
- Vayu — Life.

Post-Vedic Gods of the Indian Tradition

Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva are only three Powers and Personalities of the One Cosmic Godhead.

*

Brahma is the Power of the Divine that stands behind formation and creation.

*

As for Vishnu being the creator, all the three Gods are often spoken of as creating the universe — even Shiva who is by tradition the Destroyer.

*

There is no particular connection between Shiva and the Overmind — the Overmind is the higher station of all the Gods.

*

Mahashiva means a greater manifestation than that ordinarily worshipped as Shiva — the creative dance of a greater Divine manifesting Power.

*

At X's conscientious hesitations between Krishna and Shakti and Shiva I could not help indulging in a smile. If a man is attracted by one form or two forms only of the Divine, it is all right, — but if he is drawn to several at a time he need not torment himself

over it. A man of some development has necessarily several sides in his nature and it is quite natural that different aspects should draw or govern different personalities in him — he can very well accept them all and harmonise them in the One Divine and the One Adya Shakti of whom all are the manifestations.

*

Shiva is the Lord of Tapas. The power is the power of Tapas.

Krishna as a godhead is the Lord of Ananda, Love and Bhakti; as an incarnation, he manifests the union of wisdom (Jnana) and works and leads the earth-evolution through this towards union with the Divine by Ananda, Love and Bhakti.

The Devi is the Divine Shakti—the Consciousness and Power of the Divine, the Mother and Energy of the worlds. All powers are hers. Sometimes Devi-power may mean the power of the universal World-Force; but this is only one side of the Shakti.

*

Mahakali and Kali are not the same, Kali is a lesser form. Mahakali in the higher planes appears usually with the golden colour.

*

Ganesh is the Power that removes obstacles by the force of Knowledge—Kartikeya represents victory over the hostile Powers. Of course the names given are human, but the Gods exist.

*

Ganesh (among other things) is the devata of spiritual Knowledge—so as you are getting this knowledge, you saw yourself in this form, identified with Ganesh.

Chapter Three

The Hostile Forces and Hostile Beings

The Existence of the Hostile Forces

The hostile forces exist and have been known to Yogic experience ever since the days of the Veda and Zoroaster in Asia (and the mysteries of Egypt and Chaldea and the Cabbala) and in Europe also from old times. These things of course cannot be felt or known so long as one lives in the ordinary mind and its ideas and perceptions — for there there are only two categories of influences recognisable, the ideas and feelings and actions of oneself and others and the play of environment and physical forces. But once one begins to get the inner view of things, it is different. One begins to experience that all is an action of forces, forces of Prakriti psychological as well as physical which play upon our nature — and these are conscious forces or are supported by a consciousness or consciousnesses behind. One is in the midst of a big universal working and it is impossible any longer to explain everything as the result of one's own sole and independent personality. You yourself have at one time written that your crises of despair etc. came upon you as if thrown on you and worked themselves out without your being able to determine or put an end to them. That means an action of universal forces and not merely an independent action of your own personality, though it is something in your nature of which they make use. But you are not conscious, and others also, of this intervention and pressure at its source for the reason I state. Those in the Asram who have developed the inner view of things on the vital plane¹ have plenty of experience of the hostile forces.

¹ One may have the experiences on the mental plane without this knowledge coming — for there Mind and Idea predominate and one does not feel the play of Forces —

However, you need not personally concern yourself with them so long as they remain incognito.

*

It is true that all comes from the Divine and it is true also that a Divine Presence and a Divine Will is behind all that happens and leads the world towards a divine goal.

At the same time it is also taught in the Gita that this world is a world of obscurity and ignorance and to attain to the Divine one must overcome certain forces of Nature, such as Desire, which the Gita calls the enemy difficult to overcome. It is in this sense that we speak of hostile forces—those which stand in the way of coming out of the Ignorance and attaining to the consciousness of the Divine.

It is again true that those who have a complete and living faith in the Divine and a perfect sincerity in their vision of the Divine everywhere and a pure sattvic nature need not trouble themselves about the hostile forces—for from them the forces of the Ignorance fall back and cannot take possession of their nature.

The teaching about the hostile forces (Asuri Rakshasic forces) is necessary for those who have a divided consciousness or a more rajasic temperament—for if they are not on their guard they may fall into the control of undesirable forces of Desire and Ego—

rākṣasīm āsurīm caiva prakṛtiṁ mohinīm śritāḥ²

*

Yes, they [*the hostile forces*] have their own world and, if they kept to it, there could be no objection to their existence. There is a world that is natural to them and has its own rhythm, its own

it is only in the vital that that becomes clear. In the mind plane they manifest at most as mental suggestions and not as concrete Powers. Also if one looks at things with the Mind only (even though it be the Inner Mind), one may see the subtle play of Nature-Forces but without recognising the conscious intention which we call hostile.

² "Dwelling in the deluding Asuric and Rakshasic nature." Gita 9.12.—Ed.

dharma — just as the lesser gods have theirs. But, they want to dominate the evolution and for that purpose they have taken their station in the vital worlds which influence the earth nature and give it its materials for life.

They were created or rather manifested like other orders of being as a type or several types expressing some cosmic stress, some possibility in the Infinite, the expression of a certain kind of consciousness and force. When the work that they are permitted to do on earth, the work of negation, perversion, miscreation is finished they will be destroyed here, but there is no reason to suppose that they may not exist in their own universe, as it were, outside the system here. For here their presence is an Adharma, a disturbance of the true harmony and natural evolution there should be on the earth plane; it is an intrusion and not a natural presence.

How did the Ignorance come into being out of Sachchidananda? Or ego? The Hostile Forces in their own world embody ego self-fulfilled and having its own free play — ego on earth is not self-fulfilled and not meant to be, it is in conflict with a cosmic Force greater than itself and is only a temporary expedient for bringing forth individuality out of the indeterminateness of just conscient life and inconscient Matter.

*

If there were no hostile forces and there were still the evolutionary world, there could be ignorance still but not perversity in the ignorance. All would be a partial truth acting through imperfect instruments but for the best purposes of this or that stage in a progressive manifestation.

The Nature of the Hostile Forces

The mere intensity of the force does not show that it is a bad power; the Divine Force often works with a great intensity. Everything depends on the nature of the force and its working; what does it do, what seems to be its purpose? If it works to purify or open the system, or brings with it light or peace or

prepares the change of the thought, ideas, feelings, character in the sense of a turning towards a higher consciousness, then it is the right force. If it is dark or obscure or perturbs the being with rajasic or egoistic suggestions or excites the lower nature, then it is an adverse Force.

*

The hostiles have themselves bodies though not of a gross physical kind—they see, but with a subtle seeing that includes not only bodies, but movements of forces, thoughts, feelings.

*

Very great [*are the occult powers of the hostile beings*]—it is their occult powers and knowledge of occult processes that make them so strong and effective.

*

The lesser forces of Light are usually too much insistent on seeking for Truth to make effectivity their logic or their rule—the hostiles are too pragmatic to care for Truth, they want only success. As for the greater Forces (e.g. Overmind) they are dynamic and try always to make consciousness effective, but they insist on consciousness, while the hostiles care nothing for that—the more unconscious you are and their automatic tool, the better they are pleased—for it is unconsciousness that gives them their chance.

The Conquest of the Hostile Forces

The universe is certainly or has been up to now in appearance a rough and wasteful game with the dice of chance loaded in favour of the Powers of darkness, the Lords of obscurity, falsehood, death and suffering. But we have to take it as it is and find out—if we reject the way out of the old sages—the way to conquer. Spiritual experience shows that there is behind it all a wide terrain of equality, peace, calm, freedom, and it is only by getting into it that we can have the eye that sees and

hope to gain the power that conquers.

*

It [*the adverse force*] is the Power that keeps up ignorance and darkness in the world — it can only be destroyed when mankind is no longer in love with ignorance and darkness. Each sadhak has to push it out of contact with his being. When it has gone from him, then there will be no longer any serious difficulties in his sadhana.

*

The hostile Forces are Powers of Darkness who are in revolt against the Light and the Truth and want to keep this world under their rule in darkness and ignorance. Whenever anyone wants to reach the Truth, to realise the Divine, they stand in the way as much as possible. But what they are specially against is the work the Mother and myself are doing, to bring down the Light here into the earth and establish the Truth — that would mean their own expulsion. So they always try to destroy the work as a whole and to spoil the sadhana of each sadhak. It is not only you who are attacked: all are attacked more or less — especially when there is a great progress, these forces try to interfere. The only way to avoid it is to be entirely turned towards the Mother and to refuse any opportunity to these Forces.

*

The evil forces are perversions of the Truth by the Ignorance — in any complete transformation they must disappear and the Truth behind them be delivered. In this way they can be said to be transformed by destruction.

Asuras, Rakshasas and Other Vital Beings

The Asuras and Rakshasas etc. do not belong to the earth, but to supraphysical worlds; but they act upon the earth life and dispute the control of human life and character and action with the Gods. They are the Powers of Darkness combating the Powers of Light.

Sometimes they possess men in order to act through them, sometimes they take birth in a human body. When their use in the play is over, they will either change or disappear or no longer seek to intervene in the earth-play.

*

These things [*such as temptation by Apsaras*] are possible but they do not usually happen — because it is difficult for beings of the subtle worlds to materialise to such an extent or for a long time. They prefer to act by influencing human beings, using them as instruments or taking possession of a human mind and body.

*

There are two kinds of Asuras — one kind were divine in their origin but have fallen from their divinity by self-will and opposition to the intention of the Divine: they are spoken of in the Hindu scriptures as the former or earlier gods; these can be converted and their conversion is indeed necessary for the ultimate purposes of the universe. But the ordinary Asura is not of this character, is not an evolutionary but a typal being and represents a fixed principle of the creation which does not evolve or change and is not intended to do so. These Asuras, as also the other hostile beings, Rakshasas, Pisachas and others resemble the devils of the Christian tradition and oppose the divine intention and the evolutionary purpose in the human being; they don't change the purpose in them for which they exist which is evil, but have to be destroyed like the evil. The Asura has no soul, no psychic being which has to evolve to a higher state; he has only an ego and usually a very powerful ego; he has a mind, sometimes even a highly intellectualised mind; but the basis of his thinking and feeling is vital and not mental, at the service of his desire and not of truth. He is a formation assumed by the life-principle for a particular kind of work and not a divine formation or a soul.

*

Yes. Some kinds of Asuras are very religious, very fanatical about

their religion, very strict about rules of ethical conduct. Others of course are just the opposite. There are others who use spiritual ideas without believing in them to give them a perverted twist and delude the sadhaka. It is what Shakespeare described as the Devil quoting Scripture for his own purpose.

At present what they are most doing is to try to raise up the obscurity and weakness of the most physical mind, vital, material parts to prevent the progress or fulfilment of the sadhana.

*

As to Asuras, not many of them have shown signs of repentance or possibility of conversion up to now. It is not surprising that they should be powerful in a world of Ignorance, for they have only to persuade people to follow the established bent of their lower nature, while the Divine calls always for a change of nature. It is not to be wondered at that the Asura has an easier task and more momentary success in his combinations. But that temporary success does not bind the future.

*

It is the movements of the lower nature that get purified. The Asuras themselves are not so easily transformed.

*

The Asuras are really the dark side of the mental, or more strictly, of the vital mind plane. This mind is the very field of the Asuras. Their main characteristic is egoistic strength and struggle, which refuse the higher law. The Asura has self-control, *tapas* and intelligence, but all that for the sake of his ego. On the lower vital plane the corresponding forces we call the Rakshasas which represent violent passions and influences. There are also other kinds of beings on the vital plane which are called the Pisachas and Pramathas. They manifest more or less in the physico-vital.

On the physical plane the corresponding forces are obscure beings, more forces than beings, what the Theosophists call the elementals. They are not strongly individualised beings like the Rakshasas and Asuras, but ignorant and obscure forces

working in the subtle physical plane. What we in Sanskrit call the Bhutas mostly come under this class. But there are two kinds of elementals, the one mischievous and the other not.

There are no Asuras on the higher planes where the Truth prevails, except in the Vedic sense — “the Divine in its strength”. The mental and vital Asuras are only a deviation of that power.

*

The Gandharvas are of the vital plane but they are vital Gods, not Asuras. Many Asuras are beautiful in appearance and can carry even a splendour or light with them. It is the Rakshasas, Pisachas, etc. who are ugly or evil in appearance.

*

Some of the vital beings are very intelligent — but they do not make friends with the Light — they only try to avoid destruction and wait their time.

*

Very few [*vital beings*] come upon earth — they prefer to get hold of human beings and make them their instruments. They do not evolve. They have no evolved or evolving psychic being and they dread to incarnate just because they would then be obliged to progress and evolve the psychic.

*

There is no particular number [*of vital beings that surround a person*] — but sometimes there are particular vital beings that attach themselves to a man if he accepts them.

Section Two

The Avatar and the Vibhuti

Chapter One

The Meaning and Purpose of Avatarhood

The Avatar or Incarnation

Surely for the earth consciousness it is so [*the very fact that the Divine manifests himself is the greatest of all splendours*]. Consider the obscurity here and what it would be if the Divine did not directly intervene and the Light of Lights did not break out of the obscurity — for that is the meaning of the manifestation.

*

An Incarnation is the Divine Consciousness and Being manifesting through a physical body. It is possible from any plane.

*

It is the omnipresent cosmic Divine who supports the action of the universe; if there is an Incarnation, it does not in the least diminish the cosmic Presence and the cosmic action in the three or thirty million universes.

*

The descending Power chooses its own place, body, time for the manifestation; something of that is foreseen by those who have vision but not the whole.

*

An Avatar is supposed to be from birth. Each soul at its birth takes from the cosmic mind, life and matter to shape a new external personality for himself. What prevents the Divine from doing the same? What is continued from birth to birth is the inner being.

*

Each being in a new birth prepares a new mind, life and body—otherwise John Smith would always be John Smith and would have no chance of being Piyush Kanti Ghose. Of course inside there are old personalities contributing to the new lila—but I am speaking of the new visible personality, the outer man, mental, vital, physical. It is the psychic being that keeps the link from birth to birth and makes all the manifestations of the same person. It is therefore to be expected that the Avatar should take on a new personality each time, a personality suited for the new times, work, surroundings. In my own view of things, however, the new personality has a series of non-Avatar births behind him, births in which the intermediate evolution has been followed and assisted from age to age.

*

If they [*the difficulties and struggles of the Avatar*] are shams, they have no value for others or for any true effect. If they have no value for others or for any true effect, they are perfectly irrational and unreal and meaningless. The Divine does not need to suffer or struggle for himself; if he takes on these things it is in order to bear the world-burden and help the world and men; and if the sufferings and struggles are to be of any help, they must be real. A sham or falsehood cannot help. They must be as real as the struggles and sufferings of men themselves—the Divine bears them and at the same time shows the way out of them. Otherwise his assumption of human nature has no meaning and no utility and no value. It is strange that you cannot understand or refuse to admit so simple and crucial a point. What is the use of admitting Avatarhood if you take all the meaning out of it?

The Divine and Human Sides of the Avatar

There are two sides of the phenomenon of Avatarhood, the Divine Consciousness behind and the instrumental personality. The Divine Consciousness is omnipotent but it has put forth the instrumental personality in Nature, under the conditions of Nature, and it uses it according to the rules of the game

—though also sometimes to change the rules of the game. If Avatarhood is only a flashing miracle, then I have no use for it. If it is a coherent part of the arrangement of the omnipresent Divine in Nature, then I can understand and accept it.

*

As for the Divine and human, that also is a mind-made difficulty. The Divine is there in the human, and the human fulfilling and exceeding its highest aspirations and tendencies becomes the Divine. That is what your silly X could not understand—that when the Divine descends, he takes upon himself the burden of humanity in order to exceed it—he becomes human in order to show humanity how to become Divine. But that cannot be if there is only a weakling without any divine Presence within or divine Force behind him—he has to be strong in order to put his strength into all who are willing to receive it. There is therefore in him a double element—human in front, divine behind—and it is that which gives the impression of unfathomableness of which X complained. If you look upon the human alone, looking with the external eye only and are not willing or ready to see anything else, you will see a human being only—if you look for the Divine, you will find the Divine.

*

The Avatar is not supposed to act in a non-human way—he takes up human action and uses human methods with the human consciousness in front and the Divine behind. If he did not his taking a human body would have no meaning and would be of no use to anybody. He could just as well have stayed above and done things from there.

*

What do you mean by lust? Avatars can be married and have children and that is not possible without sex; they can have friendships, enmities, family feelings etc. etc.—these are vital things. I think you are under the impression that an Avatar must be a saint or a Yogi.

*

One can be the head of a spiritual organisation or the Messiah of a religion or an Avatar without in this life reaching the Supermind and beyond.

Human Judgments of the Divine

It is true that it is impossible for the limited human reason to judge the way or purpose of the Divine, which is the way of the Infinite dealing with the finite.

*

It is not by your mind that you can hope to understand the Divine and its action, but by the growth of the true and divine consciousness within you. If the Divine were to unveil and reveal itself in all its glory, the mind might feel a Presence, but it would not understand its action or its nature. It is in the measure of your own realisation and by the birth and growth of that greater consciousness in yourself that you will see the Divine and understand its action even behind its terrestrial disguises.

*

Men's way of doing things is a mental convention; they see things and do things with the mind and what they want is a mental and human perfection. When they think of a manifestation of Divinity, they think it must be an extraordinary perfection in doing the ordinary human things — an extraordinary business faculty, political, poetic or artistic faculty, an accurate memory, not making any mental mistakes, not undergoing any defeat or failure. Or else they think of things which they call superhuman like the people who expected me not to eat food at all or wanted me to know and tell them what will be the value of the cotton shares in Bombay from day to day, or like those who think great Yogis are those who sleep on nails or eat them. All that has nothing to do with manifesting the Divine.

At that rate Rama would be undivine because he followed the Mayamriga as if it were a natural deer and Krishna would be undivine because he was forced by Jarasandha to take refuge

in distant Dwaraka. These human ideas are false.

The Divinity acts according to another consciousness — the consciousness of the Truth above and the Lila below and it acts according to the need of the Lila, not according to men's ideas of what it should or should not do. This is the first thing one must grasp, otherwise one can understand nothing about the manifestation of the Divine.

*

I do not know why you should be suddenly bewildered by what I wrote¹ — it is nothing new and we have been saying it since a whole eternity. I wrote this short answer in reference to a question which supposed that certain "perfections" must be demanded of the Divine Manifestation which seemed to me quite irrelevant to the reality. I put forward two propositions which appear to me indisputable unless we are to revise all spiritual knowledge in favour of modern European ideas about things.

First, the Divine Manifestation even when it manifests in mental and human ways has behind it a consciousness greater than the mind and not bound by the petty mental and moral conventions of this very ignorant human race — so that to impose these standards on the Divine is to try to do what is irrational and impossible. Secondly, this Divine Consciousness behind the apparent personality is concerned with only two things in a fundamental way — the Truth above and here below the Lila and the purpose of the incarnation or manifestation and it does what is necessary for that in the way its greater than human consciousness sees to be the necessary and intended way. I shall try if I can develop that when I write about it — perhaps I shall take your remarks about Rama and Krishna as the starting-point — but that I shall see hereafter.

But I do not understand how all that can prevent me from answering mental questions. On my own showing, if it is necessary for the divine purpose, it has to be done. Ramakrishna himself whom you quote for the futility of asking questions

¹ See the letter beginning "I would not describe" on pages 416–17. — Ed.

answered thousands of questions, I believe. But the answers must be such as Ramakrishna gave and such as I try to give, answers from a higher spiritual experience, from a deeper source of knowledge and not lucubrations of the logical intellect trying to coordinate its ignorance; still less can they be a placing of the Divine or the Divine Truth before the judgment of the intellect to be condemned or acquitted by that authority — for the authority here has no sufficient jurisdiction or competence.

The Work of the Avatar

I have said that the Avatar is one who comes to open the Way for humanity to a higher consciousness — if nobody can follow the Way, then either our conception of the thing, which is also that of Christ and Krishna and Buddha, is all wrong or the whole life and action of the Avatar is quite futile. X seems to say that there is no way and no possibility of following, that the struggles and sufferings of the Avatar are unreal and all humbug, — there is no possibility of struggle for one who represents the Divine. Such a conception makes nonsense of the whole idea of Avatarhood — there is then no reason in it, no necessity for it, no meaning in it. The Divine being all-powerful can lift people up without bothering to come down on earth. It is only if it is part of the world-arrangement that he should take upon himself the burden of humanity and open the Way that Avatarhood has any meaning.

*

If the Divine were not in essence omnipotent, he could not be omnipotent anywhere — whether in the supramental or anywhere else. Because he chooses to limit or determine his action by conditions, it does not make him less omnipotent. His self-limitation is itself an act of omnipotence.

*

Why the immortal Hell should the Divine be tied down to succeed in all his operations? What if failure suits him better and

serves better the ultimate purpose? What if the gentleman in question had to be given his chance as Duryodhan was given his chance when Krishna went to him as ambassador in a last effort to avoid the massacre of Kurukshetra? What rigid primitive notions are these about the Divine! And what about my explanation of how the Divine acts through the Avatar?² It seems all to have gone into water.

By the way about the ass becoming an elephant — what I meant to say was that the only reason why it can't be done is because there is no recognisable process for it. But if a process can be discovered whether by a scientist (let us say transformation or redistribution of the said ass's atoms or molecules — or what not) or by an occultist or by a Yogi, then there is no reason why it should not be done. In other words certain conditions have been established for the game and so long as those conditions remain unchanged certain things are not done — so we say they are impossible, can't be done. If the conditions are changed, then the same things are done or at least become licit — allowable, legal, according to the so-called laws of Nature, — and then we say they can be done. The Divine also acts according to the conditions of the game. He may change them, but he has to change them first, not proceed while maintaining the conditions to act by a series of miracles.

*

If your argument is that the life, actions, struggles of the Avatar (e.g. Rama's, Krishna's) are unreal because the Divine is there and knows it is all a Maya, in man also there is a self, a spirit that is immortal, untouched, divine, you can say that man's sufferings and ignorance are only put on, shams, unreal. But if man feels them as real and if the Avatar feels his work and the difficulties to be serious and real?

If the existence of the Divinity is of no practical effect, what is the use of a theoretical admission? The manifestation of the

² The "explanation" Sri Aurobindo refers to here is probably the one presented in Essays on the Gita, First Series, Chapters XV to XVII. — Ed.

Divinity in the Avatar is of help to man because it helps him to discover his own divinity, find the way to realise it. If the difference is so great that the humanity by its very nature prevents all possibility of following the way opened by the Avatar, it merely means that there is no divinity in man that can respond to the Divinity in the Avatar.

*

I repeat, the Divine when he takes on the burden of terrestrial nature, takes it fully, sincerely and without any conjuring tricks or pretence. If he has something behind him which emerges always out of the coverings, it is the same thing in essence, even if greater in degree, that there is behind others—and it is to awaken that that he is there.

The psychic being does the same for all who are intended for the spiritual way—men need not be extraordinary beings to follow Yoga. That is the mistake you are making—to harp on greatness as if only the great can be spiritual.

*

An Avatar or Vibhuti have the knowledge that is necessary for their work, they need not have more. There was absolutely no reason why Buddha should know what was going on in Rome. An Avatar even does not manifest all the Divine omniscience and omnipotence; he has not come for any such unnecessary display; all that is behind him but not in the front of his consciousness. As for the Vibhuti, the Vibhuti need not even know that he is a power of the Divine. Some Vibhutis, like Julius Caesar for instance, have been atheists. Buddha himself did not believe in a personal God, only in some impersonal and indescribable Permanent.

The Avatar: Historicity and Symbols

Then as to the Avatar and the symbols. There is, it seems to me, a cardinal error in the modern insistence on the biographical and historical, that is to say, the external factuality of the Avatar,

the incidents of his outward life. What matters is the spiritual Reality, the Power, the Influence that came with him or that he brought down by his action and his existence. First of all what matters in a spiritual man's life is not what he did or what he was outside to the view of the men of his time (that is what historicity or biography comes to, does it not?) but what he was and did within; it is only that that gives any value to his outer life at all. It is the inner life that gives to the outer any power it may have, and the inner life of a spiritual man is something vast and full and, at least in the great figures, so crowded and teeming with significant things that no biographer or historian could ever hope to seize it all or tell it. Whatever is significant in the outward life is so because it is a symbol of what has been realised within himself and one may go on and say that the inner life also is only significant as an expression, a living representation of the movement of the Divinity behind it. That is why we need not enquire whether the stories about Krishna were transcripts, however loose, of his acts on earth or are symbol-representations of what Krishna was and is for men, of the Divinity expressing itself in the figure of Krishna. Buddha's renunciation, his temptation by Mara, his enlightenment under the Bo-Tree are such symbols, so too the virgin birth, the temptation in the desert, the crucifixion of Christ are such symbols true by what they signify, even if they are not scrupulously recorded historical events. The outward facts as related of Christ or Buddha come to not much more than what has happened in many other lives — what is it that gives Buddha or Christ their enormous place in the spiritual world? It was because something manifested through them that was more than any outward event or any teaching. The verifiable historicity gives us very little of that, yet it is that only that matters. So it seems to me that Krishnaprem is fundamentally right in what he says of the symbols. To the physical mind only the words and facts and acts of a man matter; to the inner mind it is the spiritual happenings in him that matter. Even the teachings of Christ and Buddha are spiritually true not as mere mental teachings but as the expression of spiritual states or happenings in them which by their life on earth they made possible (or at

any rate more dynamically potential) in others. Also evidently sectarian walls are a mistake, an accretion, a mental limiting of the Truth which may serve a mental, but not a spiritual purpose. The Avatar, the Guru have no meaning if they do not stand for the Eternal; it is that that makes them what they are for the worshipper or the disciple.

It is also a fact that nobody can give you any spiritual revelation which does not come from something in one's own true Self, it is always the Divine who reveals himself and the Divine is within you; so He who reveals must be felt in your own heart. Your query here simply suggests that this is a truth which can be misinterpreted or misused, but so can every spiritual truth if it is taken hold of in the wrong way — and the human mind has a great penchant for taking Truth by the wrong end and arriving at falsehood. All statements about these things are, after all, mental statements and at the mercy of any mind that interprets them. There is a snag in every such statement created not by the Truth that it expresses but by the mind's interpretation. The snag here (what you call the slip) lies not in the statement itself which is quite correct, but in the deflected sense in which it may be taken by ignorant or self-sufficient minds enamoured of their ego. Many have put forward the "own self" gospel without taking the trouble to see whether it is the true Self, have pitted the ignorance of their "own self" — in fact, their ego — against the knowledge of the Guru or made their ego or something that flattered and fostered it the Ishta Devata. The snag in the worship of Guru or Avatar is a sectarian bias which insists on the Representative or the Manifestation but loses sight of the Manifested; the snag in the emphasis on the other side is the ignoring of the need or belittling of the value of the Representative or Manifestation and the substitution not of the true Self one in all but of one's "own self" as the guide and light. How many have done that here and lost the way through the pull of the magnified ego which is one of the great perils on the way! However that does not lessen the truth of the things said by Krishnaprem — only in looking at the many sides of Truth one must put each thing in its place in the harmony of the All which

is for us the expression of the Supreme.

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The answer to the question [*whether the Krishna of Brindavan and the stories of his lila are literally true or merely symbols of deep spiritual realities*] depends on what value one attaches to spiritual experience and to mystic and occult experience, that is to say, to the data of other planes of consciousness than the physical, as also on the nature of the relations between the cosmic consciousness and the individual and collective consciousness of man. From the point of view of spiritual and occult Truth, what takes shape in the consciousness of man is a reflection and particular kind of formation, in a difficult medium, of things much greater in their light, power and beauty or in their force and range which come to it from the cosmic consciousness of which man is a limited and, in his present state of evolution, a still ignorant part. All this explanation about the genius of the race, of the consciousness of a nation creating the Gods and their forms is a very partial, somewhat superficial and in itself a misleading truth. Man's mind is not an original creator, it is an intermediary; to start creating it must receive an initiating "inspiration", a transmission or a suggestion from the cosmic consciousness, and with that it does what it can. God is, but man's conceptions of God are reflections in his own mentality, sometimes of the Divine, sometimes of other Beings and Powers and they are what his mentality can make of the suggestions that come to him, generally very partial and imperfect so long as they are still mental, so long as he has not arrived at a higher and truer, a spiritual or mystic knowledge. The Gods already exist, they are not created by man even though he does seem to conceive them in his own image; fundamentally, he formulates as best he can what truth about them he receives from the cosmic Reality. An artist or a bhakta may have a vision of the Gods and it may get stabilised and generalised in the consciousness of the race and in that sense it may be true that man gives their forms to the Gods; but he does not invent these forms, he records what he sees; the forms that he gives are given to him. In the

“conventional” form of Krishna men have embodied what they could see of his eternal beauty and what they have seen may be true as well as beautiful, it conveys something of the form, but it is fairly certain that if there is an eternal form of that eternal beauty it is a thousand times more beautiful than what man had as yet been able to see of it. Mother India is not a piece of earth; she is a Power, a Godhead, for all nations have such a Devi supporting their separate existence and keeping it in being. Such Beings are as real and more permanently real than the men they influence, but they belong to a higher plane, are part of the cosmic consciousness and being and act here on earth by shaping the human consciousness on which they exercise their influence. It is natural for man who only sees his own consciousness individual, national or racial at work and does not see what works upon it and shapes it, to think that all is created by him and there is nothing cosmic and greater behind it. The Krishna consciousness is a reality, but if there were no Krishna, there could be no Krishna consciousness: except in arbitrary metaphysical abstractions there can be no consciousness without a Being who is conscious. It is the person who gives value and reality to the personality, he expresses himself in it and is not constituted by it. Krishna is a being, a person and it is as the Divine Person that we meet him, hear his voice, speak with him and feel his presence. To speak of the consciousness of Krishna as something separate from Krishna is an error of the mind, which is always separating the inseparable and which also tends to regard the impersonal, because it is abstract, as greater, more real and more enduring than the person. Such divisions may be useful to the mind for its own purposes, but it is not the real truth; in the real truth the being or person and its impersonality or state of being are one reality.

The historicity of Krishna is of less spiritual importance and is not essential, but it has still a considerable value. It does not seem to me that there can be any reasonable doubt that Krishna the man was not a legend or a poetic invention but actually existed upon earth and played a part in the Indian past. Two facts emerge clearly, that he was regarded as an important

spiritual figure, one whose spiritual illumination was recorded in one of the Upanishads, and that he was traditionally regarded as a divine man, one worshipped after his death as a deity; this is apart from the story in the Mahabharata and the Puranas. There is no reason to suppose that the connection of his name with the development of the Bhagavata religion, an important current in the stream of Indian spirituality, was founded on a mere legend or poetic invention. The Mahabharata is a poem and not history, but it is clearly a poem founded on a great historical event, traditionally preserved in memory; some of the figures connected with it, Dhritarashtra, Parikshit, for instance, certainly existed and the story of the part played by Krishna as leader, warrior and statesman can be accepted as probable in itself and to all appearance founded on a tradition which can be given a historical value and has not the air of a myth or a sheer poetical invention. That is as much as can be positively said from the point of view of the theoretical reason as to the historical figure of the man Krishna; but in my view there is much more than that in it and I have always regarded the incarnation as a fact and accepted the historicity of Krishna as I accept the historicity of Christ.

The story of Brindavan is another matter; it does not enter into the main story of the Mahabharata and has a Puranic origin and it could be maintained that it was intended all along to have a symbolic character. At one time I accepted that explanation, but I had to abandon it afterwards; there is nothing in the Puranas that betrays any such intention. It seems to me that it is related as something that actually occurred or occurs somewhere; the Gopis are to them realities and not symbols. It was for them at the least an occult truth, and occult and symbolic are not the same thing; the symbol may be only a significant mental construction or only a fanciful invention, but the occult is a reality which is actual somewhere, behind the material scene as it were and can have its truth for the terrestrial life and its influence upon it, may even embody itself there. The lila of the Gopis seems to be conceived as something which is always going on in a divine Gokul and which projected itself in

an earthly Brindavan and can always be realised and its meaning made actual in the soul. It is to be presumed that the writers of the Puranas took it as having been actually projected on earth in the life of the incarnate Krishna and it has always been so accepted by the religious mind of India.

These questions and the speculations to which they have given rise have no indispensable connection with the spiritual life. There what matters is the contact with Krishna and the growth towards the Krishna consciousness, the presence, the spiritual relation, the union in the soul and, till that is reached, the aspiration, the growth in bhakti and whatever illumination one can get on the way. To one who has had these things, lived in the presence, heard the voice, known Krishna as Friend or Lover, Guide, Teacher, Master or, still more, has had his whole consciousness changed by the contact, or felt the presence within him, all such questions have only an outer and superficial interest. So also, to one who has had contact with the inner Brindavan and the lila of the Gopis, made the surrender and undergone the spell of the joy and the beauty or even only turned to the sound of the flute, the rest hardly matters. But from another point of view, if one can accept the historical reality of the incarnation, there is this great spiritual gain that one has a *point d'appui* for a more concrete realisation in the conviction that once at least the Divine has visibly touched the earth, made the complete manifestation possible, made it possible for the divine supernature to descend into this evolving but still very imperfect terrestrial nature.

*

What he [Krishnaprem] says³ — the central thing — is very correct as always, the position of all who have any notion of spirituality, though the religionists seem to find it difficult to get to it. But though Christ and Krishna are the same, they are the same in difference; that is indeed the utility of so many manifestations

³ In his letter to the correspondent, Krishnaprem observed that "Christ and Krishna are the same." He also said: "Why is Christianity tottering? Primarily because the Christians have pinned their faith on historical events and a historical person." — Ed.

instead of there being only one as these missionaries would have it. But is it really because the historical Christ has been made too much the foundation-stone of the faith that Christianity is failing? It may be something inadequate in the religion itself—perhaps in religion itself; for all religions are a little off-colour now. The need of a larger opening of the soul into the Light is being felt, an opening through which the expanding human mind and heart can follow.

The Avatar and the Vibhuti

The Avatar is necessary when a special work is to be done and in crises of the evolution. The Avatar is a special manifestation, while for the rest of the time it is the Divine working within the ordinary human limits as a Vibhuti.

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An Avatar, roughly speaking, is one who is conscious of the presence and power of the Divine born in him or descended into him and governing from within his will and life and action; he feels identified inwardly with this divine power and presence. A Vibhuti is supposed to embody some power of the Divine and is enabled by it to act with great force in the world but that is all that is necessary to make him a Vibhuti: the power may be very great but the consciousness is not that of an inborn or indwelling Divinity. This is the distinction we can gather from the Gita which is the main authority on this subject. If we follow this distinction, we can confidently say from what is related of them that Rama and Krishna can be accepted as Avatars; Buddha figures as such although with a more impersonal consciousness of the Power within him; Ramakrishna voiced the same consciousness when he spoke of him who was Rama and who was Krishna being within him. But Chaitanya's case is peculiar; for according to the accounts he ordinarily felt and declared himself a bhakta of Krishna and nothing more, but in great moments he manifested Krishna, grew luminous in mind and body and was Krishna himself and spoke and

acted as the Lord. His contemporaries saw in him an Avatar of Krishna, a manifestation of the divine love. Shankara and Vivekananda were certainly Vibhutis; they cannot be reckoned as more, though as Vibhutis they were very great.

*

It was not my intention to question in any degree Chaitanya's position as an Avatar of Krishna and the divine love. That character of the manifestation appears very clearly from all the accounts about him and even, if what is related about the appearance of Krishna in him from time to time is accepted, these outbursts of the splendour of the Divine Being are among the most remarkable in the story of the Avatar. As for Ramakrishna, the manifestation in him was not so intense but more many-sided and fortunately there can be no doubt about the authenticity of the details of his talk and actions since they have been recorded from day to day by so competent an observer as Mahendranath Gupta. I would not care to enter into any comparison as between these two great spiritual personalities; both exercised an extraordinary influence and did something supreme in their own sphere.

Chapter Two

Specific Avatars and Vibhutis

The Ten Avatars as a Parable of Evolution

Avatarhood would have little meaning if it were not connected with the evolution. The Hindu procession of the ten Avatars is itself, as it were, a parable of evolution. First the Fish Avatar, then the amphibious animal between land and water, then the land animal, then the Man-Lion Avatar, bridging man and animal, then man as dwarf, small and undeveloped and physical but containing in himself the godhead and taking possession of existence, then the rajasic, sattvic, nirguna Avatars, leading the human development from the vital rajasic to the sattvic mental man and again the overmental superman. Krishna, Buddha and Kalki depict the last three stages, the stages of the spiritual development—Krishna opens the possibility of Overmind, Buddha tries to shoot beyond to the supreme liberation but that liberation is still negative, not returning upon earth to complete positively the evolution; Kalki is to correct this by bringing the Kingdom of the Divine upon earth, destroying the opposing Asura forces. The progression is striking and unmistakable.

As for the lives in between the Avatar lives, it must be remembered that Krishna speaks of many lives in the past, not only a few supreme ones, and secondly that while he speaks of himself as the Divine, in one passage he describes himself as a Vibhuti, *vṛṣṇīnāṁ vāsudevah*. We may therefore fairly assume that in many lives he manifested as the Vibhuti veiling the fuller Divine Consciousness. If we admit that the object of Avatarhood is to lead the evolution, this is quite reasonable, the Divine appearing as Avatar in the great transitional stages and as Vibhutis to aid the lesser transitions.

*

In speaking of supreme liberation [*in the previous letter*] I was

simply taking the Buddhist, Adwaita view for granted and correcting it by saying that this Nirvana view is too negative. Krishna opened the possibility of Overmind with its two sides of realisation, static and dynamic. Buddha tried to shoot from mind to Nirvana in the Supreme, just as Shankara did in another way after him. Both agree in overleaping the other stages and trying to get at a nameless and featureless Absolute. Krishna on the other hand was leading by the normal course of evolution. The next normal step is not a featureless Absolute, but the Supermind. I consider that in trying to overshoot, Buddha like Shankara made a mistake, cutting away the dynamic side of the liberation. Therefore there has to be a correction by Kalki.

I was of course dealing with the Ten Avatars as a “parable of the evolution”, and only explaining the interpretation we can put on it from that point of view. It was not my own view of the thing that I was giving.

*

I only took the Puranic list of Avatars and interpreted it as a parable of evolution, so as to show that the idea of evolution is implicit behind the theory of Avatarhood. As to whether one accepts Buddha as an Avatar or prefers to put others in his place (in some lists Balaram replaces Buddha), is a matter of individual feeling. The Buddhist Jatakas are legends about the past incarnations of the Buddha, often with a teaching implied in them, and are not a part of the Hindu system. To the Buddhists Buddha was not an Avatar at all, he was the soul climbing up the ladder of spiritual evolution till it reached the final stage of emancipation — although Hindu influence did make Buddhism develop the idea of an eternal Buddha above, that was not a universal or fundamental Buddhistic idea. Whether the Divine in manifesting his Avatarhood could choose to follow the line of evolution from the lowest scale, manifesting on each scale as a Vibhuti, is a question again to which the answer is not inevitably in the negative. If we accept the evolutionary idea, such a thing may have its place.

If Buddha taught something different from Krishna, that

does not prevent his advent from being necessary in the spiritual evolution. The only question is whether the attempt to scale the heights of an absolute Nirvana through negation of cosmic existence was a necessary step or not, having a view to the fact that one can make the attempt to reach the Highest on the *neti neti* as well as the *iti iti* line.

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Too much importance need not be attached to the details about Kalki—they are rather symbolic than an attempt to prophesy details of future history. What is expressed is something that has to come, but it is symbolically indicated, no more.

So too, too much weight need not be put on the exact figures about the Yugas in the Purana. Here again the Kala and the Yugas indicate successive periods in the cyclic wheel of evolution, the perfect state, decline and disintegration of successive ages of humanity followed by a new birth—the mathematical calculations are not the important element. The argument of the end of the Kali Yuga already come or coming and a new Satya Yuga coming is a very familiar one and there have been many who have upheld it.

Rama as an Avatar

I have no intention of entering into a supreme defence of Rama—I only entered into the points about Bali etc. because these are usually employed nowadays to belittle him as a great personality on the usual level. But from the point of view of Avatarhood I would no more think of defending his moral perfection according to modern standards than I would think of defending Napoleon or Caesar against the moralists or the democratic critics or the debunkers in order to prove that they were Vibhutis. Vibhuti, Avatar are terms which have their own meaning and scope, and they are not concerned with morality or immorality, perfection or imperfection according to small human standards or setting an example to men or showing new moral attitudes or giving new spiritual teachings. These things may or may not

be done, but they are not at all the essence of the matter.

Also, I do not consider your method of dealing with Rama's personality to be the right one. It has to be taken as a whole in the setting that Valmiki gave it (not treated as if it were the story of a modern man) and with the significance that he gave to his hero's personality, deeds and works. If it is pulled out of its setting and analysed under the dissecting knife of a modern ethical mind, it loses all its significance at once. Krishna so treated becomes a mere debauchee and trickster who no doubt did great things in politics — but so did Rama in war. Achilles and Odysseus pulled out of their setting become, one a furious egoistic savage, and the other a cruel and cunning savage. I consider myself under an obligation to enter into the spirit, significance, atmosphere of the Mahabharata, Iliad, Ramayana and identify myself with their time-spirit before I can feel what their heroes were in themselves apart from the details of their outer action.

As for the Avatarhood, I accept it for Rama first because he fills a place in the scheme and seems to me to fill it rightly — and because when I read the Ramayana I feel a great afflatus which I recognise and which makes of its story — mere faery-tale though it seems — a parable of a great critical transitional event that happened in the terrestrial evolution and gives to the main character's personality and actions a significance of the large typical cosmic kind which these actions would not have had if they had been done by another man in another scheme of events. The Avatar is not bound to do extraordinary actions, but he is bound to give his acts or his work or what he is — any of these or all — a significance and an effective power that are part of something essential to be done in the history of the earth and its races.

All the same, if anybody does not see as I do and wants to eject Rama from his place, I have no objection — I have no particular partiality for Rama — provided somebody is put in who can more worthily fill up the gap his absence leaves. There *was* somebody there, Valmiki's Rama or another Rama or somebody else not Rama.

Also I do not mean that I admit the validity of your remarks

about Rama, even taken as a piecemeal criticism; but that I have no time for today. I maintain my position about the killing of Bali and the banishment of Sita in spite of Bali's preliminary objection to the procedure, afterwards retracted, and in spite of the opinions of Rama's relatives. Necessarily from the point of view of the antique dharma — not from that of any universal moral standard — which besides does not exist, since the standard changes according to clime or age.

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No, certainly not — an Avatar is not at all bound to be a spiritual prophet — he is never in fact merely a prophet, he is a realiser, an establisher — not of outward things only, though he does realise something in the outward also, but, as I have said, of something essential and radical needed for the terrestrial evolution which is the evolution of the embodied spirit through successive stages towards the Divine. It was not at all Rama's business to establish the spiritual stage of that evolution — so he did not at all concern himself with that. His business was to destroy Ravana and to establish the Ramarajya — in other words, to fix for the future the possibility of an order proper to the sattwic civilised human being who governs his life by the reason, the finer emotions, morality or at least moral ideals, such as truth, obedience, cooperation and harmony, the sense of humour, the sense of domestic and public order, to establish this in a world still occupied by anarchic forces, the Animal Mind and the powers of the vital Ego making its own satisfaction the rule of life, in other words, the Vanara and the Rakshasa. This is the meaning of Rama and his life-work and it is according as he fulfilled it or not that he must be judged as Avatar or no Avatar. It was not his business to play the comedy of the chivalrous Kshatriya with the formidable brute beast that was Bali, it was his business to kill him and get the Animal Mind under his control. It was his business to be not necessarily a perfect, but a largely representative sattwic Man, a faithful husband and lover, a loving and obedient son, a tender and perfect brother, father, friend — he is friend of all kinds of people, friend of the outcaste Guhaka, friend of the Animal

leaders, Sugriva, Hanuman, friend of the vulture Jatayu, friend even of the Rakshasa Vibhishan. All that he was in a brilliant, striking but above all spontaneous and inevitable way, not with a forcing of this note or that like Harishchandra or Shivi, but with a certain harmonious completeness. But most of all, it was his business to typify and establish the things on which the social idea and its stability depend, truth and honour, the sense of the Dharma, public spirit and the sense of order. To the first, to truth and honour, much more even than to his filial love and obedience to his father — though to that also — he sacrificed his personal rights as the elect of the King and the Assembly and fourteen of the best years of his life and went into exile in the forests. To his public spirit and his sense of public order (the great and supreme civic virtue in the eyes of the ancient Indians, Greeks, Romans, for at that time the maintenance of the ordered community, not the separate development and satisfaction of the individual was the pressing need of human evolution) he sacrificed his own happiness and domestic life and the happiness of Sita. In that he was at one with the moral sense of all the antique races, though at variance with the later romantic individualistic sentimental morality of the modern man who can afford to have that less stern morality just because the ancients sacrificed the individual in order to make the world safe for the spirit of social order. Finally it was Rama's business to make the world safe for the ideal of the sattwic human being by destroying the sovereignty of Ravana, the Rakshasa menace. All this he did with such a divine afflatus in his personality and action that his figure has been stamped for more than two millenniums on the mind of Indian culture and what he stood for has dominated the reason and idealising mind of man in all countries — and in spite of the constant revolt of the human vital is likely to continue to do so until a greater Ideal arises. And you say in spite of all this that he was no Avatar? If you like — but at any rate he stands among the few greatest of the great Vibhutis. You may dethrone him now — for man is no longer satisfied with the sattwic ideal and is seeking for something more — but his work and meaning remain stamped on the past of the earth's evolving race.

When I spoke of the gap that would be left by his absence, I did not mean a gap among the prophets and intellectuals, but a gap in the scheme of Avatarhood — there was somebody who was the Avatar of the sattwic Human as Krishna was the Avatar of the overmental Superhuman — I see no one but Rama who can fill the place. Spiritual teachers and prophets (as also intellectuals, scientists, artists, poets, etc.) — these are at the greatest Vibhutis, but they are not Avatars. For at that rate all religious founders would be Avatars — Joseph Smith (I think that is his name) of the Mormons, St. Francis of Assisi, Calvin, Loyola and a host of others as well as Christ, Chaitanya or Ramakrishna.

For faith, miracles, Bijoy Goswami, another occasion. I wanted to say this much more about Rama — which is still only a hint and is not the thing I was going to write about the general principle of Avatarhood.¹

*

I am rather perplexed by your strictures on Rama. Cowardice is the last thing that can be charged against Valmiki's Rama; he has always been considered as a warrior and it is the "martial races" of India who have made him their god. Valmiki everywhere paints him as a great warrior. His employment of ruse against an infrahuman enemy does not prove the opposite — for that is always how the human (even great warriors and hunters) has dealt with the infrahuman. I think it is Madhusudan who has darkened Valmiki's hero in Bengali eyes and turned him into a poor puppet, but that is not the authentic Rama who, say what one will, was a great epic figure, — Avatar or no Avatar. As

¹ Nor, I may add, is it a complete or supreme defence of Rama. For that I would have to write about what the story of the Ramayana meant, appreciate Valmiki's presentation of his chief characters (they are none of them copy-book examples, but great men and women with the defects and merits of human nature, as all men, even the greatest, are), and show also how the Godhead, which was behind the frontal and instrumental personality we call Rama, worked out every incident of his life as a necessary step in what had to be done. As to the weeping of Rama, I had answered that in my other yet unfinished letter. You are imposing the colder and harder Nordic ideal on the Southern temperament which regarded the expression of emotion, not its suppression, as a virtue. Witness the weeping and lamentations of Achilles, Ulysses and other Greek, Persian and Indian heroes — the latter especially as lovers.

for conventional morality, all morality is a convention—man cannot live without conventions, mental and moral, otherwise he feels himself lost in the rolling sea of the anarchic forces of vital Nature. Even the Russells and Bernard Shaws can only end by setting up another set of conventions in the place of those they have skittled over. Only by rising above mind can one really get beyond conventions—Krishna was able to do it because he was not a mental human being but an overmental godhead acting freely out of a greater consciousness than man's. Rama was not that, he was the Avatar of the sattvic human mind—mental, emotional, moral—and he followed the Dharma of the age and race. That may make him temperamentally congenial to Gandhi and the reverse to you; but just as Gandhi's temperamental recoil from Krishna does not prove Krishna to be no Avatar, so your temperamental recoil from Rama does not establish that he was not an Avatar. However, my main point will be that Avatarhood does not depend upon these questions at all, but has another basis, meaning and purpose.

*

No time for a full answer to your renewed remarks on Rama tonight. You are intrigued only because you stick to the standard modern measuring rods of moral and spiritual perfection (introduced by Seeley and Bankim) for the Avatar—while I start from another standpoint altogether and resolutely refuse these standard human measures. The ancient Avatars except Buddha were *not* either standards of perfection or spiritual teachers—in spite of the Gita which was spoken, says Krishna, in a moment of supernormal consciousness which he lost immediately afterwards. They were, if I may say so, representative cosmic men who were instruments of a divine Intervention for fixing certain things in the evolution of the earth-race. I stick to that and refuse to submit myself in this argument to any other standard whatever.

I did not admit that Rama was a blind Avatar, but offered you two alternatives of which the latter represents my real view founded on the impression made on me by the Ramayana that

Rama knew very well but refused to be talkative about it—his business being not to disclose the Divine, but to fix mental, moral and emotional man (not to originate him for he was there already) on the earth as against the Animal and the Rakshasa forces. My argument from Chaitanya (who was for most of the time, first a pandit and then a bhakta, but only occasionally the Divine himself) is perfectly rational and logical, if you follow my line and don't insist on a high specifically spiritual consciousness for the Avatar. I shall point out what I mean in my next.

By sattwic man I do not mean a moral or an always self-controlled one, but a predominantly mental (as opposed to a vital or merely physical man) who has rajasic emotions and passions, but lives predominantly according to his mind and its will and ideas. There is no such thing, I suppose, as a purely sattwic man—since the three gunas go always together in a state of unstable equilibrium, but a predominantly sattwic man is what I have described. My impression of Rama from Valmiki is such—it is quite different from yours. I am afraid your picture of him is quite out of focus—you efface the main lines of the character, belittle and brush out all the lights to which Valmiki gave so much value and prominence and hammer always at some details and some parts of shadow which you turn into the larger part of Rama. That is what the debunkers do—but a debunked figure is not the true figure.

By the way, a sattwic man can have strong passion and strong anger—and when he lets the latter loose, the normally violent fellow is simply nowhere. Witness the outbursts of anger of Christ, the indignation of Chaitanya—and the general evidence of experience and psychology on that point. All this however by the way—I shall try to develop later.

P.S. The trait of Rama which you give as that of an undeveloped man, viz., his decisive spontaneous action according to the will and the idea that came to him, is a trait of the cosmic man and many Vibhutis, men of action of the large Caesarian or Napoleonic type. That also I hope to develop sometime.

Why should Rama not have *kāma* as well as *prema*? — they were supposed to go together as between husband and wife in ancient India. The performances of Rama in the *viraha* of Sita are due to Valmiki's poetic idea which was also Kalidasa's and everybody else's in those far-off times about how a complete lover should behave in such a quandary. Whether the actual Rama bothered himself to do all that is another matter.

As for the unconscious Avatar, why not? Chaitanya is supposed to be an Avatar by the Vaishnavas, yet he was conscious of the Godhead behind only when that Godhead came in front and possessed him on rare occasions. Christ said "I and my Father are one", but yet he always spoke and behaved as if there were a difference. Ramakrishna's earlier period was that of one seeking God, not aware from the first of his identity. These are the reputed religious Avatars who ought to be more conscious than a man of action like Rama. And supposing the full and permanent consciousness, why should the Avatar proclaim himself except on rare occasions to an Arjuna or to a few bhaktas or disciples? It is for others to find out what he is; though he does not deny when others speak of him as That, he is not always saying and perhaps never may say or only in moments like that of the Gita, "I am He."

*

When I said, "Why not an unconscious Avatar?" I was taking *your* statement (not mine) that Rama was unconscious and how could there be an unconscious Avatar. My own view is that Rama was not blind, not unconscious of his Avatarhood, only uncommunicative about it. But I said that even taking your statement to be correct, the objection was not insuperable. I instanced the case of Chaitanya and the others, because there the facts are hardly disputable. Chaitanya for the first part of his life was simply Nimai Pandit and had no consciousness of being anything else. Then he had his conversion and became the bhakta, Chaitanya. This bhakta at times seemed to be possessed by the presence of Krishna, knew himself to be Krishna, spoke, moved and appeared with the light of the Godhead — none around him

could think of or see him as anything else when he was in this glorified and transfigured condition. But from that he fell back to the ordinary consciousness of the bhakta and, as I have read in his biography, refused then to consider himself as anything more. These, I think, are the facts. Well then, what do they signify? Was he only Nimai Pandit at first? It is quite conceivable that he was so and the descent of the Godhead into him only took place after his conversion and spiritual change. But also afterwards when he was in his normal bhakta-consciousness, was he then no longer the Avatar? An intermittent Avatarhood? Krishna coming down for an afternoon call into Chaitanya and then going up again till the time came for the next visit? I find it difficult to believe in this phenomenon. The rational explanation is that in the phenomenon of Avatarhood there is a Consciousness behind, at first veiled or sometimes perhaps only half-veiled, which is that of the Godhead and a frontal consciousness, human or apparently human or at any rate with all the appearance of terrestriality, which is the instrumental Personality. In that case, it is possible that the secret Consciousness was all along there, but waited to manifest until after the conversion; and it manifested intermittently because the main work of Chaitanya was to establish the type of a spiritual and psychic bhakti and love in the emotional vital part of man, preparing the vital in us in that way to turn towards the Divine — at any rate, to fix that possibility in the earth-nature. It was not that there had not been the emotional type of bhakti before; but the completeness of it, the *élan*, the vital's rapture in it had never manifested as it manifested in Chaitanya. But for that work it would never have done if he had always been in the Krishna consciousness; he would have been the Lord to whom all gave bhakti, but not the supreme example of the divine ecstatic bhakta. At the same time the occasional manifestation showed who he was and at the same time evidenced the mystic law of the Immanence.

Voilà — for Chaitanya. But, if Chaitanya, the frontal consciousness, the instrumental Personality, was all the time the Avatar, yet except in his highest moments was unconscious of it and even denied it, that pushed a little farther would establish the

possibility of what you call an unconscious Avatar—that is to say, of one in which the veiled consciousness might not come in front but always move the instrumental Personality from behind. The frontal consciousness might be aware in the inner parts of its being that it was only an instrument of Something Divine which was its real Self, but outwardly would think, speak and behave as if it were only the human being doing a given work with a peculiar power and splendour. Whether there was such an Avatar or not is another matter, but logically it is quite possible.

*

What is all this obsession of greater or less? In our Yoga we do not strive after greatness.

It is not a question of Sri Krishna's disciples, but of the earth consciousness—Rama was a mental man, there is no touch of the overmind consciousness (direct) in anything he said or did, but what he did was done with the greatness of the Avatar. But there have since been men who did live in touch with the planes above mind—higher mind, illumined mind, Intuition. There is no question of asking whether they were "greater" than Rama; they might have been less "great", but they were able to live from a new plane of consciousness. And Krishna's opening the overmind certainly made it possible for the attempt at bringing Supermind to the earth to be made.

*

About greater and less, one point. Is Captain John Higgins of S.S. *Mauretania* a greater man than Christopher Columbus because he can reach America without trouble in a few days? Is a university graduate in philosophy greater than Plato because he can reason about problems and systems which had never even occurred to Plato? No, only humanity has acquired greater scientific power which any good navigator can use or a wider intellectual knowledge which anyone with a philosophic training can use. You will say greater scientific power and wider knowledge is not a change of consciousness. Very well, but there are Rama and Ramakrishna. Rama spoke always from

the thinking intelligence, the common property of developed men; Ramakrishna spoke constantly from a swift and luminous spiritual intuition. Can you tell me which is the greater? the Avatar recognised by all India? or the saint and Yogi recognised as an Avatar only by his disciples and some others who follow them?

Krishna as an Avatar

Krishna is not the supramental light. The descent of Krishna would mean the descent of the Overmind Godhead preparing, though not itself actually bringing, the descent of Supermind and Ananda. Krishna is the Anandamaya, he supports the evolution through the Overmind leading it towards his Ananda.

*

What Krishna worked for was the Overmind consciousness acting in the mind and vital.

*

What was said² was that Krishna as a manifestation on earth opened the possibility of the Overmind consciousness here to men and stood for that, as Rama was the incarnation in mental Man. If Krishna was *an* overmind “God”, that means he was not an Incarnation, not the Divine, but somebody else who claimed to be the Divine — i.e. he was a god who somehow thought he was God.

*

I suppose very few recognised him [*Krishna*] as an Avatar; certainly it was not at all a general recognition. Among the few those nearest him do not seem to have counted — it was less prominent people like Vidura etc.

*

² *The correspondent asked, “Why is it said that Krishna is an Overmind God?” — Ed.*

Those who were with Krishna were in all appearance men like other men. They spoke and acted with each other as men with men and were not thought of by those around them as gods. Krishna himself was known by most as a man—only a few worshipped him as the Divine.

*

*Yuge yuge*³ may be used in a general sense, as in English “from age to age” and not refer technically to the *yuga* proper according to the Puranic computation. But the *bahūni* has an air of referring to very numerous lives especially when coupled with *tava ca*. In that case all these many births could not be full incarnations,—many may have been merely Vibhuti births carrying on the thread from incarnation to incarnation. About Arjuna’s accompanying him in each and every birth, nothing is said, but it would not be likely—many, of course.

Buddha as an Avatar

He [*Buddha*] affirmed practically something unknowable that was Permanent and Unmanifested. Adwaita does the same. Buddha never said he was an Avatar of a Personal God but that he was the Buddha. It is the Hindus who made him an Avatar. If Buddha had looked upon himself as an Avatar at all, it would have been as an Avatar of the impersonal Truth.

*

If a Divine Consciousness and Force descended and through the personality we call Buddha did a great work for the world, then Buddha can be called an Avatar—the tapasya and arriving at knowledge are only an incident of the manifestation.

If on the other hand Buddha was only a human being like many others who arrived at some knowledge and preached it,

³ In the Gita, Krishna tells Arjuna, “Many are my lives that are past” (4.5) and again, “I am born from age to age.” (4.8) The correspondent asked how Krishna’s past lives could be many (*bahūni*) if he was born only from age to age (*yuge yuge*). —Ed.

then he was not an Avatar — for of that kind there have been thousands and they cannot be all Avatars.

*

I don't know that historically there could have been any other Buddha. It is the Vaishnava Puranas, I think, that settled the list of Avatars, for they are all Avatars of Vishnu according to the Purana. The final acceptance by all may have come later than Shankara, after the Buddhist-Brahminic controversy had ceased to be an actuality. For some time there was a tendency to substitute Balarama's name for Buddha's or to say that Buddha was an Avatar of Vishnu, but that he came to mislead the Asuras. He is evidently aimed at in the story of Mayamoha in the Vishnu Purana.

*

He [*Buddha*] had a more powerful vital than Ramakrishna, a stupendous will and an invincible mind of thought. If he had led the ordinary life, he would have been a great organiser, conqueror and creator.

Mahomed and Christ

Mahomed would himself have rejected the idea of being an Avatara, so we have to regard him only as the prophet, the instrument, the Vibhuti. Christ realised himself as the Son who is one with the Father — he must therefore be an *āṁśa avatāra*, a partial incarnation.

Ramakrishna

He [*Ramakrishna*] never wrote an autobiography. What he said was in conversation with his disciples and others. He was certainly quite as much an Avatar as Christ or Chaitanya.

Augustus Caesar and Leonardo da Vinci

Augustus Caesar organised the life of the Roman Empire and it was this that made the framework of the first transmission of the Graeco-Roman civilisation to Europe—he came for that work and the writings of Virgil and Horace and others helped greatly towards the success of his mission. After the interlude of the Middle Ages, this civilisation was reborn in a new mould in what is called the Renaissance, not in its life-aspects but in its intellectual aspects. It was therefore a supreme intellectual, Leonardo da Vinci, who took up again the work and summarised in himself the seeds of modern Europe.

*

Never heard before of my declaring or anybody declaring such a thing [*that a divine descent was attempted during the Renaissance with Leonardo da Vinci as its centre*]. What Leonardo da Vinci held in himself was all the new age of Europe on its many sides. But there was no question of Avatarhood or consciousness of a descent or pressure of spiritual planes. Mysticism was no part of what he had to manifest.

Napoleon

I don't think it can be said that Napoleon had little of ego. He was exceedingly ego-centric. He made himself a dictator from Brumaire, and as a dictator he should always have acted—but he felt the need of support and made the error of seeking it in the democratic way—a way for which he was utterly unfit. He had the capacities of a ruler but not of a politician—as a politician he would have been an entire failure. His hesitations were due to this defect—if it can be called one. He could not have dealt successfully with parties or a parliamentary assembly.

*

I never heard that Napoleon failed at Waterloo for want of self-confidence. I have always read that he failed because he

was, owing to his recent malady, no longer so quick and self-confident in decision and so supple in mental resource as before. Please don't rewrite history unless you have data for your novel version.

Chapter Three

Human Greatness

Greatness

Why should the Divine not care for the outer greatness? He cares for everything in the universe. All greatness is the Vibhuti of the Divine, says the Gita.

*

Obviously outer greatness is not the aim of Yoga. But that is no reason why one should not recognise the part played by greatness in the order of the universe or the place of great men of action, great poets and artists etc.

*

People have begun to try to prove that great men were not great, which is a very big mistake. If greatness is not appreciated by men, the world will become mean, small, dull, narrow and tamasic.

*

By greatness is meant an exceptional capacity of one kind or another which makes a man eminent among his fellows.

*

That kind of greatness [*scientific, literary, political*] has nothing to do with the psychic. It consists in a special mental capacity (Raman, Tagore) or in a great vital force which enables them to lead men and dominate them. These faculties are often but not always accompanied by something in the personality Daivic or Asuric which supports their action and gives to men an impression of greatness apart even from the special capacity — the sense of a great personality.

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Most great men know perfectly well that they are great.

*

It is the power in them [*great men*] that is great and that power comes from the Divine—by their actions and greatness they help the world and aid the cosmic purpose. It does not matter whether they have ego or not—they are not doing Yoga.

*

If a man rises to a higher plane of consciousness, it does not necessarily follow that he will be a greater man of action or a greater creator. One may rise to spiritual planes of inspiration undreamed of by Shakespeare and yet not be as great a poetic creator as Shakespeare. “Greatness” is not the object of spiritual realisation any more than fame or success in the world—how are these things the standard of spiritual realisation?

*

Of course you can [*do Yoga without being great*]—there is no need of being great. On the contrary humility is the first necessity, for one who has ego and pride cannot realise the Highest.

*

Each one can be truly great only in the measure in which he feels and opens to the source of all greatness, the Divine.

Greatness and Vices

It is not only the very very very big people who are of importance to the Divine. All energy, strong capacity, power of effectuation are of importance.

As for Napoleon, Caesar and Shakespeare, not one of them was a virtuous man, but they were great men—and that was your contention, that only virtuous men are great men and those who have vices are not great, which is an absurd contention. All of them went after women—two were ambitious, unscrupulous. Napoleon was most arrogant and violent.

Shakespeare stole deer, Napoleon lied freely, Caesar was without scruples.

*

But do you really believe that men like Napoleon, Caesar, Shakespeare were not great men and did nothing for the world or for the cosmic purpose? that God was deterred from using them for His purpose because they had defects of character and vices? What a singular idea!

*

Why should he [*the Divine*] care [*about the vices of great men*]? Is he a policeman? So long as one is in the ordinary nature, one has qualities and defects, virtues and vices. When one goes beyond, there are no virtues and vices,—for these things do not belong to the Divine Nature.

*

Yes, certainly. Many great men even have often very great vices and many of them. Great men are not usually model characters.

*

They [*great men*] have more energy and the energy comes out in what men call vices as well as in what men call virtues.

*

Men with great capacities or a powerful mind or a powerful vital have very often more glaring defects of character than ordinary men—or at least the defects of the latter do not show so much, being like themselves, smaller in scale.

*

Great or dazzling, or small in their field, ambition is ambition and it is necessary for most for an energetic action. What is the use of calling a thing a vice when it is small and glorifying it when it is big?

Section Three

Destiny, Karma, Death and Rebirth

Chapter One

Fate, Free Will and Prediction

Destiny

Each follows in the world his own line of destiny which is determined by his own nature and actions—the meaning and necessity of what happens in a particular life cannot be understood except in the light of the whole course of many lives. But this can be seen by those who can get beyond the ordinary mind and feelings and see things as a whole, that even errors, misfortunes, calamities are steps in the journey, the soul gathering experience as it passes through and beyond them until it is ripe for the transition which will carry it beyond these things to a higher consciousness and higher life. When one comes to that line of crossing one has to leave behind one the old mind and feelings. One looks then on those who are still fixed in the pleasures and sorrows of the ordinary world with sympathy and wherever it is possible with spiritual helpfulness, but no longer with attachment. One learns that they are being led through all their stumbling and trusts to the universal Power that is watching and supporting their existence to do for them whatever for them is the best. But the one thing that is really important for us is to get into the greater Light and the Divine Union—to turn to the Divine alone, to put our trust there alone whether for ourselves or for others.

*

Destiny in the rigid sense applies only to the outer being so long as it lives in the Ignorance. What we call destiny is only in fact the result of the present condition of the being and the nature and energies it has accumulated in the past acting on each other and determining the present attempts and their future results. But as soon as one enters the path of spiritual life, this old predetermined destiny begins to recede. There comes in a new factor, the

Divine Grace, the help of a higher Divine Force other than the force of Karma which can lift the sadhak beyond the present possibilities of his nature. One's spiritual destiny is then the divine election which ensures the future. The only doubt is about the vicissitudes of the path and the time to be taken by the passage. It is here that the hostile forces playing on the weaknesses of the past nature strive to prevent the rapidity of the progress and to postpone the fulfilment. Those who fell, fell not because of the attacks of the vital forces, but because they put themselves on the side of the hostile Force and preferred a vital ambition or desire (ambition, vanity, lust, etc.) to the spiritual siddhi.

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Each has his own destiny which he brings with him into the world.

*

Each has his own destiny and his entering into a particular family in one life is only an incident.

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Obviously, neither Nature nor Destiny nor the Divine work in the mental way or by the law of the mind or according to its standards—that is why even to the scientist and the philosopher Nature, Destiny, the way of the Divine, all remain a mystery.

*

Nature is very largely what you make of her—or can make of her.

*

Destiny is not an absolute, it is a relative. One can alter it for the better or the worse.

Free Will and Determinism

It is difficult indeed to make out what Planck means in these

pages¹—what is his conclusion and how he arrives at it; he has probably so condensed his arguments that the necessary explanatory links are missing. The free will affair, I see by glancing through the previous pages, arises only incidentally from his position that the new discoveries grouped round the quantum theory do not make a radical difference in physics. If there is a tendency to regard laws as statistical—in which case there is no “strict causality” and no determinism—still there is nothing to prove that they cannot be treated and may not be advantageously treated as dynamical also—in which case determinism can stand; the uncertainty of individual behaviour (electrons, quanta) does not really undermine determinism, but only brings a new feature into it. That seems from a hasty glance to be his position. Certain scientific thinkers consider this uncertainty of individual behaviour to be a physical factor correspondent to the element of free will in individual human beings. It is here that Planck brings in the question of free will to refute the conclusion that it affects strict causality and the law of determinism. His argument, as far as I can make it out, is this:

(1) The law of strict causality stands because any given action or inner happening of the individual human being is an effect determined completely by two causes, (a) the previous state of his mind taken as a whole, (b) external influences.

(2) The will is a mental process completely determined by these two factors; therefore it is not free, it is part of the chain of strict causality—as are also the results of the free will.

(3) What is important is not the actual freedom of the will, but the man's consciousness of freedom. This creates an inner experience of conscious motive which again creates fresh motives and so on indefinitely. For this reason it is impossible for a man to predict his future action—for at any moment a fresh motive may arise. But when we look back at the past, then the concatenation of cause and effect becomes apparent.

(4) The fact of strict causality (or at least the theory of it)

¹ Max Planck, *The Universe in the Light of Modern Physics* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1931), pp. 84–87.

stands therefore unshaken by the consciousness of free will of the individual. It is only obscured by the fact that a man cannot predict his own actions or grasp the causes of his present state; but that is because here the subject and object are the same and this subject-object is in a state of constant alterative motion unlike an object outside, which is supposed not to change as a result of the inner movements of the knower.

There is a reference to causal law and ethical law which baffles me. Is the “ethical law” something outside the strict chain of effects and causes? Is there such a thing at all? If “strict causality” rules all, what is such an ethical law doing there?

That is the argument so far as I can follow it, but it does not seem to me very conclusive. If a man’s conduct cannot be predicted by himself, neither can it be predicted by anyone else, though here the subject and object are not the same; if not predictable, then it must be for the same reason, the element of free will and the mobility created by the possible indefinite intrusion of fresh motives. If that is so, strict causality cannot be affirmed, though a plastic causality in which the power of choice called by us free will is an element (either as one among many contributory causes or as an instrument of a cause beyond itself) can still be asserted as possible.

The statement that the action of the individual is strictly determined by his total mental state + external influences is doubtful and does not lead very far. It is possible to undermine the whole idea of inevitable causality by holding that the total existing state before a happening is only the condition under which it happens — there are a mass of antecedents and there is a sequent, if it may be so called, or a mass of sequences, but nothing proves that the latter are inevitable consequences of the mass of antecedents. Possibly this total existing state is a matrix into which some seed of happening is thrown or becomes active, so that there may be many possible results, and in the case of human action it is conceivable that free will is *the* or at least *a* determining factor.

I do not think therefore that these arguments of Planck carry us very far. There is also of course the question raised in the book

itself whether, granting determinism, a local state of things is an independent field of causality or all is so bound together that it is the whole that determines the local result. A man's action then would be determined by universal forces and his state of mind and apparent choice would be only part of the instrumentation of Universal Force.

*

In the case of Socrates and that of the habitual drunkard raised by you, the difference you make is correct. The weak-willed man is governed by his vital and physical impulsions, his mental being is not dynamic enough to make its will prevail over them. His will is not "free" because it is not strong enough to be free, it is the slave of the forces that act on or in his vital and physical nature. In the case of Socrates the will is so far free that it stands above the play of these forces and he determines by his mental idea and resolve what he shall or shall not do. The question remains whether the will of Socrates is only free in this sense, itself being actually determined by something larger than the mentality of Socrates, something of which it is the instrument, whether Universal Force or a Being in him of which his daemon was the voice and which not only gave his mind that decisive awareness of the mental ideal but imposed on it the drive to act in obedience to the awareness. Or it may be subject to a nexus between the inner Purusha and the Universal Force. In the latter case there would be an unstable balance between determinism of Nature and a self-determination from within. If we start from the Sankhya view of things, that Being would be the soul or Purusha and both in the strong-willed Socrates and in the weak-willed slave of vital impulse, the action and its results would be determined by the assent or refusal of the Purusha. In the latter the Purusha gives its assent to and undergoes the play of the forces of Nature, the habit of the vital impulse, through a vital submission while the mind looks on helpless. In Socrates the Purusha has begun to emancipate itself and decide what it shall accept or shall not accept—the conscious being has begun to impose itself on the forces that act on it. This mastery has become

so complete that he can largely determine his own actions and can even within certain limits not only forecast but fix the results — so that what he wants shall happen sooner or later.

As for the Superman, that is the conscious being whose emancipation is complete by his rising to a station beyond the limits of mind. He can determine his action in complete accord with an awareness which perceives all the forces acting in and on and around him and is able, instead of undergoing, to use them and even to determine.

*

After reading Krishnaprem's exposition [*on free will and determinism*], I saw what might be said from the intellectual point of view on this question so as to link the reality of the supreme Freedom with the phenomenon of the determinism of Nature — in a different way from his but to the same purpose. In reality, the freedom and the determination are only two sides of the same thing — for the fundamental truth is self-determination, a self-determination of the cosmos and in it a secret self-determination of the individual. The difficulty arises from the fact that we live in the surface mind of ignorance, do not know what is going on behind and see only the phenomenal process of Nature. There the apparent fact is an overwhelming determinism of Nature and as our surface consciousness is part of that process we are unable to see the other term of the biune reality. For practical purposes, on the surface there is an entire determinism in Matter — though this is now disputed by the latest school of Science. As Life emerges a certain plasticity sets in, so that it is difficult to predict anything exactly as one predicts material things that obey a rigid law. The plasticity increases with the growth of Mind so that man can have at least a sense of free will, of a choice of his action, of a self-movement which at least helps to determine circumstances. But this freedom is dubious because it can be declared to be an illusion, a device of Nature, part of its machinery of determination, only a seeming freedom or at most a restricted, relative and subject independence. It is only when one goes behind away from Prakriti to Purusha and upward

away from Mind to spiritual Self that the side of freedom comes to be first evident and then, by unison with the Will which is above Nature, complete.

*

Well, the determination of human life and events is a mysterious thing. Can't help that, you know. Fate is composed of many things—Cosmic Will + individual self-determination + play of forces + Karma + x + y + z + a + b + c ad infinitum.

Predictions and Prophecy

I am afraid I have no great confidence in Cheiro's ideas and prophecies—some prophecies are fulfilled but most have gone wrong. The idea about the Jews is an old Jewish and Christian belief; not much faith can be put in it. As for the numbers it is true that according to occult science numbers have a mystic meaning. It is also true that there are periods and cycles in life as well as in world-life. But too exact a meaning cannot always be put in these things.

*

Mother says Cheiro has always missed his predictions. They are (at best) half truths which you have to turn this way or that to get something out of them corresponding with the fact.

*

Your extracts taken by themselves are very impressive, but when one reads the book, the impression made diminishes and fades away. You have quoted Cheiro's successes, but what about his failures? I have looked at the book and was rather staggered by the number of prophecies that have failed to come off. You can't deduce from a small number of predictions, however accurate, that all is predestined down to your putting the questions in the letter and my answer. It may be, but the evidence is not sufficient to prove it. What is evident is that there is an element of the predictable, predictable accurately and in detail as well

as in large points, in the course of events. But that was already known; it leaves the question still unsolved whether all is so predictable, whether destiny is the sole factor in existence or there are other factors also that can modify destiny,—or, destiny being given, there are not different sources or powers or planes of destiny and we can modify the one with which we started by calling in another destiny source, power or plane and making it active in our life. Metaphysical questions are not so simple that they can be trenchantly solved either in one sense or in another contradictory to it—that is the popular way of settling things, but it is quite summary and inconclusive. All is free will or else all is destiny—it is not so simple as that. This question of free will or determination is the most knotty of all metaphysical questions and nobody has been able to solve it—for a good reason, that both destiny and will exist and even a free will exists somewhere—the difficulty is only how to get at it and make it effective.

Astrology? Many astrological predictions come true, quite a mass of them, if one takes all together. But it does not follow that the stars rule our destiny; the stars merely record a destiny that has been already formed, they are a hieroglyph, not a Force,—or if their action constitutes a force, it is a transmitting energy, not an originating Power. Someone is there who has determined or something is there which is Fate, let us say; the stars are only indicators. The astrologers themselves say that there are two forces, *daiva* and *puruṣārtha*, fate and individual energy, and the individual energy can modify and even frustrate fate. Moreover the stars often indicate several fate-possibilities; for example that one may die in mid-age, but that if that determination can be overcome, one can live to a predictable old age. Finally, cases are seen in which the predictions of the horoscope fulfil themselves with great accuracy up to a certain age, then apply no more. This often happens when the subject turns away from the ordinary to the spiritual life. If the turn is very radical the cessation of predictability may be immediate; otherwise certain results may still last on for a time, but there is no longer the same inevitability. This would seem to show that there is or

can be a higher-power or higher-plane or higher-source spiritual destiny which can, if its hour has come, override the lower-power, lower-plane or lower-source vital and material fate of which the stars are indicators. I say vital because character can also be indicated from the horoscope much more completely and satisfactorily than the events of the life.

The Indian explanation of fate is Karma. We ourselves are our own fate through our actions, but the fate created by us binds us; for what we have sown, we must reap in this life or another. Still we are creating new fate for the future even while undergoing old fate from the past in the present. That gives a meaning to our will and action and does not, as European critics wrongly believe, constitute a rigid and sterilising fatalism. But again our will and action can often annul or modify even the past Karma, it is only certain strong effects, called *utkaya karma*, that are non-modifiable. Here too the achievement of the spiritual consciousness and life is supposed to annul or give the power to annul Karma. For we enter into union with the Will Divine, cosmic or transcendent, which can annul what it had sanctioned for certain conditions, new-create what it had created; the narrow fixed lines disappear, there is a more plastic freedom and wideness. Neither Karma nor Astrology therefore points to a rigid and for ever immutable fate.

As for prophecy, I have never met or known of a prophet, however reputed, who was infallible. Some of their predictions come true to the letter, others do not,—they half-fulfil or misfire entirely. It does not follow that the power of prophecy is unreal or the accurate predictions can be all explained by probability, chance or coincidence. The nature and number of those that cannot is too great. The variability of fulfilment may be explained either by an imperfect power in the prophet sometimes active, sometimes failing or by the fact that things are predictable in part only, they are determined in part only or else by different factors or lines of power, different series of potentials and actuals. So long as one is in touch with one line, one predicts accurately, otherwise not—or if the line of power changes, one's prophecy also goes off the rails. All the same, one may say, there must be, if

things are predictable at all, some power or plane through which or on which all is foreseeable; if there is a divine Omniscience and Omnipotence it must be so. Even then what is foreseen has to be worked out, actually is worked out by a play of forces,—spiritual, mental, vital, physical forces—and in that plane of forces there is no absolute rigidity discoverable. Personal will or endeavour is one of those forces—Napoleon when asked why he believed in Fate, yet was always planning and acting, answered, “Because it is fated that I should work and plan”—in other words, his planning and acting were part of Fate, contributed to the results Fate had in view. Even if I foresee an adverse result, I must work for the one that I consider should be; for it keeps alive the force, the principle of Truth which I serve and gives it a possibility to triumph hereafter, so that it becomes part of the working of a future favourable Fate, even if the fate of the hour is adverse. Men do not abandon a cause because they have seen it fail or foresee its failure; and they are spiritually right in their stubborn perseverance. Moreover, we do not live for material result alone,—far more the object of life is the growth of the soul, not outward success of the hour or even of the near future. The soul can grow against or even by a material destiny that is adverse.

Finally, even if all is determined, why say that Life is, in Shakespeare's phrase or rather Macbeth's, “a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing”? Life would rather be that if it were all chance and random incertitude. But if it is something foreseen, planned in every detail, does it not rather mean that life does signify something, that there must be a secret Purpose that is being worked up to, powerfully, persistently through the ages, and ourselves are a part of it and fellow-workers in the fulfilment of that invincible Purpose?

*

Well, one of the greatest ecstasies possible is to feel oneself carried by the Divine,—not by the stars or Karma, for the latter is a bad business, dry and uncomfortable—like being turned on a machine, “*yantrārūḍhāni māyayā*”.

Astrology and Yoga

Astrology is an occult science—it is not a part of the Yoga except as anything can be made part of the Yoga—if done in the right spirit.

*

That is not the question.² The question is what influence has the sadhak on the stars at his birth?

² *The correspondent asked, "Can astrological truths have any influence on a sadhak?" —Ed.*

Chapter Two

Karma and Heredity

Karma

Karma is not luck, it is the transmission of past energies into the present with their results.

*

All energies put into activity — thought, speech, feeling, act — go to constitute Karma. These things help to develop the nature in one direction or another, and the nature and its actions and reactions produce their consequences inward and outward: they also act on others and create movements in the general sum of forces which can return upon oneself sooner or later. Thoughts unexpressed can also go out as forces and produce their effects. It is a mistake to think that a thought or will can have effect only when it is expressed in speech or act: the unspoken thought, the unexpressed will are also active energies and can produce their own vibrations, effects or reactions.

*

If it [*the soul*] goes on with its Karma, then it does not get liberation. If it wants only farther experience, it can just stay there in the ordinary nature. The aim of Yoga is to transcend Karma. Karma means subjection to lower Nature; through Yoga the soul goes towards freedom.

*

The bondage to the effects of Karma remains so long as one has not passed out of the ordinary human consciousness which is its field to the higher spiritual consciousness where all bonds are untied. As for peace one can gain it by an entire reliance on the Divine and surrender to the Divine Will.

*

In life all sorts of things offer themselves. One cannot take anything that comes with the idea that it is sent by the Divine. There is a choice and a wrong choice produces its consequence.

Karma and Heredity

Karma and heredity are the two main causes [*of one's temperament*]. According to some heredity is also subject to Karma, but that may be only in a general way, not in all the details.

*

Many things in the body and some in the mind and vital are inherited from the father and mother or other ancestors—that everybody is supposed to know. There are other things that are not inherited, but peculiar to one's own nature or developed by the happenings of this life.

*

You must realise that all human beings are made partly of what is given them by their ancestors (not only father and mother but all the ancestors), partly of what they bring with them. The part they get from the ancestors is called hereditary—it is part (not the whole) of the physical and lower vital consciousness, sometimes a little of the external mind also—it is a small portion of the external being, but although small, it is sometimes very persistent and active. The rest of the being, inner and a great part too of the external, is brought from past lives. This hereditary part has to be got rid of and replaced by the true individuality spreading itself to the whole external nature.

*

A very big stamp in most cases¹—it is in the physical vital and physical material that the stamp chiefly exists—and it is increased by education and upbringing.

*

¹ *The correspondent asked whether the influence of heredity, race, caste and family leaves a stamp on one's lower nature.—Ed.*

There is always a hereditary part of the nature which is a large portion of the outward nature—there is also the educational influence of the father which has put a stamp on you.

*

Hereditary influence² creates an affinity and affinity is a living thing. It is only when the hereditary part is changed that the affinity ceases.

*

It is your own being that seeks for the Divine. The hereditary part is not your true being, but something you have taken up as part of this birth. It can be got rid of or changed.

Evolution, Karma and Ethics

The question as put in your letter seems to me to be too rigidly phrased and not to take into sufficient account the plasticity of the facts and forces of existence. It sounds like the problem which one might raise on the strength of the most recent scientific theories—if all is made up of protons and electrons, all exactly similar to each other (except for the group numbers, and why should a difference of quantity make such an extraordinary difference or any difference of quality?) how does their action result in such stupendous differences of degree, kind, power, everything? But why should we assume that the psychic seeds or sparks all started in a race at the same time, equal in conditions, equal in power and nature? Granted that the One Divine is the source of all and the Self is the same in all; but in manifestation why should not the Infinite throw itself out in infinite variety, why must it be in an innumerable sameness? How many of these psychic seeds started long before others and have a great past of development behind them and how many are young and raw and half-grown only? And even among those who started together,

² The correspondent asked whether the hereditary influence created by his father had come to an end in him.—Ed.

why should not there be some who ran at a great speed and others who loitered and grew with difficulty or went about in circles? And then there is an evolution, and it is only at a certain stage in the evolution that the animal belt is past and there is a human beginning; what constitutes the human beginning, which represents a very considerable revolution or turnover? Up to the animal line it is the vital and physical that have been developing—for the human to begin is it not necessary that there should be the descent of a mental being to take up the vital and physical evolution? And may it not well be that the mental beings who descend are not all of the same power and stature and, besides, do not take up equally developed vital and physical consciousness-material? There is also the occult tradition of a hierarchy of beings who stand above the present manifestation and put themselves into it with results which will obviously be just such a stupendous difference of degrees, and even intervene by descending into the play through the gates of birth in human Nature. There are many complexities and the problem cannot be put with the rigidity of a mathematical formula.

A great part of the difficulty of these problems, I mean especially the appearance of inexplicable contradiction, arises from the problem itself being badly put. Take the popular account of reincarnation and Karma—it is based on the mere mental assumption that the workings of Nature ought to be moral and proceed according to an exact morality of equal justice—a scrupulous, even mathematical law of reward and punishment or, at any rate, of results according to a human idea of right correspondences. But Nature is non-moral—she uses forces and processes moral, immoral and amoral pell-mell for working out her business. Nature in her outward aspect seems to care for nothing except to get things done—or else to make conditions for an ingenious variety of the play of life. Nature in her deeper aspect as a conscious spiritual Power is concerned with the growth, by experience, the spiritual development of the souls she has in her charge—and these souls themselves have a say in the matter. All these good people lament and wonder that unaccountably they and other good people are visited with

such meaningless sufferings and misfortunes. But are they really visited with them by an outside Power or by a mechanical Law of Karma? Is it not possible that the soul itself—not the outward mind, but the spirit within—has accepted and chosen these things as part of its development in order to get through the necessary experience at a rapid rate, to hew through, *durchnauen*, even at the risk or the cost of much damage to the outward life and the body? To the growing soul, to the spirit within us, may not difficulties, obstacles, attacks be a means of growth, added strength, enlarged experience, training for spiritual victory? The arrangement of things may be that and not a mere question of the pounds, shillings and pence of a distribution of rewards and retributory misfortunes!

It is the same with the problem of the taking of animal life under the circumstances put forward by your friend in the letter. It is put on the basis of an invariable ethical right and wrong to be applied to all cases—is it right to take animal life at all, under any circumstances, is it right to allow an animal to suffer under your eyes when you can relieve it by an euthanasia? There can be no indubitable answer to a question put like that, because the answer depends on data which the mind has not before it. In fact there are many other factors which make people incline to this short and merciful way out of the difficulty—the nervous inability to bear the sight and hearing of so much suffering, the unavailing trouble, the disgust and inconvenience—all tend to give force to the idea that the animal itself would want to be out of it. But what does the animal really feel about it—may it not be clinging to life in spite of the pain? Or may not the soul have accepted these things for a quicker evolution into a higher state of life? If so, the mercy dealt out may conceivably interfere with the animal's Karma. In fact the right decision might vary in each case and depend on a knowledge which the human mind has not—and it might very well be said that until it has it, it has not the right to take life. It was some dim perception of this truth that made religion and ethics develop the law of Ahimsa—and yet that too becomes a mental rule which it is found impossible to apply in practice. And perhaps the moral of it all is that we must

act for the best according to our lights in each case, as things are, but that the solution of these problems can only come by pressing forward towards a greater light, a greater consciousness in which the problems themselves, as now stated by the human mind, will not arise because we shall have a vision which will see the world in a different way and a guidance which at present is not ours. The mental or moral rule is a stop-gap which men are obliged to use, very uncertainly and stumblingly, until they can see things whole in the light of the spirit.

Chapter Three

Death

Death and Karma

It [*death*] is a universal force — the happening or change called death is simply one result of the working of the force.

*

Most people die before the vitality of the body is exhausted. It is due to many causes of which one is the destiny prepared by past lives; another the inner purpose or utility of the present life being completed — but these are subtle and secret reasons — others, accident, violence or other causes, are only an exterior machinery.

*

X had reached a stage of her development marked by a predominance of the sattwic nature, but not a strong vital (which works towards a successful or fortunate life) or the opening to a higher light, — her mental upbringing and surroundings stood against that and she herself was not ready. Her early death with much suffering may have been the result of past (prenatal) influences or they may have been chosen by her own psychic being as a passage towards a higher state for which she was not yet prepared but towards which she was moving. This and the non-fulfilment of her capacities would be a final tragedy if there were this life alone. As it is she has passed towards the psychic sleep to prepare for her life to come.

*

You can explain¹ to X that the death of his nephew had nothing

¹ Written by Sri Aurobindo to his secretary, who replied to the enquirer. — Ed.

to do with their [*his family members'*] obscurities and imperfections—it was part of his own Karma—each person has his own destiny and follows its line; to be in a certain family and with certain relations is only a temporary incident in its course. The sadhak should be free from these attachments and regard these happenings as ordeals to be passed through with equality and faith in the Divine—doing his best for those who are in his charge but not disturbed by results.

*

It is a very intricate and difficult question to tackle² and it can hardly be answered in a few words. Moreover it is impossible to give a general rule as to why there are these close inner contacts followed by a physical separation through death—in each case there is a difference and one would have to know the persons and be familiar with their soul history to tell what was behind their meeting and separation. In a general way, a life is only one brief episode in a long history of spiritual evolution in which the soul follows the curve of the line set for the earth, passing through many lives to complete it. It is an evolution out of material unconsciousness to consciousness and on towards the divine Consciousness, from ignorance to divine Knowledge, from darkness through half-lights to Light, from death to Immortality, from suffering to the Divine Bliss. Suffering is due first to the Ignorance, secondly to the separation of the individual consciousness from the Divine Consciousness and Being, a separation created by the Ignorance—when that ceases, when one lives completely in the Divine and no more in one's separated smaller self, then only suffering can altogether cease. Each soul follows its own line and these lines meet, journey together for a space, then part to meet again perhaps hereafter—often they meet to help each other on the journey in one way or another. As for the after-death period, the soul passes into other planes of existence, staying there for a while till it reaches its place of rest where it

² A mother whose sixteen-year-old son had died wrote to ask why his death had taken place. Her letter was referred to Sri Aurobindo.—Ed.

remains until it is ready for another terrestrial existence. This is the general law, but for the connections of embodied soul with embodied soul, that is a matter of personal evolution on which nothing general can be said as it is intimate to the soul stories of the two and needs a personal knowledge. That is all I can say, but I don't know that it will be of much help to her, as these things are helpful usually only when one enters into the consciousness in which they become not mere ideas but realities. Then one grieves no longer because one has entered into the Truth and the Truth brings calm and peace.

Death and Grieving

I can understand the shock your wife's catastrophic death must have been to you. But you are now a seeker and sadhak of the Truth and must set your mind above the normal reactions of the human being and see things in a larger greater light. Regard your lost wife as a soul that was progressing through the vicissitudes of the life of Ignorance — like all others here — in that progress things happen that seem unfortunate to the human mind and a sudden accidental or violent death cutting short prematurely this always brief spell of terrestrial experience we call life seems to it especially painful and unfortunate. But one who gets behind the outward view knows that all that happens in the progress of the soul has its meaning, its necessity, its place in the series of experiences which are leading it towards the turning point where one can pass from the Ignorance to the Light. He knows that whatever happens in the Divine Providence is for the best even though it may seem to the mind otherwise. Look on your wife as a soul that has passed the barrier between two states of existence. Help her journey towards her place of rest by calm thoughts and the call to the Divine Help to aid her upon it. Grief too long continued does not help but delays the journey of the departed soul. Do not brood on your loss, but think only of her spiritual welfare.

*

The telegram announces the passing away of your husband.

All has been done that could be done to keep him in life. What has happened must now be accepted calmly as the thing decreed and best for his soul's progress from life to life though not the best in human eyes which look only at the present and at outside appearance. For the spiritual seeker death is only a passage from one form of life to another, and none is dead but only departed. Look at it as that and shaking from you all reactions of vital grief — they cannot help him in his journey, — pursue steadfastly the path to the Divine.

*

There is nothing to grieve about as death means only passing over to another country — to which you probably go very often when you are asleep.

That is, so long as one has attachment — one ought to look at it like that. But all attachment to past ties should be overcome.

*

Of course, that is the real fact — death is only a shedding of the body, not a cessation of the personal existence. A man is not dead because he goes into another country and changes his clothes to suit that climate.

The After-Death Sojourn

There is after death a period in which one passes through the vital world and lives there for a time. It is only the first part of this transit that can be dangerous or painful; in the rest one works out, under certain surroundings, a remnant of the vital desires and instincts which one had in the body. As soon as one is tired of these and able to go beyond, the vital sheath is dropped and the soul, after a little time needed to get rid of some mental survivals, passes into a state of rest in the psychic world and remains there till the next life on earth.

One can help the departed soul by one's good will or by occult means if one has the knowledge. The one thing that one

should not do is to hold them back by sorrow for them or longings or anything else that would pull them nearer to earth or delay their journey to their place of rest.

*

It may happen to some not to realise for a little time that they are dead, especially if the death has been unforeseen and sudden, but it cannot be said that it happens to all or to most—some may enter into a state of semi-unconsciousness or obsession by a dark inner condition, created by their state of mind at death, in which they realise nothing of where they are etc., others are quite conscious of the passage. It is true that the departing being in the vital body lingers for some time near the body or the scene of life very often for as many as eight days and in the ancient religions mantras and other means were used for the severance. Even after the severance from the body a very earthbound nature or one full of strong physical desires may linger long in the earth-atmosphere up to a maximum period extended to three years. Afterwards it passes to the vital worlds, proceeding on its journey which must sooner or later bring it to the psychic rest till the next life. It is true also that sorrow and mourning for the dead impedes its progress by keeping it tied to the earth-atmosphere and pulling it back from its passage.

*

After death the soul passes in a little while or at once from the earth atmosphere and goes into the vital worlds where it remains for a time until it is ready to leave it. Thus it passes on its way till it is ready to pass into the psychic world where it rests until it is ready for a new birth.

*

After death one passes through various vital and mental planes till the psychic being drops its vital and mental sheaths and enters into rest on the psychic plane till the time comes for rebirth.

*

At the time of death the being goes out of the body through the head; it goes out in the subtle body and goes to different planes of existence for a short time until it has gone through certain experiences which are the result of its earthly existence. Afterwards it reaches the psychic world where it rests in a kind of sleep until it is time for it to start a new life on earth. That is what happens usually—but there are some beings who are more developed and do not follow this course.

*

That is a superstition [*that people have to live in naraka (hell) due to their bad actions*]. People after death pass through certain vital and mental worlds or through certain psychological states which are the results of their nature and action in life, afterwards they go to the psychic world and return to birth at a later time.

*

When the Mother spoke of the continuance of the same trouble after death, she did not mean another life. At death you go out of this physical frame in another kind of body, not physical, and are the same person with the same consciousness. That is why to talk of dying as going to rest is an ignorance and why it is useless. The only real thing is to get rid of the old lower self and be reborn to the new higher one, which can only be done by a change within you. That is what the Mother wants of you.

Chapter Four

Rebirth

The Psychic's Choice at the Time of Death

The psychic being at the time of death chooses what it will work out in the next birth and determines the character and conditions of the new personality. Life is for the evolutionary growth by experience in the conditions of the Ignorance till one is ready for the higher light.

*

The dying wish of the man is only something on the surface — it may be determined by the psychic and so help to shape the future but it does not determine the psychic's choice. That is something behind the veil. It is not the outer consciousness's action that determines the inner process, but the other way round. Sometimes, however, there are signs or fragments of the inner action that come up on the surface, e.g. some people have a vision or remembrance of the circumstances of their past in a panoramic flash at the time of death, that is the psychic's review of the life before departing.

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The psychic being's choice at the time of death doesn't work out the next formation of personality, it fixes it. When it enters the psychic world, it begins to assimilate the essence of its experience and by that assimilation is formed the future psychic personality in accordance with the fixation already made. When this assimilation is over, it is ready for a new birth — but the less developed beings do not work out the whole thing for themselves, there are beings and forces of the higher world who have that work. Also when it comes to birth, it is not sure that the forces of the physical world will not come across the working out of what it wanted — its own new instrumentation may not be strong enough for

that purpose; for there is the interaction of its own energies and the cosmic forces here. There may be frustration, diversion, a partial working out — many things may happen. All that is not a rigid machinery, it is a working out of complex forces. It may be added however that a developed psychic being is much more conscious in this transition and works much of it out itself. The time depends also on the development and on a certain rhythm of the being — for some there is practically immediate rebirth, for others it takes longer, for some it may take centuries; but here again, once the psychic being is sufficiently developed, it is free to choose its own rhythm and its own intervals. The ordinary theories are too mechanical — and that is the case also with the idea of *punya* and *pāpa* and their results in the next life. There are certainly results of the energies put forth in a past life, but not on that rather infantile principle. A good man's sufferings in this life would be a proof according to the orthodox theory that he had been a very great villain in his past life, a bad man's prospering would be a proof that he had been quite angelic in his last visit to earth and sown a large crop of virtues and meritorious actions to reap this bumper crop of good fortune. Too symmetrical to be true. The object of birth being growth by experience, whatever reactions come to past deeds must be for the being to learn and grow, not as lollipops for the good boys of the class (in the past) and canings for the bad ones. The real sanction for good and ill is not good fortune for the one and bad fortune for the other, but this that good leads us towards a higher nature which is eventually lifted above suffering and ill pulls us towards the lower nature which remains always in the circle of suffering and evil.

Assimilation in the Psychic World

The soul after it leaves the body travels through several states or planes until the psychic being has shed its temporary sheaths, then it reaches the psychic world where it rests in a kind of sleep till it is ready for reincarnation. What it keeps with it of the human experience in the end is only the essence of all

that it has gone through, what it can use for its development. This is the general rule, but it does not apply to exceptional cases or to very developed beings who have achieved a greater consciousness than the ordinary human level.

It is not the soul (the psychic being) that takes a lesser form [*in its next birth*], it is some part of the manifested being, usually some part of the vital that does it, owing to some desire, affinity, need of particular experience. This happens fairly often to the ordinary man.

*

After leaving the body, the soul, after certain experiences in other worlds, throws off its mental and vital personality and goes into rest to assimilate the essence of its past and prepare for a new life. It is this preparation that determines the circumstances of the new birth and guides it in its reconstitution of a new personality and the choice of its materials.

The departed soul retains the memory of its past experiences only in their essence, not in their form or detail. It is only if the soul brings back some past personality or personalities as part of its present manifestation that it is likely to remember the details of the past life. Otherwise, it is only by Yogadrishti that the memory comes.

There may be what seem to be retrograde movements [*in the evolution of the soul*], but these are only like zigzag movements, not a real falling back, but a return on something not worked out so as to go on better afterwards.

The soul does not go back to the animal condition; but part of the vital personality may disjoin itself and join an animal birth to work out its animal propensities there.

There is no truth in the popular belief about the avaricious man becoming a serpent. These are popular romantic superstitions.

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The soul takes birth each time, and each time a mind, life and body are formed out of the materials of universal Nature,

according to the soul's past evolution and its need for the future.

When the body is dissolved, the vital goes into the vital plane and remains there for a time, but after a time the vital sheath disappears. The last to dissolve is the mental sheath. Finally the soul or psychic being retires into the psychic world to rest there till a new birth is due.

This is the general course for ordinarily developed human beings. There are variations according to the nature of the individual and his development. For example, if the mental is strongly developed, then the mental being can remain; so also can the vital, provided they are organised by and centred around the true psychic being; they share the immortality of the psychic.

The soul gathers the essential element of its experiences in life and makes that its basis of growth in the evolution; when it returns to birth it takes up with its mental, vital, physical sheaths so much of its Karma as is useful to it in the new life for farther experience.

It is really for the vital part of the being that *śrāddha* and rites are done — to help the being to get rid of the vital vibrations which still attach it to the earth or to the vital worlds, so that it may pass quickly to its rest in the psychic peace.

*

The movement of the psychic being dropping its outer, its vital and mental sheaths on its way to the psychic plane, is its normal movement after death. But there can be any number of variations; one can return directly from the vital plane without passing on to farther and higher states, and there are cases of an almost immediate rebirth, sometimes even attended with a detailed memory of the events of the past life.

Hell and heaven are often imaginary states of the soul, or rather of the vital being, which it constructs about it after its passing. What is meant by hell is a painful passage through some vital world or a dolorous lingering there, as for instance in many cases of suicide where one remains surrounded by the forces of suffering and turmoil created by this unnatural and violent exit. There are also, of course, real worlds of mind and vital

worlds which are penetrated with joyful or dark experiences, and one may pass through these as the result of things formed in the nature which create the necessary affinities. But the idea of reward or retribution is a crude and vulgar conception and we can disregard it as a mere popular error.

There is no rule of complete forgetfulness in the return of the soul to rebirth. There are, especially in childhood, many impressions of the past life which can be strong and vivid enough, but a materialising education and the overpowering influences of the environment must often, but not quite always, prevent their true nature from being recognised. There are even a number of people who have definite recollections of a past life. But these things are discouraged by education and the atmosphere and cannot remain or develop; in most cases they are stifled out of existence. At the same time it must be noted that what the psychic being mainly carries away with it and brings back is ordinarily the essence and effect of the experiences it had in former lives, and not the details, so that you cannot expect the same coherent memory as one has of past happenings in the present existence.

A soul can go straight to the psychic world but that depends on the state of consciousness at the time of departure. If the psychic is in front at the time, this immediate transition is possible. It does not depend on the acquisition of a mental and vital as well as a psychic immortality — those who have acquired that would rather have the power to move about in the different planes and even act on the physical world without being bound to it. On the whole it may be said that there is no one rigid rule for these things; manifold variations are possible depending upon the consciousness, its energies, tendencies and formations, although there is a general framework and design into which all fit and take their place.

The Psychic Being and the Progression from Life to Life

It is necessary to understand clearly the difference between the evolving soul (psychic being) and the pure Atman, self or spirit. The pure self is unborn, does not pass through death or birth,

is independent of birth or body, mind or life or this manifested Nature. It is not bound by these things, not limited, not affected, even though it assumes and supports them. The soul, on the contrary, is something that comes down into birth and passes through death — although it does not itself die, for it is immortal — from one state to another, from the earth-plane to other planes and back again to the earth-existence. It goes on with this progression from life to life through an evolution which leads it up to the human state and evolves through it all a being of itself which we call the psychic being. This being supports the evolution and develops a physical, a vital, a mental human consciousness as its instruments of world-experience and of a disguised, imperfect, but growing self-expression. All this it does from behind a veil, showing something of its divine self only in so far as the imperfection of the instrumental being will allow it. But a time comes when it is able to prepare to come out from behind the veil, to take command and turn all the instrumental nature towards a divine fulfilment. This is the beginning of the true spiritual life. The soul is able now to make itself ready for a higher evolution of manifested consciousness than the mental human — it can pass from the mental to the spiritual and through degrees of the spiritual to the supramental state. Till then, till it has reached the spiritual realisation, there is no reason why it should cease from birth, it cannot in fact so cease. If having reached the spiritual state, it wills to pass out of the terrestrial manifestation, it may indeed make such an exit, — but there is also possible a higher manifestation, in the Knowledge and not in the Ignorance.

Your question therefore does not arise. It is not the naked spirit, but the psychic being that goes to the psychic plane to rest till it is called again to another life. There is therefore no need of a Force to compel it to take birth anew. It is in its nature something that is put forth from the Divine to support the evolution and it must do so till the Divine's purpose in its evolution is accomplished. Karma is only a machinery, it is not the fundamental cause of terrestrial existence — it cannot be, for when the soul first entered this existence, it had no Karma.

What again do you mean by “the all-veiling Maya” or by “losing all consciousness”? The soul cannot lose all consciousness, for its very nature is consciousness though not of the mental kind to which we give the name. The consciousness is merely covered, not lost or abolished by the so-called Inconscience of material Nature and then by the half-conscious ignorance of mind, life and body. It manifests, as the individual mind and life and body grow, as much as may be of the consciousness which it holds in potentiality, manifests it in the outward instrumental nature as far as and in the way that is possible through these instruments and through the outer personality that has been prepared for it and by it — for both are true — for the present life.

I know nothing about any terrible suffering endured by the soul in the process of rebirth; popular beliefs even when they have some foundation are seldom enlightened and accurate.

*

1. The psychic being stands behind mind, life and body, supporting them; so also the psychic world is not one world in the scale like the mental, vital or physical worlds, but stands behind all these and it is there that the souls evolving here retire for the time between life and life. If the psychic were only one principle in the rising order of body, life and mind on a par with the others and placed somewhere in the scale on the same footing as the others, it could not be the soul of all the rest, the divine element making the evolution of the others possible and using them as instruments for a growth through cosmic experience towards the Divine. So also the psychic world cannot be one among the other worlds to which the evolutionary being goes for supraphysical experience, it is a plane where it retires into itself for rest, for a spiritual assimilation of what it has experienced and for a replunging into its own fundamental consciousness and psychic nature.

2. For the few who go out of the Ignorance and enter into Nirvana, there is no question of their going straight up into higher worlds of manifestation. Nirvana or Moksha is a liberated condition of the being, not a world — it is a withdrawal

from the worlds and the manifestation. The analogy of Pitriyana and Devayana can hardly be mentioned in this connection.

3. The condition of the souls that retire into the psychic world is entirely static; each withdraws into himself and is not interacting with the others. When they come out of their trance, they are ready to go down into a new life, but meanwhile they do not act upon the earth life. There are other beings, guardians of the psychic world, but they are concerned only with the psychic world itself and the return of the souls to reincarnation, not with the earth.

4. A being of the psychic world cannot get fused into the soul of a human being on earth. What happens sometimes is that a very advanced psychic being sometimes sends down an emanation which resides in a human being and prepares it until it is ready for the psychic being itself to enter into the life. This happens when some special work has to be done and the human vehicle prepared. Such a descent produces a remarkable change of a sudden character in the personality and the nature.

5. Usually, a soul follows continuously the same line of sex. If there are shiftings of sex, it is as a rule a matter of parts of the personality which are not central.

6. As regards the stage at which the soul returning for rebirth enters the new body no rule can be laid down, for the circumstances vary with the individual. Some psychic beings get into relation with the birth-environment and the parents from the time of inception and determine the preparation of the personality and future in the embryo, others join only at the time of delivery, others even later on in the life and in these cases it is some emanation of the psychic being which upholds the life. It should be noted that the conditions of the future birth are determined fundamentally not during the stay in the psychic world but at the time of death — the psychic being then chooses what it should work out in the next terrestrial appearance and the conditions arrange themselves accordingly.

Note that the idea of rebirth and the circumstances of the new life as a reward or punishment for *punya* or *pāpa* is a crude human idea of "justice" which is quite unphilosophical

and unspiritual and distorts the true intention of life. Life here is an evolution and the soul grows by experience, working out by it this or that in the nature, and if there is suffering, it is for the purpose of that working out, not as a judgment inflicted by God or Cosmic Law on the errors or stumblings which are inevitable in the Ignorance.

*

It is difficult to give a positive answer to these questions, because no general rule can be laid down applicable to all. The mind makes rigid rules or one rigid rule, but the Manifestation is in reality very plastic and various and many-sided. My answers therefore must not be taken as exhaustive of the subject or complete.

1. He [*a Jivanmukta*] can go wherever his aim was fixed, into a state of Nirvana or one of the divine worlds and stay there or remain, wherever he may go, in contact with the earth-movement and return to it if his will is to help that movement.

This is doubtful [*whether a Jivanmukta can go direct from the world of the soul's present highest achievement to a still higher world*]. If originally he is not a being of the evolution but of some higher world, he could go back to that world. If he wants to go higher, it is logical that he should return to the field of evolution so long as he has not evolved the consciousness proper to that higher plane. The orthodox idea that even the gods have to come to earth if they want salvation may be applied to this ascension also. If he is originally an evolutionary being (Ramakrishna's distinction of the Jivakoti and Ishwarakoti may be extended to this also), he must proceed by the evolutionary path to either the negative withdrawal through Nirvana or some positive divine fulfilment in the increasing manifestation of Sachchidananda.

As to the impossibility of return [*to the earth*], that is a knotty question. A divine being can always return—as Ramakrishna said, the Ishwarakoti can at will ascend or descend the stair between Birth and Immortality. For the others, it is probable that they may rest for a relative infinity of time, *sāsvatīḥ samāḥ*,

if that is the will in them, but a return cannot be barred out unless they have reached their highest possible status.

No [*a Jivanmukta does not take rest in the psychic world before taking birth again on earth*]. That is part of the evolutionary line only, not obligatory for divine returns.

2. An advanced psychic being may mean here [*in the preceding letter*] one who has arrived at the soul's freedom and is immersed in the Divine — immersed does not mean abolished. Such a being does not sleep in the psychic world, but may remain in his state of blissful immersion or come back for some purpose.

The word "descend" has various meanings according to the context—I used it here in the sense of the psychic being "coming down" into the human consciousness and body ready for it; that descent might be at the time of birth or before or it may come down later and occupy the personality it has prepared for itself. I do not quite understand what are these personalities from above¹ — it is the psychic being itself that takes up a body.

3. No, the psychic being cannot take up more than one body. There is only one psychic being for each human being, but the Beings of the higher planes, e.g. the Gods of the Overmind can manifest in more than one human body at a time by sending different emanations into different bodies. These would be called Vibhutis of these Devatas.

4. These [*guardians of the psychic world*] are not human souls nor is this an office to which they are appointed nor are they functionaries — these are beings of the psychic plane pursuing their own natural activity in that plane. My word "guardians" [*in the preceding letter*] was simply a phrase meant to indicate by an image or metaphor the nature of their action.

The New Birth

When there is a new birth one brings all that is necessary from

¹ *The correspondent asked whether the "personalities" of an advanced being "move about in the higher planes". — Ed.*

past lives but also one gathers what is necessary from the earth consciousness and so too brings in new elements as one develops.

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It is a little difficult to explain. When one gets a new body, the nature which inhabits it, nature of mind, nature of vital, nature of physical, is made up of many personalities, not one simple personality as is supposed—although there is one central being. This complex personality is formed partly by bringing together personalities of past lives, but also by gathering experiences, tendencies, influences from the earth atmosphere—which are taken up by one of the constituent personalities as suitable to his own nature. Such an influence left behind by Vivekananda or one of his disciples may have been taken up by you without your being an incarnation of either.

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The being as it passes through the series of its lives takes on personalities of various kinds and passes through various types of experiences, but it does not carry these on to the next life, as a rule. It takes on a new mind, vital and body. The mental capacities, occupations, interests, idiosyncrasies of the past mind and vital are not taken over by the new mind and vital, except to the extent that is useful for the new life. One may have the power of poetic expression in one life, but in the next have no such power nor any interest in poetry. On the other hand tendencies suppressed or missed or imperfectly developed in one life may come out in the next. There would be therefore nothing surprising in the contrast which you noted. The essence of past experiences is kept by the psychic being but the forms of experience or of personality are not, except such as are needed for the new stage in the soul's progress.

The being in its long course of experience may permit for a time the search after sensual pleasure and afterwards discard it and turn to higher things. This can happen even in the course of a lifetime, *a fortiori* in a second life where the old personalities would not be carried over.

Reincarnation and Soul Evolution

You must avoid a common popular blunder about reincarnation. The popular idea is that Titus Balbus is reborn again as John Smith, a man with the same personality, character, attainments as he had in his former life with the sole difference that he wears coat and trousers instead of a toga and speaks in cockney English instead of popular Latin. That is not the case. What would be the earthly use of repeating the same personality or character a million times from the beginning of time till its end! The soul comes into birth for experience, for growth, for evolution till it can bring the Divine into matter. It is the central being that incarnates, not the outer personality — the personality is simply a mould that it creates for its figures of experience in that one life. In another birth it will create for itself a different personality, different capacities, a different life and career. Supposing Virgil is born again, he may take up poetry in one or two other lives, but he will certainly not write an epic but rather perhaps slight but elegant and beautiful lyrics such as he wanted to write, but did not succeed, in Rome. In another birth he is likely to be no poet at all, but a philosopher and a Yogan seeking to attain and to express the highest truth — for that too was an unrealised trend of his consciousness in that life. Perhaps before he had been a warrior or ruler doing deeds like Aeneas or Augustus before he sang them. And so on — on this side or that the central being develops a new character, a new personality, grows, develops, passes through all kinds of terrestrial experience.

As the evolving being develops still more and becomes more rich and complex, it accumulates its personalities, as it were. Sometimes they stand behind the active elements, throwing in some colour, some trait, some capacity here and there, — or they stand in front and there is a multiple personality, a many-sided character or a many-sided, sometimes what looks like a universal capacity. But if a former personality, a former capacity is brought fully forward, it will not be to repeat what was already done, but to cast the same capacity into new forms and new shapes and fuse it into a new harmony of the being which will not be a

reproduction of what it was before. Thus you must not expect to be what the warrior and the poet were—something of the outer characteristics may reappear but very much changed and new-cast in a new combination. It is in a new direction that the energies will be guided to do what was not done before.

Another thing. It is not the personality, the character that is of the first importance in rebirth—it is the psychic being who stands behind the evolution of the nature and evolves with it. The psychic when it departs from the body, shedding even the mental and vital on its way to its resting place, carries with it the heart of its experiences,—not the physical events, not the vital movements, not the mental buildings, not the capacities or characters, but something essential that it gathered from them, what might be called the divine element for the sake of which the rest existed. That is the permanent addition, it is that that helps in the growth towards the Divine. That is why there is usually no memory of the outward events and circumstances of past lives—for this memory there must be a strong development towards unbroken continuance of the mind, the vital, even the subtle physical; for though it all remains in a kind of seed memory, it does not ordinarily emerge. What was the divine element in the magnanimity of the warrior, that which expressed itself in his loyalty, nobility, high courage, what was the divine element behind the harmonious mentality and generous vitality of the poet and expressed itself in them, that remains and in a new harmony of character may find a new expression or, if the life is turned towards the Divine, be taken up as powers for the realisation or for the work that has to be done for the Divine.

What Survives and What Does Not

Nothing in the nature is carried over [*in the next incarnation*] except the essence of the past experiences and energies as much as is necessary for the new life. The rest is held in reserve, but things so held in reserve can be brought forward in a new form and under new conditions.

*

If all is centred consciously around the psychic then they [*the mental and vital parts of the being*] survive, otherwise they separate. The vital for instance survives for a time, then breaks up and dissolves into desires and fragmentary bits of vital personality. The mental is usually more lasting — but that too dissolves. It all depends on the person, how far he has developed his mind or vital or connected them with the psychic.

*

If one has had a strong spiritual development, that makes it easier to retain the developed mental or vital after death. But it is not absolutely necessary that the person should have been a Bhakta or a Jnani. One like Shelley or like Plato for instance could be said to have a developed mental being centred round the psychic — of the vital the same can hardly be said. Napoleon had a strong vital but not one organised round the psychic being.

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What you suggest [*that certain forces from a past life or lives may “stick” to a person in the present life*] is true — that is to say when it is some past personality which or part of which is strongly carried over into the present life. It is, I believe, true that you were a revolutionary in a past life or if not a revolutionary, engaged in a violent political action. I can't put a name or a precise form on it. But it was not only the sudden angers and violences, but probably also the desire to help, to reform, to purify and other intensities and vehemences that came from there. When a personality is carried over like that it is not only the undesirable sides that are carried over but things that purified and chastened can be useful.

*

There is no such thing as an insuperable difficulty from past lives. There are formations that help and formations that hamper; the latter have to be dismissed and dissolved, not to be allowed to repeat themselves. The Mother told you that to explain the origin of this tendency and the necessity of getting rid of it —

there was no hint of any insuperable difficulty, quite the contrary.

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For most people [*when they die*] the vital dissolves after a time as it is not sufficiently formed to be immortal. The soul descending makes a new vital formation suitable for the new life.

*

The physical always dissolves and in each new life one gets a new physical formation. To preserve the same physical would mean physical immortality.

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Not *as* they are.² What remains and to what degree depends on the development in each case. Of course the centres themselves remain — for they are in the subtle body and it is from there that they act on the corresponding physical centres.

*

No, the subconscious is an instrument for the physical life and disappears [*after death*]. It is too incoherent to be an organised enduring existence.

Lines of Force and Consciousness

What is exactly your theory? There is one thing — influences — everybody undergoes influences, absorbs them or rejects, makes them disappear in one's own developed [*poetic*] style or else keeps them as constituent strands. There is another thing — lines of Force. In the universe there are many lines of Force on which various personalities or various achievements and formations spring up — e.g. the line Pericles—Caesar—Napoleon or the line Alexander—Jenghiz—Tamerlane—Napoleon — meeting together there — so it may be too in poetry, lines of poetic force prolonging themselves from one poet to another, meeting and

² *The disciple asked, "Do the centres remain as they are after death?" — Ed.*

diverging. Yours seems to be a third—a daemon or individual Spirit of Poetry migrating from one individual to another, several perhaps meeting together in one poet who gives them all a combined full expression. Is that it? If so, it is an interesting idea and arguable.

*

But after all it is a line of consciousness and not a personality that reincarnates; the personality is only for the one life, so it does not bind though it may influence at certain points the present life.

Beings of the Higher Planes

It is always possible for a being of the higher planes to take birth on earth—in that case they create a mind or vital for themselves or else they join a mind, vital and body which has already been prepared under their influence—there are indeed many ways and not one only in which they can manifest here.

*

As there are many personalities in a man in his various ordinary planes of consciousness, so also several beings can associate themselves with his consciousness as it develops afterwards—descending into his higher mind or other higher planes of being and connecting themselves with his personality. That is for the principle. But as for the particular information [*about a certain person*], it is inaccurate. It has probably reference to the period when Mother was bringing down beings to aid in the work.

Fragments of a Dead Person that Reincarnate

All human incarnations or births have naturally a psychic being. It is only other types like the vital beings that have not, and that is precisely the reason why they want to possess men and enjoy physical life without being themselves born here, for so they escape the psychic law of evolution and spiritual progress

and change. But these formations [*the vital fragments of a dead person*] are different, they are things that do not leave the earth and do not possess but simply attach themselves to some human rebirth (of course with a psychic in it) which has some affinity and therefore does not object to or resist their inclusion.

*

The fragments [*of a dead person*] are not of the inner being (who goes on his way to the psychic world) but of his vital sheath which falls away after death. These can join for birth the vital of some other Jiva who is being born or they can be used by a vital being to enter a body in process of birth and partly possess it for the satisfaction of its propensities. The junction can also take place after birth.

Connections from Life to Life

There is a vital connection generally—the psychic is comparatively rare. It is something in past lives usually that determines these connections in this one, but the connection in this life is seldom the same as that of the past which determined it.

Lines of Sex in Rebirth

As far as I know, the births follow usually one line [*of sex*] or the other and do not alternate—that, I think, is the Indian tradition also, though there are purposeful exceptions like Shikhandi's. If there is a change of sex, it is only part of the being that associates itself with the change, not the central being.

*

Not sex exactly [*is present in the psychic being*], but what might be called the masculine and feminine principle. It is a difficult question [*whether a man can be reborn as a woman or a woman as a man*]. There are certain lines the reincarnation follows and so far as my experience goes and general experience goes, one follows usually a single line. But the alteration of sex cannot

be declared impossible. There may be some who do alternate. The presence of feminine traits in a male does not necessarily indicate a past feminine birth — they may come in the general play of forces and their formations. There are besides qualities common to both sexes. Also a fragment of the psychological personality may have been associated with a birth not one's own. One can say of a certain person of the past, "That was not myself, but a fragment of my psychological personality was present in him." Rebirth is a complex affair and not so simple in its mechanism as in the popular idea.

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All the instances I have heard of in the popular accounts of rebirth are of man becoming man and woman becoming woman in the next life — except when they become animal, but even then I think the male becomes a male animal and the female a female animal. There are only stray cases quoted like Shikhandi's in the Mahabharata for variations of sex. The Theosophist conception is full of raw imagination, one Theosophist even going so far as to say that if you are a man in this birth you are obliged to be a woman in the next and so on.

Asuric Births

*Āsurīṣu*³ can't possibly mean "animal". The Gita uses precise terms and if it had meant animal it would have said animal and not Asuric. As for the punishment, it is that they [Asuric men] go down in their nature to more depths of Asurism till they touch bottom as it were. But that is a natural result of their uncontrolled tendencies which they freely indulge without any effort to rise out of them while by the cultivation of the higher side of personality one naturally rises and develops towards godhead or the Divine. In the Gita the Divine is regarded as the controller of the whole cosmic action through Nature, so the "I cast" is in

³ Kṣipāmyajasram aśubhān āśurīṣveva yoniṣu. "*I cast down them continually into more and more Asuric births.*" *Gita* 16.19.

harmony with its ideas. The world is a mechanism of Nature, but a mechanism regulated by the presence of the Divine.

Animals and the Process of Rebirth

The soul in the animal evolves its manifestation to a point at which it can pass from the expression in animal to the expression in human consciousness.

*

It is when the vital gets broken up, some strong movements of it, desires, greeds, may precipitate themselves into animal forms, e.g., sexual desire with the part of the vital consciousness under its control into a dog or some habitual movement of excessive greed may carry part of the vital consciousness into a pig. The animals represent the vital consciousness with mind involved in the vital, so that it is naturally there that such things would gravitate for satisfaction.

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Mūḍhayoniṣu or *adho gacchanti* [*in the Gita*] does not necessarily refer to animal birth, but it is true that there has been a general belief of that kind [*that a man may be born as an animal in his next birth*] not only in India but wherever “transmigration” or “metempsychosis” was believed in. Shakespeare is referring to Pythagoras’ belief in transmigration when he speaks of the passage of somebody’s grandmother into an animal. But the soul, the psychic being, once having reached the human consciousness cannot go back to the inferior animal consciousness any more than it can go back into a tree or an ephemeral insect. What is true is that some part of the vital energy or the formed instrumental consciousness or nature can and very frequently does so, if it is strongly attached to anything in the earth life. This may account for some cases of immediate rebirth with full memory in human forms also. Ordinarily it is only by Yogic development or by clairvoyance that the exact memory of past lives can be brought back.

Remembering Past Lives

Certainly, the subconscious is formed for this life only and is not carried with it by the soul from one life to another. The memory of past lives is not something that is active anywhere in the being — if by memory is meant the memory of details. That memory of details is quiescent and untraceable except in so far as certain constituent personalities taken over from the past retain the memories of the particular life in which they were manifest. E.g. if some personality that was put forth by one in Venice or Rome remembers from time to time a detail or details of what happened then. But usually it is only the essence of past lives that is activised in the being, not any particular memories. So it is impossible to say that the memory is located in a particular part of the consciousness or in a particular plane.

*

These ideas of past lives are not experiences, they are mental formations trying to give a name and form to something that is true, but you must not attach any importance to the forms the mind gives it. The truth is that there was a connection in past lives, but the forms given by the mind are likely to be mistaken.

*

It is not the ego, but the inner being that remembers the past lives — and the inner being as a rule is perfectly detached about them.

*

The different and contrasting phases through which you pass are obviously due to the emergence of different personalities in you created by past lives. One is full of the zest of life and its ardour, the other has the Nirvanic tendency and a certain incapacity for mastery over the physical existence. This is very self-evident and the putting of a name or a frame to the past lives in which these personalities were formed could hardly add anything of importance. If you yourself remembered the essence

of them (not the details), then it might be of some use for your own consciousness in determining the limits of each influence in you and its place — but that can also be done well enough even without that remembrance.

Unimportance of Past-Life Experience in Yoga

These things (events etc.) [*of past lives*] are not known usually unless they come in some concentrated state of vision of themselves. The Mother nowadays seldom has these states because the whole concentration is on bringing down the supramental principle here. When that work is done then these things may come.

*

The Mother only speaks to people about their past births when she sees definitely some scene or memory of their past in concentration; but this happens rarely nowadays.

What is remembered mainly from past lives is the nature of the personality and the subtle results of the life-experience. Names, events, physical details are remembered only under exceptional circumstances and are of a very minor importance. When people try to remember these outward things, they usually build up a number of romantic imaginations which are not true.

I think you should dismiss this idea about the past lives. If the memory of past personalities comes of itself (without a name or mere outward details) that is sometimes important as giving a clue to something in the present development, but to know the nature of that personality and its share in the present constitution of the character is quite enough. The rest is of little use.

*

It is not of course indispensable to know [*about past lives*]. It is sometimes a matter of interest for knowing the lines of one's past development and how one has come to what one is now. But to overpass this outward development is of course the main aim of the Yoga. We are not to be tied by our past lives.

*

Too much importance must not be given to past lives. For the purpose of this Yoga one is what one is and, still more, what one will be. What one was has a minor importance.

Speculating about Past Lives

It is not necessary to attach any entire belief to these ideas of past births. X's idea of Y's rebirth is evidently a mere idea—nothing else.

When there is any truth in these things, it is most often a perception that some Force once represented in a certain person has also some part in one's own nature—not that the same personality is here.

Of course, there is rebirth, but to establish that one is such a one reborn, a deeper experience is necessary, not a mere mental intuition which may easily be an error.

*

Ideas of this kind about Vivekananda and Ramakrishna are ideas of the mind to which the vital strongly attaches itself—the truth of the past lives cannot be discovered in that way. These mental ideas are not true. You must wait for direct knowledge in a liberated nature before you can know who in past lives you were.

*

It is better not to think of past lives just now. The mind and vital would probably become active and weave things that are not true.

*

Seriously, these historical identifications are a perilous game and open a hundred doors to the play of imagination. Some may, in the nature of things must be true; but once people begin, they don't know where to stop. What is important is the lines, rather than the lives, the incarnation of Forces that explain what one now is—and, as for particular lives or rather personalities, those alone matter which are very definite in one

and have powerfully contributed to what one is developing now. But it is not always possible to put a name upon these; for not one hundred-thousandth part of what has been has still a name preserved by human Time.

Traditional Indian Ideas about Rebirth and Other Worlds

The general Divine Will in the universe is for the progressive manifestation in the universe. But that is the general will—it admits the withdrawal of individual souls who are not ready to persevere in the world.

*

The escape from birth was a universal ideal at that time [*the time of the Gita*] except with one or two sects of the Shaivas, I believe. It is not at all consistent with the Divine taking many births, for the Gita speaks of the highest condition not as a *laya*, but as a dwelling in the Divine. If so there seems to be no reason why the *mukta* and *siddha* who has reached that dwelling in the consciousness of the Divine should fear rebirth and its troubles any more than the Divine does.

*

The Pitriyan is supposed to lead to inferior worlds attained by the Fathers who still belong to the evolution in the Ignorance. By the Devayan one gets beyond the Ignorance into the light. The difficulty about the Pitrīs is that in the Puranas they are taken as the Ancestors to whom the tarpan is given—it is an old Ancestor worship such as still exists in Japan, but in the Veda they seem to be the Fathers who have gone before and discovered the supraphysical worlds.

European Resistance to the Idea of Reincarnation

But that [*the idea of reincarnation*] is just what is disputed by the Western scientific mind or was up till yesterday and is still considered as unverifiable today. It is contended that the idea of

self is an illusion — apart from the body. It is the experiences of the body that create the idea of a self and the desire to live prolongs itself illusorily in the notion that the self outlasts the body. The West is accustomed besides to the Christian idea that the self is created with the body — an idea which the Christians took over from the Jews who believed in God but not in immortality — so the Western mind is dead set against any idea of reincarnation. Even the religious used to believe that the soul was born in the body, God first making the body then breathing the soul into it (Prana?). It is difficult for Europeans to get over this past mental inheritance.

Section Four

Occult Knowledge and Powers

Chapter One

Occult Knowledge

Occultism and the Supraphysical

[*Occultism:*] The knowledge and right use of the hidden forces of Nature.

*

What did he himself [*Ramakrishna*] say about it — that it was the sins of his disciples which constituted the cancer. There is a physical aspect to things and there is an occult supraphysical aspect — one need not get in the way of the other. All physical things are the expression of the supraphysical. The existence of a body with physical instruments and processes does not, as the 19th century wrongly imagined, disprove the existence of a soul which uses the body even if it is also conditioned by it. Laws of Nature do not disprove the existence of God. The fact of a material world to which our instruments are accorded does not disprove the existence of less material worlds which certain subtler instruments can show to us.

Occult Forces

[*Occult forces:*] The forces that can only be known by going behind the veil of apparent phenomena — especially the forces of the subtle physical and supraphysical planes.

*

Nature-forces are conscious forces — they can very well combine all that is necessary for an action or a purpose and when one means fails, take another.

*

They [*general forces and impulses in the atmosphere*] are able to act with a greater force if they can make a special formation

than by a general psychological action common to all human nature.

*

The forces are conscious. There are besides individualised beings who represent the forces or use them. The wall between consciousness and force, impersonality and personality becomes much thinner when one goes behind the veil of matter. If one looks at a working from the side of impersonal force one sees a force or energy at work acting for a purpose or with a result, if one looks from the side of being one sees a being possessing, guiding and using or else representative of and used by a conscious force as its instrument of specialised action and expression. You speak of the wave, but in modern science it has been found that if you look at the movement of energy, it appears on one side to be a wave and act as a wave, on the other as a mass of particles and to act as a mass of particles each acting in its own way. It is somewhat the same principle here.

*

The experience you had of something going out from the head like an arrow probably indicates something going out of the mental consciousness towards some aim or object. Sometimes it is a part of the mind-consciousness itself that goes like that either upward to a higher plane or somewhere in the world around—and afterwards returns. Sometimes it is a thought-force or a will-force. Forces are always going out from us without our knowing it even, and often they have some effect there. If we think of a person or a place and things happening there, something can go out like that to that person or place. If we have a will or strong mental desire that something should happen, a will-force may go out and try to make that happen. But also forces can go out from the inner mind without any conscious cause on the surface.

The Play of Forces

My experience shows me that human beings are less deliberate

and responsible for their acts than the moralists, novelists and dramatists make them and I look rather to see what forces drove them than what the man himself may have seemed by inference to have intended or purposed — our inferences are often wrong and even when they are right touch only the surface of the matter.

*

All life is the play of universal forces. The individual gives a personal form to these universal forces. But he can choose whether he shall respond or not to the action of a particular force. Only most people do not really choose — they undergo the play of the forces. Your illnesses, depressions etc. are the repeated play of such forces. It is only when one can make oneself free of them that one can be the true person and have a true life — but one can be free only by living in the Divine.

*

Predestination and chance are words — words that obscure the truth by their extreme rigidity of definition. All is done through a play of forces which seems to be a play of different possibles, but there is Something that looks and selects and uses without being either blindly arbitrary (predestination) or capriciously decisive (chance).

*

There is no question of responsibility.¹ The “Something” does not act arbitrarily, paying no heed to the play of forces or the man’s nature. “Selects” does not mean “selects at random”. If a man puts himself on the side of or into the hands of the hostile influences and says, “This way I will go and no other. I want my ego, my greatness, my field of power and action”, has not the Something the right to say, “I agree. Go and find it — if you can”? On the other hand, if the balance of forces is otherwise,

¹ *The correspondent wrote, in regard to the preceding letter: “If there is Something that looks, selects and uses our actions, then it is not the play of forces that is responsible for any action; the ultimate responsibility lies with this Something.”*

less on one side, the selection may be the other way, the saving element being present, and determine another orientation. But to understand the working of this Cosmic Something one must see not only the few outward factors observed by the human eye, but the whole working with all its multitudinous details—that one cannot do unless one is oneself in the cosmic consciousness and with some opening at least to the Overmind.

There is no such thing as “free” will, but there is the power of the Purusha to say “yes” or “no” to any particular pressure of Prakriti and there is the power of the mind, vital etc. to echo feebly or strongly the Purusha’s “yes” or “no” or to resist it. A constant (not a momentary) Yes or No has its effect in the play of the forces and the selection by the Something.

*

No, of course not [*helpful synchronicities are not just accidents*]. But they seem so to all who live in the outward vision only. “Coincidence the scientists do them call.” But anyone with some intelligence and power of observation who lives more in an inward consciousness can see the play of invisible forces at every step which act on men and bring about events without their knowing about the instrumentation. The difference created by Yoga or by an inner consciousness—for there are people like Socrates who develop or have some inner awareness without Yoga—is that one becomes conscious of these invisible forces and can also consciously profit by them or use and direct them. That is all.

*

I have not said [*in the preceding letter*] that everything is rigidly predetermined. Play of forces does not mean that. What I said was that behind visible events in the world there is always a mass of invisible forces at work unknown to the outward minds of men and by Yoga (by going inward and establishing a conscious connection with the cosmic Self and Force and forces) one can become conscious of these forces, intervene consciously in the play, to some extent at least determine things in the result of the play. All that has nothing to do with predetermination. On the

contrary one watches how things develop and gives a push here and a push there when possible or when needed. There is nothing in all that to contradict the dictum of the great scientist Sir C. V. Raman. Raman said once that all these scientific discoveries are only games of chance. Only, when he says these things are games of chance, he is merely saying that human beings don't know how it works out. It is not a rigid predetermination, but it is not a blind unconscious Chance either. It is a play in which there is a working out of possibilities in Time.

*

What X said is true, the play of the forces is very complex and one has to be conscious of them and, as it were, see and watch how they work before one can really understand why things happen as they do. All action is surrounded by a complexity of forces and if one puts a force for one of them to succeed, one must be careful to do it thoroughly and maintain it and not leave doors open for the other contrary ones to find their way in. I left at least two doors open and the forces that wanted him [*a sadhak*] here pushed in through them. As for what they were, it can only be said that it was probably a mixture. Each man is himself a field of many forces — some were working for his sadhana, some were working for his ego and desires. There are besides powers which seek to make a man an instrument for purposes not his own without his knowing it. All of these may combine to bring about a particular result. These forces work each for the fulfilment of its own drive — they need not be at all what we call hostile forces, — they are simply forces of Nature. It is not a fact however that hostile forces cannot bring a man here — e.g. when Y came back and wanted to enter the Asram, there was clearly a hostile force working that wanted to create trouble, but it was not strong enough to do it.

*

X's new consciousness makes him feel more strongly the opposite forces that one contacts when one moves in the world and has to do affairs and meet with others and he is afraid of

a response in his vital which will upset his sadhana or create difficulties. Evidently he is a man who is psychically sensitive or has become so to that thing which you blindly refuse to recognise even when you are in the midst of it—the play of forces. You can feel your friend's atmosphere through the letter "so beautiful, so strengthening, so refreshing" and it has an immediate effect on you. But your mind stares like an owl and wonders, "What the hell can this be?" — I suppose, because your medical books never told you about it and how can things be true which are not known either to the ordinary mind or science? It is by an incursion of an opposite kind of forces that you fall into the Old Man's clutches, but you can only groan and cry, "What's this?" and when they are swept aside in a moment by other forces blink and mutter, "Well, that's funny!" Your friend can feel and know at once when he is being threatened by the opposite forces—and so he can be on his guard and resist Old Nick, because he can detect at once one of his principal means of attack.

*

It is this play of forces that is trying to bring about your removal to Burdwan and, if it succeeds, you have not to be troubled or shaken or disappointed, but to accept and make use of all that happens for your sadhana and progress. For the play of cosmic forces, the will in the cosmos—as one might say—does not always work apparently in favour of a smooth and direct line for the work or the sadhana, it often brings in what seem to be upheavals, sudden turns which break or deflect the line, opposing or upsetting circumstances or perplexing departures from what had been temporarily settled and established. The one thing is to preserve equanimity and make an opportunity and means of progress out of all that happens in the course of the life and the sadhana. There is a higher secret Will transcendent behind the play and will of the cosmic forces—a play which is always a mixture of things favourable and things adverse—and it is that Will which one must wait upon and have faith in; but you must not expect to be able always to understand its workings. The mind wants this or that to be done, the line once

taken to be maintained, but what the mind wants is not at all always what is intended in a larger purpose. One has to follow indeed a fixed central aim in the sadhana and not deviate from it, but not to build on outward circumstances, conditions etc. as if they were fundamental things.

*

One can not only receive a force, but an impulse, thought or sensation. One may receive it from others, from beings in Nature or from Nature herself if she chooses to give her Force a ready-made form of that kind.

*

The force "created" is not yours—it is Prakriti's—your will sets it in motion, it does not really create it; but once set in motion, it tends to fulfil itself so far as the play of other forces will allow it. So, naturally, if you want to stop it, you have to set a contrary force in motion which will be strong enough to prevail against its momentum.

*

There is one cosmic Force working in all and a vibration of that Force or any one of its movements can awake (it does not always) the same vibration in another.

*

The play of forces can lead to nothing, if the One Force does not take them up and change them.

The Place of Occult Knowledge in Yoga

To know and use the subtle forces of the supraphysical planes is part of the Yoga.

*

You take a very utilitarian view of spiritual things. Whatever develops in the sadhana, provided it is genuine, has its place in

the total experience and knowledge. A knowledge of the occult worlds and occult forces and phenomena has its place also. Visions and voices are only a small part of that vast realm of occult experience. As for utility, for one who has intelligence and discrimination, visions etc. have many uses — but very little use for those who have no discrimination or understanding.

*

Because a great number of people don't know how to use these [*occult*] faculties or misuse them or give them excessive value or nourish their ego by them, does it follow that the faculties themselves have no Yogic use or value?

*

Even by itself it [*the development of the occult faculties*] is a progress in the development of the consciousness though it may not carry with it any spiritualisation of the nature.

*

I do not know what you mean by practical sadhana. If one develops the occult faculty and the occult experience and knowledge, these things can be of great use, therefore practical. In themselves they are a proof of opening of the inner consciousness and also help to open it farther — though they are not indispensable for that.

*

He [Ramana Maharshi] discouraged his disciples [*from having any occult dealings*] because his aim was the realisation of the inner Self and the intuition — in other words the fullness of the spiritual Mind — visions and voices belong to the inner occult sense, therefore he did not want them to lay stress on it. I also discourage some from having any dealing with visions and voices because I see that they are being misled or in danger of being misled by false visions and false voices. That does not mean that visions and voices have no value.

*

People who have the occult faculty always tend to give too large a place to it.

Spiritism

About spiritism I think I can say this much for the present. It is quite possible for the dead or rather the departed—for they are not dead—who are still in regions near the earth to have communication with the living. Sometimes it happens automatically, sometimes by an effort at communication on one side of the curtain or the other. There is no impossibility of such communication by the means used by the spiritists; usually however genuine communications or a contact can only be with those who are yet in a world which is a sort of idealised replica of the earth-consciousness in which the same personality, ideas, memories persist that the person had here. But all that pretends to be communication with departed souls is not genuine,—especially when it is done through a paid professional medium. There is there an enormous amount of mixture of a very undesirable kind—for apart from the great mass of unconscious suggestions from the sitters or the contributions of the medium's subliminal consciousness one gets into contact with a world of beings which is of a very deceptive or self-deceptive illusory nature. Many of these come and claim to be the departed souls of relatives, acquaintances, well-known men, famous personalities etc. There are also beings who pick up the discarded feelings and memories of the dead and masquerade with them. There are a great number of beings who come to such séances only to play with the consciousness of men or exercise their powers through this contact with the earth and who dupe the mediums and sitters with their falsehoods, tricks and illusions. (I am supposing of course the case of mediums who are not themselves tricksters.) A contact with such a plane of spirits can be harmful (most mediums become nervously or morally unbalanced) and spiritually dangerous. Of course, all pretended communications with the famous dead of long-past times are in their very nature deceptive and most of those with

the recent ones also — that is evident from the character of these communications. Through conscientious mediums one may get sound results (in the matter of the dead) but even these are very ignorant of the nature of the forces they are handling and have no discrimination which can guard them against trickery from the other side of the veil. Very little genuine knowledge of the nature of the after-life can be gathered from these séances; a true knowledge is more often gained by the experience of individuals who make serious contact or are able in one way or another to cross the border.

*

They [*mediums and clairvoyants*] are most of them in contact with the vital-physical or subtle physical worlds and do not receive anything higher at all.

*

Not much confidence can be placed in all that [*communications from spirit guides on other planes*]. If examined closely it will be seen that these spirit guides only suggest to their subjects what is in the mind of the sitter or sitters or in the air and it comes to very little. Influences from the other worlds there are of course and any number of them, but the central guidance is not of this kind except in very rare cases.

Séances

Automatic writings and spiritualistic séances are a very mixed affair. Part comes from the subconscious mind of the medium and part from that of the sitters. But it is not true that all can be accounted for by a dramatising imagination and memory. Sometimes there are things none present could know or remember; sometimes even, though that is rare, glimpses of the future. But usually these séances etc. put one into rapport with a very low world of vital beings and forces, themselves obscure, incoherent or tricky and it is dangerous to associate with them or to undergo any influence. Ouspensky and others must have gone

through these experiments with too “mathematical” a mind, which was no doubt their safeguard but prevented them from coming to anything more than a surface intellectual view of their significance.

*

The psychic does not give up the mental and other sheaths (apart from the physical) immediately at death. It is said that it takes three years on the whole to get clear away from the zone of communicability with the earth — though there may be cases of slower or quicker passage. The psychic world does not communicate with earth — at any rate not in that way. And the ghost or spirit who turns up at séances is not the psychic being. What comes through the medium is a mixture of the medium's subconscious mind (using subconscious in the ordinary, not in the Yogic sense), that of the sitters, vital sheaths left by the departed or perhaps occupied or used by some “spirit”, i.e. some vital being, the departed himself in his vital sheath or else something assumed for the occasion (but it is the vital part that communicates), elementals, spirits of the lowest vital physical world near earth, etc. etc. A horrible confusion for the most part — a hotch-potch of all sorts of things coming through a medium of “astral” grey light and shadow. Many communicants seem to be people who have just gone across into some subtle world where they feel surrounded by an improved edition of the earthly life and think that is the real and definitive other world after earth — but it is a mere optimistic prolongation of the ideas and images and associations of the human plane. Hence the next world as depicted by the spiritualist “guides” and other séance communicants.

Ghosts

What do you mean by a ghost? The word “ghost” as used in popular parlance covers an enormous number of distinct phenomena which have no necessary connection with each other. To name a few only —

(1) An actual contact with the soul of a departed human being housed in its subtle body and transcribed to our mind by the appearance of an image or the hearing of a voice.

(2) A mental formation stamped by the thoughts and feelings of a departed human being on the atmosphere of a place or locality, wandering about there or repeating itself—till that formation either exhausts itself or is dissolved by one means or another. This is the explanation of such phenomena as the haunted house in which the scenes attending or surrounding or preceding a murder are repeated over and over again and many similar phenomena.

(3) A being of the lower vital planes who has assumed the discarded vital sheath of a departed human being or a fragment of his vital personality and appears and acts in the form and perhaps with the surface thoughts and memories of that person.

(4) A being of the lower vital plane who by the medium of a living human being or by some other means or agency is able to materialise itself sufficiently so as to appear and act in a visible form or speak with an audible voice or, without so appearing, to move about material things, e.g. furniture or to materialise objects or to shift them from place to place. This accounts for what are called *poltergeists*, phenomena of stone-throwing, tree-inhabiting *bhūtas* and other well-known phenomena.

(5) Apparitions which are the formations of one's own mind but take to the senses an objective appearance.

(6) Temporary possession of people by vital beings who sometimes pretend to be departed relatives etc.

(7) Thought-images of themselves projected, often by people at the moment of death, which appear at that time or a few hours afterwards to their friends or relatives.

You will see that in only one of these cases, the first, can a soul be posited and there no difficulty arises.

Chapter Two

Occult Powers or Siddhis

General Remarks

The *aṣṭasiddhis* as obtained in the ordinary Yoga are vital powers or, as in the Rajayoga, mental siddhis. Usually they are uncertain in their application and precarious depending on the maintenance of the process by which they were attained.

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It is certainly possible to have consciousness of things going on at a distance and to intervene.

The idea that true Yogins do not or ought not to use such powers, I regard as an ascetic superstition. I believe that all Yogins who have these powers do use them whenever they find that they are called on from within to do so. They may refrain if they think the use in a particular case is contrary to the Divine Will or see that preventing one evil may be opening the door to worse or for any other valid reason, or simply because it is outside the scope of their action, but not from any general prohibitory rule. What is forbidden to anyone with a strong spiritual sense is to be a miracle-monger, performing extraordinary things for show, for gain, for fame, out of vanity or pride. It is forbidden to use powers from mere vital motives, to make an Asuric ostentation of them or to turn them into a support for arrogance, conceit, ambition—or any other of the amiable weaknesses to which human nature is prone. It is because half-baked Yogins so often fall into these traps of the hostile forces that the use of Yogic powers is sometimes discouraged as harmful to the user. But it is mostly people who live much in the vital that so fall; with a strong and free and calm mind and a psychic awake and alive, such perversities are not likely to occur. As for those who can live in the true divine consciousness, certain powers are not “powers” at all in that sense, not, that is to say, supernatural

or abnormal, but rather their normal way of seeing and acting, part of the consciousness—and how can they be forbidden or refuse to act according to their consciousness and its nature?

I suppose I have had myself an even more completely European education than you and I have had too my period of agnostic denial, but from the moment I looked at these things I could never take the attitude of doubt and disbelief which was for so long fashionable in Europe. Abnormal, otherwise supraphysical experiences and powers, occult or Yogic, have always seemed to me something perfectly natural and credible. Consciousness in its very nature could not be limited by the ordinary physical human-animal consciousness; it must have other ranges. Yogic or occult powers are no more supernatural or incredible than is supernatural or incredible the power to write a great poem or compose great music. Few people can do it, as things are,—not even one in a million; for poetry and music come from the inner being and to write or to compose true and great things one has to have the passage clear between the outer mind and something in the inner being. That is why you got the poetic power as soon as you began Yoga—Yoga-force made the passage clear. It is the same with Yogic consciousness and its powers; the thing is to get the passage clear,—for they are already there within you. Of course the first thing is to believe, aspire and, with the true urge within, make the endeavour.

*

It is not possible to put any credence in the stories about this Swami and Mahabhanu. It is possible that he has practised some kind of Tantric Yoga and obtained a few occult powers, but in all that you have said about him and in the printed papers there is no trace of any spiritual realisation or experience. All that he seems to think about is occult powers and feats of thaumaturgy. Those who take their stand on occult powers divorced from spiritual experience are not Yogis of a high plane of achievement. There are Yogis who behave as if they had no control over themselves—the theory is that they separate the spirit from the nature and live in the inner realisation leaving the nature to a disordered

action "like a child, mad man, pisacha or inert object". There are others who deliberately use rough or violent speech to keep people at a distance or to test them. But the outbreak of rage of this Swami which you recount seems to have been simply an outburst of fury due to offended egoism. His judgment about Ramana Maharshi is absurd in the extreme.¹ As to his asking for the nail, hair etc. and his presenting of clothes or jumper, it was probably to establish a physical means of establishing an occult influence on you and your wife possibly by some Tantric or magic kriya — in Tibet such magic processes are well known and in common use.

*

There are many Yogins of the Vedantic school who follow both siddhis and the final emancipation — they would say, I suppose, that they take the siddhis on the way to Nirvana. The harmonisation is in the supermind — the Divine Truth at once static and dynamic, a withdrawal and extinction of the Ignorance, a re-creation in the Divine Knowledge.

*

I am unable to see why you should give up Yoga, because you cannot believe in the action of occult laws and forces or in siddhis. The object of Yoga is realisation of the Divine; these other things are side-matters which need be no part of spiritual experience, nor is belief in them necessary for realisation. Everyone has the right of private judgment in these matters; so you need not worry.

Occult Powers Not the Object of Our Yoga

Yes, the object of our Yoga is to establish direct contact with the Divine above and bring down the divine consciousness from above into all the centres. Occult powers belonging to the

¹ Absurd because the greatness of a Yogi does not depend at all on how long he lives or his state of health, but on the height or the depth of his spiritual realisation and experience.

mental, vital and subtle physical planes are not our object. One can have contact with various Divine Forms and Personalities on the way, but there is no need to establish them in the centres, though sometimes that happens automatically (as with the four Personalities of the Mother) for a time in the course of the sadhana. But it is not a rule to do so. Our Yoga is meant to be plastic and to allow all necessary workings of the Divine Power according to the nature, but these in the details may vary with each individual.

*

All these “experiments” of yours are founded upon the vital nature and the mind in connection with it; working on this foundation, there is no security against falsehood and fundamental error. No amount of powers (small or great) developing can be a surety against wandering from the Truth; and, if you allow pride and arrogance and ostentation of power to creep in and hold you, you will surely fall into error and into the power of rajasic Maya and Avidya. Our object is not to get powers, but to ascend towards the divine Truth-consciousness and bring its Truth down into the lower members. With the Truth all the necessary powers will come, not as one’s own, but as the Divine’s. The contact with the Truth cannot grow through rajasic mental and vital self-assertion, but only through psychic purity and surrender.

*

An activity on the astral plane in contact with the astral Forces attended by a leaving of the body is not a spiritual aim but belongs to the province of occultism. It is not a part of the aim of Yoga. Also fasting is not permissible in the Asram, as its practice is more often harmful than helpful to the spiritual endeavour.

This aim suggested to you seems to be part of a seeking for occult powers; such a seeking is looked on with disfavour for the most part by spiritual teachers in India because it belongs to the inferior planes and usually pushes the seeker on a path which

may lead him very far from the Divine. Especially, a contact with the forces and beings of the astral (or, as we term it, the vital) plane is attended with great dangers. The beings of this plane are often hostile to the true aim of spiritual life and establish contact with the seeker and offer him powers and occult experiences only in order that they may lead him away from the spiritual path or else that they may establish their own control over him or take possession of him for their own purpose. Often, representing themselves as divine powers, they mislead, give erring suggestions and impulsions and pervert the inner life. Many are those who, attracted by these powers and beings of the vital plane, have ended in a definitive spiritual fall or in mental and physical perversion and disorder. One comes inevitably into contact with the vital plane and enters into it in the expansion of consciousness which results from an inner opening, but one ought never to put oneself into the hands of these beings and forces or allow oneself to be led by their suggestions and impulsions. This is one of the chief dangers of the spiritual life and to be on one's guard against it is a necessity for the seeker if he wishes to arrive at his goal. It is true that many supraphysical or supernormal powers come with the expansion of the consciousness in Yoga; to rise out of the body consciousness, to act by subtle means on the supraphysical planes etc. are natural activities for the Yogi. But these powers are not sought after, they come naturally, and they have not the astral character. Also, they have to be used on purely spiritual lines, that is by the Divine Will and the Divine Force, as an instrument, but never as an instrumentation of the forces and beings of the vital plane. To seek their aid for such powers is a great error.

Prolonged fasting may lead to an excitation of the nervous being which often brings vivid imaginations and hallucinations that are taken for true experiences; such fasting is frequently suggested by the vital Entities because it puts the consciousness into an unbalanced state which favours their designs. It is therefore discouraged here. The rule to be followed is that laid down by the Gita which says that "Yoga is not for one who eats too much or who does not eat"; a moderate use of food sufficient

for the maintenance and health and strength of the body.

There is no brotherhood of the kind you describe in India. There are Yogis who seek to acquire and practise occult powers but it is as individuals learning from an individual Master. Occult associations, lodges, brotherhoods for such a purpose as described by European occultists are not known in Asia.

As regards secrecy, a certain discretion or silence about the instructions of the Guru and one's own experiences is always advisable, but an absolute secrecy or making a mystery of these things is not. Once a Guru is chosen, nothing must be concealed from him. The suggestion of absolute secrecy is often a trick of the astral Powers to prevent the seeking for enlightenment and succour.

*

Ordinarily, all the more inward and all the abnormal psychological experiences are called psychic. I use the word psychic for the soul as distinguished from the mind and vital. All movements and experiences of the soul would in that sense be called psychic, those which rise from or directly touch the psychic being; where mind and vital predominate, the experience would be called psychological (surface or occult). "Spiritual" has nothing to do with the Absolute, except that the experience of the Absolute is spiritual. All contacts with self, the higher consciousness, the Divine above are spiritual. There are others that could not be so sharply classified and set off against each other.

The spiritual realisation is of primary importance and indispensable. I would consider it best to have the spiritual and psychic development first and have it with the same fullness before entering the occult regions. Those who enter the latter first may find their spiritual realisation much delayed — others fall into the mazy traps of the occult and do not come out in this life. Some no doubt can carry on both together, the occult and the spiritual, and make them help each other; but the process I suggest is the safer.

The governing factors for us must be the spirit and the psychic being united with the Divine — the occult laws and

phenomena have to be known but only as an instrumentation, not as the governing principles. The occult is a vast field and complicated and not without its dangers. It need not be abandoned but it should not be given the first place.

*

You need not think about the occult Power. Let the Mother's consciousness grow in you and her Force work; occult powers are not indispensable, but if they are needed they will come in their proper time.

*

A sincere heart is worth all the extraordinary powers in the world.

Ethical Rules for the Use of Occult Powers

There are a number of rules, really of an ethical, not a spiritual nature, which are necessary for the very safety of the society itself — those, for instance, against an egoistic use of occult secrets; for if that were disregarded, there would be inevitably a clash with other formations on the same plane and consequent disaster.

Thought Reception and Thought Reading

About X's faculty of receiving the thoughts of others, — if this had been of the nature of thought reading, that is to say looking at the minds of others and seeing what is there, the remedy would have been simple; refusal to look would be enough and even the faculty might disappear by atrophy through long discontinuance. But if the thoughts of others come to her of themselves, it may be the psychic opening in her inner mind which it would be difficult to get rid of. If she could remain indifferent or push away these unwelcome visitors behind her and not think of them again, that would be one remedy; it might even be discouraged from coming after a time by this lack of reception. As for why it comes, it is not something that comes but something that is

there, a faculty or a psychic habit of the nature—I use the word psychic in the popular sense, it has nothing to do with what I call the psychic being. If she practises Yoga and is able to make some considerable progress, then it would be possible for her to bar the door to these visitors. At the same time I might say that this power need not be a mere source of trouble; it can be helpful even: for it can give one who has acquired mastery over his own nature the knowledge of the thoughts and feelings around her and she can then help, guide, change what has to be changed in their minds so that they can become more effective for the divine work. I shall await what further you have to tell me about X's experiences before saying anything further about her entry into the field of Yoga.

Occult Powers and Health

Your generalisation cannot stand because it is contradicted by other numerous instances which go to prove the opposite. In my own experience I have found that those who possessed well developed and well organised "psychic" and occult powers were healthy and well poised; indeed they said that in ill health or physical weakness they could do nothing—it impaired their power. These certainly had no lack or deficiency of the red aura.

The woman you speak of was evidently under a vital Influence. A vital Influence always acts by disorganising the system and by disturbing the mental, vital or physical balance. But such cases of phenomena in the vital mind due to a possession or influence have no relation to the true mastery of psychic or occult powers (clairvoyance, clair-audience etc.).

Visions and experiences need not at all depend upon physical weakness or a pathological taint. It is not safe to judge from individual cases. The majority of those who have developed the faculty do not suffer from these defects. Those on the other hand who cannot keep their psychic experiences when in a robust state of health, lose them because then they get into a very external consciousness and feel at ease in it; but the true psychic does not depend for his experiences on disease.

The Power of Healing

I don't know whether I can throw any positive light on X's mystic experiences. The description, at any rate the latter part, is not very easy to follow as it is very allusive in its expressions and not always precise enough to be clear. The first part of the experience indicates a native power of healing of whose action she herself does not know the process. It seems from her account to come from something in herself which should be, from the terms she uses, a larger and higher and brighter and more powerful consciousness with which she is in occasional communion but in which she does not constantly live. On the other hand another sentence seems to point to a Godhead or Divine Presence and it would then be not so much within as above. The language later on would seem to indicate such a Presence giving commands to her to guide others so that they might grow in consciousness. But she distinctly speaks of it as a greater "me" standing behind a blue diamond force. We must fall back then on the idea of a greater consciousness very high up with a feeling of divinity, a sense of considerable light and spiritual authority — perhaps in one of those higher spiritual mental planes of which I speak in *The Life Divine* and the letters. The diamond light could well be native to these planes; it is usually white, but there it might well be blue: it is a light that dispels or drives away all impure things, especially a demoniac possession or the influence of some evil force. Evidently, the use of a power like this should be carefully guarded from the intrusion of any wrong element such as personal love of power, but that need not cause any apprehension as a keen inlook into oneself would be sufficient to reject it or keep it aloof. I think that is all I can say upon the data given in her letter.

*

It is difficult to say [*why Christ healed people*] — it looks from the Bible account as if he did it as a sign that he was one sent by the Divine with power.

Miracles

What do you mean by a miracle? What people call a miracle is only something done in a striking way by a process unknown to them which their minds cannot follow.

*

I have explained that there is no such thing as a miracle. If a higher consciousness opens a higher power in him, the sadhak has to use it as part of the new consciousness but in the right way, without egoism, selfishness, vanity or pride.

Magic

Jādu (magic) is a special practice which is done by professional magicians or those who learn the art of the magician, but it is no part of Yoga. What happens in Yoga is that sometimes or even very commonly certain powers develop in the sadhak by which he can influence others or make them do things or make things happen that he wants. This and other Yogic powers should never be used by the sadhak for egoistic purposes or to satisfy his vital desires. They can only be used when they become part of the realised divine consciousness by the Mother herself or at her command for good and unselfish purposes. There is no harm in Yogic powers that come naturally as a part of the new consciousness and are not used for a wrong personal purpose. For instance you see something in vision or dream and that happens afterwards in the waking state. Well, that is a Yogic power of prevision, knowing future things which often occurs as the consciousness grows; there is nothing wrong in its happening; it is part of the growth in sadhana. So with other powers. Only one must not get proud or boast or misuse the powers for the sake of desire, pride, power or the satisfaction of the ego.

*

By black magic is meant the occultism of the adverse powers — the occultism of the divine Powers is quite different. One is based on unity, the other on division.

Note on the Texts

Note on the Texts

LETTERS ON YOGA—I, the first of four volumes, contains letters in which Sri Aurobindo speaks about the foundations of his spiritual teaching and method of Yogic practice. The letters have been arranged in five parts dealing with five broad subject areas:

1. The Divine, the Cosmos and the Individual
2. The Parts of the Being and the Planes of Consciousness
3. The Evolutionary Process and the Supermind
4. Problems of Philosophy, Science, Religion and Society
5. Questions of Spiritual and Occult Knowledge

The letters in this volume have been selected from the extensive correspondence Sri Aurobindo carried on with his disciples and others between 1927 and 1950. Letters from this corpus appear in seven volumes of THE COMPLETE WORKS OF SRI AUROBINDO: *Letters on Poetry and Art* (Volume 27), *Letters on Yoga* (Volumes 28–31), *The Mother with Letters on the Mother* (Volume 32), and *Letters on Himself and the Ashram* (Volume 35). The titles of these works specify the nature of the letters included in the volumes, but there is some overlap. For example, a number of letters in the present volume are also published in *Letters on Himself and the Ashram*.

The Writing of the Letters

Between 1927 and 1950, Sri Aurobindo replied to hundreds of correspondents in tens of thousands of letters, some of them many pages in length, others only a few words long. Most of his replies, however, were sent to just a few dozen disciples, almost all of them resident members of his Ashram; of these disciples, about a dozen received more than half the replies. Sri Aurobindo wrote most of these letters between 1931 and 1937, the prime period of his correspondence. Letters before and after this period were written on a more restricted scale and confined

to a few persons for special reasons.

Disciples in the Ashram wrote to Sri Aurobindo on loose sheets or sent him the notebooks in which they kept diaries as a record of their spiritual endeavour and a means of communicating with him. These notebooks and loose sheets reached Sri Aurobindo via an internal “post” once or twice a day. Letters from outside which his secretary thought he might like to see were sent at the same time. Correspondents wrote in English if they knew the language well enough, but a good number wrote in Bengali, Gujarati, Hindi or French, all of which Sri Aurobindo read fluently, or in other languages that were translated into English for him. The disciples usually addressed their letters to the Mother, since Sri Aurobindo had asked them to do so, but most assumed that he would answer them. He generally replied in the notebook or on the sheets sent by the correspondent, writing beneath the correspondent’s remarks or in the margin or between the lines; sometimes, however, he wrote his reply on a separate sheet of paper. In some cases he had his secretary prepare a typed copy of his letter, which he revised before it was sent. For correspondents living outside the Ashram, Sri Aurobindo sometimes addressed his reply not to the correspondent but to his secretary, who quoted, paraphrased or translated the reply and signed the letter himself. In these indirect replies, Sri Aurobindo often referred to himself in the third person.

While going through Sri Aurobindo’s letters, the reader should keep in mind that each letter was written to a specific person at a specific time, in specific circumstances and for a specific purpose. The subjects taken up arose in regard to the needs of the person. Sri Aurobindo varied the style and tone of his replies according to his relationship with the correspondent; to those with whom he was close, he sometimes employed humour, irony and even sarcasm.

Although written to specific recipients, these letters contain much of general interest, which justifies their inclusion in a volume destined for the general public. For the reasons mentioned above, however, the advice in them does not always apply equally to everyone. Aware of this, Sri Aurobindo himself made some cautionary remarks about the proper use of his letters:

I should like to say, in passing, that it is not always safe to

apply practically to oneself what has been written for another. Each sadhak is a case by himself and one cannot always or often take a mental rule and apply it rigidly to all who are practising the Yoga.

The tendency to take what I lay down for one and apply it without discrimination to another is responsible for much misunderstanding. A general statement, too, true in itself, cannot be applied to everyone alike or applied now and immediately without consideration of condition or circumstance or person or time.

It is not a fact that all I write is meant equally for everybody. That assumes that everybody is alike and there is no difference between sadhak and sadhak. If it were so everybody would advance alike and have the same experiences and take the same time to progress by the same steps and stages. It is not so at all.¹

The Typing and Revision of the Letters

Most of the shorter items in this volume, and many of the longer ones, were not typed or revised during Sri Aurobindo's lifetime and are reproduced here directly from his handwritten manuscripts. A good number of the letters, however, as mentioned above, were typed for Sri Aurobindo and revised by him before sending. Other letters were typed by the recipients for their own use or for circulation within the Ashram. At first, circulation of the letters was restricted to members of the Ashram and others whom Sri Aurobindo had accepted as disciples. When these letters were circulated, personal references were removed. Persons mentioned by Sri Aurobindo were indicated by their initials or by the letters X, Y, Z, etc. Copies of these typed letters were kept by Sri Aurobindo's secretary and sometimes presented to Sri Aurobindo for revision before publication. These typed copies sometimes contained errors, most of which were corrected by him while revising.

¹ First and third passages: *Letters on Himself and the Ashram*, volume 35 of THE COMPLETE WORKS OF SRI AUROBINDO, pp. 473 and 475. Second passage: *The Mother with Letters on the Mother*, volume 32, p. 349.

Sri Aurobindo's revision sometimes amounted merely to making minor changes here and there, sometimes to a complete rewriting of the letter. He generally removed personal references if this had not already been done by the typist. When necessary, he also rewrote the openings or other parts of the replies in order to free them from dependence on the correspondent's question. As a result, some of these letters have an impersonal tone and read more like brief essays than personal communications.

The Publication of the Letters

Around 1933, Sri Aurobindo's secretary Nolini Kanta Gupta began to compile selections from the growing body of letters in order to publish them. During Sri Aurobindo's lifetime, four small books of letters were published: *The Riddle of This World* (1933), *Lights on Yoga* (1935), *Bases of Yoga* (1936) and *More Lights on Yoga* (1948). Sri Aurobindo revised the typescripts of most of the letters in these books. During this revision, he continued the process of removing personal references. A letter he wrote in August 1937 alludes to his approach to the revision:

I had no idea of the book being published as a collection of personal letters—if that were done, they would have to be published whole as such without a word of alteration. I understood the book was meant like the others [*i.e.*, *like Bases of Yoga, etc.*] where only what was helpful for an understanding of things Yogic was kept with necessary alterations and modifications. . . . With that idea I have been not only omitting but recasting and adding freely. Otherwise as a book it would be too scrappy and random for public interest. In the other books things too personal were omitted—it seems to me the same rule must hold here—except very sparingly where unavoidable.

A number of letters not included in the four books mentioned above were published in the mid and late 1940s in several journals associated with the Ashram: *Sri Aurobindo Circle*, *Sri Aurobindo Mandir Annual*, *The Advent* and *Mother India*. Many letters in these journals were revised by Sri Aurobindo before publication.

By the mid-1940s a significant body of letters had been collected, typed and revised. In 1945 plans were made, with Sri Aurobindo's approval, to publish a collection of his letters. The work of compiling and editing these letters was done under his guidance. At that time, many typed or printed copies of letters, some revised, some not, were presented to Sri Aurobindo for approval or revision. The resulting material was arranged and published in a four-volume series entitled *Letters of Sri Aurobindo*. Series One appeared in 1947, Series Two and Three in 1949 and Series Four in 1951. The first, second and fourth series contained letters on Yoga, the third letters on poetry and literature. In 1958, most of these letters on Yoga, along with many additional ones, were published under the titles *On Yoga II: Tome One* and *On Yoga II: Tome Two*, as Volumes VI and VII of the Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education collection. The first tome, with further additions, was reissued in 1969. In 1970 a new edition of the letters was published under the title *Letters on Yoga*; this edition contained many new letters not included in *On Yoga II*. The three volumes of the enlarged edition constituted volumes 22, 23 and 24 of the Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary Library.

The present edition, also titled *Letters on Yoga*, incorporates the Centenary Library letters, but also contains a large number of letters that have come to light in the four decades between the two editions. One source of new letters is the correspondences of several disciples which were published in books after the Centenary Library edition had been issued. Govindbhai Patel's correspondence was published in 1974 in a book entitled *My Pilgrimage to the Spirit*; an enlarged edition appeared in 1977. Nagin Doshi's correspondence, *Guidance from Sri Aurobindo: Letters to a Young Disciple*, was brought out in three volumes in 1974, 1976 and 1987. Nirodbaran's Correspondence with Sri Aurobindo came out in two volumes in 1983 and 1984. Sahana Devi's correspondence came out in 1985 in a book entitled *At the Feet of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother*. Prithwi Singh's correspondence came out in 1988 as *Sri Aurobindo and the Mother to Prithwi Singh*. Dilip Kumar Roy's correspondence was issued in four volumes in 2003, 2005, 2007 and 2011 under the title *Sri Aurobindo to Dilip*. A second source of new material is individual letters and small collections of letters published in Ashram journals and elsewhere after the Centenary

Library had been issued. A third source is letters transcribed from manuscripts or from early typed copies. Many unpublished letters were discovered while reviewing correspondences long held by the Ashram; some of these had never been assessed to find letters for publication; others had been assessed, but relatively few letters were selected at the time. Additional letters were received by the Ashram upon the passing away of disciples. From the three sources mentioned above, many letters have been found that are worthy of publication. The present edition contains about one-third more letters than appear in the Centenary Library.

The Selection, Arrangement and Editing of the Letters

In compiling the present edition, all known manuscripts, typed copies or photographic copies of manuscripts and printed texts of letters were checked. From these sources, letters that seemed to be of general interest were selected. Electronic texts of the letters were then made and carefully checked at least twice against the handwritten, typed, photocopied, and printed versions of the texts.

The selected letters have been arranged according to subject and placed in the four volumes of the present edition. Each volume is divided and subdivided into parts, sections, chapters and groups with descriptive headings; each group, the lowest unit of division, contains one or more letters devoted to the specific subject of the group.

The present volume consists of about 1150 separate items, an "item" being defined as what is published between one heading or asterisk and another heading or asterisk. Many items correspond exactly to individual letters; a good number, however, contain only part of the individual letters; a small number consist of two or more letters (or parts of them) that were joined together by early typists or editors and then revised in that form by Sri Aurobindo.

Whenever possible, the letters are reproduced to their full extent. In some cases, however, portions of the letters have been omitted because they are not of general interest. A number of letters, for example, begin with personal remarks by Sri Aurobindo unrelated to the more substantial remarks which follow; these personal openings have often been removed. In some letters, Sri Aurobindo marked the transition

from one part of a letter to another with a phrase such as "As to"; these transitional phrases have often been retained and stand at the beginning of abbreviated letters — that is, letters in which the first part of the letter has been omitted or placed elsewhere.

A number of letters, or portions of them, have been published in more than one volume of THE COMPLETE WORKS OF SRI AUROBINDO. Most of this doubling of letters occurs between *Letters on Yoga* and *Letters on Himself and the Ashram*. The form of these letters is not always the same in both places. In *Letters on Himself and the Ashram*, the manuscript version of a given letter has often been used because it contains Sri Aurobindo's remarks on himself or the Mother or members of the Ashram. These personal remarks, as noted above, were usually removed by Sri Aurobindo when he revised the letter for publication as a letter on Yoga. This revised form of the letter has generally been reproduced in *Letters on Yoga*. Thus, a number of letters are available both in their original form and their revised form.

As in previous collections of Sri Aurobindo's letters, the names of Ashram members and others have often been replaced by the letters X, Y, Z, etc. In any given letter, X stands for the first name replaced, Y for the second, Z for the third, A for the fourth, and so on. An X in a given letter has no necessary relation to an X in another letter. Names of Ashram members to whom Sri Aurobindo referred not as sadhaks but as holders of a certain position — notably Nolini Kanta Gupta in his position as Sri Aurobindo's secretary — are given in full. Sometimes the names of people who played a role in the history of the period are also given.

In his letters Sri Aurobindo sometimes wrote Sanskrit words in the devanagari script; these words have been transliterated into roman script in this edition. Words in Bengali script have likewise been transliterated. This policy is in accord with the practice followed in Sri Aurobindo's lifetime.

The reader may note that Sri Aurobindo almost always spelled the word "Asram" without an "h" in his manuscripts. Around 1945, due to failing eyesight, he began dictating most of his writings to his amanuensis Nirodbaran; Nirodbaran sometimes spelled the word without an "h", sometimes with one. In the present edition, the word is always spelled as it occurs in the manuscripts, both those of Sri

Aurobindo and of Nirodbaran. In headings and other editorial matter, the spelling “Ashram” has been used, since this is now the official spelling of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram.

Letters on Yoga

II



Sri Aurobindo

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Letters on Yoga — II

Publisher's Note

Letters on Yoga—II comprises letters written by Sri Aurobindo on the practice of the Integral Yoga. It is the second of four volumes of *Letters on Yoga*, arranged by the editors as follows:

- I. Foundations of the Integral Yoga
- II. Practice of the Integral Yoga
- III. Experiences and Realisations in the Integral Yoga
- IV. Transformation of Human Nature in the Integral Yoga

The letters in these volumes have been selected from the large body of letters that Sri Aurobindo wrote to disciples and others between 1927 and 1950. Other letters from this period are published in *Letters on Poetry and Art* and *Letters on Himself and the Ashram*, volumes 27 and 35 of THE COMPLETE WORKS OF SRI AUROBINDO. Letters written before 1927 are reproduced in *Autobiographical Notes and Other Writings of Historical Interest*, volume 36 of THE COMPLETE WORKS.

During Sri Aurobindo's lifetime, relatively few of his letters were published. Three small books of letters on Yoga were brought out in the 1930s. A more substantial collection came out between 1947 and 1951 in a four-volume series entitled *Letters of Sri Aurobindo* (including one volume of letters on poetry and literature). In 1958, many more letters were included in the two large tomes of *On Yoga—II*. A further expanded collection in three volumes entitled *Letters on Yoga* was published in 1970 as part of the Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary Library. The present collection, also entitled *Letters on Yoga*, constitutes volumes 28–31 of THE COMPLETE WORKS. These volumes incorporate previously published letters and contain many new ones as well. About one-third of the letters in the present volume were not published in the Centenary Library.

The present volume is arranged by subject in three parts:

1. The Path of the Integral Yoga
2. The Synthetic Method of the Integral Yoga
3. The Integral Yoga and Other Spiritual Paths

The texts of all the letters have been checked against the available manuscripts, typescripts and printed versions.

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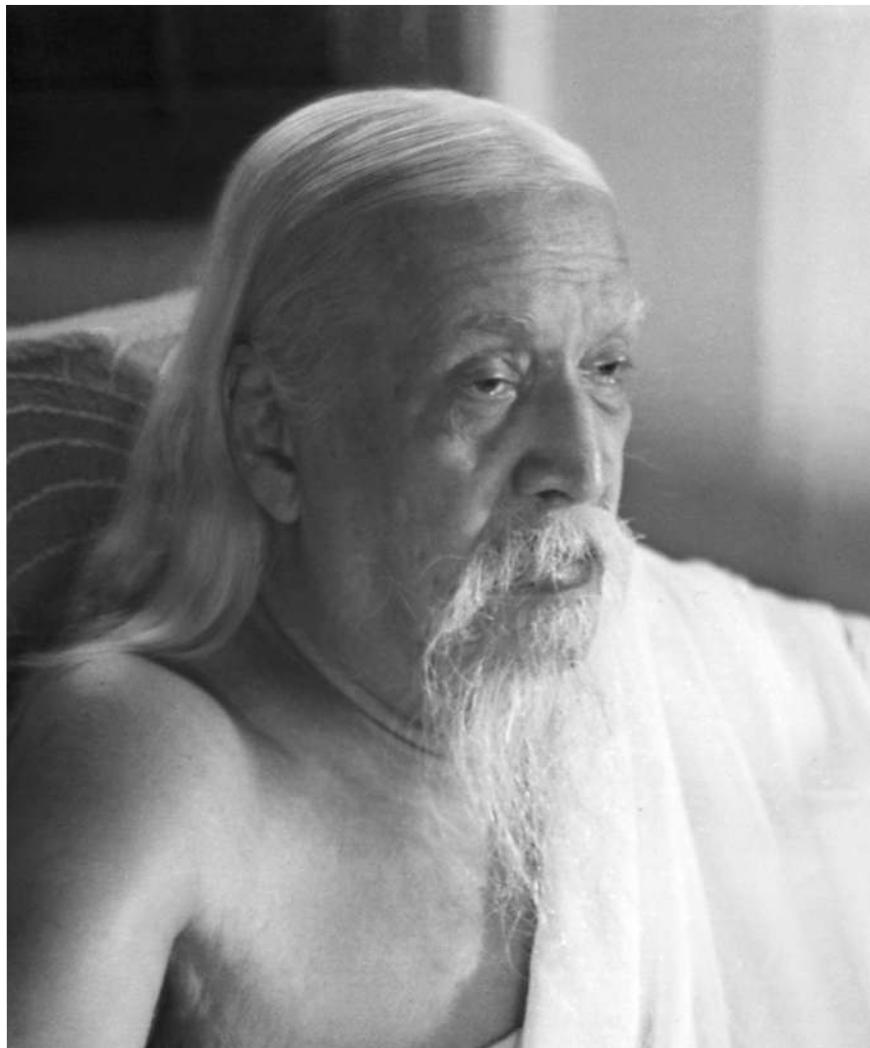
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Sri Aurobindo, 1950

Part One

The Path of the Integral Yoga

Section One

The Path and the Goal

Chapter One

Seeking the Divine

The True Object of Spiritual Seeking

To find the Divine is indeed the first reason for seeking the spiritual Truth and the spiritual life; it is the one thing indispensable and all the rest is nothing without it. The Divine once found, to manifest Him,—that is, first of all to transform one's own limited consciousness into the Divine Consciousness, to live in the infinite Peace, Light, Love, Strength, Bliss, to become that in one's essential nature and, as a consequence, to be its vessel, channel, instrument in one's active nature. To bring into activity the principle of oneness on the material plane or to work for humanity is a mental mistranslation of the Truth—these things cannot be the first or true object of spiritual seeking. We must find the Self, the Divine, then only can we know what is the work the Self or the Divine demands from us. Until then our life and action can only be a help or means towards finding the Divine and it ought not to have any other purpose. As we grow in the inner consciousness, or as the spiritual Truth of the Divine grows in us, our life and action must indeed more and more flow from that, be one with that. But to decide beforehand by our limited mental conceptions what they must be is to hamper the growth of the spiritual Truth within. As that grows we shall feel the Divine Light and Truth, the Divine Power and Force, the Divine Purity and Peace working within us, dealing with our actions as well as our consciousness, making use of them to reshape us into the Divine Image, removing the dross, substituting the pure gold of the Spirit. Only when the Divine Presence is there in us always and the consciousness transformed, can we have the right to say that we are ready to manifest the Divine on the material plane. To hold up a mental ideal or principle and impose that on the inner working brings the danger of limiting ourselves to a mental realisation or of impeding or even falsifying by a

half-way formation the true growth into the full communion and union with the Divine and the free and intimate outflowing of His will in our life. This is a mistake of orientation to which the mind of today is especially prone. It is far better to approach the Divine for the Peace or Light or Bliss that the realisation of Him gives than to bring in these minor things which can divert us from the one thing needful. The divinisation of the material life also as well as the inner life is part of what we see as the Divine Plan, but it can only be fulfilled by an outflowing of the inner realisation, something that grows from within outward, not by the working out of a mental principle.

You have asked what is the discipline to be followed in order to convert the mental seeking into a living spiritual experience. The first necessity is the practice of concentration of your consciousness within yourself. The ordinary human mind has an activity on the surface which veils the real self. But there is another, a hidden consciousness within behind the surface one in which we can become aware of the real self and of a larger, deeper truth of nature, can realise the self and liberate and transform the nature. To quiet the surface mind and begin to live within is the object of this concentration. Of this true consciousness other than the superficial there are two main centres, one in the heart (not the physical heart, but the cardiac centre in the middle of the chest), one in the head. The concentration in the heart opens within and by following this inward opening and going deep one becomes aware of the soul or psychic being, the divine element in the individual. This being unveiled begins to come forward, to govern the nature, to turn it and all its movements towards the Truth, towards the Divine, and to call down into it all that is above. It brings the consciousness of the Presence, the dedication of the being to the Highest and invites the descent into our nature of a greater Force and Consciousness which is waiting above us. To concentrate in the heart centre with the offering of oneself to the Divine and the aspiration for this inward opening and for the Presence in the heart is the first way and, if it can be done, the natural beginning; for its result once obtained makes the spiritual path far more easy and safe than if one begins the other way.

That other way is the concentration in the head, in the mental centre. This, if it brings about the silence of the surface mind, opens up an inner, larger, deeper mind within which is more capable of receiving spiritual experience and spiritual knowledge. But once concentrated here one must open the silent mental consciousness upward to all that is above mind. After a time one feels the consciousness rising upward and in the end it rises beyond the lid which has so long kept it tied in the body and finds a centre above the head where it is liberated into the Infinite. There it begins to come into contact with the universal Self, the Divine Peace, Light, Power, Knowledge, Bliss, to enter into that and become that, to feel the descent of these things into the nature. To concentrate in the head with the aspiration for quietude in the mind and the realisation of the Self and Divine above is the second way of concentration. It is important, however, to remember that the concentration of the consciousness in the head is only a preparation for its rising to the centre above; otherwise one may get shut up in one's own mind and its experiences or at best attain only to a reflection of the Truth above instead of rising into the spiritual transcendence to live there. For some the mental concentration is easier, for some the concentration in the heart centre; some are capable of doing both alternately—but to begin with the heart centre, if one can do it, is the more desirable.

The other side of discipline is with regard to the activities of the nature, of the mind, of the life-self or vital, of the physical being. Here the principle is to accord the nature with the inner realisation so that one may not be divided into two discordant parts. There are here several disciplines or processes possible. One is to offer all the activities to the Divine and call for the inner guidance and the taking up of one's nature by a Higher Power. If there is the inward soul-opening, if the psychic being comes forward, then there is no great difficulty—there comes with it a psychic discrimination, a constant intimation, finally a governance which discloses and quietly and patiently removes all imperfections, brings the right mental and vital movements and reshapes the physical consciousness also. Another method

is to stand back detached from the movements of the mind, life, physical being, to regard their activities as only a habitual formation of general Nature in the individual imposed on us by past workings, not as any part of our real being; in proportion as one succeeds in this, becomes detached, sees mind and its activities as not oneself, life and its activities as not oneself, the body and its activities as not oneself, one becomes aware of an inner Being within us — inner mental, inner vital, inner physical — silent, calm, unbound, unattached which reflects the true Self above and can be its direct representative; from this inner silent Being proceeds a rejection of all that is to be rejected, an acceptance only of what can be kept and transformed, an inmost Will to perfection or a call to the Divine Power to do at each step what is necessary for the change of the Nature. It can also open mind, life and body to the inmost psychic entity and its guiding influence or its direct guidance. In most cases these two methods emerge and work together and finally fuse into one. But one can begin with either, the one that one feels most natural and easy to follow.

Finally, in all difficulties where personal effort is hampered, the help of the Teacher can intervene and bring about what is needed for the realisation or for the immediate step that is necessary.

Motives for Seeking the Divine

Obviously to seek the Divine *only* for what one can get out of Him is not the proper attitude; but if it were absolutely forbidden to seek Him for these things, most people in the world would not turn towards Him at all. I suppose therefore it is allowed so that they may make a beginning—if they have faith, they may get what they ask for and think it a good thing to go on and then one day they may suddenly stumble upon the idea that this is after all not quite the one thing to do and that there are better ways and a better spirit in which one can approach the Divine. If they do not get what they want and still come to the Divine and trust in Him, well, that shows they are getting ready.

Let us look on it as a sort of infants' school for the unready. But of course that is not the spiritual life, it is only a sort of elementary religious approach. For the spiritual life to give and not to demand is the rule. The sadhak however can ask for the Divine Force to aid him in keeping his health or recovering it if he does that as part of his sadhana so that his body may be able and fit for the spiritual life and a capable instrument for the Divine Work.

*

First, it is a great exaggeration to deduce from your difficulties any idea of unfitness or of going away or being sent away or giving up the Yoga. I am certainly not going to pronounce you unfit because you want the Ananda; on such grounds I would have to pronounce myself unfit, because I have myself wanted it and many other things besides. And if I were to send you away because you are not entirely disinterested in the approach to the Divine, I should have, to be consistent, to send practically the whole Asram packing. I do not know why you are allowing yourself to indulge in such black and despondent thoughts — there is no ground for them at all, and I do not think I gave any grounds for them in my letter. Whatever your difficulties, the Mother and I have every intention of seeing you through them, and I think that you too, whatever suggestions your vital depression may make to you at the moment, have every intention of going through to the end of the Path. I imagine you have gone too far on it to go back and, if you wanted to, your psychic being which has persistently pushed you towards it, would not allow such a retreat.

Next, it was not my intention to say that it was wrong to aspire for the Ananda. What I wanted to point out was the condition for the permanent possession of the Ananda (intimations, visits, downrushes of it one can have before); the essential condition for it is a change of consciousness, the coming of peace, light, etc., all that brings about the transition from the normal to the spiritualised nature. And that being so, it is better to make this change of consciousness the first object of the sadhana. On

the other hand, to press for the constant Ananda immediately in a consciousness which is not yet able to retain it, still more to substitute for it lesser (vital) joys and pleasures may very well stop the flow of these spiritual experiences which make the continuous ecstasy eventually possible. But I certainly never intended to say that the Ananda was not to be attained or to insist on your moving towards a *nirānanda* (joyless) Brahman. On the contrary, I said that Ananda was the crown of the Yoga, which surely means that it was part of the highest final *siddhi*.

Whatever one wants sincerely and persistently from the Divine, the Divine is sure to give. If then you want Ananda and go on wanting, you will surely have it in the end. The only question is what is to be the chief power in your seeking, a vital demand or a psychic aspiration manifesting through the heart and communicating itself to the mental and vital and physical consciousness. The latter is the greatest power and makes the shortest way — and besides one has to come to that way sooner or later.

*

Let us first put aside the quite foreign consideration of what we would do if the union with the Divine brought eternal joylessness, Nirvana or torture. Such a thing does not exist and to drag it in only clouds the issue. The Divine is Anandamaya and one can seek him for the Ananda he gives; but he has also in him many other things and one may seek him for any of them, for peace, for liberation, for knowledge, for power, for anything else of which one may feel the pull or the impulse. It is quite possible for someone to say: "Let me have Power from the Divine and do His work or His will and I am satisfied, even if the use of Power entails suffering also." It is possible to shun bliss as a thing too tremendous or ecstatic and ask only or rather for peace, for liberation, for Nirvana. You speak of self-fulfilment, — one may regard the Supreme not as the Divine but as one's highest Self and seek fulfilment of one's being in that highest Self; but one need not envisage it as a self of bliss, ecstasy, Ananda — one may envisage it as a self of freedom, vastness, knowledge,

tranquillity, strength, calm, perfection — perhaps too calm for a ripple of anything so disturbing as joy to enter. So even if it is for something to be gained that one approaches the Divine, it is not a fact that one can approach Him or seek union only for the sake of Ananda and nothing else.

That involves something which throws all your reasoning out of gear. For these are aspects of the Divine Nature, powers of it, states of his being, — but the Divine Himself is something absolute, someone self-existent, not limited by his aspects, — wonderful and ineffable, not existing by them, but they existing because of him. It follows that if he attracts by his aspects, all the more he can attract by his very absolute selfness which is sweeter, mightier, profounder than any aspect. His peace, rapture, light, freedom, beauty are marvellous and ineffable, because he is himself magically, mysteriously, transcendently marvellous and ineffable. He can then be sought after for his wonderful and ineffable self and not only for the sake of one aspect or another of him. The only thing needed for that is, first, to arrive at a point when the psychic being feels this pull of the Divine in himself and, secondly, to arrive at the point when the mind, vital and each thing else begins to feel too that that was what it was wanting and the surface hunt after Ananda or what else was only an excuse for drawing the nature towards that supreme magnet.

Your argument that because we know the union with the Divine will bring Ananda, therefore it must be for the Ananda that we seek the union, is not true and has no force. One who loves a queen may know that if she returns his love it will bring him power, position, riches and yet it need not be for the power, position, riches that he seeks her love. He may love her for herself and could love her equally if she were not a queen; he might have no hope of any return whatever and yet love her, adore her, live for her, die for her simply because she is she. That has happened and men have loved women without any hope of enjoyment or result, loved steadily, passionately after age has come and beauty has gone. Patriots do not love their country only when she is rich, powerful, great and has much to give them; their love for country has been most ardent, passionate, absolute when the

country was poor, degraded, miserable, having nothing to give but loss, wounds, torture, imprisonment, death as the wages of her service; yet even knowing that they would never see her free, men have lived, served and died for her—for her own sake, not for what she could give. Men have loved Truth for her own sake and for what they could seek or find of her, accepted poverty, persecution, death itself; they have been content even to seek for her always, not finding, and yet never given up the search. That means what? That men, country, Truth and other things besides can be loved for their own sake and not for anything else, not for any circumstance or attendant quality or resulting enjoyment, but for something absolute that is either in them or behind their appearance and circumstance. The Divine is more than a man or woman, a stretch of land or a creed, opinion, discovery or principle. He is the Person beyond all persons, the Home and Country of all souls, the Truth of which truths are only imperfect figures. And can He then not be loved and sought for his own sake, as and more than these have been by men even in their lesser selves and nature?

What your reasoning ignores is that which is absolute or tends towards the absolute in man and his seeking as well as in the Divine—something not to be explained by mental reasoning or vital motive. A motive, but a motive of the soul, not of vital desire; a reason not of the mind, but of the self and spirit. An asking too, but the asking that is the soul's inherent aspiration, not a vital longing. That is what comes up when there is the sheer self-giving, when "I seek you for this, I seek you for that" changes to a sheer "I seek you for you." It is that marvellous and ineffable absolute in the Divine that Krishnaprem means when he says, "Not knowledge nor this nor that, but Krishna." The pull of that is indeed a categorical imperative, the self in us drawn to the Divine because of the imperative call of its greater Self, the soul ineffably drawn towards the object of its adoration, because it cannot be otherwise, because it is it and He is He. That is all about it.

I have written all that only to explain what we mean when we speak of seeking the Divine for himself and not for anything

else—so far as it is explicable. Explicable or not, it is one of the most dominant facts of spiritual experience. The call to self-giving is only an expression of this fact. But this does not mean that I object to your asking for Ananda. Ask for that by all means, so long as to ask for it is a need of any part of your being—for these are the things that lead on towards the Divine so long as the absolute inner call that is there all the time does not push itself to the surface. But it is really that that has drawn from the beginning and is there behind—it is the categorical spiritual imperative, the absolute need of the soul for the Divine.

I am not saying that there is to be no Ananda. The self-giving itself is a profound Ananda and what it brings, carries in its wake an inexpressible Ananda—and it is brought by this method sooner than by any other, so that one can say almost, “A self-less self-giving is the best policy.” Only one does not do it out of policy. Ananda is the result, but it is done not for the result, but for the self-giving itself and for the Divine himself—a subtle distinction, it may seem to the mind, but very real.

*

No, what you write in your letter was not at all what the Mother was trying to tell you. The question of *ahaitukī bhakti* and its opposite was settled long ago and the Mother did not intend to return upon it; it is understood that whatever the motive immediately pushing the mind or the vital, an asking for Ananda or knowledge or power, yet if there is a true seeking for the Divine in the being, it must lead eventually to the realisation of the Divine. The soul within has always the inherent (*ahaitukī*) yearning for the Divine; the *hetu* or special motive is simply an impulsion used by it to get the mind and the vital to follow the inner urge. If the mind and the vital can feel and accept the soul's sheer love for the Divine for his own sake, then the sadhana gets its full power and many difficulties disappear; but even if they do not, they will get what they seek after in the Divine and through it they will come to realise something, even perhaps to pass beyond the limit of their original desire. I may say that the idea of a joyless God is an absurdity which only the ignorance of

the mind could engender; the Radha love is not based upon any such thing, but means simply that whatever comes on the way to the Divine, pain or joy, *milana* or *viraha*, and however long the sufferings may last, the Radha love is unshaken and keeps its faith and certitude pointing fixedly like a star to the supreme object of Love.

All this, however, has nothing to do with what the Mother wished to say in the morning. What she told you was that you seemed to have a fixed notion about the Divine, as of a rather distant Being somewhere whom you expect to give you an article called Ananda, and, when there is some prospect of his giving it to you, you are on good terms with him, but when he doesn't, you quarrel and revolt and call him names! And she said a notion of the kind was in itself an obstacle,— because it is rather far from the Truth,— in the way of realising the Divine. What is this Ananda that you seek, after all? The mind can see in it nothing but a pleasant psychological condition,— but if it were only that, it would not be the rapture which the bhaktas and the mystics find in it. When the Ananda comes into you, it is the Divine who comes into you; just as when the Peace flows into you, it is the Divine who is invading you, or when you are flooded with Light, it is the flood of the Divine Himself that is around you. Of course, the Divine is something much more; many other things besides and in them all a Presence, a Being, a Divine Person; for the Divine is Krishna, is Shiva, is the Supreme Mother. But through the Ananda you can perceive the Anandamaya Krishna; for the Ananda is the subtle body and being of Krishna; through the Peace you can perceive the Shantimaya Shiva; in the Light, in the delivering Knowledge, the Love, the fulfilling and uplifting Power you can meet the presence of the Divine Mother. It is this perception that makes the experiences of the bhaktas and mystics so rapturous and enables them to pass more easily through the nights of anguish and separation— when there is this soul-perception, it gives to even a little or brief Ananda a force or value it would not otherwise have and the Ananda itself gathers by it a growing power to stay, to return, to increase. This was what the Mother meant

when she said, "Don't ask the Divine to give you Ananda, ask Him to give you Himself"—signifying that in the Ananda and through the Ananda it would be Himself that He would give you. There would then be no cause to say, "I do not know the Divine. I have never felt or met Him"; it would be a gate too for other experiences and make it easier to see the Divine in the material object, in the human form, in the body.

It was not a condition that the Mother was laying down when she said this; it was simply a suggestion which, if something in you could seize and profit by it, would make things less slow and difficult than they actually are.

Dedication to the Spiritual Life

This Yoga demands a total dedication of the life to the aspiration for the discovery and embodiment of the Divine Truth and to nothing else whatever. To divide your life between the Divine and some outward aim and activity that has nothing to do with the search for the Truth is inadmissible. The least thing of that kind would make success in the Yoga impossible.

You must go inside yourself and enter into a complete dedication to the spiritual life. All clinging to mental preferences must fall away from you, all insistence on vital aims and interests and attachments must be put away, all egoistic clinging to family, friends, country must disappear if you want to succeed in Yoga. Whatever has to come as outgoing energy or action, must proceed from the Truth once discovered and not from the lower mental or vital motives, from the Divine Will and not from personal choice or the preferences of the ego.

*

It is a universally accepted principle of the spiritual endeavour that one must be prepared to sacrifice everything without reserve in order to reach the Divine through a spiritualised consciousness. If self-development on the mental, vital and physical plane is his aim that is another matter—that life is the life of the ego with the soul kept behind undeveloped or half developed.

But for the spiritual seeker the only development he seeks is the development of the psychic and spiritual consciousness and that too, only because it is necessary to reach and to serve the Divine, not for its own sake. Whatever mental, vital, physical development or use of faculties can be made part of the spiritual life and an instrumentation for the Divine can be kept on condition of surrender of them for transformation and restatement on the spiritual basis. But they must not be kept for their own sake or for the sake of the ego or considered as one's own possession or used for one's own purpose but only for the sake of the Divine.

As for James' statement¹ it is of course true except in so far as the politician can indulge in other things as hobbies for his leisure hours, but if he wants to succeed as a politician he must give his best energies to politics. Conversely if Shakespeare or Newton had spent part of their energies in politics they would not have been able to reach such heights in poetry and in science or even if they had they would have done much less. The main energies have to be concentrated on one thing; the others can only be minor pursuits at leisure or for distraction or interests rather than pursuits useful for keeping up a general culture.

*

All depends on the aim of the life. To one whose aim is to discover and possess the highest spiritual truth and the divine life, I do not think a University post can count for much, nor do I see that there can be any practical connection between them. It might be different if the aim were the life of a writer and thinker on the intellectual level only without any higher flight or deeper seeking. I do not see that your unwillingness to commit yourself to this kind of work is due to any weakness. It is rather that only a small part of your nature, and that not the deepest or strongest part, would be satisfied with it or with the atmosphere in which it would have to be done.

¹ The correspondent wrote: "Prof. James even says [in *Principles of Psychology*] about the 'social me' and other 'me's, that one has to suppress several of them in order to achieve one or two main aims in life. A politician, in order to concentrate on politics alone, has to let go his tendency for music or painting or social fame or family affections." — Ed.

In these matters it is not the thinking mind but the vital being—the life-force and the desire nature—or some part of it at least, that usually determines men's action and their choice—when it is not some outward necessity or pressure that compels or mainly influences the decision. The mind is only an interpreting, justifying and devising agent. By your taking up the sadhana this part of your vital being has had a pressure put upon it from above and within which has discouraged its old turn of desires and tendencies, its past grooves, those which would have decided its direction before; this vital has, as is often one first result, fallen silent and neutral. It is no longer strongly moved towards the ordinary life; it has not yet received from or through the psychic centre and the higher mental will a sufficient illumination and impulse to take up a new vital movement and run vigorously on the road to a new life. That is the reason for the listlessness of which you speak and the mistiness of the future. Men do not know themselves and have not learned to distinguish these different parts of the being which are usually lumped together as mind; they do not understand their own states and actions, or, if at all, then only on the surface. It is part of the foundation of Yoga to become conscious of the complexity of the nature, see the different forces that move it and get over it a control of directing knowledge.

The remedy can only come from the parts of the being that are already turned towards the Light. To call in the light of the divine consciousness, bring the psychic being to the front and kindle a flame of aspiration which will awaken spiritually the outer mind and set on fire the vital being, is the way out. It is usually a psychic awakening or a series of strong experiences by which the sadhak comes out of this intermediary no man's land of the quiescent vital (few can avoid altogether this passage through a neutral vital indifference) into the full dynamic course of the spiritual movement.

*

It is not absolutely necessary to abandon the ordinary life in order to seek after the Light or to practise Yoga. This is usually

done by those who want to make a clean cut, to live a purely religious or exclusively inner and spiritual life, to renounce the world entirely and to depart from the cosmic existence by cessation of the human birth and a passing away into some higher state or into the transcendental Reality. Otherwise it is only necessary when the pressure of the inner urge becomes so great that the pursuit of the ordinary life is no longer compatible with the pursuit of the dominant spiritual objective. Till then what is necessary is a power to practise an inner isolation, to be able to retire within oneself and concentrate at any time on the necessary spiritual purpose. There must also be a power to deal with the ordinary outer life from a new inner attitude and one can then make the happenings of that life itself a means for the inner change of nature and the growth in spiritual experience.

Chapter Two

The Aim of the Integral Yoga

A Yoga of Divine Life

You have apparently a call and may be fit for Yoga; but there are different paths and each has a different aim and end before it. It is common to all the paths to conquer the desires, to put aside the ordinary relations of life, and to try to pass from uncertainty to everlasting certitude. One may also try to conquer dream and sleep, thirst and hunger etc. But it is no part of my Yoga to have nothing to do with the world or with life or to kill the senses or entirely inhibit their action. It is the object of this Yoga to transform life by bringing down into it the Light, Power and Bliss of the divine Truth and its dynamic certitudes. This Yoga is not a Yoga of world-shunning asceticism, but of divine Life. Your object, on the other hand, can only be gained by entering into Samadhi and ceasing in it from all connection with world-existence.

*

The way of Yoga followed here has a different purpose from others,—for its aim is not only to rise out of the ordinary ignorant world-consciousness into the divine consciousness, but to bring the supramental power of that divine consciousness down into the ignorance of mind, life and body, to transform them, to manifest the Divine here and create a divine life in Matter. This is an exceedingly difficult aim and difficult Yoga; to many or most it will seem impossible. All the established forces of the ordinary ignorant world-consciousness are opposed to it and deny it and try to prevent it, and the sadhak will find his own mind, life and body full of the most obstinate impediments to its realisation. If you can accept the ideal whole-heartedly, face all the difficulties, leave the past and its ties behind you and are ready to give up everything and risk everything for this divine

possibility, then only can you hope to discover by experience the Truth behind it.

The sadhana of this Yoga does not proceed through any set mental teaching or prescribed forms of meditation, mantras or others, but by aspiration, by a self-concentration inwards or upwards, by self-opening to an Influence, to the Divine Power above us and its workings, to the Divine Presence in the heart, and by the rejection of all that is foreign to these things. It is only by faith, aspiration and surrender that this self-opening can come.

*

The aim of the Yoga is to open the consciousness to the Divine, to live in the inner consciousness more and more while acting from it on the external life, to bring the inmost psychic into the front and by the power of the psychic to purify and change the being so that it may become ready for transformation and in union with the Divine Knowledge, Will and Love. Secondly, to develop the Yogic consciousness—i.e. to universalise the being on all the planes, become aware of the cosmic being and cosmic forces and be in union with the Divine on all the planes up to the Overmind. Thirdly, to come into contact with the transcendent Divine, beyond the Overmind, through the supramental consciousness, supramentalise the consciousness and the nature and make oneself an instrument for the realisation of the dynamic Divine Truth and its transforming descent into the earth-nature.

A Yoga Not for Ourselves

Well, I once wrote in my callow days, “Our Yoga is not for ourselves but humanity” — that was in the *Bande Mataram* times. To get out of the hole self-created I had to explain that it was no longer for humanity, but for the Divine. The “not for ourselves” remained intact.

*

Quite possible and practical and a very rapturous thing [*is absolute surrender to the Divine*] as anyone who has done it can tell you. It is also the easiest and most powerful way of “getting the Divine”. So it is the best policy also. The phrase [“*for the Divine*”], however, means that the object of the Yoga is to enter into and be possessed by the Divine Presence and Consciousness, to love the Divine for the Divine’s sake alone, to be turned in our nature into nature of the Divine and in our will and works and life to be the instrument of the Divine. Its object is not to be a great Yogi or a superman (although that may come) or to grab at the Divine for the sake of the ego’s power, pride or pleasure. It is not for salvation though liberation comes by it and all else may come; but these must not be our objects. The Divine alone is our object.

*

To come to this Yoga merely with the idea of being a superman would be an act of vital egoism which would defeat its own object. Those who put this object in the front of their preoccupations invariably come to grief, spiritually and otherwise. The aim of this Yoga is, first, to enter into the divine consciousness by merging into it the separative ego (incidentally, in doing so one finds one’s true individual self which is not the limited, vain and selfish human ego but a portion of the Divine) and, secondly, to bring down the supramental consciousness on earth to transform mind, life and body. All else can be only a result of these two aims, not the primary object of the Yoga.

The extreme difficulty of these two aims has never been concealed from the sadhakas; on the contrary, difficulties and dangers have been overemphasised, rather than minimised. If still they choose and persist in this path, it is supposed that they are ready to risk everything, sacrifice everything, surrender everything in order to achieve this end or help towards its achievement.

*

You must get out of certain wrong ideas that you seem to have

about Yoga, for these are dangerous and ought to be thrown away by every sadhak:

(1) The object of Yoga is not to become “like” Sri Aurobindo or the Mother. Those who cherish this idea easily come to the further idea that they can become their equals and even greater. This is only to feed the ego.

(2) The object of Yoga is not to get power or to be more powerful than others or to have great siddhis or to do great or wonderful or miraculous things.

(3) The object of Yoga is not to be a great Yogi or a superman. This is an egoistic way of taking the Yoga and can lead to no good; avoid it altogether.

(4) To talk about the supramental and think of bringing it down in yourself is the most dangerous of all. It may bring an entire megalomania and loss of balance. What the sadhak has to seek is the full opening to the Divine, the psychic change of his consciousness, the spiritual change. Of that change of consciousness, selflessness, desirelessness, humility, bhakti, surrender, calm, equality, peace, quiet, sincerity are necessary constituents. Until he has the psychic and spiritual change, to think of being supramental is an absurdity and an arrogant absurdity.

All these egoistic ideas, if indulged, can only aggrandise the ego, spoil the sadhana and lead to serious spiritual dangers. They should be rejected altogether.

*

Making fulfilment etc. the aim encourages an ego-centric attitude. Fulfilment, liberation, bliss etc. will come, but as a result of union with the Divine, not as a personal object of the sadhana.

Not Liberation But Transformation

Peace is a necessary basis, but peace is not sufficient. Peace if it is strong and permanent can liberate the inner being which can become a calm and unmoved witness of the external movements. That is the liberation of the Sannyasin. In some cases it can liberate the external also, throwing the old nature out into

the environmental consciousness, but even this is liberation, not transformation.

*

Spiritual liberation means to be free from ego and from the imprisonment in the mind and vital and physical nature and to be conscious of the spiritual Self and live in that consciousness.

Spiritual perfection and fulfilment means that the nature should be spiritualised, new-formed in the consciousness of the free Self and the divine consciousness of infinity, purity, light, power, bliss and knowledge.

*

In the Brahmanic condition one feels the self to be untouched and pure — but the nature remains imperfect. The ordinary Sannyasin does not care about that, because it is not his object to perfect the nature, but to separate himself from it.

*

The negative means [*of sadhana*] are not evil — they are useful for their object which is to get away from life. But from the positive point of view, they are disadvantageous because they get rid of the powers of the being instead of divinising them for the transformation of life.

Divinisation and Transformation

The fundamental difference is in the teaching that there is a dynamic divine Truth (the Supermind) and that into the present world of Ignorance that Truth can descend, create a new Truth-consciousness and divinise Life. The old Yogas go straight from mind to the absolute Divine, regard all dynamic existence as Ignorance, Illusion or Lila: when you enter the static and immutable Divine Truth, they say, you pass out of cosmic existence.

*

They [*the ancient Yogas*] aimed at realisation and did not care

about divinisation, except the Tantric and some others. The aim however even in these was rather to become saints and siddhas than anything else.

*

If your soul always aspires for the transformation, then that is what you have to follow after. To seek the Divine or rather some aspect of the Divine — for one cannot entirely realise the Divine if there is no transformation — may be enough for some, but not for those whose soul's aspiration is for the entire divine change.

*

Unless the external nature is transformed, one may go as high as possible and have the largest experiences — but the external mind remains an instrument of the Ignorance.

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If the presence of the Divine is established, it means that the being is ready for the transformation which proceeds naturally.

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The full transformation is the result of union with the divine consciousness.

*

To be in full union with the Divine is the final aim. When one has some kind of constant union, one can be called a Yogi, but the union has to be made complete. There are Yogis who have only the union on the spiritual plane, others who are united in mind and heart, others in the vital also. In our Yoga our aim is to be united too in the physical consciousness and on the supramental plane.

Section Two

Basic Requisites of the Path

Chapter One

The Call and the Capacity

The Call

This Yoga is a special way to a high and difficult spiritual achievement. It is given only when there is sufficient evidence of capacity or an irresistible call. Inner peace is not its object; that is only one of the elementary conditions for it.

*

The goal of Yoga is always hard to reach, but this one is more difficult than any other, and it is only for those who have the call, the capacity, the willingness to face everything and every risk, even the risk of failure, and the will to progress towards an entire selflessness, desirelessness and surrender.

*

This Yoga implies not only the realisation of God, but an entire consecration and change of the inner and outer life till it is fit to manifest a divine consciousness and become part of a divine work. This means an inner discipline far more exacting and difficult than mere ethical and physical austerities. One must not enter on this path, far vaster and more arduous than most ways of Yoga, unless one is sure of the psychic call and of one's readiness to go through to the end.

*

By readiness I did not mean capacity but willingness. If there is the will within to face all difficulties and go through, no matter how long it takes, then the path can be taken.

*

A mere restless dissatisfaction with the ordinary life is not a sufficient preparation for this Yoga. A positive inner call, a

strong will and a great steadiness are necessary for success in the spiritual life.

*

Knowledge of the way is not enough — one must tread it, or if one cannot do that, allow oneself to be carried along it. The human vital and physical external nature resist to the very end, but if the soul has once heard the call, it arrives, sooner or later.

*

What you write [*about the urge of the soul*] is quite accurate about the true soul, the psychic being. But people mean different things when they speak of the soul. Sometimes it is what I have called in the *Arya* the desire soul,—that is the vital with its mixed aspirations, desires, hungers of all kinds good and bad, its emotions, finer and grosser, or sensational urges crossed by the mind's idealisings and psychic stresses. But sometimes it is also the mind and vital under the stress of a psychic urge. The psychic so long as it is veiled must express itself through the mind and vital and its aspirations are mixed and coloured there by the vital and mental stuff. Thus the veiled psychic urge may express itself in the mind by a hunger in the thought for the knowledge of the Divine, what the Europeans call the intellectual love of God. In the vital it may express itself as a hunger or hankering after the Divine. This can bring much suffering because of the nature of the vital, its unquiet passions, desires, ardours, troubled emotions, cloudings, depressions, despairs. The psychic can have a psychic sorrow when things go against its diviner yearnings, but this sorrow has in it no touch of torment, depression or despair. Nevertheless all cannot approach, at least cannot at once approach the Divine in the pure psychic way — the mental and vital approaches are often necessary beginnings and better from the spiritual point of view than an insensitiveness to the Divine. It is in both cases a call of the soul, the soul's urge — it only takes a form or colour due to the stress of the mind or vital nature.

*

For those who have within them a sincere call for the Divine, however the mind or vital may present difficulties or attacks come or the progress be slow and painful,— even if they fall back or fall away from the path for a time, the psychic always prevails in the end and the Divine Help proves effective. Trust in that and persevere — then the goal is sure.

*

There is only one logic in spiritual things: when a demand is there for the Divine, a sincere call, it is bound one day to have its fulfilment. It is only if there is a strong insincerity somewhere, a hankering after something else — power, ambition, etc. — which counterbalances the inner call that the logic is no longer applicable. Supramental realisation is another matter: I am speaking now of the realisation of the Divine, of the contact with the Divine, through whatever lever, heart or mind, or both. In your case it is likely to come through the heart, through increase of bhakti or psychic purification of the heart: that is why I was pressing the psychic way upon you. I do not mean that nothing can come through meditation for you, but probably — barring the unexpected — only after the heart-experience.

Do not allow these wrong ideas and feelings to govern you or your state of depression to dictate your decisions: try to keep a firm central will for the realisation — you can do so if you make up your mind to it — these things are not impossible for you; they are within the scope of your nature which is strong. You will find that the obstinate spiritual difficulty disappears in the end like a mirage. It belongs to the maya and, where the inner call is sincere, cannot hold even the outer consciousness always: its apparent solidity will dissolve.

Turning towards the Divine

An idealistic notion or a religious belief or emotion is something quite different from getting spiritual light. An idealistic notion might turn you towards getting spiritual light, but it is not the light itself.

It is true however that “the spirit bloweth where it listeth”, and that one can get some initial impulse or touch of mental realisation of spiritual things from almost any circumstance, as Bilwamangal got it from the words of his courtesan mistress. Obviously it happens because something is ready somewhere, —if you like, the psychic being waiting for its chance and taking some opportunity in mind, vital or heart to knock open a window somewhere.

*

Mental idealism can only have an effect if one has a strong will in the mind capable of forcing the vital to follow.

*

The push to drown oneself in the Divine is very rare. It is usually a mental idea, a vital fumbling or some quite inadequate reason that starts the thing—or else no reason at all. The only reality is the occult psychic push behind of which the surface consciousness is not aware or else hardly aware.

*

Your influence on him for turning towards the Yoga was good, but it was not able to change his vital nature. No human influence—which can only be mental and moral—can do that. You can see that he is just what he was before. It is only from the sadhak’s own soul turning towards the Divine [*that the change can come*].

*

It is so with everybody. Part of the nature turns to the Divine, another part does not give its consent at all; it either revolts or remains dully discontented or only pretends to acquiesce. It is only by making the whole being turn whole-heartedly to the Divine that one can enter fully into the Yoga.

Spiritual Destiny

When someone is destined for the Path all circumstances,

through all the deviations of mind and life, help in one way or another to lead him to it. It is his own psychic being within him and the Divine Power above that use to that end the vicissitudes both of mind and outward circumstance.

*

A spiritual opportunity is not a thing that should be lightly thrown away with the idea that it will be all right some other time — one cannot be so sure of the other time. Besides, these things leave a mark and at the place of the mark there can be a recurrence.

*

The spiritual destiny always stands — it may be delayed or seem to be lost for a time, but it is never abolished.

Capacity for Yoga

All can do some kind of Yoga according to their nature, if they have the will to it. But there are few of whom it can be said that they have capacity for this Yoga. Only some can develop a capacity, others cannot. What X wants is peace and something to carry her through the trials of life — she is not ready for more.

*

In sadhana it is not by the personal capacity that things are done. It is the Divine Power that works and if one makes oneself its instrument, even what is impossible for the personal capacity can be done.

*

When one once enters into the true (Yogic) consciousness, then you see that everything can be done, even if at present only a slight beginning has been made; but a beginning is enough, once the Force, the Power are there. It is not really on the capacity of the outer nature that success depends, (for the outer nature all self-exceeding seems impossibly difficult), but on the inner being and to the inner being all is possible. One has only to get

into contact with the inner being and change the outer view and consciousness from the inner—that is the work of the sadhana and it is sure to come with sincerity, aspiration and patience.

*

You must realise that these moods are attacks which should be rejected at once—for they repose on nothing but suggestions of self-distrust and incapacity which have no meaning, since it is by the Grace of the Divine and the aid of a Force greater than your own, not by personal capacity and worth that you can attain the goal of the sadhana. You have to remember that and dissociate yourself from these suggestions when they come, never accept or yield to them. No sadhak even if he had the capacity of the ancient Rishis and Tapaswis or the strength of a Vivekananda can hope to keep during the early years of his sadhana a continuous good condition or union with the Divine or an unbroken call or height of aspiration. It takes a long time to spiritualise the whole nature and until that is done, variations must come. A constant trust and patience must be cultivated—must be acquired—not least when things go against—for when they are favourable, trust and patience are easy.

*

Spiritual capacity means simply a natural capacity for true spiritual experience and development. It can be had on any plane, but the natural result is that one gets easily into touch with the Self and the higher planes.

Fitness for Yoga

Nobody is fit for the sadhana — i.e. nobody can do it by his sole capacity. It is a question of preparing oneself to bring in fully the Force not one's own that can do it with one's consent and aspiration.

*

It is useless to raise the question of fitness. No one is fit — for all human beings are full of faults and incapacities — even the greatest sadhaks are not free. It is a question only of aspiration, of believing in the divine Grace and letting the Divine work in you, not making a refusal.

*

It is difficult to say that any particular quality makes one fit or the lack of it unfit. One may have strong sex impulses, doubts, revolts and yet succeed in the end, while another may fail. If one has a fundamental sincerity, a will to go through in spite of all things and a readiness to be guided, that is the best security in the sadhana.

*

Fitness for Yoga is a very relative term — the real fitness comes by the soul's call and the power to open oneself to the Divine. If you have that, you have the fitness, and your past actions cannot stand in the way: the past cannot bind the future. Of course, you have to finish with it, reject it and turn into the new ways — otherwise the past remains the present. But that is the question of the will in you and the soul's call. If you are faithful to your soul's call there is no reason why you should not be able to do Yoga. All that you have to do is to keep your aspiration and not lose the inner connection that has been made — then the Mother's thought and the help will be with you and you will find your way.

*

You speak of your possible unfitness, but it is not a question of fitness or unfitness. There is nobody who can go on in his own strength or by right of his fitness to the goal of the sadhana. It is only by the Divine Grace and reliance on the Divine Grace that it can be done. It is in a strength greater than your own that you must put your first and last reliance. If your faith falters you have to call on that to sustain you; if your force is insufficient against the ill-will and opposition that surround

you, open yourself to receive that force in its place.

*

The Mother's help and mine are always there for you. You have only to turn fully towards it and it will act on you.

What has come across is these wrong ideas about your unfitness, about bad things in you that prevent you from receiving the Mother's grace, about the lack of aspiration which prevents you from having realisation and experience. These thoughts are quite wrong and untrue — they are not even your own thoughts, they are suggestions thrown on you just as they are thrown on the other sadhaks and intended to produce depression. There is no unfitness, no bad thing inside that comes across, no lack of aspiration causing the cessation of experience. It is the depression, the self-distrust, the readiness to despair which are the only cause; there is no other. To all sadhaks, as I wrote to you, even to the best and strongest there come interruptions in the flow of the sadhana; that is not a cause for thinking oneself unfit and wanting to go away with the idea that there is no hope. A little quietude would bring back the flow. You were having the necessary experiences, the necessary progress and it was only a coming forward of some difficulties of the physical consciousness that stopped them for a time. That happens to all and is not particular to you, as I explained to you. These difficulties always come and have to be overcome. Once overcome by the working of the Force, the sadhana goes on as before. But you began to entertain this wrong idea of unfitness and lack of aspiration as the cause and got entirely depressed. You must shake all that off and refuse to believe in the thought-suggestions that come to you. No sadhak ought ever to indulge thoughts of unfitness and hopelessness — they are quite irrelevant because it is not one's personal fitness and worthiness that makes one succeed, but the Mother's grace and power and the consent of the soul to her grace and the workings of her Force.

Turn from these dark thoughts and look to the Mother only, not with impatience for the result and desire, but with trust and confidence and let her workings bring you quietude

and the renewal of the progress towards the psychic opening and realisation. That will bring surely and without doubt the fuller faith and the love which you seek.

*

I repeat what I said before (though your physical mind does not yet believe) that these experiences show at once that your inner being is a Yogi capable of trance, ecstasy, intensest bhakti, fully aware of Yoga and Yoga consciousness, and showing himself the very moment you get inside yourself, even as the outer man is very much the other way round, modernised, externalised, vigorously outward-vital (for the Yogi is inward-vital and psychic) and knowing nothing of Yoga or the world of inner experience. I could see at once when I saw you that there was this inner Yогин and your former experiences here were quite convincing to anyone who knows anything at all about these things. When there is this inner Yогин inside, the coming to the way of Yoga is sure and not even the most externalised surface consciousness — not even a regular *homo Russelicus* outside and you are not that, only a little *Russelicatus* on the surface, — can prevent final success in the Yoga. But the tussle between the inward and the outward man can create a lot of trouble, because the inward man pushes towards the Divine and will not let go and the outward man regrets, repines, pulls back, asks what is this shadowy thing to which he is being brought, this Unknown, this (to him) far-off Ineffable. That, and not merely sex, food or society, is the genesis of the struggle and trouble in you. And yet it is all a misunderstanding — for if the outer gave way entirely to the inner Yogi, he would find that what he lost or thought he was losing would be repaid a hundredfold — though he would get it in another spirit and consciousness, not any longer the transient and deceptive delight of the world for its own sake, but the delight of the Divine in the world, a thousand times more intense, sweet and desirable.

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The vision of the Light and the vision of the Lord in the form of

Jagannath are both of them indications that he has the capacity for Yoga experience and that there is a call of the Divine on his inner being. But capacity is not enough; there must be also the will to seek after the Divine and courage and persistence in following the path. Fear is the first thing that must be thrown away and, secondly, the inertia of the outer being which has prevented him from responding to the call.

The Light is the light of the Divine Consciousness. The aim of this Yoga is first to come into contact with this consciousness and then to live in its light and allow the light to transform the whole nature, so that the being may live in union with the Divine and the nature become a field for the action of the Divine Knowledge, the Divine Power and the Divine Ananda.

He can succeed in that only if he makes it the supreme object of his life and is prepared to subordinate everything else to this one aim. Otherwise all that can be done is only to make some preparation in this life—a first contact and some preliminary spiritual change in part of the nature.

Capacity of Westerners for Yoga

The best way to answer your letter will be, I think, to take separately the questions implied in it. I will begin with the conclusion you have drawn of the impossibility of the Yoga for a non-Oriental nature.

I cannot see any ground for such a conclusion; it is contrary to all experience. Europeans throughout the centuries have practised with success spiritual disciplines which were akin to Oriental Yogas and have followed too ways of the inner life which came to them from the East. Their non-Oriental nature did not stand in their way. The approach and experiences of Plotinus and the European mystics who derived from him were identical, as has been shown recently, with the approach and experiences of one type of Indian Yoga. Especially, since the introduction of Christianity Europeans have followed its mystic disciplines which were one in essence with those of Asia, however much they may have differed in forms, names and symbols.

If the question be of Indian Yoga itself in its own characteristic forms, here too the supposed inability is contradicted by experience. In early times Greeks and Scythians from the West as well as Chinese and Japanese and Cambodians from the East followed without difficulty Buddhist or Hindu disciplines; at the present day an increasing number of occidentals have taken to Vedantic or Vaishnava or other Indian spiritual practices and this objection of incapacity or unsuitableness has never been made either from the side of the disciples or from the side of the Masters. I do not see, either, *why* there should be any such unbridgeable gulf; for there is no essential difference between spiritual life in the East and spiritual life in the West,—what difference there is has always been of names, forms and symbols or else of the emphasis laid on one special aim or another or on one side or another of psychological experience. Even here differences are often alleged which do not exist or else are not so great as they appear. I have seen it alleged by a Christian writer (who does not seem to have shared your friend X's objection to these scholastic (?) distinctions) that Hindu spiritual thought and life acknowledged or followed after only the Transcendent and neglected the Immanent Divinity while Christianity gave due place to both Aspects; but, in matter of fact, Indian spirituality, even if it laid the final stress on the Highest beyond form and name, yet gave ample recognition and place to the Divine immanent in the world and the Divine immanent in the human being. Indian spirituality has, it is true, a wider and more minute knowledge behind it; it has followed hundreds of different paths, admitted every kind of approach to the Divine and has thus been able to enter into fields which are outside the less ample scope of occidental practice; but that makes no difference to the essentials, and it is the essentials alone that matter.

Your explanation of the ability of many Westerners to practise Indian Yoga seems to be that they have a Hindu temperament in a European or American body. As Gandhi is inwardly a moralistic Westerner and Christian, so, you say, the other non-Oriental members of the Asram are essentially Hindus in outlook. But

what exactly is this Hindu outlook? I have not myself seen anything in them that can be so described nor has the Mother. My own experience contradicts entirely your explanation. I knew very well Sister Nivedita (she was for many years a friend and a comrade in the political field) and met Sister Christine,— the two closest European disciples of Vivekananda. Both were Westerners to the core and had nothing at all of the Hindu outlook; although Sister Nivedita, an Irishwoman, had the power of penetrating by an intense sympathy into the ways of life of the people around her, her own nature remained non-Oriental to the end. Yet she found no difficulty in arriving at realisation on the lines of Vedanta. Here in this Asram I have found the members of it who came from the West (I include especially those who have been here longest) typically occidental with all the quality and also all the difficulties of the Western mind and temperament and they have had to cope with their difficulties, just as the Indian members have been obliged to struggle with the limitations and obstacles created by *their* temperament and training. No doubt, they have accepted in principle the conditions of the Yoga; but they had no Hindu outlook when they came and I do not think they have tried to acquire one. Why should they do so? It is not the Hindu outlook or the Western that fundamentally matters in Yoga, but the psychic turn and the spiritual urge, and these are the same everywhere.

What are the differences after all from the viewpoint of Yoga between the sadhak of Indian and the sadhak of occidental birth? You say the Indian has his Yoga half done for him,— first, because he has his psychic much more directly open to the Transcendent Divine. Leaving out the adjective, (for it is not many who are by nature drawn to the Transcendent, most seek more readily the Personal, the Divine immanent here, especially if they can find it in a human body), there is there no doubt an advantage. It arises simply from the strong survival in India of an atmosphere of spiritual seeking, and a long tradition of practice and experience, while in Europe the atmosphere has been lost, the tradition interrupted and both have to be rebuilt. There is an absence too of the *essential* doubt which so much afflicts

the minds of Europeans or, it may be added, of Europeanised Indians, although that does not prevent a great activity of a practical and very operative kind of doubt in the Indian sadhak. But when you speak of indifference to fellow human beings in any deeper aspect, I am unable to follow your meaning. My own experience is that the attachment to persons — to mother, father, wife, children, friends — not out of sense of duty or social relationship, but through close heart-ties is quite as strong as in Europe and often more intense; it is one of the great stumbling blocks in the way, some succumbing to the pull and many even advanced sadhaks being still unable to get it out of their blood and their vital fibre. The impulse to set up a “spiritual” or a “psychic” relationship with others — very usually covering a vital mixture which distracts them from the one aim — is a persistently common feature. There is no difference here between Western and Eastern human nature. Only the teaching in India is of old standing that all must be turned towards the Divine and everything else either sacrificed or changed into a subordinate and ancillary movement or made by sublimation a first step only towards the seeking for the Divine. This no doubt helps the Indian sadhak if not to become single-hearted at once, yet to orientate himself more completely towards the goal. It is not always for him the Divine alone, though that is considered the highest state, but the Divine chief and first is easily grasped by him as the ideal.

The Indian sadhak has his own difficulties in his approach to the Yoga — at least to this Yoga — which a Westerner has in less measure. Those of the occidental nature are born of the dominant trend of the European mind in the immediate past. A greater readiness of essential doubt and sceptical reserve; a habit of mental activity as a necessity of the nature which makes it more difficult to achieve a complete mental silence; a stronger turn towards outside things born of the plenitude of active life (while the Indian commonly suffers from defects born rather of a depressed or suppressed vital force); a habit of mental and vital self-assertion and sometimes an aggressively vigilant independence which renders difficult any completeness of internal

surrender even to a greater Light and Knowledge, even to the divine Influence — these are frequent obstacles. But these things are not universal in Westerners, and they are on the other hand present in many Indian sadhaks, and they are, like the difficulties of the typical Indian nature, superstructural formations, not the very grain of the being. They cannot permanently stand in the way of the soul, if the soul's aspiration is strong and firm, if the spiritual aim is the chief thing in the life. They are impediments which the fire within can easily burn away if the will to get rid of them is strong, and which it will surely burn away in the end, — though less easily — even if the outer nature clings long to them and justifies them — provided that central will, that deeper impulse is behind all, real and sincere.

This conclusion of yours about the incapacity of the non-Oriental for Indian Yoga is simply born of a too despondently acute sense of your own difficulties, — you have not seen those, equally great, that have long troubled or are still troubling others. Neither to Indian nor to European can the path of Yoga be smooth and easy; their common human nature is there to see to that. To each his own difficulties seem enormous and radical and even incurable by their continuity and persistence and induce long periods of despondency and crises of despair. To have faith enough or enough psychic sight to react at once or almost at once and prevent these attacks is given hardly to two or three in a hundred. But one ought not to settle down into a fixed idea of one's own incapacity or allow it to become an obsession; for such an attitude has no true justification and unnecessarily renders the way harder. Where there is a soul that has once become awake, there is surely a capacity within that can outweigh all surface defects and can in the end conquer.

If your conclusion were true, the whole aim of this Yoga would be a vain thing; for we are not working for a race or a people or a continent or for a realisation of which only Indians or only Orientals are capable. Our aim is not, either, to found a religion or a school of philosophy or a school of Yoga, but to create a ground and a way of spiritual growth and experience which will bring down a greater Truth beyond the mind but not

inaccessible to the human soul and consciousness. All can pass who are drawn to that Truth, whether they are from India or elsewhere, from the East or from the West. All may find great difficulties in their personal or common human nature; but it is not their physical origin or their racial temperament that can be an insuperable obstacle to their deliverance.

*

I am not sure about the last matter.¹ After all India with her mentality and method has done a hundred times more in the spiritual field than Europe with her intellectual doubts and questionings. Even when a European overcomes the doubt and questioning, he does not find it as easy to go as fast and far as an Indian with the same force of personality because the stir of mind is still greater. It is only when he can get beyond that that he arrives, but for him it is not so easy.

On the other hand however your statement is correct. It [*the tendency to doubt and question*] is “natural considering the times” and the occidental mentality prevalent everywhere. It is also probably necessary that this should be faced and overcome before any supramental realisation is possible in the earth-consciousness — for it is the attitude of the physical mind to spiritual things and as it is in the physical that the resistance has to be overcome before the mind can be overpassed in the way required for this Yoga, the strongest possible representation of its difficulties was indispensable.

¹ *The correspondent suggested that in this Yoga a disciple with an occidental mentality might be “even better off” than a disciple with a traditional Indian mentality of humility and respect for the Guru. — Ed.*

Chapter Two

Qualities Needed for Sadhana

Indispensable Qualities

It goes without saying that the qualities you speak of are helpful in the approach to the spiritual path, while the defects you enumerate are each a serious stumbling-block in the way. Sincerity especially is indispensable to the spiritual endeavour, and crookedness a constant obstacle. The sattwic nature has always been held to be the most apt and ready for the spiritual life, while the rajasic nature is encumbered by its desires and passions. At the same time, spirituality is something above the dualities, and what is most needed for it is a true upward aspiration. This may come to the rajasic man as well as to the sattwic. If it does, he can rise by it above his failings and desires and passions, just as the other can rise beyond his virtues, to the Divine Purity and Light and Love. Necessarily this can only happen if he conquers his lower nature and throws it from him; for if he relapses into it, he is likely to fall from the path or at least to be, so long as the relapse lasts, held back by it from inner progress. But for all that the conversion of great sinners into great saints, of men of little or no virtue into spiritual seekers and God-lovers has frequently happened in religious and spiritual history — as in Europe St. Augustine, in India Chaitanya's Jagai and Madhai, Bilwamangal and many others. The house of the Divine is not closed to any who knock sincerely at its gates, whatever their past stumbles and errors. Human virtues and human errors are bright and dark wrappings of a divine element within which once it pierces the veil, can burn through both towards the heights of the Spirit.

Humility before the Divine is also a *sine qua non* of the spiritual life, and spiritual pride, arrogance, or vanity and self-assurance press always downward. But confidence in the Divine and a faith in one's spiritual destiny (i.e. since my heart and

soul seek for the Divine, I cannot fail one day to reach Him) are much needed in view of the difficulties of the Path. A contempt for others is out of place, especially since the Divine is in all. Evidently, the activities and aspirations of men are not trivial and worthless, for all life is a growth of the soul out of the darkness towards the Light. But our attitude is that humanity cannot grow out of its limitations by the ordinary means adopted by the human mind, politics, social reform, philanthropy, etc., — these can only be temporary or local palliatives. The only true escape is a change of consciousness, a change into a greater, wider and purer way of being, and a life and action based upon that change. It is therefore to that that the energies must be turned, once the spiritual orientation is complete. This implies no contempt, but the preference of the only effective means over those which have been found ineffective.

*

Such qualities as faith, sincerity, aspiration, devotion etc. make up the perfection indicated in our language of the flowers.¹ In ordinary language it would mean something else such as purity, love, benevolence, fidelity and a host of other virtues.

Conditions of the Yoga

I have never said that this Yoga was a safe one — no Yoga is. Each has its dangers as has every great attempt in human life. But it can be carried through if one has a central sincerity and a fidelity to the Divine. These are the two necessary conditions.

*

The first conditions of this Yoga are:

(1) A complete sincerity and surrender in the being. The divine life and the transformation of the lower human into the higher divine nature must be made the sole aim of all the life.

¹ The Mother named the Plumeria flower "Psychological perfection" and said that its five elements were faith, sincerity, aspiration, devotion and surrender.—Ed.

No attachments, desires or habits of the mind, heart, vital being or body should be clung to which come in the way of this one aspiration and one object of the life. One must be ready to renounce all these completely as soon as the demand comes from above and from the divine Shakti.

(2) A fundamental calm, peace and purity in the mind, vital being and all the nature.

The hours of meditation should be devoted to the formation of these two conditions in you, by aspiration and by self-observation and rejection of all that disturbs the nature or keeps it troubled, confused and impure. Aspiration if rightly done, quietly, earnestly and sincerely, brings the divine help from above to effect this object.

As to the hours devoted to work, needs, family, etc., they can be made an aid only on the following conditions.

(1) To regard all these things as not belonging to yourself, your inner being, but as things external, work to be done so long as it remains on your shoulders to the best of your ability without desire or attachment of any kind.

(2) To do all work as a sacrifice without any egoistic motive.

(3) To establish and deepen the inner calm and quiet. If that is done, all these things will be felt more and more as external and the falling off of desire and attachment will become possible.

For getting rid of passion the same condition. If you separate yourself from these movements and establish calm and peace inside, the passions may still rise on the surface, but they will be felt to be external movements and you can deal with them or call down the divine aid to get rid of them. So long as the mind does not fall quiet, it is not possible to deal finally with the vital being from which these forces rise.

*

The way to realise is through a quiet mind and a vital free from desires. To reject the desires and demands of the vital and to quiet the excessive activity of the mind, so that a true consciousness and spiritual perception and knowledge may take the place of the mind's activity, are the requisite conditions of the Yoga.

The further method is,— (1) To concentrate in the heart and aspire and (2) to call to the divine Mother to enter there and purify the mind and vital and unveil the psychic being so that her constant guidance and presence in it may be felt always and (3) to concentrate in the quiet mind and (in the head) open oneself first to the divine force and light which is always above the mind and call to it to descend into the body and the whole being— either of these or both, according to the capacity of the sadhaka.

Yoga must be done not for oneself or what one can get but for the sake of the Divine and to be united with the Divine.

If he can do any of these things (not minding how long it takes) in this spirit, then let him do Yoga; if he cannot, then there is no use in doing it.

Chapter Three

Purity

Purification of the Nature

A certain amount of purification is necessary before there can be any realisation of the Divine and that is what has been going on in you. It is after all not a very long time since the real purification began and it is never an easy work. So the impatience may be natural, but it is not exactly reasonable.

*

Purification — rejecting from one's nature all that is egoistic or of the nature of rajasic desire.

Aspiration for peace and calm and a perfect equality.

Purification and a basis of calm are the first necessary steps in the spiritual life.

*

The aspiration must be for entire purification, especially (1) purification from sex, so that no sex imaginations may enter and the sex impulse may cease, (2) purification from desires and demands, (3) purification from depression which is the result of disappointed desires. It is the most important for you. Particularly what you must aspire for is peace in all the being, complete equanimity, samata. The feeling that peace is not enough must go. Peace and purity and equanimity once established, all the rest must be the Mother's free gift, not a result of the demand from the being.

You can mix normally with people keeping as much as possible an inner quietude. In future when the purification is done and a continuous experience possible we can reconsider the matter.

*

Very often the earlier stage of the sadhana is successful, because there is an opening of the mind to first workings of the Force — afterwards the lower vital consciousness and the physical rise up and if these are not ready or inclined for the sadhana, it ceases. The sadhaka has first to purify and open them and call in the Force to work there and make all ready until he can bring the true consciousness and experience there. Yoga implies a long and difficult work and one must be ready to accept the necessity of years of preparation and purification and increasing consecration before the greater results can come.

*

By meditation alone and trying to concentrate you will never succeed. There must be an aspiration from the heart and a giving up of all yourself to Krishna.

In your nature there are many obstacles, chiefly a great activity of the outward-going mind and a thick crust of the impure lower Prakriti that covers the heart and the vital being. Quieting of the mind and purification of the nature are what you must have before you can fulfil your aim. Aspire for these two things first; ask for them constantly from above. You will not be able to achieve them by your own unaided effort.

*

As for the way out of the impasse, I know only of the quieting of the mind which makes meditation effective, purification of the heart which brings the divine touch and in time the divine presence, humility before the Divine which liberates from egoism and the pride of the mind and of the vital, the pride that imposes its own reasonings on the ways of the spirit and the pride that refuses or is unable to surrender, sustained persistence in the call within and reliance on the Grace above. Meditation, japa, prayer or aspiration from the heart can all succeed, if they are attended by these or even some of these things. But I do not know that you can be promised what you always make the condition of any inner endeavour, an immediate or almost immediate realisation or beginning of concrete realisation. I fully

believe on the other hand that one who has the call in him cannot fail to arrive, if he follows patiently the way towards the Divine.

*

I can only hope that the depression and the suggestions it brings will pass away soon. You were making very good progress before it touched you. There is no impossibility in the purification of the heart which was the thing you were trying for and when the heart is purified, other things which seemed impossible before become easy — even the inner surrender which now seems to you impracticable. I at any rate will go on trusting in your spiritual destiny until the performance of the “miracle”.

The Meaning of Purity

Purity is to accept no other influence but only the influence of the Divine.

*

It [*purity*] is more a condition than a substance. Peace helps to purity — since in peace disturbing influences cease and the essence of purity is to respond only to the Divine Influence and not to have an affinity with other movements.

*

Purity means freedom from soil or mixture. The divine Purity is that in which there is no mixture of the turbid ignorant movements of the lower nature. Ordinarily purity is used to mean (in the common language) freedom from vital passion and impulse.

*

The Divine Purity is a more wide and all-embracing experience than the psychic.

*

Purity or impurity depends upon the consciousness; in the divine

consciousness everything is pure, in the ignorance everything is subject to impurity, not the body only or part of the body, but mind and vital and all. Only the self and the psychic being remain always pure.

*

A pure mind means a mind quiet and free from thoughts of a useless or disturbing character.

*

X pretends to be pure and surrendered to the will of God. How can he be pure when his whole trouble has come from the indulgence of impure desires? He pretends to act according to God's will, but his actions are moved by three things, desire, vanity and self-will. The devil makes suggestions supported by one or another of these three motives and persuades him that it is the will of God.

Ignorance is not a state of innocence or purity; that is an old blunder. Only a consciousness full of light can be pure. For instance, when you are conscious, your mind is clear and you have the right ideas about things and people; your mind is pure of ignorance. But when the mind is clouded by some impurity,—say, anger, jealousy or pride or some unreasonable desire,—you at once become ignorant and mistake and misunderstand everything.

Again, when your heart is turned to the Mother and satisfied with her love, when you are full of peace, contentment and happiness, then there is no room for wrong feelings and desires; your heart is pure.

This is what the Mother meant by purity; to be free from false ideas, wrong feelings, desires, demands etc. is to be pure.

*

Purity in the consciousness and purity in the conduct is what is usually meant by these terms [*inner and outer purity*].

Chapter Four

Sincerity

The Meaning of Sincerity

There is one indispensable condition, sincerity.

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What is meant by “sincere”? Sincerity means to accept the Divine influence only and not that of lower forces.

*

Sincerity means to be turned wholly to the Divine and accept only the Divine impulses—it means also the true and constant will or effort to be like this.

*

Sincere is simply an adjective meaning that the will must be a true will. If you simply think “I aspire” and do things inconsistent with the aspiration, or follow your desires or open yourself to contrary influences, then it is not a sincere will.

*

Sincerity means more than mere honesty. It means that you mean what you say, feel what you profess, are earnest in your will. As the sadhak aspires to be an instrument of the Divine and one with the Divine, sincerity in him means that he is really in earnest in his aspiration and refuses all other will or impulse except the Divine's.

*

[*Sincerity*:] To allow no part of the being to contradict the highest aspiration towards the Divine.

*

All sincere aspiration has its effect; if you are sincere, you will grow into the divine life.

To be entirely sincere means to desire the divine Truth only, to surrender yourself more and more to the Divine Mother, to reject all personal demand and desire other than this one aspiration, to offer every action in life to the Divine and do it as the work given without bringing in the ego. This is the basis of the divine life.

One cannot become altogether this at once, but if one aspires at all times to it and calls in always the aid of the Divine Shakti with a true heart and straightforward will, one grows more and more into this consciousness.

Sincerity in Sadhana

Men are always mixed and there are qualities and defects mingled together almost inextricably in their nature. What a man wants to be or wants others to see in him or what he is sometimes on one side of his nature or in some relations can be very different from what he is in the actual fact or in other relations or on another side of his nature. To be absolutely sincere, straightforward, open, is not an easy achievement for human nature. It is only by spiritual endeavour that one can realise it — and to do it needs a severity of introspective self-vision, an unsparing scrutiny of self-observation of which many sadhaks or Yogins even are not capable and it is only by an illuminating Grace that reveals the sadhak to himself and transforms what is deficient in him that it can be done. And even then only if he himself consents and lends himself wholly to the divine working.

*

It is quite natural that there should be much mixture in the attitude till all is clear — the ordinary nature clings to the action and the transformation in its completeness cannot be sudden. What is necessary is that the basic consciousness should become firmly established in the Divine, then the mixture in the rest can

be seen and steadily weeded out. To have this outwardly as well as inwardly is a great progress.

*

It is true that a central sincerity is not enough except as a beginning and a base; the sincerity must spread as you describe through the whole nature. But still unless there is a double nature (without a central harmonising consciousness) the basis is usually sufficient for that to happen.

*

I do not think there is any reason for anxiety about your sadhana. We feel always a great depth and sincerity of aspiration in you which keeps you in constant and close relation with us, and where there is this depth and sincerity and this closeness the progressive opening of the being is assured; for the openness already exists.

*

You speak of insincerity in your nature. If insincerity means the unwillingness of some part of the being to live according to the highest light one has or to equate the outer with the inner man, then this part is always insincere in all. The only way is to lay stress on the inner being and develop in it the psychic and spiritual consciousness till that comes down in it which pushes out the darkness from the outer man also.

*

It is not sincerity to express only what the adverse forces suggest or what you feel when you are in a bad condition full of obscurity and a wrong outlook. When you are in the Truth, you feel quite the opposite and it is not insincerity to cling to that and recall it. It is only by bringing it back that the Truth can grow in you.

The trouble in your chest comes only from a vital resistance and it continues because you identify yourself with that resistance. It is only by quietude and opening to the Mother that these things can disappear. There is no other way to progress.

If you have not got quietude, you can always aspire first and a sincere aspiration will bring it back.

*

All need vital sincerity, it is the most difficult to have and the most needful.

*

To perceive one's own weaknesses is one result of sincerity.

*

One cannot be perfect in discrimination at once or in rejection either. The one indispensable thing is to go on trying sincerely till there comes the full success. So long as there is complete sincerity, the Divine Grace will be there and assist at every moment on the way.

*

If he [*the sadhak*] is sincere, there is bound to be devotion. Sincerity in Yoga means to respond to the Divine alone and if he has no devotion he cannot do it.

*

It is difficult for the ordinary Christian to be of a piece, because the teachings of Christ are on quite another plane from the consciousness of the intellectual and vital man trained by the education and society of Europe—the latter, even as a minister or priest, has never been called upon to practise what he preached in entire earnest. But it is difficult for the human nature anywhere to think, feel and act from one centre of true faith, belief or vision. The average Hindu considers the spiritual life the highest, reveres the Sannyasi, is moved by the Bhakta; but if one of the family circle leaves the world for spiritual life, what tears, arguments, remonstrances, lamentations! It is almost worse than if he had died a natural death. It is not conscious mental insincerity—they will argue like Pandits and go to Shastra to prove you in the wrong; it is unconsciousness, a vital insincerity which

they are not aware of and which uses the reasoning mind as an accomplice.

That is why we insist so much on sincerity in the Yoga—and that means to have all the being consciously turned towards the one Truth, the one Divine. But that for human nature is one of the most difficult of tasks, much more difficult than a rigid asceticism or a fervent piety. Religion itself does not give this complete harmonised sincerity—it is only the psychic being and the one-souled spiritual aspiration that can give it.

Earnestness and Straightforwardness

In the major part of your being you are very much in earnest. But of course there are always parts or rather parts of parts that are not equally ready to change. But that is not hypocrisy. It is so with everybody, otherwise there would be no difficulty in the transformation.

*

Straightforwardness means simply to be honest with oneself and with the Divine and not to be crooked in one's ways.

Self-justification is unwillingness to recognise a mistake and an attempt to prove oneself right even against the censure of the Mother.

Chapter Five

Aspiration

The Value of Aspiration

What you say is quite true. A simple, straight and sincere call and aspiration from the heart is the one important thing and more essential and effective than capacities. Also to get the consciousness to turn inwards, not remain outward-going is of great importance — to arrive at the inner call, the inner experience, the inner Presence.

The help you ask will be with you. Let the aspiration grow and open the inner consciousness altogether.

*

One has only to aspire sincerely and keep oneself as open as possible to the Mother's Force. Then whatever difficulties come, they will be overcome — it may take some time, but the result is sure.

*

One has to suppose that [*the Mother's*] force everywhere around and call it in — if one feels it, so much the better, but even otherwise if there is faith and power in the call, it can flow in.

*

One must rely on the Divine and yet do some enabling sadhana — the Divine gives the fruits, not by the measure of the sadhana but by the measure of the soul and its aspiration. Also worrying does no good — “I shall be this, I shall be that, what shall I be?” Say “I am ready to be not what I want, but what the Divine wants me to be” — all the rest should go on that base.

*

I mean by the measure of the soul's sincerity a yearning after the

Divine and its aspiration towards the higher life.

*

But why allow *anything* to come in the way between you and the Divine, any idea, any incident; when you are in full aspiration and joy, let nothing count, nothing be of any importance except the Divine and your aspiration. If one wants the Divine quickly, absolutely, entirely, that must be the spirit of approach, absolute, all-engrossing, making that the one point with which nothing else must interfere.

What value have mental ideas about the Divine, ideas about what he should be, how he should act, how he should not act—they can only come in the way. Only the Divine Himself matters. When your consciousness embraces the Divine, then you can know what the Divine is, not before. Krishna is Krishna, one does not care what he did or did not do; only to see Him, meet Him, feel the Light, the Presence, the Love, the Ananda is what matters. So it is always for the spiritual aspiration—it is the law of the spiritual life.

Don't waste time any longer in these ideas of the mind or in any starts of the vital—blow these clouds away. Keep fixed on the one thing indispensable.

The Meaning of Aspiration

There is no deep meaning [*of aspiration*]—the meaning is plain. It is the call of the being for higher things—for the Divine, for all that belongs to the higher or Divine Consciousness.

*

It [*aspiration*] is the call in the being for the Divine or for the higher things that belong to the Divine Consciousness. (To “aspire” always means to call for higher things.)

*

Aspiration is a turning upward of the inner being with a call, yearning, prayer for the Divine, for the Truth, for the

Consciousness, Peace, Ananda, Knowledge, descent of Divine Force or whatever else is the aim of one's endeavour.

*

Aspiration is to call the forces. When the forces have answered, there is a natural state of quiet receptivity concentrated but spontaneous.

*

Aspiration is a call to the Divine,—will is the pressure of a conscious force on Nature.

*

Aspiration is a call in the being, it is not opening.

The Object of Aspiration

The aspiration should be for the full descent of the Truth and the victory over falsehood in the world.

*

Aspire for the constant contact and the light. It is in the Light that the being will get organised in the Truth.

*

Aspire for your will to be one with the Divine will, concentrate in the heart and be plastic to whatever experience comes, neither forcing nor resisting any spiritual experience.

*

The aspiration for the supramental would be premature. What you have to aspire for is for the psychic change and the spiritual change of the whole being — which is the necessary condition before one can even think of the supramental.

*

To want to be a superman is a mistake, it only swells the ego.

One can aspire for the Divine to bring about the supramental transformation, but that also should not be done till the being has become psychic and spiritualised by the descent of the Mother's peace, force, light and purity.

No Need of Words in Aspiration

There is no need of words in aspiration. It can be expressed or unexpressed in words.

*

The aspiration need not be in the form of thought — it can be a feeling within that remains even when the mind is attending to the work.

The Necessity of Aspiration

It depends on the stage which one has reached. Personal aspiration is necessary until there is the condition in which all comes automatically and only a certain knowledge and assent is necessary for the development.

*

Even if there is no rising up, the aspiration connects you with the higher consciousness and helps or prepares to bring down something from it.

*

It [*the higher consciousness*] may not come exactly according to the aspiration, but the aspiration is not ineffective. It keeps the consciousness open, prevents an inert state of acquiescence in all that comes and exercises a sort of pull on the sources of the higher consciousness.

*

Aspiration during the period of experience is not so necessary.

It is in the intervals that it should be there.

*

Why do you write “If I get” [*aspiration*] — one can always aspire. It is your mistake to think that everything must come of itself and nothing is within your own power to do. This kind of belief in the necessity of passivity to all movements should be thrown aside. Will, aspiration, surrender are things that you must do yourself — although even in doing them you must call in the Divine Power to help your will, aspiration and surrender and make them effective.

*

Why “getting” aspiration? Aspiration is an act of the will and one can always aspire.

*

Activity in aspiration, tapasya, rejection of the wrong forces, passivity to the true working, the working of the Mother’s force are the right things in sadhana.

*

One has to aspire to the Divine and surrender and leave it to the Divine to do what is true and right with the Adhar once it is perfected.

Intensity of Aspiration and Vital Impatience

Intense aspiration is always good, but let there also be calm and peace and joy in the mind and heart, and a confidence that all will be done in its due time.

*

There can be an intense but quiet aspiration which does not disturb the harmony of the inner being.

*

Yes — that is the way. The intensity of the aspiration brings

the intensity of the experience and by repeated intensity of the experience the change.

*

The impatience and restless disquietude come from the vital which brings that even into the aspiration. The aspiration must be intense, calm and strong (that is the nature of the true vital also) and not restless and impatient,—then alone it can be stable.

*

It is the psychic that gives the true aspiration—if the vital is purified and subjected to the psychic, then the vital gives intensity—but if it is unpurified it brings in a rajasic intensity with impatience and reactions of depression and disappointment. As for the calm and equality needed, it must come down from above through the mind.

*

That [*fiery aspiration*] is all right, that is the psychic aspiration, the psychic fire. Where the vital comes in is in the impatience for result and dissatisfaction if the result is not immediate. That must cease.

Aspiration and Desire

One should be satisfied with what one gets and still aspire quietly, without struggle, for more—till all has come. No desire, no struggle—aspiration, faith, openness—and the grace.

*

There is no doubt the mixture of desire in what you do, even in your endeavour of sadhana, that is the difficulty. The desire brings a movement of impatient effort and a reaction of disappointment and revolt when difficulty is felt and the immediate result is not there and other confusing and disturbing feelings. Aspiration should be not a form of desire, but the feeling of an

inner soul's need, and a quiet settled will to turn towards the Divine and seek the Divine. It is certainly not easy to get rid of this mixture of desire entirely — not easy for anyone; but when one has the will to do it, this also can be effected by the help of the sustaining Force.

*

If there are good desires, bad desires will come also. There is a place for will and aspiration, not for desire.

If there is desire there will be attachment, demand, craving, loss of equanimity, sorrow at not getting, all that is unyogic.

Aspiration and Pulling

Pulling comes usually from a desire to get things for oneself — in aspiration there is a self-giving for the higher consciousness to descend and take possession — the more intense the call, the greater the self-giving.

*

It is certainly a mistake to bring down the light by force — to pull it down. The supramental cannot be taken by storm. When the time is ready it will open of itself — but first there is a great deal to be done and that must be done patiently and without haste.

Lack of Aspiration

Naturally the more one-pointed the aspiration the swifter the progress. The difficulty comes when either the vital with its desires or the physical with its past habitual movements comes in — as they do with almost everyone. It is then that the dryness and difficulty of spontaneous aspiration come. This dryness is a well-known obstacle in all sadhana. But one has to persist and not be discouraged. If one keeps the will fixed even in these barren periods, they pass and after their passage a greater force of aspiration and experience becomes possible.

*

You are finding it still difficult to bear the interval periods when all is quiet and nothing being done on the surface. But such interval periods come to all and cannot be avoided. You must not cherish the suggestion that it is because of your want of aspiration or any other unfitness that it is so and, if you had the constant ardent aspiration, then there would be no such periods and there would be an uninterrupted stream of experiences. It is not so. Even if the aspiration were there, the interval periods would come. If even in them one can aspire, so much the better—but the main thing is to meet them with quietude and not become restless, depressed or despondent. A constant fire can be there only when a certain stage has been reached, that is when one is always inside consciously living in the psychic being, but for that all this preparation of the mind, vital, physical is necessary. For this fire belongs to the psychic and one cannot command it always merely by the mind's effort. The psychic has to be fully liberated and that is what the Force is working to make fully possible.

*

No doubt the true and strong aspiration is needed, but it is not a fact that the true thing is not there in you. If it had not been, the Force could not have worked in you. But this true thing was seated in the psychic and in the heart and whenever these were active in the meditation it showed itself. But for the sake of completeness the working had to come down into the physical consciousness and establish the quietude and the openness there. The physical consciousness is always in everybody in its own nature a little inert and in it a constant strong aspiration is not natural, it has to be created. But first there must be the opening, a purification, a fixed quietude, otherwise the physical vital will turn the strong aspiration into over-eagerness and impatience or rather it will try to give it that turn. Do not therefore be troubled if the state of the nature seems to you to be too neutral and quiet, not enough aspiration and movement in it. This is a passage necessary for the progress and the rest will come.

Aspiration and Conversion

Those who come here have an aspiration and a possibility—something in their psychic being pushes and if they follow it, they will arrive; but that is not conversion. Conversion is a definite turning of the being away from lower things towards the Divine.

*

Aspiration can lead hereafter to conversion; but aspiration is not conversion.

*

Conversion is a spontaneous movement of the consciousness, a turning of it away from external things towards the Divine. It comes usually as the result of a touch from within and above. Self-consecration may help to open one to the touch or the touch may come of itself. But conversion may also come as the culmination of a long process of aspiration and tapasya. There is no fixed rule in these things.

If the psychic being comes to the front, then conversion becomes easy or may come instantaneously or the conversion may bring the psychic being to the front. Here again there is no rule.

Chapter Six

Rejection

Rejection of the Lower Impulses

It is no part of the sadhana to accept the uglinesses of the lower nature on the ground that they exist—if that is what is meant by realism. Our object is not to accept or enjoy these things but to get rid of them and create a life of spiritual beauty and perfection. So long as we accept these things, that cannot be done. To observe that these things are there and reject them, refusing to allow them to touch you, is one thing; to accept and acquiesce in them is quite another.

*

Who is able to reject the lower nature fully? All one can do is to aspire and reject the lower impulses and call in the Divine to do the rest.

*

There are no right positive vibrations of devious impulses—these are wrong vibrations of the mind or vital. The right vibrations I speak of are those that come from the psychic or from the spiritual above or take place in the mind or vital under the influence of the psychic or spiritual. If one aspires sincerely and rejects what has to be rejected, as far as one can, then the psychic and spiritual influences will more and more work, bring more and more true discrimination, support, stimulate and create the right vibrations, detect, discourage and eliminate the wrong ones. That is the method the Mother and I advise to all.

*

Rejection is a principle element in this sadhana. But what I say is that one can reject best by bringing in the positive psychic

and spiritual forces through the pursuit of positive things like brahmacharya and the rest.

*

I do not know what you mean by dissolution [of *desires*]. The principle of the Yoga is rejection — throwing out of the being. It is true that rejected from the mind it often goes to the vital, rejected by the vital, to the physical, rejected by the physical to the subconscious. Rejected from the subconscious also, it can still linger in the environmental consciousness — but there it has no longer any possession of the being and can be thrown away altogether.

*

That is a known fact that everything comes from outside, from universal Nature. But the individual is not bound to accept everything that comes; he can accept and he can reject. The rejection may not succeed at once, if there is a strong habit of past acceptance; but if it is steadily persisted in, the rejection will succeed in the end.

What you should do, is always to reject the lower experiences and concentrate on a fixed and quiet aspiration towards the one thing needed, the Light, the Calm, the Peace, the Devotion that you felt for two or three days. It is because you get interested in the lower vital experiences and in observing and thinking about them that they take hold, and then comes the absence of the Contact and the confusion. You have surely had enough of this kind of experience already and should make up your mind to steadily reject it when it comes.

*

The effort should be to reject the restlessness and its suggestions altogether. These things come to everybody in the early stages of the sadhana and are sometimes very persistent, even later on they continue — but the sadhak rejects them and regards them as no part of his true consciousness or worthy to determine his action and life, but as untrue suggestions which he has to overcome. If

that is always done, they begin after a time to lose their force of invasion and become superficial things; finally they disappear.

*

The peace and the equality are there above you, you have to call them down into the mind and the vital and the body. And whenever something disturbs you have to reject the thing that disturbs and the disturbance.

*

What do you mean by active means [*to overcome inertia*]? The power to refuse, to reject is always there in the being and to go on rejecting till the rejection is effective. Nothing can obstruct a quiet aspiration except one's own acquiescence in the inertia.

*

The practice of rejection prevails in the end; but with personal effort only, it may take a long time. If you can feel the Divine Power working in you, then it should become easier.

There should be nothing inert or tamasic in the self-giving to the guidance and it should not be made by any part of the vital into a plea for not rejecting the suggestions of lower impulse and desire.

Chapter Seven

Surrender

The Meaning of Surrender

The Divine gives itself to those who give themselves without reserve and in all their parts to the Divine. For them the calm, the light, the power, the bliss, the freedom, the wideness, the heights of knowledge, the seas of Ananda.

*

Surrender is giving oneself to the Divine — to give everything one is or has to the Divine and regard nothing as one's own, to obey only the Divine will and no other, to live for the Divine and not for the ego.

*

Self-surrender is to give up yourself and all that is yours, mind and everything else to the Divine, so that the Divine Force may take everything and change it.

*

Surrender means to consecrate everything in oneself to the Divine, to offer all one is and has, not to insist on one's ideas, desires, habits etc., but to allow the divine Truth to replace them by its knowledge, will and action everywhere.

*

Surrender means to be entirely in the Mother's hands and not to resist in any way by egoism or otherwise her Light, Knowledge, Will, the working of her Force etc.

*

The essence of surrender is not to ask the Mother before doing anything — but to accept whole-heartedly the influence and the

guidance, when the joy and peace come down to accept them without question or cavil and let them grow, when the Force is felt at work to let it work without opposition, when the Knowledge is given to receive and follow it, when the Will is revealed to make oneself its instrument.

*

To believe that one is being constantly guided by the Divine in the heart is not necessarily surrender. It is necessary to be detached, to see what are the divine forces and undivine and to reject the undivine forces. It is only by this discrimination that one can make a true surrender to the Divine in the heart.

*

It [*true surrender*] begins when there is the true self-offering.

A Free Surrender

The Divine can lead, he does not drive. There is an internal freedom permitted to every mental being called man to assent or not to assent to the Divine leading — how else can any real spiritual evolution be done?

*

All the play in this world is based on a certain relative free will in the individual being. Even in the sadhana it remains and his consent is necessary at each step — even though it is by surrender to the Divine that he escapes from ignorance and separateness and ego, it must be at every step a free surrender.

*

Each person has his own freedom of choice up to a certain point — unless he makes the full surrender — and as he uses the freedom, has to take the spiritual or other consequences. The help can only be offered, not imposed. Silence, absence of frank confession, means a desire in the vital to go its own way. When there is no longer concealment, when there is the physical

self-opening to the Divine, then the Divine can intervene.

The Will to Surrender

All can be done by the Divine, the heart and nature purified, the inner consciousness awakened, the veils removed, if one gives oneself to the Divine with trust and confidence—and even if one cannot do so fully at once, yet the more one does so, the more the inner help and guidance comes and the contact and the experience of the Divine grows within. If the questioning mind becomes less active and humility and the will to surrender grow in you, this ought to be perfectly possible. No other strength and tapasya are then needed, but this alone.

*

Surrender cannot be made at once—it is not so easy; for there is much in the being that resists. But one must have the will to surrender. It is the same with becoming an instrument. If one has the will and calls on the Mother and opens oneself as much as possible to her, then gradually these things develop in the nature.

*

If the difficulties that arise are in the nature itself, it is inevitable that they should rise and manifest themselves. Surrender is not easy, it is resisted by a large part of the nature. If the mind forms the will to surrender, all these inner obstacles are bound to show themselves; the sadhak has then to observe them and detach himself from them, reject them from his nature and overcome. This may take a very long time but it has to be done.

Outer obstacles cannot prevent the inner surrender unless they are supported by a resistance in the nature itself.

The Inner Surrender

It was never my intention to suggest that there was only a faint hope of your sadhana depending on the *if* of surrender. I have always said the contrary, that since your soul wants the Divine

truly, you are sure to reach him; only if you give up — and that is why I strongly object to these despondencies apart from the suffering they inflict, because they try to drive you to that — can it be frustrated or rather postponed to a far future.

What I wrote was in answer to your statement about your former idea of the Yoga that if one wanted the Divine, the Divine himself would take up the purifying of the heart and develop the sadhana and give the necessary experiences. I meant to say that it can and does happen in that way if one has trust and confidence in the Divine and the will to surrender. For such a taking up involves one's putting oneself in the hands of the Divine rather than trusting to one's own efforts alone and it implies one's putting one's trust and confidence in the Divine and a progressive self-giving. It is in fact the principle of sadhana that I myself followed and it is the central part of the Yoga as I envisage it. It is, I suppose, what Ramakrishna meant by the method of the baby cat in his image. But all cannot follow that at once; it takes time for them to arrive at it — it grows most when the mind and vital fall quiet.

What I meant by surrender was this inner surrender of the mind and vital. There is of course the outer surrender also, the giving up of all that is found to conflict with the spirit or need of the sadhana, the offering, the obedience to the guidance of the Divine, whether directly, if one has reached that stage, or through the psychic or to the guidance of the Guru. I may say that *prāyopaveśana* does not seem to me to have anything to do with surrender; it is a form of tapasya of a very austere and in my opinion very excessive kind, often dangerous. But what I was speaking of in my letter was the inner surrender.

The core of this inner surrender is trust and confidence in the Divine. One takes the attitude, "I want the Divine and nothing else." I do not know why you should think that you can be asked to give up that — if there is not that, then the Yoga cannot be done. "I want to give myself entirely to him and since my soul wants that, it cannot be but that I shall meet him and realise him. I ask nothing but that and his action in me to bring me to him, his action secret or open, veiled or manifest. I do not insist

on my own time and way; let him do all in his own time and way, I shall believe in him, accept his will, aspire steadily for his light and presence and joy, go through all difficulties and delays relying on him and never giving up. Let my mind be quiet and turn to him and let him open it to his light; let my vital be quiet and turn to him alone and let him open it to his calm and joy. All for him and myself for him. Whatever happens, I will keep to this aspiration and self-giving and go on in perfect reliance that it will be done." That is the attitude into which one must grow; for, certainly, it cannot be made perfect at once; mental and vital movements come across; but if one keeps the will to it, it will grow in the being. The rest is a matter of obedience to the guidance when it makes itself manifest — not allowing one's mental or vital movements to interfere.

It was not my intention to say that this way is the only way and sadhana cannot be done otherwise — there are so many others by which one can approach the Divine. But this is the only one I know by which the taking up of the sadhana by the Divine becomes a sensible fact before the preparation of the nature is done. In other methods the Divine action and help may be felt from time to time, but it remains mostly behind the veil till all is ready. In some sadhanas the Divine action is not recognised; all must be done by tapasya. In most there is a mixing of the two, the tapasya finally calling the direct help and intervention. The idea and experience of the Divine doing all belongs to the Yogas based on surrender.

But whatever way is followed, the one thing to be done is to be faithful and go to the end. You have so often taken that decision — stand by it, do not let the storms of the vital quench the aspiration of your soul.

*

It depends on the sadhak [*whether the surrender should begin from within*]. Some may find it necessary to surrender the external activities first so as to bring the inner surrender.

The Central Surrender

I have said that if one has the principle of surrender and union in the mind and heart there is no difficulty in extending it to the obscurer parts of the physical and the subconscious. As you have this central surrender and union, you can easily complete it everywhere. A quiet aspiration for complete consciousness is all that is needed. Then the material and subconscious will become penetrated by the light like the rest and there will come in a quietude, wideness, harmony free from all reactions that will be the basis of the final change.

*

When the psychic being and the heart and the thinking mind have surrendered, the rest is a matter of time and process—and there is no reason for disturbance. The central and effective surrender has been made.

Complete or Absolute Surrender

If you are surrendered only in the higher consciousness, with no peace or purity in the lower, certainly that is not enough and you have to aspire for the peace and purity everywhere.

*

It [*surrender*] cannot be absolutely complete in the beginning, but it can be true—if the central will is sincere and there is the faith and the Bhakti. There may be contrary movements, but these will be unable to stand for long and the imperfection of the surrender in the lower part will not seriously interfere with the power and pervasiveness of the inner attitude.

*

A complete surrender is not possible in so short a time,—for a complete surrender means to cut the knot of the ego in each part of the being and offer it, free and whole, to the Divine. The mind, the vital, the physical consciousness (and even each

part of these in all its movements) have one after the other to surrender separately, to give up their own way and to accept the way of the Divine. But what one can do is to make from the beginning a central resolve and self-dedication and to implement it in whatever way one finds open, at each step, taking advantage of each occasion that offers itself to make the self-giving complete. A surrender in one direction makes others easier, more inevitable; but it does not of itself cut or loosen the other knots, and especially those which are very intimately bound up with the present personality and its most cherished formations may often present great difficulties, even after the central will has been fixed and the first seals put on its resolve in practice.

*

You can get the full surrender only by degrees. Meanwhile you have to go on the straight path not regarding the suggestions that are put into you through the vital or physical parts.

*

It is on that consciousness of complete surrender that the psychic foundation of sadhana can be made. If once it fixes itself, then, whatever difficulties remain to be overcome, the course of the sadhana becomes perfectly easy, sunlit, natural like the opening of a flower. The feeling you have is an indication of what can and must develop in you.

*

It depends on what is meant by absolute surrender — the experience of it in some part of the being or the fact of it in all parts of the being. The former may easily come at any time; it is the latter that takes time to complete.

*

The absolute surrender must be not only an experience in meditation, but a fact governing all the life, all the thoughts, feelings, actions. Till then the use of one's own will and effort is necessary, but an effort in which also there is the spirit of surrender, calling

in the Force to support the will and effort and undisturbed by success or failure. When the Force takes up the sadhana, then indeed effort may cease, but still there will be the necessity of the constant assent of the being and a vigilance so that one may not admit a false Force at any point.

*

It is never too early to make the complete surrender. Some things may need to wait, but not that.

The Surrender of the Vital

The surrender of the vital is always difficult, because of the unwillingness of the forces of the universal vital Ignorance. But that does not mean a fundamental incapacity.

*

The ordinary vital is never willing to surrender. The true inmost vital is different—surrender to the Divine is as necessary to it as to the psychic.

*

If there is any identification with the vital demands or outcries, that necessarily diminishes the surrender for the time.

*

What is this surrender to which there is no response? Surrender and demands don't go together. Evidently the vital is not afraid of thinking illogical and self-contradictory nonsense. So long as the vital keeps up its demand, these things will come.

*

It was from your description of the reaction that I said there was a vital demand. In the pure psychic or spiritual self-giving there are no reactions of this kind, no despondency or despair, no saying, "What have I gained by seeking the Divine?", no anger, revolt, abhiman, wish to go away — such as you describe

here—but an absolute confidence and a persistence in clinging to the Divine under all conditions. That is what I wanted you to have; it is the only basis in which one is free from troubles and reactions and goes steadily forward.

*

Not to impose one's mind and vital will on the Divine but to receive the Divine's will and follow it, is the true attitude of sadhana. Not to say, "This is my right, want, claim, need, requirement, why do I not get it?" but to give oneself, to surrender and to receive with joy whatever the Divine gives, not grieving or revolting, is the better way. Then what you receive will be the right thing for you.

*

The Divine is not bound to do that [*supply all one's real needs*], He can give or not give; whether He gives or does not give makes no difference to the one who is surrendered to Him. Otherwise, there is an arrière-pensée in the surrender which is not then complete.

*

Most of the sadhaks have similar thoughts [*of hostility and ingratitude*]—or had them at one time or another. They rise from the vital ego which either does not want the Divine or wants It for its own purpose and not for the Divine's purpose. It gets furious when it is pressed to change or when its desires are not satisfied—that is at the root of all these things. That is why we insist on surrender in this Yoga—because it is only by the surrender (especially of the vital ego) that these things can go—to accept the Divine for the Divine's sake and for no other motive and in the Divine's way and not in one's own way or on one's own conditions.

*

Difficult? It is the first principle of our sadhana that surrender is the means of fulfilment and so long as ego or vital demand

and desire are cherished, complete surrender is impossible — the self-giving is incomplete. We have never concealed that. It may be difficult and it is; but it is the very principle of the sadhana. Because it is difficult it has to be done steadily and patiently till the work is complete.

*

Your mind and psychic being are concentrated on the spiritual aim and open to the Divine — that is why the Influence comes down into the head and as far as the heart. But the vital being and nature and the physical consciousness are under the influence of the lower nature. As long as the vital and physical being are not surrendered or do not on their own account call for the higher life, this struggle is likely to continue.

Surrender everything, reject all other desires or interests, call on the divine Shakti to open the vital nature and bring down calm, peace, light, Ananda into all the centres. Aspire, await with faith and patience the result. All depends on a complete sincerity and an integral consecration and aspiration.

The world will trouble you so long as any part of you belongs to the world. It is only if you belong entirely to the Divine that you can become free.

Surrender and the Psychic

For surrender it is necessary not to insist on the mind's opinions, ideas and preferences, the vital's desires and impulses, the physical's habitual actions, the life of the ego — all such insistence is contrary to surrender. All egoism and self-will has to be abandoned and one must seek to be governed only by the Divine Shakti. No complete surrender is possible without the psychic opening.

*

It is impossible to become like a child giving oneself entirely until the psychic is in control and stronger than the vital.

*

It is the psychic coming forward that brings the force of surrender.

*

The power of experience is not gone—but what is most important now is to develop the psychic condition of surrender, devotion, love and cheerful confidence in the Mother, an unshaken faith and a constant inner closeness, and also to bring down from above the peace, wideness, purity etc. of the higher Self which is that of the Mother's consciousness. It is these things that are the basis of the siddhi in this Yoga — other experiences are only a help, not the basis.

*

It is the psychic surrender in the physical that you have begun to experience.

All the parts are essentially offered, but the surrender has to be made complete by the growth of the psychic self-offering in all of them and in all their movements separately and together.

To be enjoyed by the Divine is to be entirely surrendered so that one feels the Divine Presence, Power, Light, Ananda possessing the whole being rather than oneself possessing these things for one's own satisfaction. It is a much greater ecstasy to be thus surrendered and possessed by the Divine than oneself to be the possessor. At the same time by this surrender there comes also a calm and happy mastery of self and nature.

*

No surrender to the psychic being is demanded, the surrender is to the Divine. One approaches the Divine through faith; concrete experience comes as a result of sadhana. One cannot demand a direct experience without doing anything to prepare the consciousness for it. If one feels the call, one follows it—if there is no call, then there is no need to seek the Divine. Faith is sufficient to start with—the idea that one must first understand and realise before one can seek is a mental error and if it were true would make all sadhana impossible—realisation can come

only as a result of sadhana, not as its preliminary.

*

There is no need of all this complication. If the psychic manifests, it will not ask you to surrender to it, but to surrender to the Mother.

*

The surrender must be to the Mother — not even to the Force, but to the Mother herself.

Surrender and Bhakti

Surrender and love-bhakti are not contrary things — they go together. It is true that at first surrender can be made through knowledge by the mind, but it implies a mental bhakti and, as soon as the surrender reaches the heart, the bhakti manifests as a feeling and with the feeling of bhakti love comes.

*

Self-surrender at first comes through love and bhakti, more than through Atmajnana. But it is true that with Atmajnana the complete surrender becomes more possible.

Surrender and the Brahmic Condition

There can be [*devotion and surrender on the higher spiritual planes*], but it is not inevitable as in the psychic. In the higher mind one may be too conscious of identity with the “Brahman” to have devotion or surrender.

*

The Brahmic condition brings a negative peace of shanti and mukti in the soul. Self-giving brings a positive freedom which can become also a dynamic force of action in the nature.

*

One can have the Brahmic condition without self-giving, because it is the impersonal Brahman to which one turns. Renunciation of desires and of all identification with Nature is its condition. One can have self-giving of the nature to the Divine as well as of the soul and reach by it the Brahmic condition which is not only negative but positive, a release of the nature itself and not only a release from the nature.

Surrender and Transformation

If there is no surrender, there can be no transformation of the whole being.

*

A surrender by any means is good, but obviously the impersonal is not enough—for surrender to that may be limited in result to the inner experience without any transformation of the outer nature.

Passive or Tamasic Surrender

Active surrender is when you associate your will with the Divine Will, reject what is not the Divine, assent to what is the Divine. Passive surrender is when everything is left entirely to the Divine—that few can really do, because in practice it turns out that you surrender to the lower nature under pretext of surrendering to the Divine.

*

I wanted to stress two things, that is why I have written so much about them.

(1) There must be no tamasic (inert, passive) surrender to the Mother—for that will bring as its reaction a passive inert helplessness before the lower or hostile forces or suggestions, an unresisting or helplessly resisting acquiescence or sufferance of these inroads. A passive condition can bring much peace, quietude, joy even, but it disperses the being instead of concentrating it in wideness and the will becomes atrophied. Surrender

must be luminous, active, a willed offering to the Mother and reception of her Force and support to its workings, at the same time a strong vigilant will to reject all that is not hers. Too many sadhaks cry before the attacks of their lower nature, "I am helpless, I cannot react, it comes and makes me do what it wants." This is a wrong passivity.

(2) One must not get into the habit of a state in which one is always in a struggle with suggestions and forces. People very easily fall into this and make it a habit—the vital part takes a sort of glowing satisfaction in crying out, "I am attacked, overborne, suffering, miserable! How tragic is my fate! Why do you not help, O Divine? There is no help, nor divine Grace? I am left to my misery and downfall etc. etc. etc." I do not want one more sadhak to fall into this condition—that is why I am calling Halt! before you get entangled in this kind of habit of constant struggle. It is what these forces want—to make you feel helpless, defeated, overborne. You must not allow it.

*

You are always expecting the Mother to do it [*remove vital dissatisfaction and revolt*]—and here again the laziness and tamas come in—it is the spirit of tamasic surrender. If the Mother puts you back into a good condition, your vital pulls you down again. How is that to stop so long as you say Yes to the vital and accept its discouragement and restlessness and anguish and the rest of it as your own? Detachment is absolutely necessary.

*

Talk of surrender or a mere idea or tepid wish for integral consecration will not do; there must be the push for a radical and total change.

It is not by taking a mere mental attitude that this can be done or even by any number of inner experiences which leave the outer man as he was. It is this outer man who has to open, to surrender and to change. His every least movement, habit, action has to be surrendered, seen, held up and exposed to the divine Light, offered to the divine Force for its old forms and

motives to be destroyed and the divine Truth and the action of the transforming consciousness of the Divine Mother to take their place.

*

It [*the idea that the sadhana is done by the Divine rather than by oneself*] is a truth but a truth that does not become effective for the consciousness until or in proportion as it is realised. The people who stagnate because of it are those who accept the idea but do not realise—so they have neither the force of tapasya nor that of the Divine Grace. On the other hand those who can realise it feel even behind their tapasya and in it the action of the Divine Force.

Surrender and Tapasya

Yoga is an endeavour, a tapasya—it can cease to be so only when one surrenders sincerely to a higher Action and keeps the surrender and makes it complete. It is not a fantasia, devoid of all reason and coherence or a mere miracle. It has its laws and conditions and I do not see how you can demand of the Divine to do everything by a violent miracle.

*

When the will and energy are concentrated and used to control the mind, vital and physical and change them or to bring down the higher consciousness or for any other Yogic purpose or high purpose, that is called Tapasya.

*

Tapasya has predominated in your sadhana, for you have a fervour and active energy which predisposes you to that. No way is entirely easy, and in that of surrender the difficulty is to make a true and complete surrender. Once it is made, it certainly makes things easier—not that things are all done in no time or that there are no difficulties, but there is an assurance, a support, an absence of tension which gives the consciousness rest as well

as strength and freedom from the worst forms of resistance.

*

Yes, of course you are right. The process of surrender is itself a Tapasya. Not only so, but in fact a double process of Tapasya and increasing surrender persists for a long time even when the surrender has fairly well begun. But a time comes when one feels the Presence and the Force constantly and more and more feels that that is doing everything — so that the worst difficulties cannot disturb this sense and personal effort is no longer necessary, hardly even possible. That is the sign of the full surrender of the nature into the hands of the Divine. There are some who take this position in faith even before there is this experience and if the Bhakti and the faith are strong it carries them through till the experience is there. But all cannot take this position from the beginning — and for some it would be dangerous since they might put themselves into the hand of a wrong Force thinking it to be the Divine. For most it is necessary to grow through Tapasya into surrender.

*

Yes, if there is the sense of the Divine Will behind all the Tapasya and receiving it and bestowing the fruit — it is at least a first form of surrender.

Surrender and Personal Effort

There are always two ways of doing the Yoga — one by the action of a vigilant mind and vital seeing, observing, thinking and deciding what is or is not to be done. Of course it acts with the Divine Force behind it, drawing or calling in that Force — for otherwise nothing much can be done. But still it is the personal effort that is prominent and assumes most of the burden.

The other way is that of the psychic being, the consciousness opening to the Divine, not only opening the psychic and bringing it forward, but opening the mind, the vital and the physical, receiving the Light, perceiving what is to be done, feeling and

seeing it done by the Divine Force itself and helping constantly by its own vigilant and conscious assent to and call for the Divine working.

Usually there cannot but be a mixture of these two ways until the consciousness is ready to be entirely open, entirely submitted to the Divine's origination of all its action. It is then that all responsibility disappears and there is no personal burden on the shoulders of the sadhak.

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There are two possibilities, one of purification by personal effort, which takes a long time, another by a direct intervention of the Divine Grace which is usually rapid in its action. For the latter there must be a complete surrender and self-giving and for that again usually it is necessary to have a mind that can remain quite quiet and allow the Divine Force to act supporting it with its complete adhesion at every step, but otherwise remaining still and quiet. This last condition which resembles the baby cat attitude spoken of by Ramakrishna, is difficult to have. Those who are accustomed to a very active movement of their thought and will in all they do, find it difficult to still the activity and adopt the quietude of mental self-giving. This does not mean that they cannot do the Yoga or cannot arrive at self-giving — only the purification and the self-giving take a long time to accomplish and one must have the patience and steady perseverance and resolution to go through.

*

If there is not a complete surrender, then it is not possible to adopt the baby cat attitude, — it becomes mere tamasic passivity calling itself surrender. If a complete surrender is not possible in the beginning, it follows that personal effort is necessary.

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In the early part of the sadhana — and by early I do not mean a short part — effort is indispensable. Surrender of course, but surrender is not a thing that is done in a day. The mind has its

ideas and it clings to them; the human vital resists surrender, for what it calls surrender in the early stages is a doubtful kind of self-giving with a demand in it; the physical consciousness is like a stone and what it calls surrender is often no more than inertia. It is only the psychic that knows how to surrender and the psychic is usually very much veiled in the beginning. When the psychic awakes, it can bring a sudden and true surrender of the whole being, for the difficulty of the rest is rapidly dealt with and disappears. But till then effort is indispensable. Or else it is necessary till the Force comes flooding down into the being from above and takes up the sadhana, does it for one more and more and leaves less and less to individual effort—but even then, if not effort, at least aspiration and vigilance are needed till the possession of mind, will, life and body by the Divine Power is complete. I have dealt with this subject, I think, in one of the chapters of *The Mother*.

On the other hand, there are some people who start with a genuine and dynamic will for a total surrender. It is those who are governed by the psychic or are governed by a clear and enlightened mental will which having once accepted surrender as the law of the sadhana will stand no nonsense about it and insists on the other parts of the being following its direction. Here there is still effort, but it is so ready and spontaneous and has so much the sense of a greater Force behind it that the sadhak hardly feels that he is making an effort at all. In the contrary case of a will in mind or vital to retain self-will, a reluctance to give up your independent movement, there must be struggle and endeavour until the wall between the instrument in front and the Divinity behind or above is broken. No rule can be laid down which applies without distinction to everybody—the variations in human nature are too great to be covered by a single trenchant rule.

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It is not possible to get rid of the stress on personal effort at once—and not always desirable; for personal effort is better than tamasic inertia.

The personal effort has to be transformed progressively into

a movement of the Divine Force. If you feel conscious of the Divine Force, then call it in more and more to govern your effort, to take it up, to transform it into something not yours, but the Mother's. There will be a sort of transfer, a taking up of the forces at work in the personal adhar—a transfer not suddenly complete but progressive.

But the psychic poise is necessary: the discrimination must develop which sees accurately what is the Divine Force, what is the element of personal effort, and what is brought in as a mixture from the lower cosmic forces. And until the transfer is complete, which always takes time, there must always be as a personal contribution, a constant consent to the true Force, a constant rejection of any lower mixture—that is very important.

At present to give up personal effort is not what is wanted, but to call in more and more the Divine Power and govern and guide by it the personal endeavour.

*

It is not advisable in the early stages of the sadhana to leave everything to the Divine or expect everything from it without the need of one's own endeavour. That is only possible when the psychic being is in front and influencing the whole action (and even then vigilance and a constant assent are necessary) or else, later on in the ultimate stages of the Yoga when a direct or almost direct supramental force is taking up the consciousness; but this stage is very far away as yet. Under other conditions this attitude is likely to lead to stagnation and inertia. (See *The Mother*, Part I.)

It is only the more mechanical parts of the being that can truly say they are helpless: the physical (material) consciousness, especially, is inert in its nature and moved either by the mental and vital or by the higher forces. But one has always the power to put the mental will or vital push at the service of the Divine. One cannot be sure of the immediate result, for the obstruction of the lower Nature or the pressure of the adverse forces can often act successfully for a time, even for a long time, against

the necessary change. One has then to persist, to put always the will on the side of the Divine, rejecting what has to be rejected, opening oneself to the true Light and the true Force, calling it down quietly, steadfastly, without tiring, without depression or impatience, until one feels the Divine Force at work and the obstacles beginning to give way.

You say you are conscious of your ignorance and obscurity. If it is only a general consciousness, that is not enough. But if you are conscious of it in the details, in its actual working, then that is sufficient to start with; you have to reject steadfastly the wrong workings of which you are conscious and make your mind and vital a quiet and clear field for the action of the Divine Force.

*

Certainly one ought not to fret [*about whether one will achieve one's end*]—and certainly one ought to dedicate [*one's desire to achieve it*] to the Divine. But our experience is that merely leaving the Divine to do everything (to fulfil) does not carry one very far. There must be a cooperation, a consent, an aspiration, a will to change.

*

If there were no conditions at all [*in Yoga*], then there would be no need of sadhana; all would be done automatically by the Force or help without any need of effort by the sadhak. The help is always there and it has pulled you out of many difficulties and attacks. It is, I suppose, because of the feeling “I do not want to do anything” that you have not been able to receive the help, but that is a temporary inertia of the physical mind and will. I do not see the use of your going back for a few months to a life which could not now satisfy you. The only course is to shake off the inertia of the will and persevere.

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So long as there is not the full presence and conscious working of the higher Force, some amount of personal effort is

indispensable. To do the sadhana for the sake of the Divine and not for one's own sake is of course the true attitude.

*

Faith, reliance upon God, surrender and self-giving to the Divine Power are necessary and indispensable. But reliance upon God must not be made an excuse for indolence, weakness and surrender to the impulses of the lower nature; it must go along with untiring aspiration and a persistent rejection of all that comes in the way of the Divine Truth. The surrender to the Divine must not be turned into an excuse, a cloak or an occasion for surrender to one's own desires and lower movements or to one's ego or to some Force of the ignorance and darkness that puts on a false appearance of the Divine.

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It is always better to make an effort in the right direction; even if one fails the effort bears some result and is never lost.

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For those who do not make any effort,—that absence of effort is itself a difficulty — they do not progress.

Chapter Eight

Faith

Faith, Belief, Confidence, Trust

Faith is a general word = *śraddhā*—the soul's belief in the Divine's existence, wisdom, power, love and grace—confidence and trust are aspects of faith and results of it.

Confidence is a feeling of sureness that the Divine will hear when sincerely called and help and that all the Divine does is for the best.

Trust is the mind's and heart's complete reliance on the Divine and its guidance and protection.

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Faith—a dynamic entire belief and acceptance.

Belief—intellectual acceptance only.

Conviction—intellectual belief held on what seem to be good reasons.

Reliance—dependence on another for something, based on trust.

Trust—the feeling of sure expectation of another's help and reliance on his word, character etc.

Confidence—the sense of security that goes with trust.

*

Faith is a feeling in the whole being, belief is mental; confidence means trust in a person or in the Divine or a feeling of surety about the result of one's seeking or endeavour.

*

You have seized the right principle again, to be all for the Mother and to have full confidence that one has only to go on quietly in that confidence and all will come that needs to come and all be done that the Divine wills to be done. The workings of the

world are too subtle and strange and complex for the human mind to understand it—it is only when the knowledge comes from above and one is taken into the higher consciousness that the understanding can come. Meanwhile what one has to follow is the dictates of the deeper psychic heart within based on that faith and love which is the only sure guiding star.

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Faith in its essence is a light in the soul which turns towards the truth even when the mind doubts or the vital revolts or the physical consciousness denies it. When this extends itself to the instruments, it becomes a fixed belief in the mind, a sort of inner knowledge which resists all apparent denial by circumstances or appearances, a complete confidence, trust, adhesion in the vital and in the physical consciousness, an invariable clinging to the truth in which one has faith even when all is dark around and no cause of hope seems to be there.

*

Faith in the spiritual sense is not a mental belief which can waver and change. It can wear that form in the mind, but that belief is not the faith itself, it is only its external form. Just as the body, the external form, can change but the spirit remains the same, so it is here. Faith is a certitude in the soul which does not depend on reasoning, on this or that mental idea, on circumstances, on this or that passing condition of the mind or the vital or the body. It may be hidden, eclipsed, may even seem to be quenched, but it reappears again after the storm or the eclipse; it is seen burning still in the soul when one has thought that it was extinguished for ever. The mind may be a shifting sea of doubts and yet that faith may be there within and, if so, it will keep even the doubt-racked mind in the way so that it goes on in spite of itself towards its destined goal. Faith is a spiritual certitude of the spiritual, the divine, the soul's ideal, something that clings to that even when it is not fulfilled in life, even when the immediate facts or the persistent circumstances seem to deny it. This is a common experience in the life of the human being; if

it were not so, man would be the plaything of a changing mind or a sport of circumstance.

A Problem of Faith

How to conciliate these two notions:

- (1) that the Divine's Will is behind all movements and happenings,
- (2) that the Divine Will is distorted in the manifestation.

There are two kinds of faith:

The faith that calls down the equanimity and the faith that calls down the realisation.

These two faiths correspond to two different aspects of the Divine.

There is the Transcendent Divine and there is the Cosmic Divine.

The Will of realisation is that of the Transcendent Divine.

The Cosmic Divine is what is concerned with the actual working out of things under the present circumstances. It is the Will of that Cosmic Divine which is manifested in each circumstance, each movement of this world.

The Cosmic Will is not, to our ordinary consciousness, something that acts as an independent power doing whatever it chooses; it works through all these beings, through the forces at play in the world and the law of these forces and their results. It is only when we open ourselves and get out of the ordinary consciousness that we can feel it intervening as an independent power and overriding the ordinary play of the forces.

Then too we can see that even in the play of the forces and in spite of their distortions the Cosmic Will is working towards the eventual realisation of the Will of the Transcendent Divine.

The supramental realisation is the Will of the Transcendent Divine which we have to work out. The circumstances under which we have to work it out are those of an inferior consciousness in which things can be distorted by our own ignorance, weaknesses and mistakes, and by the clash of conflicting forces. That is why faith and equanimity are indispensable.

We have to have the faith that in spite of our ignorance and errors and weaknesses and in spite of the attacks of hostile forces and in spite of any immediate appearance of failure the Divine Will is leading us, through every circumstance, towards the final realisation. This faith will give us equanimity; it is a faith that accepts what happens not definitively but as something that has to be gone through on the way. Once equanimity is established there can be established too another kind of faith, supported by it, which can be made dynamic with something from the supramental consciousness and can overcome the present circumstances and determine what will happen and help to bring down the realisation of the Will of the Transcendent Divine.

The faith that goes to the Cosmic Divine is limited in the power of its action by the necessities of the play.

To get entirely free from these limitations one must reach the Transcendent Divine.

Faith and Knowledge

Faith is a thing that precedes knowledge, not comes after knowledge. It is a glimpse of a truth which the mind has not yet seized as knowledge.

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Until we know the Truth (not mentally but by experience, by change of consciousness) we need the soul's faith to sustain us and hold on to the Truth — but when we live in the knowledge, this faith is changed into knowledge.

Of course I am speaking of direct spiritual knowledge. Mental knowledge cannot replace faith; so long as there is only mental knowledge, faith is still needed.

*

The phrase [“*blind faith*”] has no real meaning. I suppose they mean they will not believe without proof — but the conclusion formed after proof is not faith, it is knowledge or it is a mental opinion. Faith is something which one has before proof or

knowledge and it helps you to arrive at knowledge or experience. There is no proof that God exists, but if I have faith in God, then I can arrive at the experience of the Divine.

Faith and Experience

Mental theories are of no fundamental importance, for the mind forms or accepts the theories that support the turn of the being. What is important is that turn and the call within you.

The knowledge that there is a Supreme Existence, Consciousness and Bliss which is not merely a negative Nirvana or a static and featureless Absolute, but dynamic, the perception that this Divine Consciousness can be realised not only beyond but here, and the consequent acceptance of a divine life as the aim of Yoga, do not belong to the mind. It is not a question of mental theory — even though mentally this outlook can be as well supported as any other, if not better, — but of experience and, before the experience comes, of the soul's faith bringing with it the mind's and the life's adhesion. One who is in contact with the higher Light and has the experience can follow this way, however difficult it may be for the lower members to follow; one who is touched by it, without having the experience, but having the call, the conviction, the compulsion of the soul's adherence, can also follow it.

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There is much in your letter that would need long explanation for an adequate reply — but I want to say something about the faith which you say you don't have and can't have in the absence of experience. First of all, faith does not depend upon experience; it is something that is there before experience. When one starts the Yoga, it is not usually on the strength of experience, but on the strength of faith. It is so not only in Yoga and the spiritual life, but in ordinary life also. All men of action, discoverers, inventors, creators of knowledge proceed by faith and, until the proof is made or the thing done, they go on in spite of disappointment, failure, disproof, denial, because of something

in them that tells them that this *is* the truth, the thing that must be followed and done. Ramakrishna even went so far as to say, when asked whether blind faith was not wrong, that blind faith was the only kind to have, for faith is either blind or it is not faith but something else — reasoned inference, proved conviction or ascertained knowledge.

Faith is the soul's witness to something not yet manifested, achieved or realised, but which yet the Knower within us, even in the absence of all indications, feels to be true or supremely worth following or achieving. This thing within us can last even when there is no fixed belief in the mind, even when the vital struggles and revolts and refuses. Who is there that practises the Yoga and has not his periods, long periods of disappointment and failure and disbelief and darkness — but there is something that sustains him and even goes on in spite of himself, because it feels that what it followed after was yet true and it more than feels, it knows. The fundamental faith in Yoga is this, inherent in the soul, that the Divine exists and the Divine is the one thing to be followed after — nothing else in life is worth having in comparison with that. It was this faith growing in you that made you come for Yoga and this faith has not died or diminished — to judge from what you say in your letters, it has become more insistent and abiding. So long as a man has that, he is marked for the spiritual life and I will say that, even if his nature is full of obstacles and crammed with denials and difficulties, and even if he has many years of struggle, he is marked out for success in the spiritual life.

What you really have not yet a fixed faith in is the guidance of the Divine, his will to manifest to you or your capacity to receive him. It is this that the adverse attacks which began when you were on the threshold of the inner experience — as so often happens in the Yoga — try constantly to fix in your brain. They want to have a fixed mental formation there, so that whenever you make the attempt there will be in the physical mind an expectation of difficulty, a dwelling on the idea of difficulty and unsuccess and incapacity, if not always in the front of the mind, yet at the back and by that they hope to prevent the experience

from coming. It is these mental formations that you must reject, for they are a much greater obstacle than the vital failings to which you give such an exaggerated importance. It is not a fact that you have not had experiences — you had them but you did not give them their full value, because you were expecting something else. Otherwise the sense of the Divine Guidance and the faith in attainment would have formed in spite of difficulties and relapses such as everyone has in the Yoga. It is this faith that you need to develop, — a faith which is in accordance with reason and common sense — that if the Divine exists and has called you to the Path, as is evident, then there must be a Divine Guidance behind and that through and in spite of all difficulties you will arrive. Not to listen to the hostile voices that suggest failure or to the voices of impatient vital haste that echo them, not to believe that because great difficulties are there, there can be no success or that because the Divine has not yet shown himself he will never show himself, but to take the position that everyone takes when he fixes his mind on a great and difficult goal, "I will go on till I succeed and I will succeed — all difficulties notwithstanding." To which the believer in the Divine adds, "The Divine exists, he is there, and since he exists, my following after the Divine cannot fail. I will go on through everything till I find him."

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I am rather surprised at Krishnaprem's surprise about my statement of faith. I thought he had said once you should not hanker after experiences. As for experience being necessary for faith and no faith possible without it, that contradicts human psychology altogether. Thousands of people have faith before they have experience and it is the faith that helps them to the experience. The doctrine "No belief without proof" applies to physical science, it would be disastrous in the field of spirituality — or for that matter in the field of human action. The saints or bhaktas have the faith in God long before they get the experience of God — the man of action has the faith in his cause long before his cause is crowned with success — otherwise they would not have been able to struggle persistently towards their end in spite of defeat,

failure and deadly peril. I don't know what Krishnaprem means by true faith. For me faith is not intellectual belief but a function of the soul; when my belief has faltered, failed, gone out the soul has remained steadfast, obstinately insisting, "This path and no other; the Truth I have felt is the Truth whatever the mind may believe or not believe." On the other hand experiences do not necessarily lead to faith. One sadhak writes to me, "I feel the grace of the Mother descending into me, but I cannot believe it because it may be a vital imagination." Another has experiences for years together, then falls down because he has, he says, "lost faith". All these things are not my imagination, they are facts and tell their own tale.

All that, however, is by the way. I have no objection to you or anybody having experiences. I am not a fool. Let everybody have as many experiences as possible. What I say is that the hankering for experiences should not be there in such a way as to replace the true attitude and bring disappointment and revolt. Bhakti is not an experience, it is a state of the heart and soul. It is a state which comes when the psychic being is awake and prominent. It is for that reason that I asked you to cleave to the psychic way and not go back to that of vital desire. I have not said that your psychic being was "in front" in such a way as to be proof against all attack. What I said was that it was becoming awake and active, giving you the right attitude and helping you towards the change of your nature. I certainly did not mean a moral but a spiritual change. Freedom from ego is not a moral but a spiritual change—a moral man may be chock full of ego, an ego increased by his sense of goodness and rectitude. Freedom from ego is spiritually valuable because then one can be centred, no longer in one's personal self, but in the Divine, and that too is the condition of bhakti.

The Gospel of Faith

I spoke of a strong central and if possible complete faith because your attitude seemed to be that you only cared for the full response—that is, realisation, the Presence, regarding all else as

quite unsatisfactory, and your prayer was not bringing you that. But prayer by itself does not usually bring that at once — only if there is a burning faith at the centre or a complete faith in all the parts of the being. That does not mean that those whose faith is not so strong or surrender complete cannot arrive, but usually they have to go at first by small steps and to face the difficulties of their nature until by perseverance or tapasya they make a sufficient opening. Even a faltering faith and a slow and partial surrender have their force and their result, otherwise only the rare few could do sadhana at all. What I mean by the central faith is a faith in the soul or the central being behind, a faith which is there even when the mind doubts and the vital despairs and the physical wants to collapse, and after the attack is over, reappears and pushes on the path again. It may be strong and bright, it may be pale and in appearance weak, but if it persists each time in going on, it is the real thing. Fits of despair and darkness are a tradition in the path of sadhana — in all Yogas oriental and occidental they seem to have been the rule. I know all about them myself — but my experience has led me to the perception that they are an unnecessary tradition and could be dispensed with if one chose. That is why whenever they come in you or others I try to lift up before them the gospel of faith. If still they come, one has only to get through them as soon as possible and get back into the sun. Your dream of the sea was a perfectly true one — in the end the storm and swell do not prevent the arrival of the state of Grace in the sadhak and with it the arrival of the Grace itself. That I suppose is what something in you is always asking for — the suprarational miracle of Grace, something that is impatient of the demand for tapasya and self-perfection and long labour. Well, it can come, it has come to several here after years upon years of blank failure and difficulty or terrible internal struggles. But it comes usually in that way — as opposed to a slowly developing Grace — after much difficulty and not at once. If you go on asking for it in spite of the apparent failure of response, it is sure to come.

Faith and Doubt

I see you have let the demons of self-doubt and doubt in general and melancholy get inside again and sit down at your table. There is no other reason for your troubles than this readiness to listen to their knock and open the door. You speak of X, but that is why X gets on because when they knock, he turns them out at once. If you resolutely do that, you will arrive also at security and perfect ease — for there are only two things that create insecurity — doubt and desire. If you desire only the Divine, there is an absolute certitude that you will reach the Divine. But all these questionings and repinings at each moment because you have not yet reached, only delay and keep an impeding curtain before the heart and the eyes. For at every step when one makes an advance, the opposite forces will throw this doubt like a rope between the legs and stop one short with a stumble — it is their *métier* to do that. One must not give them that advantage. Instead of saying, “I want only the Divine, why is the Divine not already here?”, one must say, “Since I want only the Divine, my success is sure, I have only to walk forward in all confidence and his own hand will be there secretly leading me to him by his own way and at his own time.” That is what you must keep as your constant mantra and it is besides the only logical and reasonable thing to do — for anything else is an irrational self-contradiction of the most glaring kind. Anything else one may doubt — whether the supermind will come down, whether this world can ever be anything but a field of struggle for the mass of men, — these can be rational doubts — but that he who desires only the Divine shall reach the Divine is a certitude much more certain than that two and two make four. That is the faith every sadhak must have in the bottom of his heart, supporting him through every stumble and blow and ordeal. It is only false ideas still casting their shadow on your mind that prevent you from having it. Push them aside for good and see this simple inner truth in a simple and straightforward way — the back of the difficulty will be broken.

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As for the doubts, such occurrences happen to almost all sadhaks from time to time so long as there is not such a fixity of continuous experience as makes any fundamental doubt impossible, although there may still be questionings about this or that until the knowledge and experience are made complete.

The nature of the doubts and misbeliefs were such as are always suggested to everybody when this kind of Influence envelops—the part of the mind which responds to them is the physical mind—for the other parts are covered over at such times and the physical mind left to itself naturally doubts everything supraphysical and believes only in its own domain.

Mental faith is very helpful, but it is a thing that can always be temporarily shaken or quite clouded—until the higher consciousness and experience get fixed for good. What endures even if concealed is the inner being's aspiration or need for something higher which is the soul's faith. That too may be concealed for a time but it reasserts itself—it undergoes eclipse but not extinction.

*

It is quite sufficient if there is the firm and constant will towards faith and self-offering. It is understood that it is not possible for the human nature to be always without movements of doubt, obscurity or things not yet offered until the inner consciousness has sufficiently grown to make these impossible. It is because it is so that the will is necessary so that the Force may work to remove these things with full consent and will of the mind and heart of the sadhak. To try to reject these things and make the will permanent is sufficient,—for it is this effort that brings eventually the permanence.

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It is possible for anyone to attain to a complete and living faith in the Divine if he has the sincere will to do so, even though he may not be sattvic in his nature; but, if he is sattvic, it will be easier for him—he will not be hampered by doubts and revolts such as afflict the rajasic man on his way.

Types of Faith

Mental faith combats doubt and helps to open to the true knowledge; vital faith prevents the attacks of the hostile forces or defeats them and helps to open to the true spiritual will and action; physical faith keeps one firm through all physical obscurity, inertia or suffering and helps to open to the foundation of the true consciousness; psychic faith opens to the direct touch of the Divine and helps to bring union and surrender.

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Faith can be tamasic and ineffective, e.g. "I believe the Mother will do everything, so I will do nothing. When she wants, she will transform me." That is not a dynamic but a static and inert faith.

Faithfulness

When I spoke of being faithful to the light of the soul and the divine Call, I was not referring to anything in the past or to any lapse on your part. I was simply affirming the great need in all crises and attacks,—to refuse to listen to any suggestions, impulses, lures and to oppose to them all the call of the Truth, the imperative beckoning of the Light. In all doubt and depression, to say "I belong to the Divine, I cannot fail"; to all suggestions of impurity and unfitness, to reply "I am a child of Immortality chosen by the Divine; I have but to be true to myself and to Him — the victory is sure; even if I fell, I would be sure to rise again"; to all impulses to depart and serve some smaller ideal, to reply "This is the greatest, this is the Truth that alone can satisfy the soul within me; I will endure through all tests and tribulations to the very end of the divine journey." This is what I mean by faithfulness to the Light and the Call.

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I do not see how the method of faith in the cells can be likened to eating a slice of the moon. Nobody ever got a slice of the

moon, but the healing by faith in the cells is an actual fact and a law of Nature and has been demonstrated often enough even apart from Yoga. The way to get faith and everything else is to insist on having them and refuse to flag or despair or give up until one has them — it is the way by which everything has been got since this difficult world began to have thinking and aspiring creatures upon it. It is to open always, always to the Light and turn one's back on the darkness. It is to refuse the voices that cry persistently, "You cannot, you shall not, you are incapable, you are the puppet of a dream" — for these are the enemy voices, they cut one off from the result that was coming by their strident clamour and then triumphantly point to the barrenness of result as a proof of their thesis. The difficulty of the endeavour is a known thing, but the difficult is not the impossible — it is the difficult that has always been accomplished and the conquest of difficulties makes up all that is valuable in the earth's history. In the spiritual endeavour also it shall be so.

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For the sadhana, your strong distaste (to say the least) for the methods which we find most useful but you find grim and repellent, makes a great obstacle. But I maintain my idea that if you remain faithful to the seeking for the Divine, the day of grace and opening will come. Nobody will be more pleased than ourselves if it comes over there in the Himalayas, or for that matter anywhere. The place does not matter — the thing itself is all.

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I ask you to have faith in the Divine, in the Divine Grace, in the truth of the sadhana, in the eventual triumph of the spirit over its mental and vital and physical difficulties, in the Path and the Guru, in the existence of things other than are written in the philosophy of Haeckel or Huxley or Bertrand Russell, because if these things are not true, there is no meaning in the Yoga.

*

If his faith depends on the perfection of the sadhaks, obviously it must be a rather shaky thing! Sadhaks and sadhikas are not supposed to be perfect. It is only siddhas for whom one can claim perfection and even then not according to a mental standard.

Keep Firm Faith

Do not allow any discouragement to come upon you and have no distrust of the Divine Grace. Whatever difficulties are outside you, whatever weaknesses are inside you, if you keep firm hold on your faith and your aspiration, the secret Power will carry you through and bring you back here. Even if you are oppressed with opposition and difficulties, even if you stumble, even if the way seems closed to you, keep hold on your aspiration; if faith is clouded for a time, turn always in mind and heart to us and it will be removed. As for outer help in the way of letters we are perfectly ready to give it to you. But keep firm on the way—then in the end things open out of themselves and circumstances yield to the inner spirit.

*

Whatever adverse things present themselves you must meet them with courage and they will disappear and the help come. Faith and courage are the true attitude to keep in life and work always and in the spiritual experience also.

*

In moments of trial faith in the Divine protection and the call for that protection; at all times the faith that what the Divine wills is the best.

It is what turns you towards the Divine that must be accepted as good for you—all is bad for you that turns you away from the Divine.

*

That is the true resolution. Keep it firm inside you even if waves of other consciousness cover on the surface. If one plants a faith

or resolution like that firmly in oneself, then it remains and even if the mind for a time gets clouded or the resolution dimmed, yet one finds it reemerging automatically like a ship out of a covering wave, and goes invincibly on with the journey through all vicissitudes till it reaches the harbour.

*

They [*faith, surrender and samata*] have to be put into every part and atom of the being so that there may be no possibility of a contrary vibration anywhere.

*

You must keep the faith always that however the lower nature may rise or hostile forces attack, victory will be yours and the transformation is sure.

*

Keep firm faith in the victory of the Light and face with calm equanimity the resistances of Matter and human personality to their own transformation.

*

Even if there is much darkness — and this world is full of it and the physical nature of man also — yet a ray of the true Light can prevail eventually against a tenfold darkness. Believe that and cleave to it always.

Chapter Nine

Consecration and Offering

Consecration

Consecration is a process by which one trains the consciousness to give itself to the Divine.

*

The general principle of self-consecration and self-giving is the same for all in this Yoga, but each has his own way of consecration and self-giving. The way that X takes is good for X, just as the way that you take is the right one for you because it is in consonance with your nature. If there were not this plasticity and variety, if all had to be cut in the same pattern, Yoga would be a rigid mental machinery, not a living power.

When you can sing out of your inner consciousness in which you feel the Mother moving all your actions, there is no reason why you should not do it. The development of capacities is not only permissible but right, when it can be made part of the Yoga; one can give not only one's soul, but all one's powers to the Divine.

*

It is very evident that X has had a sudden opening to spiritual experience — a surprisingly sudden opening, one would think, but it happens often in that way, especially if there is a sceptical mind outside and a soul ready for experience within. In such cases also it comes often after a blow such as his brother's illness, but I think there was already a turning of the mind which prepared it. This sudden and persistent visualisation also shows that there is a faculty within that has broken the gates which shut it in — the faculty of supraphysical vision. The coming up of the word "consecration" is also a familiar phenomenon of these experiences — it is what I call the voice of the psychic, an intimation from his own soul to the mind as to what it wants

him to do. Now he has to accept it, for the assent of the nature, of the outward man to the inner voice, is necessary so that it may be effective. He is standing at the turning point and has been given an indication of the new road his inner being, the Antaratman, wants him to follow—but, as I say, the assent of his mind and vital is necessary. If he can decide to consecrate, he must make the *sankalpa* of consecration, offer himself to the Divine and call for the help and the guidance. If he is not able to do that at once let him wait and see, but keeping himself open, as it were, to the continuation and development of the experience that has begun till it becomes definitely imperative to his own feeling. He will receive help and, if he becomes conscious of it, then there can be no further question—it will be easy for him to proceed on the way.

Offering

One offers to the Divine in order to get rid of the illusion of separation—the very act of offering implies that all belongs to the Divine.

*

Have attachment to nothing [*in order to offer all to the Divine*]—aspire until you get the consciousness of the Divine—call on the Divine to control and take up all you are and have.

*

(1) Offer yourself more and more—all the consciousness, all that happens in it, all your work and action.

(2) If you have faults and weaknesses, hold them up before the Divine to be changed or abolished.

(3) Try to do what I told you, concentrate in the heart till you constantly feel the Presence there.

*

Remain quiet, put your will always on the side of the Truth, offer yourself entirely to the Divine.

Chapter Ten

Opening

The Meaning of Opening

Opening is a change of the consciousness by which it becomes receptive to the Divine.

*

Opening means that the consciousness becomes opened to the Truth or the Divine to which it is now shut — it indicates a state of receptivity.

*

Opening is a thing that happens of itself by sincerity of will and aspiration. It means to be able to receive the higher forces that come from the Mother.

*

Opening means only to be able to receive the Mother's force. Whether one is open or not is shown by two things. If one is conscious of the force working in one, then one is open. But even if one is not conscious, yet if results of the working happen, then that also means that in the inner being some opening has been made. Aspiration, sincerity and the quietude of the mind are the three best conditions for opening.

*

These [*calling the Mother, praying to her*] are acts of the mind, openness is a *state* of consciousness which keeps it turned to the Mother, free from other movements, expecting and able to receive what may come from the Divine.

*

There is a state in which the sadhak is conscious of the Divine Force working in him or of its results at least and does not

obstruct its descent or its action by his own mental activities, vital restlessness or physical obscurity and inertia. That is openness to the Divine. Surrender is the best way of opening; but aspiration and quietness can do it up to a certain point so long as there is not the surrender.

*

The object of the self-opening is to allow the force of the Divine to flow in bringing light, peace, Ananda etc. and to do the work of transformation. When the being so receives the Divine Shakti and it works in him, produces its results (whether he is entirely conscious of the process or not), then he is said to be open.

Opening to the Divine

In this Yoga the whole principle is to open oneself to the Divine Influence. It is there above you and, if you can once become conscious of it, you have then to call it down into you. It descends into the mind and into the body as Peace, as a Light, as a Force that works, as the Presence of the Divine with or without form, as Ananda. Before one has this consciousness, one has to have faith and aspire for the opening. Aspiration, call, prayer are forms of one and the same thing and are all effective; you can take the form that comes to you or is easiest to you. The other way is concentration; you concentrate your consciousness in the heart (some do it in the head or above the head) and meditate on the Mother in the heart and call her in there. One can do either and both at different times — whatever comes naturally to you or you are moved to do at the moment. Especially in the beginning the one great necessity is to get the mind quiet, reject at the time of meditation all thoughts and movements that are foreign to the sadhana. In the quiet mind there will be a progressive preparation for the experience. But you must not become impatient if all is not done at once; it takes time to bring entire quiet into the mind; you have to go on till the consciousness is ready.

*

In this Yoga all depends on whether one can open to the Influence or not. If there is a sincerity in the aspiration and a patient will to arrive at the higher consciousness in spite of all obstacles, then the opening in one form or another is sure to arrive. But it may take a long or a short time according to the prepared or unprepared condition of the mind, heart and body; so if one has not the necessary patience, the effort may be abandoned owing to the difficulty of the beginning. There is no method in this Yoga except to concentrate, preferably in the heart, and call the presence and power of the Mother to take up the being and by the workings of her force transform the consciousness; one can concentrate also in the head or between the eyebrows, but for many this is a too difficult opening. When the mind falls quiet and the concentration becomes strong and the aspiration intense, then there is a beginning of experience. The more the faith, the more rapid the result is likely to be. For the rest one must not depend on one's own efforts only, but succeed in establishing a contact with the Divine and a receptivity to the Mother's Power and Presence.

*

A Fire in the heart is usually the psychic fire and that should rather grow and be fed by the tendency or aspiration to the personal sadhana. The main principle of the personal sadhana is the surrender, the aspiration to the Divine touch, presence, control in the heart—the opening of the psychic being from within and its coming in front to govern and change mind, vital, physical consciousness. There are two openings that are necessary, one from above, the other from within. The one from above which can come by the impersonal Path or by the personal and impersonal together, seems to have come to you. Your feeling about the Personal probably comes from the push from within for the psychic to emerge fully. It is this aspiration therefore that should be the beginning of the personal path and a reliance on the Inner Power to guide and do what is needed.

*

Well, that is the idea in Yoga—that by a right passivity one opens oneself to something greater than one's limited self, and effort is only useful for getting that condition. There is also a notion that even in the ordinary life the individual is only an instrument in the hands of a Universal Energy though his ego takes the credit of all he does.

*

It is the law of the sadhana to open to the influences of the higher worlds.

*

It is true that through whatever is strongest in him a sadhak can most easily open to the Divine.

*

In the practice of Yoga, what you aim at can only come by the opening of the being to the Mother's force and the persistent rejection of all egoism and demand and desire, all motives except the aspiration for the Divine Truth. If this is rightly done, the Divine Power and Light will begin to work and bring in the peace and equanimity, the inner strength, the purified devotion and the increasing consciousness and self-knowledge which are the necessary foundation for the siddhi of the Yoga.

*

Open with sincerity. That means to open integrally and without reservation: not to give one part of you to the divine working and keep back the rest; not to make a partial offering and keep for yourself the other movements of your nature. All must be opened wide; it is insincerity to hold back any part of you or keep it shut to the Divine.

Open with faithfulness. That means to be open constantly and always; not to open one day and withdraw the next.

*

The opening is the same for all. It begins with an opening of the

mind and heart, then of the vital proper — when it reaches the lower vital and physical the opening is complete. But with the opening there must be the full self-giving to what comes down, which is the condition of the complete change. It is this last stage that is the real difficulty and it is there that everyone stumbles about till it is overcome.

*

It takes time to open all the parts fully. Let the mind and heart remain open and the rest will follow. Clouds that pass and coverings that come cannot prevent it.

*

It is certainly not by merely repeating “to will” and “to open” (with the mental idea), that the will or the opening will come. It is by using the will that the will becomes effective, it is by using the aspiration and the will also that the opening comes. The first thing is to call down the calm into the mind and the vital; with the calm established or in course of preparation to invite more and more the Mother’s workings and grow conscious of them within you and give your assent to them and refuse all else. All the rest then comes in its time and by the proper process.

*

It is by confidence in the Mother that the opening needed will come when your consciousness is ready. There is no harm in arranging your present work so that there will be time and energy for some meditation, but it is not by meditation alone that what is needed will come. It is by faith and openness to the Mother.

*

Keep yourself open to the Mother, remember her always and let her Force work in you, rejecting all other influences — that is the rule for Yoga.

Chapter Eleven

Patience and Perseverance

Patience

It is certain that an ardent aspiration for the Divine helps to progress, but patience is also needed. For it is a very big change that has to be made and, although there can be moments of great rapidity, it is never all the time like that. Old things try to stick as much as possible; the new that come have to develop and the consciousness takes time to assimilate them and make them normal to the nature.

Keep this firm faith in your mind that the thing needed is being done and will be done fully. There can be no doubt about that.

*

There are always difficulties and a hampered progress in the early stages and a delay in the opening of the inner doors until the being is ready. If you feel whenever you meditate the quiescence and the flashes of the inner Light and if the inward urge is growing so strong that the external hold is decreasing and the vital disturbances are losing their force, that is already a great progress. The road of Yoga is long, every inch of ground has to be won against much resistance and no quality is more needed by the sadhak than patience and single-minded perseverance with a faith that remains firm through all difficulties, delays and apparent failures.

*

Determination is needed and a firm patience, not to be discouraged by this or that failure. It is a change in the habit of the physical nature and that needs a long patient work of detail.

*

One who has not the courage to face patiently and firmly life and its difficulties will never be able to go through the still greater inner difficulties of the sadhana. The very first lesson in this Yoga is to face life and its trials with a quiet mind, a firm courage and an entire reliance on the Divine Shakti.

*

It is true that a great patience and steadfastness is needed. Be then firm and patient and fixed on the aims of the sadhana, but not over-eager to have them at once. A work has to be done in you and is being done; help it to be done by keeping an attitude of firm faith and confidence. Doubts rise in all, they are natural to the human physical mind — reject them. Impatience and over-eagerness for the result at once are natural to the human vital; it is by firm confidence in the Mother that they will disappear. The love, the belief in her as the Divine to whom your life is given, — oppose with that every contrary feeling and then those contrary feelings will after a time no longer be able to come to you.

*

It is an impatience and restlessness in the vital which makes it feel as if it were no use staying here because things are not moving forward. Sadhana is a thing which takes time and needs patience. There are often periods of quiescence in which a working is going on behind of which the mind is not aware — all seems then to be inert and dull; but if one has patience and confidence, the consciousness passes through these periods to new openings and things which seemed to be impossible to effect at that time, get done. The impulse to rush away is always a mistake — perseverance in the path is the one rule to cling to and with that finally all obstacles are overcome.

*

Impatience is always a mistake, it does not help but hinders. A quiet happy faith and confidence is the best foundation for sadhana; for the rest a constant opening wide of oneself to receive with an aspiration which may be intense, but must always be

calm and steady. Full Yogic realisation does not come all at once, it comes after a long preparation of the Adhara which may take a long time.

*

In a more deep and spiritual sense a concrete realisation is that which makes the thing realised more real, dynamic, intimately present to the consciousness than any physical thing can be. Such a realisation of the personal Divine or of the impersonal Brahman or of the Self does not usually come at the beginning of a sadhana or in the first years or for many years. It comes so to a very few; mine came fifteen years after my first pre-Yogic experience in London and in the fifth year after I started Yoga. That I consider extraordinarily quick, an express train speed almost—though there may no doubt have been several quicker achievements. But to expect and demand it so soon and get fed up because it does not come and declare Yoga impossible except for two or three in the ages would betoken in the eyes of any experienced Yogi or sadhaka a rather rash and abnormal impatience. Most would say that a slow development is the best one can hope for in the first years and only when the nature is ready and fully concentrated towards the Divine can the definitive experience come. To some rapid preparatory experiences can come at a comparatively early stage, but even they cannot escape the labour of the consciousness which will make these experiences culminate in the realisation that is enduring and complete. It is not a question of my liking or disliking your demand or attitude. It is a matter of fact and truth and experience, not of liking or disliking, two things which do not usually sway me. It is the fact that people who are grateful and cheerful and ready to go step by step, even by slow steps, if need be, do actually march faster and more surely than those who are impatient and in haste and at each step despair or murmur. It is what I have always seen—there may be instances to the contrary and I have no objection to your being one,—none at all. I only say that if you could maintain “hope and fervour and faith”, there would be a much bigger chance—that is all.

This is just a personal explanation — a long explanation but which seemed to be called for by your enhancement of my glory — and is dictated by a hope that after all in the long run an accumulation of explanations may persuade you to prefer the sunny path to the grey one. My faith again perhaps? But, sunny path or grey one, the one thing wanted is that you should push through and arrive.

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You say after several years you have not changed your nature. I only wish the external nature were so easy to transform that it could be done in a few years. You forget also that the real problem — to get rid of the pervading ego in this nature — is a task you have seriously tackled only a short time ago. And it is not in a few months that that can be done. Even the best sadhaks find after many experiences and large changes on the higher planes that here much remains to be done. How do you expect to get rid of it at once unlike everybody else? A Yoga like this needs patience, because it means a change both of the radical motives and of each part and detail of the nature. It will not do to say — “Yesterday I determined this time to give myself entirely to the Mother, and look it is not done, on the contrary all the old opposite things turn up once more; so there is nothing to do but to proclaim myself unfit and give up the Yoga.” Of course when you come to the point where you make a resolution of that kind, immediately all that stands in the way does rise up — it invariably happens. The thing to be done is to stand back, observe and reject, not to allow these things to get hold of you, to keep your central will separate from them and call in the Mother’s Force to meet them. If one does get involved as often happens, then to get disinvolved as soon as possible and go forward again. That is what everybody, every Yогин does — to be depressed because one cannot do everything in a rush is quite contrary to the truth of the matter. A stumble does not mean that one is unfit, nor does prolonged difficulty mean that for oneself the thing is impossible.

The fact that you have to give up your ordinary work when

you get depressed does not mean that you have not gained in steadiness—it only means that the steadiness you have gained is not a personal virtue but depends on your keeping the contact with the Mother—for it is her Force that is behind it and behind all the progress you can make. Learn to rely on that Force more, to open to it more completely and to seek spiritual progress even not for your own sake but for the sake of the Divine—then you will go on more smoothly. Get the full psychic opening in the most external physical consciousness. That and not despondency is the lesson you ought to draw from your present adverse experience.

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They [*patience and peace*] go together. By having patience under all kinds of pressure you lay the foundations of peace.

Persistence

Your attitude towards the change needed and new life is the right one. A quiet, vigilant but undistressed persistence is the best way to get it done.

For the intimacy within to be reestablished the quietude must deepen so that the psychic may come out in the physical as it had done in the higher parts.

*

Things that have long acted on the nature take some time to go altogether, but they are bound to go since you have the sincere desire and your psychic being is growing in your nature. Our help is there always with you. You have to persist in faith and quietude and let the psychic grow more and more, then all will come right and you will no longer have this trouble.

*

It is so with all things in the path of sadhana—one must persist however long it takes, so only one can achieve.

*

What I want of you besides aspiring for faith? Well, just a little thoroughness and persistence in the method! Don't aspire for two days and then sink into the dumps, evolving a gospel of earthquake and Schopenhauer plus the jackal and all the rest of it. Give the Divine a full sporting chance. When he lights something in you or is preparing a light, don't come in with a wet blanket of despondency and throw it on the poor flame. You will say it is a mere candle that is lit — nothing at all? But in these matters, when the darkness of human mind and life and body has to be dissipated, a candle is always a beginning — a lamp can follow and afterwards a sun — but the beginning must be allowed to have a sequel — not get cut off from its natural *sequelae* by chinks of sadness and doubt and despair. At the beginning and for a long time the experiences do usually come in little quanta with empty spaces between — but, if allowed their way, the spaces will diminish and the quantum theory give way to the Newtonian continuity of the spirit. But you have never yet given it a real chance. The empty spaces have become peopled with doubts and denials and so the quanta have become rare, the beginnings remain beginnings. Other difficulties you have faced and rejected, but this difficulty you dangled too much for a long time and it has become strong — it must be dealt with by a persevering effort. I do not say that all doubts must disappear before anything comes — that would be to make sadhana impossible, for doubt is the mind's persistent assailant. All I say is, don't allow the assailant to become a companion, don't give him the open door and the fireside seat. Above all don't drive away the incoming Divine with that dispiriting wet blanket of sadness and despair!

To put it more soberly, — accept once for all that this thing has to be done, that it is the only thing left for yourself or the earth. Outside are earthquakes and Hitlers and a collapsing civilisation and — generally speaking — the jackal in the flood? All the more reason to tend towards the one thing to be done, the thing you have been sent to aid in getting done. It is difficult and the way long and the encouragement given meagre? What then? Why should you expect so great a thing to be easy or that

there must be either a swift success or none? The difficulties have to be faced and the more cheerfully they are faced, the sooner they will be overcome. The one thing to do is to keep the mantra of success, the determination of victory, the fixed resolve, "Have it I must and have it I will." Impossible? There is no such thing as an impossibility — there are difficulties and things of *longue haleine*, but no impossibles. What one is determined fixedly to do, will get done now or later — it becomes possible.

There — that is my counterblast to your variations on Schopenhauer. I conclude — drive out dark despair and go bravely on with your poetry, your novels — and your Yoga. As the darkness disappears, the inner doors too will open.

Perseverance

Whatever method is used, persistence and perseverance are essential. For whatever method is used, the complexity of the natural resistance will be there to combat it.

*

One who fears monotony and wants something new would not be able to do Yoga or at least this Yoga which needs an inexhaustible perseverance and patience. The fear of death shows a vital weakness which is also contrary to a capacity for Yoga. Equally, one who is under the domination of his passions, would find the Yoga difficult and, unless supported by a true inner call and a sincere and strong aspiration for the spiritual consciousness and union with the Divine, might very easily fall fatally and his effort come to nothing.

*

There can be no doubt about the Divine Grace. It is perfectly true also that if a man is sincere, he will reach the Divine. But it does not follow that he will reach immediately, easily and without delay. Your error is there, to fix for God a term, five years, six years, and doubt because the effect is not yet there. A man may be centrally sincere and yet there may be many things

that have to be changed in him before realisation can begin. His sincerity must enable him to persevere always—for it is a longing for the Divine that nothing can quench, neither delay nor disappointment nor difficulty nor anything else.

You have got troubled again because you have allowed your mind to become active again in its ignorance, questioning, trying to refute the simplest and most established spiritual truths, trying to decide without waiting for the inner knowledge. Throw all that away and go on in quietude, not minding if it takes short or long for things to open up. That was what you had undertaken to do. Keep to it and, however slowly, the consciousness will open and light come.

*

Keep quietude, persevere. These are the clouds that cover the growing Light; but the true consciousness is there increasing behind the clouds.

*

There is no such impossibility of your victory over the harder parts of your nature as you imagine. There is only needed the perseverance to go on till this resistance breaks down and the psychic which is not absent nor unmanifest is able to dominate the others. That has to be done whether you stay here or not and to go is likely only to increase the difficulty and imperil the final result—it cannot help you. It is here that the struggle however acute has, because of the immediate presence of the Mother, the best chance and certitude of a solution and successful ending.

Endurance

[*Endurance:*] The power to go through effort, difficulty or trouble without getting fatigued, depressed, discouraged or impatient and without breaking off the effort or giving up one's aim or resolution.

Resolution

A resolution means the will to try to get a thing done by the given time. It is not a binding “promise” that the thing will be done by that time. Even if it is not, the endeavour will have to continue, just as if no date had been fixed.

Firmness

Whether by tapasya or surrender does not matter, the one thing is to be firm in setting one's face to the goal. Once one has set one's feet on the way, how can one draw back from it to something inferior? If one keeps firm, falls do not matter, one rises up again and goes forward. If one is firm towards the goal, there can be on the way to the Divine no eventual failure. And if there is something within you that drives, as surely there is, falterings or falls or failures of faith make no eventual difference. One has to go on till the struggle is over and there is the straight and open and thornless way before us.

*

One cannot say whether the conquest is near or not — one has to go on steadily with the process of the sadhana without thinking of near and far, fixed on the aim, not elated if it seems to come close, not depressed if it still seems to be far.

*

You have only to remain quiet and firm in your following of the path and your will to go to the end. If you do that, circumstances will in the end be obliged to shape themselves to your will, because it will be the Divine Will in you.

Chapter Twelve

Vigilance

Vigilance, Discrimination, Control

Yes, the vigilance is very necessary — to remain *jāgrat* and *apramatta* was always considered as a main requisite by the Yogins.

*

Openness and, whenever needed, passivity, but to the highest consciousness, not to anything that comes.

Therefore, there must be a certain quiet vigilance even in the passivity. Otherwise there may be either wrong movements or inertia.

*

Yes; vigilance should not be relaxed. In fact, it is only as the automatic knowledge and action are established in the being that the constant vigilance ceases to be needed — even then it cannot be given up absolutely until there is the full Light.

*

To give up restraint would be to give free play to the vital and that would mean leave for all kinds of forces to enter in. So long as there is not the supramental consciousness controlling and penetrating everything, in all the being from the overmind downwards, there is an ambiguous play of forces, and each force, however divine in origin, may be used by the Powers of light or intercepted as it passes through the mind and the vital by the Powers of darkness. Vigilance, discrimination, control cannot be abandoned till the complete victory has been won and the consciousness transmuted.

*

Grace is all right, but there should also be care and vigilance.

In putting the cycle, you should first observe and be sure that it will stand steady before you withdraw your hand from it or loosen too much your hold.

*

If you want the divine life, you must remain absolutely *unexcited and quiet*. Not careless, but always on your guard, sober, vigilant. “Madcaps” cannot contain the Power of the Mother, only those who are calm, poised, balanced. So do not be “something of a madcap”.

Section Three

The Foundation of the Sadhana

Chapter One

Peace—The Basis of the Sadhana

Peace Is the First Condition

Peace and purity of the consciousness are the very foundation of the necessary change in the nature.

*

Peace is necessary for all; without peace and an increasing purity, even if one opens, one cannot receive perfectly all that comes down through the opening. Light too is necessary for all — without light one cannot take full advantage of all that comes down.

*

Peace is necessary for the higher states to develop.

*

Equanimity and peace in all conditions in all parts of the being is the first foundation of the Yogic status. Either Light (bringing with it knowledge) or Force (bringing strength and dynamism of many kinds) or Ananda (bringing love and joy of existence) can come next according to the trend of the nature. But peace is the first condition without which nothing else can be stable.

*

The first thing that you have to bring down is a positive, complete and enduring peace from above — that is the only foundation on which the rest can be done, i.e. the development of the higher consciousness, force, knowledge, love, Ananda.

*

What you are doing is entirely the right thing and nothing more is needed. The peace you feel is the basis, the foundation for

the transformation, all the rest will be built on it. To open to the Divine Forces with a quiet and strong aspiration, to become conscious of their working, to allow quietly that working and calmly to contain it, seconding it with one's aspiration, getting more and more knowledge and understanding of what is being done as one goes on — this is the sound and natural way of the Yoga.

*

A quiet aspiration can be as effective as an intense call. Peace is the basis of the sadhana.

*

The meditation experience seems to be developing in the right direction. Before it was only an opening; but to get something settled, there must be this assimilation and the growth in stability, in peace. Peace is the basis of the spiritual change — all the rest falls into the peace and is sustained on it as on a sure foundation.

*

Stability is indeed a great — the first necessity, like the foundations of a house. I am so glad to hear that you feel it growing in you.

Peace, Calm, Wideness

At last you have the true foundation of the sadhana. This calm, peace and surrender are the right atmosphere for all the rest to come, knowledge, strength, Ananda. Let it become complete.

It does not remain when engaged in work because it is still confined to the mind proper which has only just received the gift of silence. When the new consciousness is fully formed and has taken entire possession of the vital nature and the physical being (the vital as yet is only touched or dominated by the silence, not possessed by it), then this defect will disappear.

The quiet consciousness of peace you now have in the mind

must become not only calm but wide. You must feel it everywhere, yourself in it and all in it. This also will help to bring the calm as a basis into the action.

The wider your consciousness becomes, the more you will be able to receive from above. The Shakti will be able to descend and bring strength and light as well as peace into the system. What you feel as narrow and limited in you is the physical mind; it can only widen if this wider consciousness and the light come down and possess the nature.

The physical inertia from which you suffer is likely to lessen and disappear only when strength from above descends into the system.

Remain quiet, open yourself and call the divine Shakti to confirm the calm and peace, to widen the consciousness and to bring into it as much light and power as it can at present receive and assimilate.

Take care not to be over-eager, as this may disturb again such quiet and balance as has been already established in the vital nature.

Have confidence in the final result and give time for the Power to do its work.

*

Wideness and calmness are the foundation of the Yogic consciousness and the best condition for inner growth and experience. If a wide calm can be established in the physical consciousness, occupying and filling the very body and all its cells, that can become the basis for its transformation; in fact, without this wideness and calmness the transformation is hardly possible.

Difficulties, Disturbances and Peace

Aspire, concentrate in the right spirit and, whatever the difficulties, you are sure to attain the aim you have put before you.

It is in the peace behind and that "something truer" in you that you must learn to live and feel it to be yourself. You must

regard the rest as not your real self, but only a flux of changing or recurring movements on the surface which are sure to go as the true self emerges.

Peace is the true remedy; distraction by hard work is only a temporary relief—although a certain amount of work is necessary for the proper balance of the different parts of the being. To feel the peace above or about your head is a first step; you have to get connected with it and it must descend into you and fill your mind and life and body and surround you so that you live in it—for this peace is one sign of the Divine's presence with you, and once you have it all the rest will begin to come.

Truth in speech and truth in thought are very important. The more you can feel falsehood as being not part of yourself, as coming on you from outside, the easier it will be to reject and refuse it.

Persevere and what is still crooked will be made straight and you will know and feel concretely the truth of the Divine's presence and your faith will be justified by direct experience.

*

So long as the mind is restless, it is not possible to get at the inner Truth. Calm, peace, quietude—that is the first necessary condition.

*

To be calm, undisturbed and quiet is not the first condition for sadhana but for siddhi. It is only a few people (very few, one, two, three, four in a hundred sadhaks) who can get it from the first. Most have to go through a long preparation before they can get anywhere near it. Even afterwards when they begin to feel the peace and calm, it takes time to establish it—they swing between peace and disturbance for a fairly long time until all parts of the nature have accepted the truth and the peace. So there is no reason for you to suppose you cannot progress or arrive. You are finding a great difficulty with one part of your nature which has been accustomed to open itself to these feelings, separation from the Mother and attachment to relatives,

and is not willing to give them up—that is all. But everybody finds such obstinate difficulties in that part of the nature, even the most successful sadhaks here. One has to persevere until the light conquers there.

*

It is the quietness in which the Force can act and an entire reliance on that Force to do for you what is necessary—and for the rest a quiet vigilance not to consent to the confusion and restlessness—that you must achieve. It has been evident throughout since the working in you began that this is the only possible foundation for your sadhana.

*

That is the right way—to keep the peace of the higher consciousness, then even if there is vital disturbance, it will be only on the surface. The foundation will remain till the Force can release the true vital.

*

Detachment, silence, inner peace are certainly indispensable for the spiritual progress—a quiet peace-filled detachment. In that peace the Force must do its work. Attacks of confusion, pains etc.—the one thing to arrive at is to be able to stand back from them, to feel detachment from them, separate and call down the Force to act. Whenever one can do that, the attack, the difficulty after a time retires—or even if it lasts a little cannot disturb what has been gained.

*

The depression and vital struggle must have been due to some defect of over-eagerness and straining for a result in your former effort—so that when a fall in the consciousness came it was a depressed, disappointed and confused vital that came to the surface giving full entry to the suggestions of doubt, despair and inertia from the adverse side of Nature. You have to move towards a firm basis of calm and equality in the vital and

physical no less than in the mental consciousness; let there be the full downflow of Power and Ananda, but into a firm adhara capable of containing it—it is a complete equality that gives that capacity and firmness.

*

When the peace of the higher consciousness descends, it brings always with it this tendency towards equality, samata, because without samata peace is always liable to be attacked by the waves of the lower nature.

Chapter Two

Equality — The Chief Support

Equality or Samata

There can be no firm foundation in sadhana without equality, *samatā*. Whatever the unpleasantness of circumstances, however disagreeable the conduct of others, you must learn to receive them with a perfect calm and without any disturbing reaction. These things are the test of equality. It is easy to be calm and equal when things go well and people and circumstances are pleasant; it is when they are the opposite that the completeness of the calm, peace, equality can be tested, reinforced, made perfect.

*

Yogic Samata is equality of soul, equanimity founded on the sense of the one Self, the one Divine everywhere—seeing the One in spite of all differences, degrees, disparities in the manifestation. The mental principle of equality tries to ignore or else to destroy the differences, degrees and disparities, to act as if all were equal there or to try and make all equal. It is like Hriday, the nephew of Ramakrishna, who when he got the touch from Ramakrishna began to shout, “Ramakrishna, you are the Brahman and I too am the Brahman; there is no difference between us”, till Ramakrishna, as he refused to be quiet, had to withdraw the power. Or like the disciple who refused to listen to the Mahout and stood before the elephant, saying, “I am Brahman”, until the elephant took him up in his trunk and put him aside. When he complained to his Guru, the Guru said, “Yes, but why didn’t you listen to the Mahout Brahman? That was why the elephant Brahman had to lift you up and put you out of harm’s way.” In the manifestation there are two sides to the Truth and you cannot ignore either.

*

Samata means a wide universal peace, calm, equanimity, an equal feeling of all in the Divine.

*

Equality is to remain unmoved within in all conditions.

*

Equality is the chief support of the true spiritual consciousness and it is this from which the sadhak deviates when he allows a vital movement to carry him away in feeling or speech or action. Equality is not the same thing as forbearance,—though undoubtedly a settled equality immensely extends, even illimitably, a man's power of endurance and forbearance.

Equality means a quiet and unmoved mind and vital; it means not to be touched or disturbed by things that happen or things said or done to you but to look at them with a straight look, free from the distortions created by personal feeling, and to try to understand what is behind them, why they happen, what is to be learnt from them, what is it in oneself which they are cast against and what inner profit or progress one can make out of them; it means self-mastery over the vital movements, anger and sensitiveness and pride as well as desire and the rest, not to let them get hold of the emotional being and disturb the inner peace, not to speak and act in the rush and impulsion of these things, always to act and speak out of a calm inner poise of the spirit. It is not easy to have this equality in any full and perfect measure, but one should always try more and more to make it the basis of one's inner state and outer movements.

Equality means another thing—to have an equal view of men and their nature and acts and the forces that move them; it helps one to see the truth about them by pushing away from the mind all personal feeling in one's seeing and judgment and even all mental bias. Personal feeling always distorts and makes one see in men's actions, not only the actions themselves, but things behind them which, more often than not, are not there. Misunderstanding and misjudgment which could have been avoided are the result; things of small consequence assume

large proportions. I have seen that more than half of the untoward happenings of this kind in life are due to this cause. But in ordinary life personal feeling and sensitiveness are a constant part of human nature and may be needed there for self-defence, although, I think, even there, a strong, large and equal attitude towards men and things would be a much better line of defence. But, for a sadhak, to surmount them and live rather in the calm strength of the spirit is an essential part of his progress.

The first condition of inner progress is to recognise whatever is or has been a wrong movement in any part of the nature,— wrong idea, wrong feeling, wrong speech, wrong action,— and by wrong is meant what departs from the Truth, from the higher consciousness and higher self, from the way of the Divine. Once recognised it is admitted,— not glossed over or defended,— and it is offered to the Divine for the Light and Grace to descend and substitute for it the right movement of the true consciousness.

*

Complete samata takes long to establish and it is dependent on three things—the soul's self-giving to the Divine by an inner surrender, the descent of the spiritual calm and peace from above and the steady, long and persistent rejection of all egoistic, rajasic and other feelings that contradict samata.

The first thing to do is to make the full consecration and offering in the heart—the increase of the spiritual calm and the surrender are the condition for making the rejection of ego, rajoguna etc. effective.

Samata and Loyalty to Truth

No doubt hatred and cursing are not the proper attitude. It is true also that to look upon all things and all people with a calm and clear vision, to be uninvolved and impartial in one's judgments is a quite proper Yogic attitude. A condition of perfect samata can be established in which one sees all as equal, friends and enemies included, and is not disturbed by what men do or by what happens. The question is whether this is all that is

demanded from us. If so, then the general attitude will be one of a neutral indifference to everything. But the Gita, which strongly insists on a perfect and absolute samata, goes on to say, "Fight, destroy the adversary, conquer." If there is no kind of general action wanted, no loyalty to Truth as against Falsehood except for one's personal sadhana, no will for the Truth to conquer, then the samata of indifference will suffice. But here there is a work to be done, a Truth to be established against which immense forces are arranged, invisible forces which use visible things and persons and actions for their instruments. If one is among the disciples, the seekers of this Truth, one has to take sides for the Truth, to stand against the Forces that attack it and seek to stifle it. Arjuna wanted not to stand for either side, to refuse any action of hostility even against assailants; Sri Krishna, who insisted so much on samata, strongly rebuked his attitude and insisted equally on his fighting the adversary. "Have samata," he said, "and seeing clearly the Truth, fight." Therefore to take sides with the Truth and to refuse to concede anything to the Falsehood that attacks, to be unflinchingly loyal and against the hostiles and the attackers, is not inconsistent with equality. It is personal and egoistic feeling that has to be thrown away; hatred and vital ill-will have to be rejected. But loyalty and refusal to compromise with the assailants and the hostiles or to dally with their ideas and demands and say, "After all we can compromise with what they ask from us", or to accept them as companions and our own people—these things have a great importance. If the attack were a physical menace to the work and the leaders and doers of the work, one would see this at once. But because the attack is of a subtler kind, can a passive attitude be right? It is a spiritual battle inward and outward; by neutrality and compromise or even passivity one may allow the enemy Forces to pass and crush down the Truth and its children. If you look at it from this point you will see that if the inner spiritual equality is right, the active loyalty and firm taking of sides is as right, and the two cannot be incompatible.

I have of course treated it as a general question apart from all particular cases or personal questions. It is a principle of

action that has to be seen in its right light and proportions.

*

It [*samata*] is to face it [*an attack*] without being disturbed and to reject it calmly. Whether one tries to remedy or not remedy should make no difference. Only when one acts against it, one must do it calmly, without anger, excitement, grief or any other disturbing movement.

Samata and Ego

Samata does not mean the absence of ego, but the absence of desire and attachment.

*

I have said “samata” shows absence of desire and attachment — the ego-sense may disappear or it may remain in a subtilised and widened form — it depends on the person.

Equality and Detachment

As for the detachment of which you speak, it comes by attaining the poise of the Spirit, the equality of which the Gita speaks always, but also by sight, by knowledge. For instance, looking at what happened in 1914 — or for that matter at all that is and has been happening in human history — the eye of the Yогin sees not only outward events and persons and causes, but the enormous forces which precipitate them into action. If the men who fought were instruments in the hands of rulers and financiers etc., these in turn were mere puppets in the clutch of these forces. When one is habituated to see the things behind, one is no longer prone to be touched by the outward aspects — or to expect any remedy from political, institutional or social changes; the only way out is through the descent of a consciousness which is not the puppet of these forces but is greater than they are and can force them either to change or disappear.

*

The Yogic attitude consists in calm, detachment, equality, universality — added to this the psychic element, bhakti, love, devotion to the Divine.

Equality in Times of Trouble and Difficulty

Equality is a very important part of this Yoga; it is necessary to keep equality under pain and suffering — and that means to endure firmly and calmly, not to be restless or troubled or depressed or despondent, to go on in a steady faith in the Divine Will. But equality does not include inert acceptance. If, for instance, there is temporary failure of some endeavour in the sadhana, one has to keep equality, not to be troubled or despondent, but one has not to accept the failure as an indication of the Divine Will and give up the endeavour. You ought rather to find out the reason and meaning of the failure and go forward in faith towards victory. So with illness — you have not to be troubled, shaken or restless, but you have not to accept illness as the Divine Will, but rather look upon it as an imperfection of the body to be got rid of as you try to get rid of vital imperfections or mental errors.

*

To be free from all preference and receive joyfully whatever comes from the Divine Will is not possible at first for any human being. What one should have at first is the constant idea that what the Divine wills is always for the best even when the mind does not see how it is so, to accept with resignation what one cannot yet accept with gladness and so to arrive at a calm equality which is not shaken even when on the surface there may be passing movements of a momentary reaction to outward happenings. If that is once firmly founded, the rest can come.

*

It is very good that you have had this experience; for this kind of consciousness full of equality (samata) is just the thing that

has to be acquired and the very basis on which a sound Yogic consciousness full of the Mother can be built up. If it can be fixed, then most of the trouble and difficulty of sadhana disappears — all necessary changes can proceed quietly without these disturbances and upsettings which break and hamper the progress. Also in it there can grow a right and clear understanding of people and things and how to deal with them without friction which can make work and action much more easy. Once this consciousness has come, it is bound to return and increase.

*

Through an equality gained by strong mental control [*the worldly man is able to bear all kinds of difficulty*] — but that is not *samatā*, it is *titikṣā*, the power to bear which is only a first step or a first element of *samatā*.

*

It is not enough to have that equality and silence and freedom only when you are in communion with the sky and sea. It is at all times that you must be able to receive it from above — then there will be a true foundation of the sadhana.

*

You must establish a basis of equanimity within — the peace of the inner being which these surface movements cannot touch, — then if they come on the surface, there will be no violent reaction and they can be rejected with more ease.

*

The sadhak has to keep his quietude and faith and equanimity in all conditions — even when the higher consciousness and experience are not there.

*

One has to proceed on a basis of firm quietude and equanimity with a steady aspiration. It is only if there is a vital excitement that progress becomes a strain and relaxation is needed; for this

demand for relaxation is the vital's counterpart of excitement and its way of relief from it.

*

A perfect spiritual equanimity throughout the being is a sure defence against all the perturbations that might come through the environmental nature.

*

The difficulty of getting the perfect equanimity is a fact, but not for you alone—it has been so for all of us—it is too universal for you to make it a legitimate ground of discouragement. Nothing is more necessary, but nothing is more difficult. So there is no reason why you should discount my encouragement. My encouragement is given in spite of difficulties and not because I think there are none. Never mind these momentary mishaps—shake off the mood and once more *en avant*.

Chapter Three

Quiet and Calm

Quiet, Calm, Peace, Silence

The words “peace, calm, quiet, silence” have each their own shade of meaning, but it is not easy to define them.

Peace — *sānti*.

Calm — *sthiratā*.

Quiet — *acañcalatā*.

Silence — *niścala-nīravatā*.

Quiet is a condition in which there is no restlessness or disturbance.

Calm is a still, unmoved condition which no disturbance can affect — it is a less negative condition than quiet.

Peace is a still more positive condition; it carries with it a sense of settled and harmonious rest and deliverance.

Silence is a state in which either there is no movement of the mind or vital or else a great stillness which no surface movement can pierce or alter.

*

Quiet is rather negative — it is the absence of disturbance.

Calm is a positive tranquillity which can exist in spite of superficial disturbances.

Peace is a calm deepened into something that is very positive amounting almost to a tranquil waveless Ananda.

Silence is the absence of all motion of thought or other vibration of activity.

*

Quietness is when the mind or vital is not troubled, restless, drawn about by or crowded with thoughts and feelings. Especially when either is detached and looks at these as a surface movement, we say that the mind or vital is quiet.

Calmness is a more positive condition, not merely an absence of restlessness, over-activity or trouble. When there is a clear sense of great or strong tranquillity which nothing troubles or can trouble, then we say that calm is established.

*

Calm is a strong and positive quietude, firm and solid—ordinary quietude is mere negation, simply the absence of disturbance.

Peace is a deep quietude where no disturbance can come—a quietude with a sense of established security and release.

In complete silence there are either no thoughts or, if they come, they are felt as something coming from outside and not disturbing the silence.

Silence of the mind, peace or calm in the mind are three things that are very close together and bring each other.

*

These [*tranquillity and stillness*] are general words, of a general and not a special Yogic significance. Quiet, calm and peace can all be described as tranquillity, silence is akin to what is meant by stillness.

Quietude

Quiet means to keep the inner quietude and keep turned to the Mother with the aspiration towards or call for the return of the right condition.

*

Remember first that an inner quietude, caused by the purification of the restless mind and vital, is the first condition of a secure sadhana. Remember, next, that to feel the Mother's presence while in external action is already a great step and one that cannot be attained without a considerable inner progress. Probably, what you feel you need so much but cannot define is a constant and vivid sense of the Mother's force working in you, descending

from above and taking possession of the different planes of your being. That is often a prior condition for the twofold movement of ascent and descent; it will surely come in time. These things can take a long time to begin visibly, especially when the mind is accustomed to be very active and has not the habit of mental silence. When that veiling activity is there, much work has to be carried on behind the mobile screen of the mind and the sadhak thinks nothing is happening when really much preparation is being done. If you want a more swift and visible progress, it can only be by bringing your psychic to the front through a constant self-offering. Aspire intensely, but without impatience.

*

Your mind is too full of demands and desires. If you want to be able to practise the Yoga here, you must throw them from you and learn quietude, desirelessness, simplicity and surrender. It is these you must get first; other things can come afterwards — for this is the only true foundation of the sadhana.

*

Always get back to quietude. It is through the quietude that the right attitude and understanding and movements come back. It is natural for the lower vital to be made up of feelings, impulses and desires and to be attached to outer things — but that is only a part of you. There is also the psychic and the higher mind and higher vital which only need quietude and the help of the Force and Peace behind them to come forward more strongly and dominate over the lower vital and help to change it.

*

You are too easily invaded by these things [*from outside*]. You must call for a calm quietness in the vital and physical and a Force in you and around you which will repel all foreign forces the moment they appear. If there is entire quietude and strength in the nerves, these outside forces will not easily be able to touch you.

*

You should realise that while quiet surroundings are desirable, the true quiet is within and no other will give you the condition you want.

*

The inner spiritual progress does not depend on outer conditions so much as on the way we react to them from within—that has always been the ultimate verdict of spiritual experience. It is why we insist on taking the right attitude and persisting in it, on an inner state not dependent on outer circumstances, a state of equality and calm, if it cannot be at once of inner happiness, on going more and more within and looking from within outwards instead of living in the surface mind which is always at the mercy of the shocks and blows of life. It is only from that inner state that one can be stronger than life and its disturbing forces and hope to conquer.

To remain quiet within, firm in the will to go through, refusing to be disturbed or discouraged by difficulties or fluctuations, that is one of the first things to be learned on the Path. To do otherwise is to encourage the instability of consciousness, the difficulty of keeping experience of which you complain. It is only if you keep quiet and steady within that the lines of experience can go on with some steadiness—though they are never without periods of interruption and fluctuation; but these, if properly treated, can then become periods of assimilation and exhaustion of difficulty rather than denials of sadhana.

A spiritual atmosphere is more important than outer conditions; if one can get that and also create one's own spiritual air to breathe in and live in it, that is the true condition of progress.

*

If you can achieve quietude followed by an upward openness, it is better than the effort which sways between strong experiences and strong adverse reactions.

*

Even to have the quietude and calm somewhere behind or in

a passive way is more important and helpful than it seems. It provides a sort of permanent ground on which ultimately a lasting peace, power and joy can be built. If one can feel one part of the being always quiet in spite of the disturbances in another part, then one has made the first firm step towards a permanent change.

*

This state of emptiness and quietude and absence of reactions is regarded by Yogins as a great step in advance, especially the equality and indifference to what is said or done. For the moment it is a neutral condition only, but that it is usually at first. Afterwards it changes into peace or even into an equal Ananda undisturbed by anything that can happen.

*

The quiet and calm have to be increased so as to be a firm basis for the love and Ananda.

Quiet Mind

A quiet mind is a mind that does not get disturbed, is not restless and always vibrating with the need of mental action.

*

It is not possible to make a foundation in Yoga if the mind is restless. The first thing needed is quiet in the mind. Also, to merge the personal consciousness is not the first aim of the Yoga; the first aim is to open it to a higher spiritual consciousness and for this also a quiet mind is the first need.

*

The first step is a quiet mind — silence is a farther step, but quietude must be there, and by a quiet mind I mean a mental consciousness within which sees thoughts arrive to it and move about, but does not itself feel that it is thinking or identify itself with the thoughts or call them its own. Thoughts, mental

movements may pass through it as wayfarers appear and pass from elsewhere through a silent country—the quiet mind observes them or does not care to observe them but in either case does not become active or lose its quietude. Silence is more than quietude; it can be gained by banishing thought altogether from the inner mind keeping it voiceless or quite outside; but more easily it is established by a descent from above—one feels it coming down, entering and occupying, or surrounding the personal consciousness which then tends to merge itself in the vast impersonal silence.

*

To get rid of the random thoughts of the surface physical mind is not easy. It is sometimes done by a sudden miracle as in my own case, but that is rare. Some get it done by a slow process of concentration, but that may take a very long time. It is easier to have a quiet mind with things that come in passing on the surface, as people pass in the street, and one is free to attend to them or not—that is to say, there develops a sort of double mind, one inner silent and concentrated when it pleases to be so, a quiet witness when it chooses to see thoughts and things,—the other meant for surface dynamism. It is probable in your case that this will come as soon as these descents of peace, intensity or Ananda get strong enough to occupy the whole system.

*

How can you throw away the mind unless you want to disappear from manifested existence? It has first to be made quiet and open to the higher consciousness and transformed by the descent of the higher consciousness.

*

First aspire and pray to the Mother for quiet in the mind, purity, calm and peace, an awakened consciousness, intensity of devotion, strength and spiritual capacity to face all inner and outer difficulties and go through to the end of the Yoga. If the consciousness awakens and there is devotion and intensity of

aspiration, it will be possible for the mind, provided it learns quietude and peace, to grow in knowledge.

*

It is in the quiet mind that the true observation and knowledge come.

*

You have to become conscious [*in writing poetry*] as in Yoga. The mind has to be silent and you have to become aware of the inspiration as it comes and its source and of the mixture that comes on the way. The more the mind becomes quiet, the more all this is possible.

*

All quietude of the mind makes good conditions for the receptivity to act.

*

As I have said already, in all matters, work and study as well as in the inner progress in the Yoga, the same thing is needed if you want perfection—quietude of mind, becoming aware of the Force, opening to it, allowing it to work in you. To aim at perfection is all right, but restlessness of mind is not the way towards it. To dwell upon your imperfections and be always thinking how to do and what to do, is not the way either. Remain quiet, open yourself, allow the consciousness to grow—call the Force to work. As it grows and as the Force works, you will become aware not only of what is imperfect, but of the movement which will take you (not at one step, but progressively) out of the imperfection and you will then only have to follow that movement.

If you overstrain yourself by too prolonged work or a restless working, that disturbs or weakens the nervous system, the vital-physical, and lays one open to the action of the wrong forces. To work but quietly so as to have a steady progress is the right way.

*

1. A quiet mind makes consciousness easier.

2. If you keep a quiet mind and a constant contact with myself and the Mother and the true Light and Force, then things will become easy and straight — it is the *only* way to get to the realisation.

3. It is a mistake to think that this method will not lead you to the supramental realisation. It is the only way to advance towards the supramental change.

4. It is because you become doubtful and begin to follow after other ways and other (lower) experiences that you get again confused and full of incertitudes.

5. Keep to *one* way, the way shown to you by me. It is by following this way that you can reach the wideness you want — if you run about on many ways, that will bring not wideness but confusion.

6. Here in the lower nature there are many things, but they are in a state of disharmony, so to follow them all together means disharmony, confusion, want of organisation, fight. In the higher (supramental) nature there is a greater wideness and much more is there than in the lower nature; but all is harmony, organisation, peace. Follow therefore the one way that leads to the higher supramental nature.

7. Do not be impatient, because full knowledge does not come to you at once. In quietude of mind keep the contact, let the true Light and Force work and with time all knowledge will come and the Truth will grow in you.

*

Do you imagine that a quiet mind cannot reject anything and it is only the unquiet mind that can do it? It is the quiet mind that can best do it. Quiet does not mean inert and tamasic.

*

That is absurd. Doing nothing with the mind is not quiet or silence. It is inactivity that keeps the mind thinking mechanically and discursively instead of concentrating on an object — that is all.

*

Keeping the mind without occupation is not the same thing as peace or silence.

Vacant Mind

Keep the quietude and do not mind if it is for a time an empty quietude; the consciousness is often like a vessel which has to be emptied of its mixed or undesirable contents; it has to be kept vacant for a while till it can be filled with things new and true, right and pure. The one thing to be avoided is the refilling of the cup with the old turbid contents. Meanwhile wait, open yourself upwards, call very quietly and steadily, not with a too restless eagerness, for the peace to come into the silence and, once the peace is there, for the joy and the presence.

*

The difference between a vacant mind and a calm mind is this, that when the mind is vacant, there is no thought, no conception, no mental action of any kind, except an essential perception of things without the formed idea; but in the calm mind, it is the substance of the mental being that is still, so still that nothing disturbs it. If thoughts or activities come, they do not rise at all out of the mind, but they come from outside and cross the mind as a flight of birds crosses the sky in a windless air. It passes, disturbs nothing, leaving no trace. Even if a thousand images or the most violent events pass across it, the calm stillness remains as if the very texture of the mind were a substance of eternal and indestructible peace. A mind that has achieved this calmness can begin to act, even incessantly and powerfully, but it will keep its fundamental stillness—originating nothing from itself but receiving from Above and giving it a mental form without adding anything of its own, calmly, dispassionately, though with the joy of the Truth and the happy power and light of its passage.

Calm

It is the first secret of Yoga, to maintain the inner calm always

and from that calm to meet everything.

*

It is not necessary [*in a calm mind*] that there should be no thought. When there is no thought, it is silence. But the mind is said to be calm when thoughts, feelings, etc. may pass through it, but it is not disturbed. It feels that the thoughts are not its own; it observes them perhaps; but it is not perturbed by anything.

*

What you have written about your condition seems to be correct as a whole. There is certainly a greater calm within and a freedom of the inner being which was not there once. It is this which gives you the equality you feel there and the capacity to escape from the more serious disturbances. When one has this basis of inner calm, the difficulties and imperfections of the surface can be dealt with without upsets, depressions, etc. The power to go among others without any invasion is also due to the same cause.

*

Do not attach so much importance to mistakes or insist on your non-receptiveness and unconsciousness. You have only to turn always to the Force that gives you calmness and in the calmness you will become progressively more and more conscious and receptive.

*

Calm, even if it seems at first only a negative thing, is so difficult to attain that to have it at all must be regarded as a great step in advance.

In reality, calm is not a negative thing; it is the very nature of the Sat-Purusha and the positive foundation of the divine consciousness. Whatever else is aspired for and gained, this must be kept. Even Knowledge, Power, Ananda, if they come and do not find this foundation, are unable to remain and have to withdraw until the divine purity and peace of the Sat-Purusha are permanently there.

Aspire for the rest of the divine consciousness, but with a calm and deep aspiration. It can be ardent as well as calm, but not impatient, restless or full of rajasic eagerness.

Only in the quiet mind and being can the supramental Truth build its true creation.

*

The calm from above came to you and established your connection with the Above,—and if you hold firmly to it, you will be able to remain calm. But to be rid of these vital disturbances from outside, you have to get down the Power and Will that is also there above—or at least so to be connected with it that it will act whenever you call upon it against the forces of the Ignorance.

*

It is the calm that has come down from above, only you are feeling it from there (mind and heart) and not from above the mind. But you have to find it below the heart and not only from the heart above,—the calm has to spread lower down.

*

The first [*calmness with disturbances on the surface*] is the ordinary fundamental calm of the individual Adhar—the second [*perfect stillness in the body and in the surrounding atmosphere*] is the fundamental limitless calm of the cosmic consciousness, a calm which abides whether separated from all movements or supporting them.

This [*limitless stillness*] is the calm of the Atman, the Self above, silent, immutable and infinite.

Chapter Four

Peace

Peace Is Something Positive

Peace is more positive than calm — there can be a negative calm which is merely an absence of disturbance or trouble, but peace is always something positive bringing not merely a release as calm does but a certain happiness or Ananda of itself. There is also a positive calm, something that stands firm against all things that seek to trouble, not thin and neutral like the negative calm, but strong and massive. Very often the two words are used in the same sense, but one can distinguish them in their true sense as above.

*

In peace there is besides the sense of stillness a harmony that gives a feeling of liberation and full satisfaction.

*

It is very good news. The peace settling in the system and with it a happy activity — that is the basis for your Yoga which I always wanted you to have — a sunny condition in which what has to come in will come in and expand like a bud into flower and what has to fall off will fall off in its time like a slough discarded.

*

The quietude and silence which you feel and the sense of happiness in it are indeed the very basis of successful sadhana. When one has got that, then one may be sure that the sadhana is placing itself on a sound footing. You are also right in thinking that if this quietude is fully established all that is concealed within will come out. It is true also that the happiness of this peace is far greater than anything outer objects can bring — there can be no comparison. To become indifferent to the attraction of outer

objects is one of the first rules of Yoga, for this non-attachment liberates the inner being into peace and the true consciousness. It is only when one sees the Divine in all things that objects get a value for the Yoga, but even then not for their own sake or as objects of desire, but for the sake of the Divine within and as a means of the divine work and manifestation.

Peace Comes Little by Little

To nobody does the divine calm and peace come uninterruptedly in the early stages of the Yoga — it comes little by little — it is sometimes absent for long periods together, or there are strong attacks which cloud it over. It is by long sadhana that one gets the permanent peace.

*

In the beginning the peace and calmness comes like that only for a short time. The Adhar cannot keep it, its own natural condition being different. But afterwards the power of holding increases until in some part of the being at least it is constant.

A Settled or Established Peace

It is very good indeed. The peace and silence must settle deep in, so deep that whatever comes from outside can only pass over the surface without troubling the settled calm within — it is good also that the meditation comes of itself. It means that the Yoga-Force is beginning to take up the sadhana.

*

Yes, a settled peace and strength supporting the intensity and from which everything foreign falls off, is the true basis.

*

The first thing to do in the sadhana is to get a settled peace and silence in the mind. Otherwise you may have experiences, but nothing will be permanent. It is in the silent mind that the true

consciousness can be built.

A quiet mind does not mean that there will be no thoughts or mental movements at all, but that these will be on the surface and you will feel your true being within separate from them, observing but not carried away, able to watch and judge them and reject all that has to be rejected and to accept and keep to all that is true consciousness and true experience.

Passivity of the mind is good, but take care to be passive only to the Truth and to the touch of the Divine Shakti. If you are passive to the suggestions and influences of the lower nature, you will not be able to progress or else you will expose yourself to adverse forces which may take you far away from the true path of Yoga.

Aspire to the Mother for this settled quietness and calm of the mind and this constant sense of the inner being in you standing back from the external nature and turned to the Light and Truth.

The forces that stand in the way of sadhana are the forces of the lower mental, vital and physical nature. Behind them are adverse powers of the mental, vital and subtle physical worlds. These can be dealt with only after the mind and heart have become one-pointed and concentrated in the single aspiration to the Divine.

*

If the peace or silence is once absolutely established, no amount of movements on the surface can impair or abolish it. It can bear all the movements of the universe and yet be the same.

*

When the peace is fully established everywhere in the being, these things [*reactions in the lower vital*] will not be able to shake it. They may come first as ripples on the surface, then only as suggestions which one looks at or does not care to look at, but in either case they don't get inside, affect or disturb at all.

It is difficult to explain, but it is something like a mountain at which one throws stones — if conscious all through the

mountain may feel the touch of the stones, but the thing would be so slight and superficial that it would not be in the least affected. In the end even that reaction disappears.

*

The peace liberates from all dependence on outer contacts — it brings what the Gita calls the *ātmarati*. But at first there is a difficulty in keeping it intact when there is the contact with others because the consciousness has the habit of running outwards in speech or external interchange or else of coming down to the normal level. One must therefore be very careful until it is fixed; once fixed it usually defends itself, for all outer contacts become surface things to a consciousness full of the higher peace.

*

Even when there is the peace and the wideness, these things [*imaginings about old enjoyments*] can float on the surface and try to come in — only then they do not occupy the consciousness but touch it merely. It is what was regarded by the old Yogis as a mechanical remnant of Prakriti, a continuation of its blind habit which remained after the essential liberation of the self. It was treated lightly as of no importance — but that view is not tenable in our sadhana which aims not only at a liberation of the Purusha but at a *complete* transformation of the Prakriti also.

*

That is of course how it should be. It should go so far indeed that you will feel this peace and vastness as your very self, the abiding stuff of your consciousness — unchangeably there.

Peace in the Mind, Vital and Physical

Yes, certainly, there is a mental peace, a vital peace, a peace of the physical Nature. It is the peace of a higher consciousness that descends from above.

*

The silence and peace are there waiting to manifest. Let the mind and vital give all themselves and they will pour in and reveal themselves.

*

There can be peace in the mind even when the vital is not quite at rest or peace in the inner being even if the surface is disturbed. Consciousness cannot feel at rest and free, if there is no peace.

*

If you get peace, then to clean the vital becomes easy. If you simply clean and clean and do nothing else, you go very slowly — for the vital gets dirty again and has to be cleaned a hundred times. The peace is something that is clean in itself — so to get it is a positive way of securing your object. To look for dirt only and clean is the negative way.

*

When the light and peace are full in the vital and physical consciousness, it is this that remains always as a basis for the right movement of the whole nature.

*

It is the same peace [*in the physical as in the vital*] — but is felt materially in the material substance, concretely in the physical mind and nervous being, as well as psychologically in the mind and vital or subtly in the subtle body.

*

I presume that [*feeling peace concretely between the lobes of the brain*] would mean that the peace had become or was becoming very material and solid and physically tangible — “peace in the cells”. Everything is a “substance” — even peace, consciousness, ananda, — only there are different orders of substance.

*

Certainly, peace, purity and silence can be felt in all material

things — for the Divine Self is there in all.

*

Nature by itself is always full of peace — a peace which is fundamental and even the perturbations of mind and life cannot break.

Peace in the Inner Being

It is quite usual to feel an established peace in the inner being even if there is disturbance on the surface. In fact that is the usual condition of the Yogi before he has attained the absolute samata in all the being.

*

When the peace is deep or wide, it is usually in the inner being. The outer parts do not ordinarily go beyond a certain measure of quietude — they get deep peace only when they are flooded with it from the inner being.

*

The peace starts in the inner being — it is spiritual and psychic but it overflows the outer being — when it is there in the activity, it means either that the ordinary restless mind, vital, physical has been submerged by the flood of the inner peace or, at a more advanced stage, that they have been partially or wholly changed into thoughts, forces, emotions, sensations which have in their very stuff an essence of inner silence and peace.

*

If peace becomes permanent in the inner being, then the sub-nature becomes an external and superficial thing — one part of the consciousness is then free; unmoved by anything that happens, it regards the surface turmoil as something not belonging to itself. If the peace extends in the same way into the external parts also, then the whole being becomes free and the inferior nature is felt only as something moving about in the atmosphere, trying to enter but unable to do so. But this of course happens

only when the descents of Peace have turned into a massive stability of Peace.

*

Yes, the inward move is the right one. To live within in the peace and silence is the first necessity. I spoke of the wideness because in the wideness of silence and peace (which the Yogins recognise as the realisation of self at once individual and universal) is the basis for harmonising the inward and the outward. It will come.

*

Peace is never easy to get in the life of the world and never constant, unless one lives deep within and bears the external activities as only a surface front of our being.

Passive Peace

Passive peace is not supposed to do anything. It is by the complete solid presence of peace alone that all disturbance is pushed out to the surface or outside the consciousness.

*

It is not the innate character of passive peace that it can only concentrate in inaction. It can be there and concentrate in or behind action also.

Peace and Inertia

The Peace is not of the nature of inertia, but the inertia (*tamas*) is a degradation of peace or rest as *rajas* is a degradation of divine Force. So when the physical is invited to peace and cannot receive it, it brings up inertia instead.

*

Rest of the being from effort, disturbance etc.¹ The Spirit is

¹ *The correspondent wrote to Sri Aurobindo, “You have said, ‘The inertia (*tamas*) is a degradation of peace or rest.’ What sort of rest do you mean?” — Ed.*

eternally at rest even in the midst of action — peace gives this spiritual rest. Tamas is a degradation of it and leads to inaction.

Peace and Force

The peace is the condition of the right play of the Force. Force and Peace are two different powers of the Divine.

*

Peace is the first condition, but peace of itself does not bring Force — it is a receptacle of Force, not a bringer of Force.

*

A peaceful state is the basis of the Yogic consciousness. It is only when that is complete and fully established that the true intensity and energy can come.

*

The greater the quietude, the greater the energy that can be received.

Peace, Love and Joy

It is the Vaishnava feeling that the Vedantic peace is not enough, the love and joy of the Divine is more precious. But unless the two things go together, the love and joy felt is perhaps intense, but impermanent, and it is also true that it gets easily mixed, misdirected or turns to something that is not the true thing at all. Peace and purity must be got as the foundation of the consciousness, otherwise there is no firm standing ground for the divine play.

*

Active experience of the joy, peace, love, etc. when the direct contact is there; but even when it is not there, a quiet mind, heart and vital waiting and aspiring for the contact and the Presence — this should always be the condition.

No disturbance or confusion due to mere vital-physical impressions and experiences. To throw these away always, not to want them or get interested when they come—this is what is very much needed in you.

Always either the contact and the true experience *or* the quiet peace and aspiration.

Peace, Happiness, Joy, Delight, Ananda

To be full of peace, the heart quiet, not troubled by grief, not excited by joy is a very good condition. As for Ananda, it can come not only with its fullest intensity but with a more enduring persistence when the mind is at peace and the heart delivered from ordinary joy and sorrow. If the mind and heart are restless, changeful, unquiet, Ananda of a kind may come, but it is mixed with vital excitement and cannot abide. One must get peace and calm fixed in the consciousness first, then there is a solid basis on which the Ananda can spread itself and in its turn become an enduring part of the consciousness and the nature.

*

The peace need not be grave or joyless—there should be nothing grey in it—but the gladness or joy or sense of lightness that comes in the peace must be necessarily something internal, self-existent or due to a deepening of experience—it cannot, like the laughter of which you speak, be conveyed by an external cause or dependent upon it, e.g. something amusing, exhilarating etc.

*

It is when one is full of peace that one laughs most gladly. It is an inner condition, not something external like being silent or not laughing. It is a condition of serenity and stillness within in which there is no disturbance even if things go wrong or people are unpleasant or the body feels unwell—the state of serene inner gladness remains the same. It is self-existent.

*

Happiness is a condition of gladness, sense of inner ease and welfare, contentment, a sunlit life — it is more quiet in its nature than joy and delight.

Joy (*harsa*) is more intense. It is a strong movement of great gladness with an exultation, a leaping up of the vital to take some happiness, good fortune or other thing pleasant to the being.

Delight is an intense joy or an intense pleasure in something or an intensely joyful condition. At its most intense it becomes what is called rapture or ecstasy when one is “carried away” or “lifted out of” oneself by the intensity of the delight.

*

Joy is a vital movement, exciting, restless and transient.

In Ananda there is no excitement, it is a calm and happy and intense spiritual state or spiritual movement.

*

The joy also should be deep within, then it will not conflict with the deeps of peace and inner consciousness.

*

Shanti is peace or calm — it is not Ananda. There can of course be a calm Ananda.

*

Peace is a sign of mukti — Ananda moves towards siddhi.

*

There are two conditions, one of Ananda, another of great calm and equality in which there is no joy or grief. If one attains the latter, afterwards a greater more permanent Ananda becomes possible.

*

The active Ananda can culminate in the shanta Ananda. Also when the shanta Ananda is established, it is the base from which active Ananda arises without disturbing its calmness.

Chapter Five

Silence

Freedom from Thoughts

Silence means freedom from thoughts and vital movements — when the whole consciousness is quite still.

*

It is the silence of the mind and vital — silence implying here not only cessation of thoughts but a stillness of the mental and vital substance. There are varying degrees of depth of this stillness.

*

It is not possible to establish a deep silence all at once unless you can separate yourself from the thoughts, feel them as coming from outside and reject them before they enter. But everybody cannot do that at once.

*

It is quite possible for thoughts to pass without disturbing the silence — but for that you must be perfectly detached from the thoughts and indifferent to them.

*

If there is absolute silence within it is quite natural that the thoughts on entering and touching it should fall off. It is the way in which silence of the outer mind usually comes.

*

In the entirely silent mind there is usually the static sense of the Divine without any active movement. But there can come into it all higher thought and aspiration and movements. There is then no absolute silence but one feels a fundamental silence behind which is not disturbed by any movement.

Silence and True Knowledge

A silent mind is the first step towards true knowledge and the experience of the Divine.

*

I have read again the message of the Yogi quoted in X's letter but apart from the context nothing much or very definite can be made out of it. There are two statements which are clear enough—

"In Silence is wisdom"—it is in the inner silence of the mind that true knowledge can come; for the ordinary activity of the mind only creates surface ideas and representations which are not true knowledge. Speech is usually only the expression of the superficial nature—therefore to throw oneself out too much in such speech wastes the energy and prevents the inward listening which brings the word of true knowledge.

"In listening you will win what you are thinking of" means probably that in the silence will come the true dynamic thought formations which can effectuate or realise themselves. Thought can be a force which realises itself, but the ordinary surface thinking is not of that kind, there is in it more waste of energy than anything else. It is in the thought that comes in a quiet or silent mind that there is power.

"Talk less and gain power" has essentially the same meaning. Not only a truer knowledge, but a greater power comes to one in the quietude and silence of a mind that instead of bubbling on the surface can go into its own depths and listen for what comes from a higher consciousness.

It is probably this that is meant—these are things known to all who have some experience of Yoga.

Silence and Quietness of Mind

Silence is a state of the consciousness which comes of itself from above when you open to the Divine Consciousness—you need not trouble about that now.

A quiet mind, receiving things and looking at them without effervescence or haste, not rushing about or throwing up random ideas, is what is necessary.

*

It is not an undesirable thing for the mind to fall silent, to be free from thoughts and still—for it is oftenest when the mind falls silent that there is the full descent of a wide peace from above and in that wide tranquillity the realisation of the silent Self above the mind spread out in its vastnesses everywhere. Only, when there is the peace and the mental silence, the vital mind tries to rush in and occupy the place or else the mechanical mind tries to raise up for the same purpose its round of trivial habitual thoughts. What the sadhaka has to do is to be careful to reject and hush these outsiders, so that during the meditation at least the peace and quietude of the mind and vital may be complete. This can be done best if you keep a strong and silent will. That will is the will of the Purusha behind the mind; when the mind is at peace, when it is silent one can become aware of the Purusha, silent also, separate from the action of the nature.

To be calm, steady, fixed in the spirit, *dhīra, sthira*, this quietude of the mind, this separation of the inner Purusha from the outer Prakriti is very helpful, almost indispensable. So long as the being is subject to the whirl of thoughts or the turmoil of the vital movements one cannot be thus calm and fixed in the spirit. To detach oneself, to stand back from them, to feel them separate from oneself is indispensable.

For the discovery of the true individuality and building up of it in the nature, two things are necessary, first, to be conscious of one's psychic being behind the heart and, next, this separation of the Purusha from the Prakriti. For the true individual is behind veiled by the activities of the outer nature.

*

Silence is always good; but I do not mean by quietness of mind entire silence. I mean a mind free from disturbance and trouble,

steady, light and glad so as to be open to the Force that will change the nature. The important thing is to get rid of the habit of the invasion of troubling thoughts, wrong feelings, confusion of ideas, unhappy movements. These disturb the nature and cloud it and make it more difficult for the Force to work; when the mind is quiet and at peace, the Force can work more easily. It should be possible to see things that have to be changed in you without being upset or depressed; the change is the more easily done.

*

Let us not exaggerate anything. It is not so much getting rid of mental activity as converting it into the right thing. Krishnaprem has mental activity, but it is a mind that has gone inside and sees things from there, an intuitive mind; I have mental activity (in the midst of silence) whenever necessary, but it is a mind that has gone up and sees things from above, an overmind action. What has to be surpassed and changed is the intellectual reason which sees things from outside only by analysis and inference — when it does not do it rather by taking a hasty look and saying "So it is" or "So it is not". But you can't get the inner or upper mind unless the old mental activity becomes a little quiet. A quiet mind does not involve itself in its thoughts or get run away with by them; it stands back, detaches itself, lets them pass, without identifying itself, without making them its own. It becomes the witness mind watching the thoughts when necessary, but able to turn away from them and receive from within and from above. Silence is good, but absolute silence is not indispensable, at least at this stage. I do not know that to wrestle with the mind to make it quiet is of much use; usually the mind gets the better of that game. It is this standing back, detaching oneself, getting the power to listen to something else other than the thoughts of the external mind that is the easier way. At the same time one can look up, as it were, imaging to oneself the Force as there just above and calling it down or quietly expecting its help. That is how most people do it till the mind falls gradually quiet or silent of itself or else silence begins

to descend from above. But it is important not to allow the depression or despair to come in because there is no immediate success; that can only make things difficult and stop any progress that is preparing.

Silence, Peace and Calm

The silence and peace are themselves part of the higher consciousness — the rest comes in the silence and peace.

*

When the mind is silent, there is peace and in peace all things that are divine can come. When there is not the mind, there is the Self which is greater than the mind.

*

You have attained the silent inner consciousness, but that can be covered over by disturbance — the next step is for calm and silence to be established as the basis in the more and more outer consciousness — probably these [*higher*] forces are working for that. Then the play of the ordinary forces will be only on the surface and can be more easily dealt with.

Silence and True Activity

The silence is the silence of the inner consciousness and it is in that silence unmoved by outward things that the true activity of the consciousness can come without disturbing the silence — true perceptions, will, feelings, action. There also one can feel more easily the Mother's working. As for the heat, it must be the heat of Agni, the fire of purification and tapasya; it often feels like that when the inner work is going on.

*

It is not possible for the spontaneous silent condition to last always at once, but that is what must grow in one till there is a constant inner silence — a silence which cannot be disturbed

by any outward activity or even by any attempt at attack or disturbance.

The condition you describe shows precisely the growth of this inner silence. It has to fix itself eventually as the basis of all spiritual experience and activity. It does not matter if one does not know what is going on within behind the silence. For there are two conditions in the Yoga, one in which all is silent and there is no thought, feeling or movement even though one is acting outwardly as others do — another in which a new consciousness becomes active bringing knowledge, joy, love and other spiritual feelings and inner activities, but yet at the same time there is a fundamental silence or quietude. Both are necessary in the development of the inner being. The absolutely silent state, which is one of lightness, voidness and release, prepares the other and supports it when it comes.

*

The passive silence is that in which the inner consciousness remains void and at rest, not making any reaction on outer things and forces.

The active silence is that in which there is a great force that goes out on things and forces without disturbing the silence.

*

It is on the Silence behind the cosmos that all the movement of the universe is supported.

It is from the Silence that the peace comes; when the peace deepens and deepens, it becomes more and more the Silence.

In a more outward sense the word silence is applied to the condition in which there is no movement of thought or feeling etc., only a great stillness of the mind.

But there can be an action in the Silence, undisturbed even as the universal action goes on in the cosmic Silence.

Section Four

The Divine Response

Chapter One

The Divine Grace and Guidance

The Divine Grace

The Divine Will works in all things — it may work out anything whatever. The Divine Grace comes in to help and save.

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If you would know what is the Divine Grace, it is necessary first to realise that it is something which contradicts the law of the world, for it is outside its normal rule and not of its nature. There is here something which does not seem to govern at all the cosmic action, but only to intervene, and yet it is always there; an element without which this universe would be either a tremendous machine or a fortuitously and yet inexorably ordered chance. For to our observation all here is a process, a mechanism of Ignorance and Inconscience manifesting a precarious consciousness distressed by a nostalgia of Truth that exists somewhere and yet seems to be unseizable and unrealisable, — a mechanism of Law that controls a frightening whirl of Forces, a mechanism of implacable justice measuring things by a mysterious and to us unintelligible balance, a mechanism of evolution with matter and inconscience as its starting point, a precarious and groping life and consciousness as its highest realised term and as its final uncertain poise some possibility of the Divine. Our senses can discover no visible presence of the Divine, our intellect can do without any idea of its intervention — but it is another experience than that of the intellect and the senses which once it is there will no longer let us escape from the Presence or refuse to see the intervening Will or Grace.

This world is a world of Ignorance and by Ignorance a world of strife, seeking, error and suffering. We start by knowing nothing and have to learn everything; because our knowledge is a mixture of truth and falsehood and our will constantly

mistaken when not perverted, we stumble at every step and pay the price of experience in pain and grief and sorrow. It would seem as if nothing could save us but thought and knowledge translated into right will and action and it is that for which man by his intellect is seeking and yet by his intellect he has never found it and it looks as if by his intellect he would never find it. Then there is probably something else beyond the intellect which alone can give him the Light—something beyond his mind and greater than himself—a Grace that intervenes, the law of a supernormal Light and Will, a help, an opening from above.

*

I should like to say something about the Divine Grace—for you seem to think it should be something like a Divine Reason acting upon lines not very different from those of human intelligence. But it is not that. Also it is not a universal Divine Compassion either, acting impartially on all who approach it and acceding to all prayers. It does not select the righteous and reject the sinner. The Divine Grace came to aid the persecutor (Saul of Tarsus), it came to St. Augustine the profligate, to Jagai and Madhai of infamous fame, to Bilwamangal and many others whose conversion might well scandalise the puritanism of the human moral intelligence; but it can come to the righteous also—curing them of their self-righteousness and leading to a purer consciousness beyond these things. It is a power that is superior to any rule, even to the Cosmic Law—for all spiritual seers have distinguished between the Law and Grace. Yet it is not indiscriminate—only it has a discrimination of its own which sees things and persons and the right times and seasons with another vision than that of the Mind or any other normal Power. A state of Grace is prepared in the individual often behind thick veils by means not calculable by the mind and when the state of Grace comes then the Grace itself acts. There are these three powers: (1) the Cosmic Law, of Karma or what else; (2) the Divine Compassion acting on as many as it can reach through the nets of the Law and giving them their chance; and (3) the Divine Grace which

acts more incalculably but also more irresistibly than the others. The only question is whether there is something behind all the anomalies of life which can respond to the call and open itself with whatever difficulty till it is ready for the illumination of the Divine Grace — and that something must be not a mental and vital movement but an inner somewhat which can well be seen by the inner eye. If it is there and when it becomes active in front, then the Compassion can act, though the full action of the Grace may still wait attending the decisive decision or change; for this may be postponed to a future hour, because some portion or element of the being may still come between, something that is not yet ready to receive.

*

Each mind can have its own way of approaching the supreme Truth and there is an entrance for each as well as a thousand ways for the journey to it. It is not necessary to believe in the Grace or to recognise a Godhead different from one's highest Self — there are ways of Yoga that do not accept these things. Also for many no form of Yoga is necessary — they arrive at some realisation by a sort of pressure of the mind or the heart or the will breaking the screen between it and what is at once beyond it and its own source. What happens after the breaking of the screen depends on the play of the Truth on the consciousness and the turn of the nature. There is no reason therefore why X's realisation of his being should not come in its own way by growth from within, not by the Divine Grace if his mind objects to that description, but let us say by the spontaneous movement of the Self within him.

For, as to this "Grace", we describe it in that way because we feel in the infinite Spirit or Self of existence a Presence or a Being, a Consciousness that determines — that is what we speak of as the Divine, — not a separate Person, but the one Being of whom our individual self is a portion or a vessel. But it is not necessary for everybody to regard it in that way. Supposing it is the impersonal Self of all only, yet the Upanishad says of the Self and its realisation, "This understanding is not to be gained by

reasoning nor by tapasya nor by much learning, but whom this Self chooses, to him it reveals its own body.” Well, that is the same thing as what we call the Divine Grace,—it is an action from above or from within independent of mental causes which decides its own movement. We can call it the Divine Grace; we can call it the Self within choosing its own hour and way to manifest to the mental instrument on the surface; we can call it the flowering of the inner being or inner nature into self-realisation and self-knowledge. As something in us approaches it or as it presents itself to us, so the mind sees it. But in reality, it is the same thing and the same process of the being in Nature.

I could illustrate my meaning more concretely from my own first experience of the Self, long before I knew even what Yoga was or that there was such a thing, at a time when I had no religious feeling, no wish for spiritual knowledge, no aspiration beyond the mind, only a contented agnosticism and the impulse towards poetry and politics. But it would be too long a story, so I do not tell it here.

*

It is not indispensable that the Grace should work in a way that the human mind can understand, it generally doesn’t: it works in its own “mysterious” way. At first usually it works behind the veil, preparing things, not manifesting. Afterwards it may manifest, but the sadhak does not understand very well what is happening. Finally, when he is capable of it, he both feels and understands or at least begins to do so. Some feel and understand from the first or very early; but that is not the ordinary case.

*

“The ordinary action of the Divine is a constant intervention within the actual law of things”—that may or may not be but is not usually called the Divine Grace. The Divine Grace is something not calculable, not bound by anything the intellect can fix as a condition — though ordinarily some call, aspiration, intensity of the psychic being can awaken it, yet it acts sometimes without any apparent cause even of that kind.

The Grace and Personal Effort

Without the Grace of the Divine nothing can be done, but for the full Grace to manifest the sadhak must make himself ready. If everything depends on the Divine intervention, then man is only a puppet and there is no use of sadhana, and there are no conditions, no law of things — therefore no universe, but only the Divine rolling things about at his pleasure. No doubt in the last resort all can be said to be the Divine cosmic working, but it is through persons, through forces that it works — under the conditions of Nature. Special intervention there can be and is, but all cannot be special intervention.

*

The Divine Grace and Power can do everything, but with the full assent of the sadhak. To learn to give that full assent is the whole meaning of the sadhana. It may take time either because of ideas in the mind, desires in the vital or inertia in the physical consciousness, but these things have to be and can be removed with the aid or by calling in the action of the Divine Force.

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There are three main possibilities for the sadhak — (1) To wait on the Grace and rely on the Divine. (2) To do everything himself like the full Adwaitin and the Buddhist. (3) To take the middle path, go forward by aspiration and rejection etc. helped by the Force.

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Everything should be for the sake of the Divine, this [*aspiration for the Divine's Presence*] also. As for leaving the result to the Divine, it depends on what you mean by the phrase. If it implies dependence on the Divine Grace and equanimity and patience in the persistent aspiration, then it is all right. But it must not be extended to cover slackness and indifference in the aspiration and endeavour.

Strength and Grace

There is nothing unintelligible in what I say about strength and Grace. Strength has a value for spiritual realisation, but to say that it can be done by strength only and by no other means is a violent exaggeration. Grace is not an invention, it is a fact of spiritual experience. Many who would be considered as mere nothings by the wise and strong have attained by Grace; illiterate, without mental power or training, without “strength” of character or will, they have yet aspired and suddenly or rapidly grown into spiritual realisation, because they had faith or because they were sincere. I do not see why these facts which are facts of spiritual history and of quite ordinary spiritual experience should be discussed and denied and argued as if they were mere matters of speculation. Strength, if it is spiritual, is a power for spiritual realisation; a greater power is sincerity; the greatest power of all is Grace. I have said times without number that if a man is sincere, he will go through in spite of long delay and overwhelming difficulties. I have repeatedly spoken of the Divine Grace. I have referred any number of times to the line of the Gita:

Aham tvā sarvapāpebhyo mokṣayisyāmi mā śucah
“I will deliver thee from all sin and evil, do not grieve.”

Grace and Tapasya

Your experience about the meditation is common enough—I used to have it or analogous things hundreds of times. I suppose it is to teach us first that grace is more effective than tapasya and, secondly, that either equanimity or a cheerful spontaneous happy self-opening is as effective, to say the least, as the grimdest wrestling for a result. But it would be dangerous to assume from that that no tapasya and no endeavour is needful—for that might very well mean inertia. I have seen too that very often a long tapasya with doubtful results prepares the moment of grace and the spontaneous downflow. All which seem to be contradictions, but are not in a whole view of things.

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What X says about tapasya is of course true. If one is not prepared for labour and tapasya, control of the mind and vital, one cannot demand big spiritual gains — for the mind and vital will always find tricks and excuses for prolonging their own reign, imposing their likes and dislikes and staving off the day when they will have to become obedient instruments and open channels of the soul and spirit. Grace may sometimes bring undeserved or apparently undeserved fruits, but one can't demand Grace as a right and privilege — for then it would not be Grace. As you have seen one can't claim that one has only to shout and the answer must come. Besides I have always seen that there has been really a long unobserved preparation before the Grace intervenes and, also, after it has intervened one has still to put in a good deal of work to keep and develop what one has got — as it is in all other things — until there is the complete siddhi. Then of course labour finishes and one is in assured possession. So tapasya of one kind or another is not avoidable.

You are right again about the imaginary obstacles. Good Lord! what mountains of them you have piled up on the way — a regular Abyssinia. It is why we always express depreciation of mental constructions and vital formations — because they are the defence works mind and vital throw up against their capture by the Divine. However the first thing is to become conscious of all that as you have now become, — the next thing is to be firm in knocking it all down and making a *tabula rasa*, a foundation of calm, peace, happy openness for the true building.

No Insistence on the Grace

I have surely never said that you should not want the Divine Response. One does Yoga for that. What I have said is that you should not expect or insist on it at once or within an early time. It can come early or it can come late, but come it will if one is faithful in one's call — for one has not only to be sincere but to be faithful through all. If I deprecate insistence, it is because I have always found it creates difficulties and delays — owing to a strain and restlessness which is created in the nature and

despondencies and revolts of the vital when the insistence is not satisfied. The Divine knows best and one has to have trust in His wisdom and attune oneself with His will. Length of time is no proof of an ultimate incapacity to arrive—it is only a sign that there is something in oneself which has to be overcome and if there is the will to reach the Divine it can be overcome.

Suicide solves nothing—it only brings one back to life with the same difficulties to be faced in worse conditions. If one wishes to escape from life altogether, it can only be by the way of complete inner renunciation and merging oneself in the Silence of the Absolute or by a bhakti that becomes absolute or by a karmayoga that gives up one's own will and desires to the will of the Divine.

I have said also that the Grace *can* at any moment act suddenly, but over that one has no control, because it comes by an incalculable Will which sees things that the mind cannot see. It is precisely the reason why one should never despair,—that and also because no sincere aspiration to the Divine can fail in the end.

Trust in the Divine Grace

Face all these things [*inner disturbances*] quietly and firmly with perseverance in the endeavour of the sadhana. Trust firmly in the Divine Grace and the Divine Grace will not fail you.

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The best possible way [*to “repay” the Divine Grace*] is to allow the Divine Grace to work in you, never to oppose it, never to be ungrateful and turn against it—but to follow it always to the goal of Light and Peace and unity and Ananda.

Withdrawal of Grace

As for withdrawal of Grace, it might be said that few are those from whom the Grace withdraws, but many are those who withdraw from the Grace.

*

If the will of the individual is towards perdition, if his ego becomes hostile to the Divine, then the Divine is not bound to show him a Grace he does not want at all and kicks at.

The First Responses of the Divine

What you describe in your letter as the response of the Divine would not be called that in the language of Yogic experience — this feeling of greater peace, light, ease, trust, difficulties lessening, certitude would rather be called a response of your own nature to the Divine. There is a Peace or a Light which is the response of the Divine, but that is a wide Peace, a great Light which is felt as a presence other than one's personal self, not part of one's personal nature, but something that comes from above, though in the end it possesses the nature — or there is the Presence itself which carries with it indeed the absolute liberation, happiness, certitude. But the first responses of the Divine are not often like that — they come rather as a touch, a pressure one must be in a condition to recognise and to accept, or it is a voice of assurance, sometimes a very "still small voice", a momentary Image or Presence; a whisper of Guidance sometimes, — there are many forms it may take. Then it withdraws and the preparation of the nature goes on till it is possible for the touch to come again and again, to last longer, to change into something more pressing and near and intimate. The Divine in the beginning does not impose himself — he asks for recognition, for acceptance. That is one reason why the mind must fall silent, not put tests, not make claims — there must be room for the true intuition which recognises at once the true touch and accepts it.

The Divine Guidance

The question you have put¹ raises one of the most difficult and complicated of all problems and to deal with it at all adequately

¹ *The correspondent said that this unhappy world seems doomed to falsehood and suffering, for it is filled with selfishness, pettiness and heartless greed. Why should one embrace such a world, he asked, "where the divine guidance seems so accidental, almost out of place"? — Ed.*

would need an answer as long as the longest chapter of *The Life Divine*. I can only state my own knowledge founded not on reasoning but on experience that there is such a guidance and that nothing is in vain in this universe.

If we look only at outward facts in their surface appearance or if we regard what we see happening around us as definitive, not as processes of a moment in a developing whole, the guidance is not apparent; at most we may see interventions occasional or sometimes frequent. The guidance can become evident only if we go behind appearances and begin to understand the forces at work and the way of their working and their secret significance. After all, real knowledge — even scientific knowledge — comes by going behind the surface phenomena to their hidden process and causes. It is quite obvious that this world is full of suffering and afflicted with transience to a degree that seems to justify the Gita's description of it as "this unhappy and transient world", *anityam asukham*. The question is whether it is a mere creation of Chance or governed by a mechanic inconscient Law or whether there is a meaning in it and something beyond its present appearance towards which we move. If there is a meaning and if there is something towards which things are evolving, then inevitably there must be a guidance — and that means that a supporting Consciousness and Will is there with which we can come into inner contact. If there is such a Consciousness and Will, it is not likely that it would stultify itself by annulling the world's meaning or turning it into a perpetual or eventual failure.

This world has a double aspect. It seems to be based on a material Inconscience and an ignorant mind and life full of that Inconscience; error and sorrow, death and suffering are the necessary consequence. But there is evidently too a partially successful endeavour and an imperfect growth towards Light, Knowledge, Truth, Good, Happiness, Harmony, Beauty,— at least a partial flowering of these things. The meaning of this world must evidently lie in this opposition; it must be an evolution which is leading or struggling towards higher things out of a first darker appearance. Whatever guidance there is must be given under these conditions of opposition and struggle and

must be leading towards that higher state of things. It is leading the individual, certainly, and the world, presumably, towards the higher state, but through the double terms of knowledge and ignorance, light and darkness, death and life, pain and pleasure, happiness and suffering; none of the terms can be excluded until the higher status is reached and established. It is not and cannot be, ordinarily, a guidance which at once rejects the darker terms or still less a guidance which brings us solely and always nothing but happiness, success and good fortune. Its main concern is with the growth of our being and consciousness, the growth towards a higher self, towards the Divine, eventually towards a highest Light, Truth and Bliss; the rest is secondary, sometimes a means, sometimes a result, not a primary purpose.

The true sense of the guidance becomes clearer when we can go deep within and see from there more intimately the play of the forces and receive intimations of the Will behind them. The surface mind can get only an imperfect glimpse. When we are in contact with the Divine or in contact with an inner knowledge and vision, we begin to see all the circumstances of our life in a new light and can observe how they all tended without our knowing it towards the growth of our being and consciousness, towards the work we had to do, towards some development that had to be made,—not only what seemed good, fortunate or successful but the struggles, failures, difficulties, upheavals. But with each person the guidance works differently according to his nature, the conditions of his life, his cast of consciousness, his stage of development, his need of farther experience. We are not automata but conscious beings and our mentality, our will and its decisions, our attitude to life and demand on it, our motives and movements help to determine our course; they may lead to much suffering and evil, but through it all, the guidance makes use of them for our growth in experience and consequently the development of our being and consciousness. All advance by however devious ways, even in spite of what seems a going backwards or going astray, gathering whatever experience is necessary for the soul's destiny. When we are in close contact with the Divine, a protection can come in which

helps or directly guides or moves us; it does not throw aside all difficulties, sufferings or dangers, but it carries us through them and out of them — except where for a special purpose there is need of the opposite.

It is the same thing though on a larger scale and in a more complex way with the guidance of the world-movement. That seems to move according to the conditions and laws or forces of the moment through constant vicissitudes, but still there is something in it that drives towards the evolutionary purpose, although it is more difficult to see, understand and follow than in the smaller and more intimate field of the individual consciousness and life. What happens in a particular juncture of the world-action or the life of humanity, however catastrophic, is not ultimately determinative. Here too one has to see not only the outward play of forces in a particular case or at a particular time but also the inner and secret play, the far-off outcome, the event that lies beyond and the Will at work behind it all. Falsehood and Darkness are strong everywhere on the earth and have always been so and at times they seem to dominate; but there have also been not only gleams but outbursts of the Light. In the mass of things and the long course of Time, whatever may be the appearances of this or that epoch or moment, the growth of Light is there and the struggle towards better things does not cease. At the present time Falsehood and Darkness have gathered their forces and are extremely powerful; but even if we reject the assertion of the mystics and prophets since early times that such a condition of things must precede the Manifestation and is even a sign of its approach, yet it does not necessarily indicate the victory — even temporary — of the Falsehood. It merely means that the struggle between the Forces is at its acme. The result may very well be the stronger emergence of the best that can be; for the world-movement often works in that way. I leave it at that and say nothing more.

Chapter Two

The Divine Force

The Nature of Spiritual Force

All the world, according to Science, is nothing but a play of Energy — a material Energy it used to be called, but it is now doubted whether Matter, scientifically speaking, exists except as a phenomenon of Energy. All the world, according to Vedanta, is a play of a power of a spiritual entity, the power of an original consciousness, whether it be Maya or Shakti, and the result an illusion or real. In the world so far as man is concerned we are aware only of mind energy, life energy, energy in matter; but it is supposed that there is a spiritual energy or force also behind them from which they originate. All things, in either case, are the results of a Shakti, energy or force. There is no action without a Force or Energy doing the action and bringing about its consequence. Farther, anything that has no Force in it is either something dead or something unreal or something inert and without consequence. If there is no such thing as spiritual consciousness, there can be no reality of Yoga, and if there is no Yoga force, spiritual force, Yoga Shakti, then also there can be no effectivity in Yoga. A Yoga consciousness or spiritual consciousness which has no power or force in it, may not be dead or unreal but it is evidently something inert and without effect or consequence. Equally a man who sets out to be a Yogi or Guru and has no spiritual consciousness or no power in his spiritual consciousness — a Yoga force or spiritual force — is making a false claim and is either a charlatan or a self-deluded imbecile; still more is he so if having no spiritual force he claims to have made a path others can follow. If Yoga is a reality, if spirituality is anything better than a delusion, there must be such a thing as Yoga force or spiritual force.

It is evident that if spiritual force exists, it must be able to produce spiritual results — therefore there is no irrationality in

the claim of those sadhaks who say that they feel the force of the Guru or the force of the Divine working in them and leading towards spiritual fulfilment and experience. Whether it is so or not in a particular case is a personal question, but the statement cannot be denounced as *per se* incredible and manifestly false because such things cannot be. Farther, if it be true that spiritual force is the original one and the others are derivative from it, then there is no irrationality in supposing that spiritual force can produce mental results, vital results, physical results. It may act through mental, vital or physical energies and through the means which these energies use, or it may act directly on mind, life or matter as the field of its own special and immediate action. Either way is *prima facie* possible. In a case of cure of illness, someone is lying ill for two days, weak, suffering from pains and fever; he takes no medicine but finally asks for cure from his Guru; the next morning he rises well, strong and energetic. He has at least some justification for thinking that a force has been used on him and put into him and that it was a spiritual power that acted. But in another case medicines may be used, while at the same time the invisible force may be called for to aid the material means, for it is a known fact that medicines may or may not succeed — there is no certitude. Here for the reason of an outside observer (one who is neither the user of the force nor the doctor nor the patient) it remains uncertain whether the patient was cured by the medicines only or by the spiritual force with the medicines as an instrument. Either is possible, and it cannot be said that because medicines were used, therefore the working of a spiritual force is *per se* incredible and demonstrably false. On the other hand it is possible for the doctor to have felt a force working in him and guiding him or he may see the patient improving with a rapidity which, according to medical science, is incredible. The patient may feel the force working in himself bringing health, energy, rapid cure. The user of the force may watch the results, see the symptoms he works on diminishing, those he did not work upon increasing till he does work on them and then immediately diminishing, the doctor working according to his unspoken suggestions, etc. etc. until the cure is

done. (On the other hand he may see forces working against the cure and conclude that the spiritual force has to be contented with a withdrawal or an imperfect success.) In all that the doctor, the patient or the user of force is justified in believing that the cure is at least partly or even fundamentally due to the spiritual force. Their experience is valid of course for themselves only, not for the outside rationalising observer. But the latter is not logically entitled to say that their experience is incredible and must be false.

Another point. It does not follow that a spiritual force must either succeed in all cases or, if it does not, that proves its non-existence. Of no force can that be said. The force of fire is to burn, but there are things it does not burn; under certain circumstances it does not burn even the feet of the man who walks barefoot on red-hot coals. That does not prove that fire cannot burn or that there is no such thing as force of fire, Agni-shakti.

I have no time to write more; it is not necessary either. My object was not to show that spiritual force must be believed in, but that the belief in it is not necessarily a delusion and that this belief can be rational as well as possible.

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The invisible Force producing tangible results both inward and outward is the whole meaning of the Yogic consciousness. Your question about Yoga bringing merely a feeling of Power without any result was really very strange. Who would be satisfied with such a meaningless hallucination and call it Power? If we had not had thousands of experiences showing that the Power within could alter the mind, develop its powers, add new ones, bring in new ranges of knowledge, master the vital movements, change the character, influence men and things, control the conditions and functionings of the body, work as a concrete dynamic Force on other forces, modify events, etc. etc., we would not speak of it as we do. Moreover, it is not only in its results but in its movements that the Force is tangible and concrete. When I speak of feeling Force or Power, I do not mean simply having a vague sense of it, but feeling it concretely and consequently being able

to direct it, manipulate it, watch its movement, be conscious of its mass and intensity and in the same way of that of other perhaps opposing forces; all these things are possible and usual by the development of Yoga.

It is not, unless it is supramental Force, a Power that acts without conditions and limits. The conditions and limits under which Yoga or sadhana has to be worked out are not arbitrary or capricious; they arise from the nature of things. These including the will, receptivity, assent, self-opening and surrender of the sadhak have to be respected by the Yoga-force—unless it receives a sanction from the Supreme to override everything and get something done—but that sanction is sparingly given. It is only if the supramental Power came fully down, not merely sent its influences through the Overmind, that things could be very radically altered in this respect—and that is why my main effort is directed towards that object—for then the sanction would not be rare! For the Law of the Truth would be at work not constantly balanced by the law of the Ignorance.

Still the Yoga-force is always tangible and concrete in the way I have described and has tangible results. But it is invisible—not like a blow given or the rush of a motor car knocking somebody down which the physical senses can at once perceive. How is the mere physical mind to know that it is there and working? By its results? but how can it know that the results were that of the Yoga-force and not of something else? One of two things it must do. Either it must allow the consciousness to go inside, to become aware of inner things, to believe in and experience the invisible and the supraphysical, and then by experience, by the opening of new capacities it becomes conscious of these forces and can see, follow and use their workings just as the scientist uses the unseen forces of Nature. Or one must have faith and watch and open oneself and then it will begin to see how things happen; it will notice that when the Force was called in, there began after a time to be a result,—then repetitions, more repetitions, more clear and tangible results, increasing frequency, increasing consistency of results, a feeling and awareness of the Force at work—until the experience

becomes daily, regular, normal, complete. These are the two main methods, one internal, working from in outward, the other external, working from outside and calling the inner force out till it penetrates and is sensible in the exterior consciousness. But neither can be done if one insists always on the extrovert attitude, the external concrete only and refuses to join to it the internal concrete — or if the physical Mind at every step raises a dance of doubts which refuses to allow the nascent experience to develop. Even the scientist carrying out a new experiment would never succeed if he allowed his mind to behave in that way.

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Concrete? what do you mean by “concrete”?¹ It [*spiritual force*] has its own concreteness; it can take a form (like a stream for instance) of which one is aware and can send it quite concretely in whatever “direction” or on whatever object one chooses.

This is a statement of fact about the power inherent in spiritual consciousness. What I was speaking of was a willed use of any subtle force (it may be spiritual or mental or vital) to secure a particular result at some point in the world. Just as there are waves of unseen physical forces (cosmic waves etc.) or currents of electricity, so there are mind waves, thought currents, waves of emotion, e.g. anger, sorrow, etc., which go out and affect others without their knowing whence they come or that they come at all — they only feel the result. One who has the occult or inner senses awake can feel them coming and invading him. Influences good or bad can propagate themselves in that way; that can happen without intention, automatically, but also a deliberate use can be made of them. There can also be a purposeful generation of force, spiritual or other. There can be too the use of the effective will or idea acting directly without the aid of any outward action, speech or other instrumentation which is not concrete in that sense, but is all the same effective.

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¹ *The correspondent asked whether the spiritual force Sri Aurobindo put on him was “concrete”. — Ed.*

Leave aside the question of Divine or undivine, no spiritual man who acts dynamically is limited to physical contact—the idea that physical contact through writing, speech, meeting is indispensable to the action of the spiritual force is self-contradictory, for then it would not be a spiritual force. The spirit is not limited by physical things or by the body. If you have the spiritual force, it can act on people thousands of miles away who do not know and never will know that you are acting on them or that they are being acted upon—they only feel that there is a force enabling them to do things and may very well suppose it is their own great energy and genius.

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The fact that you don't feel a force does not prove that it is not there. The steam-engine does not feel a force moving it, but the force is there. A man is not a steam-engine? He is very little better, for he is conscious only of some bubbling on the surface which he calls himself and is absolutely unconscious of all the subconscious, subliminal, superconscious forces moving him. (This is a fact which is being more and more established by modern psychology though it has got hold only of the lower forces and not the higher, so you need not turn up your rational nose at it.) He twitters intellectually (= foolishly) about the surface results and attributes them all to his "noble self", ignoring the fact that his noble self is hidden far away from his own vision behind the veil of his dimly sparkling intellect and the reeking fog of his vital feelings, emotions, impulses, sensations and impressions. So your argument is utterly absurd and futile. Our aim is to bring the secret forces out and unwalled into the open so that instead of getting some shadows or lightnings of themselves out through the veil or being wholly obstructed, they may "pour down" and "flow in a river". But to expect that all at once is a presumptuous demand which shows an impatient ignorance and inexperience. If they begin to trickle at first, that is sufficient to justify the faith in a future downpour. You admit that you once or twice felt "a force coming down and delivering a poem out of me" (your opinion about its worth or worthlessness is not

worth a cent, that is for others to pronounce). That is sufficient to blow the rest of your Jeremiad into smithereens; it proves that the force was and is there and at work and it is only your sweating Herculean labour that prevents you feeling it. Also it is the trickle that gives assurance of the possibility of the downpour. One has only to go on and by one's patience deserve the downpour or else, without deserving, stick on till one gets it. In Yoga itself the experience that is a promise and foretaste but gets shut off till the nature is ready for the fulfilment is a phenomenon familiar to every Yогин when he looks back on his past experience. Such were the brief visitations of Ananda you had some time before. It does not matter if you have not a leechlike tenacity — leeches are not the only type of Yogins. If you can stick anyhow or get stuck that is sufficient. The fact that you are not Sri Aurobindo (who said you were?) is an inept irrelevance. One needs only to be oneself in a reasonable way and shake off the hump when it is there or allow it to be shaken off without clinging to it with a "leechlike tenacity" worthy of a better cause.

The Divine Force Works under Conditions

The Divine Force, not using the supramental Power, can certainly throw back the forces of Death and that has been done many times. But the Divine Force works here under conditions imposed by the Divine Will and Law; it has to take up an immense mass of conflicting forces, conditions, habits and movements of Nature and out of it arrive at the result of a higher consciousness on earth and a higher state. If it were to act otherwise, then all would be done by a miracle or magic, no sadhana would be needed, no way beaten out for the process of spiritual evolution to follow; there would be no real transformation of consciousness, but only a temporary feat of force which having no basis in the substance of creation here would vanish as it came. Therefore conditions have to be satisfied, the work to be done has to be wrought out step by step. The powers that held the field up to now have to be given their chance to oppose, so that the problem

may be solved and not evaded or turned into a sham fight or unreal game without significance. Therefore there is a sadhana to be done, there is a resistance to be overcome, a choice made between the higher and the lower state. The Divine Power does the work, gives a protection and a guidance; but it is not here to use an absolute force — except when that is sanctioned by the Divine Wisdom and in the light of that Wisdom justifiable. Then the decisive Power acts of itself and does what it has to do.

Writing about Spiritual Force

If I write about these questions [*of spiritual force*] from the Yogic point of view, even though on a logical basis, there is bound to be much that is in conflict with your own settled and perhaps cherished opinions, e.g. about "miracles", persons, the limits of judgment by sense data etc. I have avoided as much as possible writing about these subjects because I would have to propound things that cannot be understood except by reference to other data than those of the physical senses or of reason founded on these alone. I might have to speak of laws and forces not recognised by physical reason or science. In my public writings and my writings to sadhaks I have not dwelt on these because they go out of the range of ordinary knowledge and the understanding founded on it. These things are known to some, but they do not usually speak about it, while the public view of such of them as are known is either credulous or incredulous, but in both cases without experience or knowledge. So if the views founded on them are likely to upset, shock or bewilder, the better way is silence.

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If I was annoyed, it was with myself for speaking of things which ought to be kept under a cover. I put the whole thing in a light form, no doubt, but the substance was perfectly serious, the intention being to point out that even in ordinary non-spiritual things the action of invisible or of subjective forces was open to doubt and discussion in which there could be no material

certitude — while the spiritual force is invisible in itself and also invisible in its action. So it is idle to try to prove that such and such a result was the effect of spiritual force. Each must form his own idea about that — for if it is accepted it cannot be as a result of proof and argument, but only as a result of experience, of faith or of that insight in the heart or the deeper intelligence which looks behind appearances and sees what is behind them. Moreover it would not be seemly for me to appear to be making a claim for myself and pleading for recognition or acceptance — for the spiritual consciousness does not claim in that way, it can state the truth about itself but not fight for a personal acceptance. A general and impersonal statement about spiritual force is another matter, but I doubt whether the time has come for it or whether it could be understood by the mere reasoning intelligence.

Use and Misuse of the Divine Force

All power comes from the Divine but it is more usually misused than used spiritually or rightly.

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The Divine Forces are meant to be used — the mistake of man individualised in the Ignorance is to use it for the ego and not for the Divine. It is that that has to be set right by the union with the Divine Consciousness and also by the widening of the individual being so that it can live consciously in the universal. Difficult it is owing to the fixed ego-habit, but it is not impossible.

The Action of the Divine Force

The action of the Force does not exclude tapasya, concentration and the need of sadhana. Its action rather comes as an answer or a help to these things. It is true that it sometimes acts without them; it very often wakes a response in those who have not prepared themselves and do not seem to be ready. But it does not always or usually act like that, nor is it a sort of magic that

acts in the void or without any process. Nor is it a machine which acts in the same way on everybody or in all conditions and circumstances; it is not a physical but a spiritual Force and its action cannot be reduced to rules.

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It [*the higher Force*] acts by awakening the inner consciousness gradually or swiftly, by replacing the principle of ego-service by the principle of service of the Divine, by making him watch his actions and see his own defects and pushing him to rectify them, by establishing a connection between his consciousness and the Mother's consciousness, by preparing his nature to be taken up more and more by the Mother's consciousness and force, by giving him experiences which make him ready for the major experiences of Yoga, by stimulating the growth of his psychic being, by opening him to the Mother as the Universal Being, etc. etc. Naturally it acts differently in different persons.

Allow the Divine Force to Act

It is quite true that, left to yourself, you can do nothing; that is why you have to be in contact with the Force which is there to do for you what you cannot do for yourself. The only thing *you* have to do is to allow the Force to act and put yourself on its side, which means to have faith in it, to rely upon it, not to trouble and harass yourself, to remember it quietly, to call upon it quietly, to let it act quietly. If you do that, all else will be done for you—not all at once, because there is much to clear away, but still it will be done steadily and more and more.

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Passivity can be only to the Divine Force when it is felt at work,—there can be no passivity to other forces, for that would be dangerous in the extreme. Passivity does *not* mean a blank mind—it means allowing the Divine Force to work without interference of the mental preferences, vital desires or physical disinclinations. As for freedom from ego or desire, that is the

general law of all Yoga, but it cannot be acquired by merely giving up work. The majority of Sannyasins are not at all free from desire or ego.

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Always keep in touch with the Divine Force. The best thing for you is to do that simply and allow it to do its own work; wherever necessary, it will take hold of the inferior energies and purify them; at other times it will empty you of them and fill you with itself. But if you let your mind take the lead and discuss and decide what is to be done, you will lose touch with the Divine Force and the lower energies will begin to act for themselves and all go into confusion and a wrong movement.

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One feels the Force only when one is in conscious contact with it.

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It is a great progress, a decisive advance if, at the time the Force is acting behind the screen, you feel that it is there, that the help and support, the more enlightened consciousness is there still. This is the second stage in the sadhana. There is a third when there is no screen and the Force and all else are always felt whether actively working or pausing during a transition.

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Remind yourself always that the Divine Force is there, that you have felt it and that, even if you seem to lose consciousness of it for a time or it seems something distant, still it is there and is sure to prevail. For those whom the Force has touched and taken up, belong thenceforth to the Divine.

Chapter Three

The Guru

Acceptance of the Guru

The Guru should be accepted in all ways — transcendent, impersonal, personal.

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It has always been held in Indian yoga that the relation between Guru and disciple must be one of full confidence and full acceptance of the Guru by the Shishya. The latter was supposed to accept unquestioningly the guidance and to follow the instructions of the Guru without criticism or questioning; he was not supposed to criticise, to blame or to refuse adhesion or to follow in a questioning or grudging spirit: for that would stand in the way of his advance. The Indian disciple of those days would not have expected the Guru to suit his directions or instructions or ways of leading to the mental demands or vital ideas of the [*incomplete*]

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There are three conditions for a disciple for profiting fully from his relation to a spiritual guide.

1st: He must accept him entirely and him alone without submitting himself to any contrary or second influence.

2nd: He must accept the indications given by the Guru and follow them firmly and with full faith and perseverance to the best of his own spiritual capacity.

3rd: He must make himself open and receptive to the Guru for even more than what the Guru teaches to the mind of the disciple, it is what he spiritually is, the spiritual consciousness, the knowledge, the light, the power, the Divinity in him that helps the disciple to grow by his receiving that into himself and its being used within himself for the growth of his consciousness

and nature into its own divine possibility.

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What the Guru can do for the sadhak depends upon the latter's receptivity—not upon any method or rule of sadhana. Certain psychological conditions or attitudes of the consciousness tend to increase the receptivity—e.g., humility towards the Guru, devotion, obedience, trust, a certain receptive passivity to his influence. The opposite things—indifference, a critical attitude, questionings—go the other way and make it necessary for the Guru to help only indirectly or behind the veil. But the main thing is a kind of psychological openness in the consciousness which comes or increases of itself with the help of the will to receive and the right attitude. If there is that then it is not necessary to pull anything from the Guru, only to receive quietly. Pulling from him often draws untruly or things for which the consciousness is not ready to assimilate.

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It is a deficiency of psychic perception and spiritual discrimination that makes people speak like that [*in a depreciatory way*] and ignore the importance of obedience. It is the mind wanting to follow its own way of thinking and the vital seeking freedom for its desires which argue in this manner. If you do not follow the rules laid down by the spiritual guide or obey one who is leading you to the Divine, then what or whom are you to follow? Only the ideas of the individual mind and the desires of the vital: but these things never lead to siddhi in Yoga. The rules are laid down in order to guard against certain influences and their dangers and to keep a right atmosphere in the Asram favourable to spiritual development; the obedience is necessary so as to get away from one's own mind and vital and learn to follow the Truth.

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Yes, it [*obedience*] is difficult, but once achieved it is immensely fruitful.

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You are putting the cart before the horse. It is not the right way to make the condition that if you get what you want you will be obedient and cheerful. But be always obedient and cheerful and then what you want will have a chance of coming to you.

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Up to now no liberated man has objected to the Guruvada; it is usually only people who live in the mind or vital and have the pride of the mind or the arrogance of the vital that find it below their dignity to recognise a Guru.

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One has to learn from the master and act according to his instructions because the master knows the subject and how it is to be learnt — just as in spiritual things one has to follow the Guru who has the knowledge and knows the way. If one learns all by oneself, the chances are that one will learn all wrong. What is the use of a freedom to learn wrongly? Of course if the pupil is more intelligent than the master, he will learn more than the master, just as a great spiritual capacity may arrive at realisations which the Guru has not — but even so, the control and discipline in the early stages is indispensable.

The Guru in the Supramental Yoga

The Guru is the Guide in the Yoga. When the Divine is accepted as the Guide, He is accepted as the Guru.

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It is not usual to use the word Guru in the supramental Yoga, here everything comes from the Divine himself. But if anybody wants it he can use it for the time being.

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The relation of Guru and disciple is only one of many relations which one can have with the Divine, and in this Yoga which aims at a supramental realisation, it is not usual to give it this

name; rather, the Divine is regarded as the Source, the living Sun of Light and Knowledge and Consciousness and spiritual realisation and all that one receives is felt as coming from there and the whole being remoulded by the Divine Hand. This is a greater and more intimate relation than that of the human Guru and disciple, which is more of a limited mental ideal. Nevertheless, if the mind still needs the more familiar mental conception, it can be kept so long as it is needed; only do not let the soul be bound by it and do not let it limit the inflow of other relations with the Divine and larger forms of experience.

Surrender to the Guru

Because through it [*surrender to the Guru*]¹ you surrender not only to the impersonal but to the personal, not only to the Divine in yourself but to the Divine outside you; you get a chance for the surpassing of ego not only by retreat into the Self where ego does not exist, but in the personal nature where it is the ruler. It is the sign of the will to complete surrender to the total Divine, *samagraṁ mām mānuṣīm tanum āśritam*. Of course it must be a genuine spiritual surrender for all this to be true.

*

When one takes sincerely to surrender, nothing must be concealed that is of any importance for the life of the sadhana. Confession helps to purge the consciousness of hampering elements and it clears the inner air and makes for a closer and more intimate and effective relation between the Guru and the disciple.

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No [*surrender to the Divine and surrender to the Guru are not two different things*]. In surrendering to the Guru, it is to the Divine in him that one surrenders—if it were only to a human

¹ *The correspondent asked, "What makes the surrender to the Guru so grand and glorious as to be called the surrender beyond all surrenders?" — Ed.*

entity it would be ineffective. But it is the consciousness of the Divine Presence that makes the Guru a real Guru, so that even if the disciple surrenders to him thinking of the human being to whom he surrenders, that Presence would still make it effective.

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Yes [*surrender to the formless Divine would leave parts of the being subject to the gunas and ego*]—because only the static parts would be free in formlessness, the active nature would be still in the play of the gunas. Many think they are free from ego because they get the sense of the formless Existence, they do not see that the egoistic element remains in their action just as before.

Other Gurus

All true Gurus are the same, the one Guru, because all are the one Divine. That is a fundamental and universal truth. But there is also a truth of difference; the Divine dwells in different personalities with different minds, teachings, influences so that He may lead different disciples with their special need, character, destiny by different ways to the realisation. Because all Gurus are the same Divine, it does not follow that the disciple does well if he leaves the one meant for him to follow another. Fidelity to the Guru is demanded of every disciple, according to the Indian tradition. “All are the same” is a spiritual truth, but you cannot convert it indiscriminately into action; you cannot deal with all persons in the same way because they are the one Brahman: if one did, the result pragmatically would be an awful mess. It is a rigid mental logic that makes the difficulty but in spiritual matters mental logic easily blunders; intuition, faith, a plastic spiritual reason are here the only guides.

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To respect the spiritual attainment of X [*another spiritual teacher*] is all right, but it is a rule of this Yoga not to mix influences (and what he [*a sadhak*] has described is very much

like undergoing an influence). Otherwise there may be harm done by two different methods getting mixed together—e.g. the vital being awakened to a Bhakti-Ananda influence on that plane before it is purified and ready.

The Guru's Help in Difficulty

I think this saying of Ramakrishna's² expresses a certain characteristic happening in sadhana and cannot be interpreted in a general and absolute sense; for in that sense it is hard for it to be true. All difficulties disappearing in a minute? Well, Vivekananda had the grace of Ramakrishna from the beginning, but I think his difficulty of doubt lasted for some time and to the end of his life the difficulty of the control of anger was there — making him say that all that was good in him was his Guru's gift but these things (anger etc.) were his own property. But what could be true is that the central difficulty may disappear by a certain touch between the Guru and the disciple. But what is meant by the *kṛpā*? If it is the general compassion and grace of the Guru, that, one would think, is always there on the disciple; his acceptance itself is an act of grace and the help is there for the disciple to receive. But the touch of grace, divine grace coming directly or through the Guru is a special phenomenon having two sides to it, — the grace of the Guru or the Divine, in fact both together, on one side and a "state of grace" in the disciple on the other. This "state of grace" is often prepared by a long tapasya or purification in which nothing decisive seems to happen, only touches or glimpses or passing experiences at the most, and it comes suddenly without warning. If this is what is spoken of in Ramakrishna's saying, then it is true that when it comes, the fundamental difficulties can in a moment and generally do disappear. Or at the very least something happens which makes the rest of the sadhana — however long it may take — sure and secure.

This decisive touch comes most easily to the "baby cat" people, those who have at some point between the psychic and

² "With the Guru's grace all difficulties can disappear in a flash, even as a glimmering darkness does the moment you strike a match." — Ed.

the emotional vital a quick and decisive movement of surrender to the Guru or the Divine. I have seen that when that is there and there is the conscious central dependence compelling the mind also and the rest of the vital, then the fundamental difficulty disappears. If others remain they are not felt as difficulties, but simply as things that have just to be done and need cause no worry. Sometimes no tapasya is necessary—one just refers things to the Power that one feels guiding or doing the sadhana and assents to its action, rejecting all that is contrary to it, and the Power removes what has to be removed or changes what has to be changed, quickly or slowly—but the quickness or slowness does not seem to matter since one is sure that it will be done. If tapasya is necessary, it is done with so much feeling of a strong support that there is nothing hard or austere in the tapasya.

For the others, the “baby monkey” type or those who are still more independent, following their own ideas, doing their own sadhana, asking only for some instruction or help, the grace of the Guru is there, but it acts according to the nature of the sadhak and waits upon his effort to a greater or less degree; it helps, succours in difficulty, saves in the time of danger, but the disciple is not always, is perhaps hardly at all aware of what is being done as he is absorbed in himself and his endeavour. In such cases the decisive psychological movement, the touch that makes all clear, may take longer to come.

But with all the *kṛpā* is there working in one way or another and it can only abandon the disciple if the disciple himself abandons or rejects it—by decisive and definitive revolt, by rejection of the Guru, by cutting the painter and declaring his independence, or by an act or course of betrayal that severs him from his own psychic being. Even then, except perhaps in the last case if it goes to an extreme, a return to grace is not impossible.

That is my own knowledge and experience of the matter. But as to what lay behind Ramakrishna’s saying and whether he himself meant it to be a general and absolute statement—I do not pronounce.

All that is popular Yoga.³ The Guru's touch or grace may open something, but the difficulties have always to be worked out still. What is true is that if there is complete surrender which implies the prominence of the psychic, these difficulties are no longer felt as a burden or obstacle but only as superficial imperfections which the working of the grace will remove.

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It has always been said that to take disciples means to take upon yourself the difficulties of the disciples as well as your own. Of course, if the Guru does not identify himself with the disciple, does not take him into his own consciousness, keeps him outside and only gives him *upadeśa*, leaving him to do the rest himself, then the chance of these effects is much diminished, made practically nil.

The Knowledge Given by the Guru

I do not know what you mean by indirect knowledge. The knowledge given by the Guru, if that is what you mean, is in the nature of experience and becomes part and parcel of the experience. Mere instruction is not knowledge but only an intellectual indication of what must be realised by experience.

According to Yoga, as it is known in India, the mediation of the Guru is almost indispensable. It is not a crutch. It is a direct action of the Divine who is realised by the Guru. It is an opening of the consciousness to spiritual experience without which few can open at all or go very far. If they advance by themselves, they can fall into all sorts of perils and errors of which they have no knowledge and no idea how to guide themselves among these things.

All experience is direct — there is no such thing as an indirect spiritual experience. But after the consciousness is sufficiently opened and matured, a knowledge and guidance can

³ *The correspondent wrote, "It is said that if a disciple receives his Guru's touch or grace, his main difficulties very often disappear." — Ed.*

come from within and above and the sadhana proceeds by Divine working within. But the sadhak has to be very careful, for he may easily mistake the guiding of his own mind, ego or vital or the guiding of some inferior Power that flatters his ego for the Divine guidance. It is by the inner experience and consciousness that one knows a spiritual result—one feels and sees it happening.

There are two kinds of knowledge—mental knowledge such as you describe here which is usually necessary as a mental preparation or for guidance and the real knowledge which is spiritual. One receives the mental knowledge from the Guru in the shape of instruction and guidance, but that is only a part of what he gives—for the man who gives only mental or what you call indirect knowledge is not a Guru but only a teacher, Acharya.

As for spiritual knowledge, it consists of two elements, experience and a direct knowledge which is not mental but is of the nature of a light showing the deeper truth of things, a direct vision and perception of the Truth.

The ordinary consciousness is not capable of receiving it as knowledge except in a fragmentary way because it belongs to a deeper consciousness within or a higher consciousness above the mind. The ordinary consciousness has therefore to open to the deeper and the higher consciousness. It has to receive the knowledge from within and above. It cannot do this if it does not open. There must, therefore, first necessarily be an opening, however small, before any direct knowledge can come. As the knowledge comes the opening also can widen and so admit a greater and greater direct knowledge and experience. In some, however, the opening comes first very wide and then the knowledge comes afterwards in a great stream, some light of the Truth and many experiences.

If one has merely a mental idea about the Divine, that is not knowledge. It is with the experiences and the inner light of knowledge that the realisation of the Divine begins. As for example, one may have the mental idea of the Divine Peace but that is nothing, only a mental conception. It is only when one

has the feeling of the Divine Peace descending from above or in oneself or surrounding one that one begins to know what it is. That is what is called experience. Afterwards one begins to have a direct vision in knowledge of what the Peace is and what is its place in regard to the Divine Realisation; that is direct knowledge.

The Capacity of the Guru

One can have a guru inferior in spiritual capacity (to oneself or to other gurus) carrying in him many human imperfections, and yet, if you have the faith, the bhakti, the right spiritual stuff, contact the Divine through him, attain to spiritual experiences, to spiritual realisation, even before the guru himself. Mark the "if", — for that proviso is necessary; it isn't every disciple who can do that with every guru. From a humbug you can acquire nothing but humbuggery. The guru must have something in him which makes the contact with the Divine possible, something which works even if he is not himself in his outer mind quite conscious of its action. If there is nothing at all spiritual in him he is not a guru — only a pseudo. Undoubtedly, there can be considerable differences of spiritual realisation between one guru and the other; but much depends on the inner relation between guru and shishya. One can go to a very great spiritual man and get nothing or only a little from him; one can go to a man of less spiritual capacity and get all he has to give — and more. The causes of this disparity are various and subtle; I need not expand on them here. It differs with each man. I believe the guru is always ready to give what can be given, if the disciple can receive, or it may be when he is ready to receive. If he refuses to receive or behaves inwardly or outwardly in such a way as to make reception impossible or if he is not sincere or takes up the wrong attitude, then things become difficult. But if one is sincere and faithful and has the right attitude and if the guru is a true guru, then, after whatever time, it *will* come.

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What X quotes about the limitation of the power of the Guru to that of a teacher who shows the way but cannot help or guide is the conception of certain paths of Yoga such as the pure Adwaitin and the Buddhist which say that you must rely upon yourself and no one can help you; but even the pure Adwaitin does in fact rely upon the Guru and the chief mantra of Buddhism insists on *śaranam* to Buddha. For other paths of sadhana, especially those which like the Gita accept the reality of the individual soul as an “eternal portion” of the Divine or which believe that Bhagavan and the bhakta are both real, the help of the Guru has always been relied upon as an indispensable aid.

I don't understand the objection to the validity of Vivekananda's experience; it was exactly the realisation which is described in the Upanishads as a supreme experience of the Self. It is not a fact that an experience gained in samadhi cannot be prolonged into the waking state.

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Ramakrishna had the siddhi himself before he began giving to others—so had Buddha. I don't know about the others [Vivekananda, Ramatirtha, Ramdas, Mahavir, Shankara]. By perfection of course is meant siddhi in one's own path—realisation. Ramakrishna always put that as a rule that one should not become a teacher to others until one has the full authority.

The Bhakta and the Disciple

It does not strike me that Krishnaprem's letters are admirable as an *aperçu* of current thoughts and general tendencies; it was rather his power to withdraw so completely from these thoughts and tendencies and look from a (for him) new and an abiding source of knowledge that impressed me as admirable. If he had remained interested and in touch with these current human movements, I don't suppose he would have done better with them than Romain Rolland or another. But he has gone to the Yoga-view of them, the summit-view, and it is the readiness with which he has been able to do it that struck me.

I would explain his progressing so far not entirely by his own superiority in the sense of a general fitness for Yoga but by the quickness and completeness with which he has taken inwardly the attitude of the Bhakta and the disciple. That is a rare achievement for a modern mind, be he European or "educated" Indian; for the modern mind is analytic, dubitative, instinctively "independent" even when it wants to be otherwise; it holds itself back and hesitates in front of the Light and Influence that comes to it; it does not plunge into it with a simple directness, crying, "Here I am, ready to throw from me all that was myself or seemed to be, if so I can enter into Thee; remake my consciousness into the Truth in thy way, the way of the Divine." There is something in us that is ready for it, but there is this element that intervenes and makes a curtain of non-receptivity; I know by my own experience with myself and others how long it can make a road that could never perhaps, for us who seek the entire truth, have been short and easy, but still we might have been spared many wanderings and stand-stills and recoils and detours. All the more I admire the ease with which Krishnaprem seems to have surmounted this formidable obstacle.

I do not know if his Guru falls far short in any respect, but with the attitude he has taken, her deficiencies, if any, do not matter. It is not the human defects of the Guru that can stand in the way when there is the psychic opening, confidence and surrender. The Guru is the channel or the representative or the manifestation of the Divine, according to the measure of his personality or his attainment; but whatever he is, it is to the Divine that one opens in opening to him, and if something is determined by the power of the channel, more is determined by the inherent and intrinsic attitude of the receiving consciousness, an element that comes out in the surface mind as simple trust or direct unconditional self-giving, and once that is there, the essential things can be gained even from one who seems to others than the disciple an inferior spiritual source and the rest will grow up in the sadhak of itself by the Grace of the Divine, even if the human being in the Guru cannot give it. It is this that Krishnaprem appears to have done perhaps from the first; but in

most nowadays this attitude seems to come with difficulty after much hesitation and delay and trouble. In my own case I owe the first decisive turn of my inner life to one who was infinitely inferior to me in intellect, education and capacity and by no means spiritually perfect or supreme; but, having seen a Power behind him and decided to turn there for help, I gave myself entirely into his hands and followed with an automatic passivity the guidance. He himself was astonished and said to others that he had never met anyone before who could surrender himself so absolutely and without reserve or question to the guidance of the helper. The result was a series of transmuting experiences of such a radical character that he was unable to follow and had to tell me to give myself up in future to the Guide within with the same completeness of surrender as I had shown to the human channel. I give this example to show how these things work; it is not in the calculated way the human reason wants to lay down, but by a more mysterious and greater law.

Part Two

The Synthetic Method
of the Integral Yoga

Section One

A Yoga of Knowledge, Works,
Bhakti and Self-Perfection

Chapter One

The Central Processes of the Sadhana

Four Necessary Processes

As regards X's question — this is not a Yoga of Bhakti alone; it is or at least it claims to be an integral Yoga, that is, a turning of all the being in all its parts to the Divine. It follows that there must be knowledge and works as well as Bhakti and, in addition, it includes a total change of the nature, a seeking for perfection, so that the nature also may become one with the nature of the Divine. It is not only the heart that has to turn to the Divine and change, but the mind also — so knowledge is necessary, and the will and power of action and creation also — so works too are necessary. In this Yoga the methods of other Yogas are taken up — like this of Purusha-Prakriti, but with a difference in the final object. Purusha separates from Prakriti, not in order to abandon her, but in order to know himself and her and to be no longer her plaything, but the knower, lord and upholder of the nature; but having become so or even in becoming so, one offers all that to the Divine. One may begin with knowledge or with works or with Bhakti or with Tapasya of self-purification for perfection (change of nature) and develop the rest as a subsequent movement or one may combine all in one movement. There is no single rule for all, it depends on the personality and the nature. Surrender is the main power of the Yoga, but the surrender is bound to be progressive; a complete surrender is not possible in the beginning, but only a will in the being for that completeness, — in fact it takes time; yet it is only when the surrender is complete that the full flood of the sadhana is possible. Till then there must be the personal effort with an increasing reality of surrender. One calls in the power of the Divine Shakti and once that begins to come into the being, it at

first supports the personal endeavour, then progressively takes up the whole action, although the consent of the sadhak continues to be always necessary. As the Force works, it brings in the different processes that are necessary for the sadhak, processes of knowledge, of Bhakti, of spiritualised action, of transformation of the nature. The idea that they cannot be combined is an error.

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The object of the sadhana is opening of the consciousness to the Divine and the change of the nature. Meditation or contemplation is one means to this but only one means; bhakti is another; work is another. Chittashuddhi was practised by the Yogis as a first means towards realisation and they got by it the saintliness of the saint and the quietude of the sage. But the transformation of the nature of which we speak is something more than that, and this transformation does not come by contemplation alone; works are necessary, Yoga in action is indispensable.

The Need for Plasticity

One must not treat human nature like a machine to be handled according to rigid mental rules — a great plasticity is needed in dealing with its complex motives.

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Fundamentally the nature in all is the same and the methods of sadhana have the same principle — but the differences in detail and arrangement are very great.

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You forget that men differ in nature and therefore each will approach the sadhana in his own way — one through work, one through bhakti, one through meditation and knowledge — and those who are capable of it through all together. You are perfectly justified in following your own way, whatever may be the theories of others — but let them follow theirs. In the end all can converge together towards the same goal.

Work, Meditation and Bhakti

There is no opposition between work and sadhana. Work itself done in the right spirit is sadhana. Meditation is not the only means of sadhana. Work is one means; love and worship and surrender are another.

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It [*the value of work in sadhana*] depends more on the intensity of the spirit put into it than on the intensity of the work itself. As for the line on which most stress is laid, it depends on the nature. There are some people who are not cut out for meditation and it is only by work that they can prepare themselves; there are also those who are the opposite. As for the enormous development of egoism, that can come whatever one follows. I have seen it blossom in the *dhyāni* as well as in the worker; Krishnaprem says it does so in the bhakta. So it is evident that all soils are favourable to this Narcissus flower. As for “no need of sadhana”, obviously one who does not do any sadhana cannot change or progress. Work, meditation, bhakti, all must be done as sadhana.

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I have always said that work done as sadhana—done, that is to say, as an outflow of energy from the Divine offered to the Divine or work done for the sake of the Divine or work done in a spirit of devotion—is a powerful means of sadhana and that such work is especially necessary in this Yoga. Work, bhakti and meditation are three supports of Yoga. One can do with all three, or two or one. There are people who can't meditate in the set way that one calls meditation, but they progress through work or through bhakti or through the two together. By work and bhakti one can develop a consciousness in which eventually a natural meditation and realisation become possible.

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The growth out of the ordinary mind into the spiritual consciousness can be effected either by meditation, dedicated work

or bhakti for the Divine. In our Yoga, which seeks not only a static peace or absorption but a dynamic spiritual action, work is indispensable. As for the Supramental Truth, that is a different matter; it depends only on the descent of the Divine and the action of the Supreme Force and is not bound by any method or rule.

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There are very few among the sadhaks here who at all concern themselves with the supermind or know anything about it except as something which the Mother and I will bring down some day and establish here. Most are seeking realisation through meditation, through love and worship or through activity and work. Meditation and silence are not necessary for everyone; there are some, even among those spoken of by you and others as the most advanced sadhaks, who do their sadhana not through meditation, for which they have no turn, but through activity, work or creation supported or founded on love and bhakti. It is not the credo but the person who matters. We impose no credo; it is sufficient if there is an established and heart-felt relation between ourselves and the disciple.

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I was quite in earnest in speaking of the progress you had made by the psychic movement and the endeavour to detect and remove the ego. I had already written to you strongly approving of that way. It is in our Yoga the way to devotion and surrender — for it is the psychic movement that brings the constant and pure devotion and the removal of ego that makes it possible to surrender. The two things indeed go together.

The other way, which is the way to knowledge, is the meditation in the head by which there comes the opening above, the quietude or silence of the mind and the descent of peace etc. of the higher consciousness generally till it envelops the being and fills the body and begins to take up all the movements. But this involves a passage through silence, a certain emptiness of the ordinary activities — they being pushed out and done as a

purely superficial action — and you strongly dislike silence and emptiness.

The third way which is one of the two ways towards Yoga by works is the separation of the Purusha from the Prakriti, the inner silent being from the outer active one, so that one has two consciousnesses or a double consciousness, one behind watching and observing and finally controlling and changing the other which is active in front. But this also means living in an inner peace and silence and dealing with the activities as if they were a thing of the surface. (The other way of beginning the Yoga of works is by doing them for the Divine, for the Mother, and not for oneself, consecrating and dedicating them till one concretely feels the Divine Force taking up the activities and doing them for one.)

If there is any secret or key of my Yoga which you say you have not found, it lies in these methods — and, in reality, there is nothing so mysterious, impossible or even new about them in themselves. It is only the farther development at a later stage and the aim of the Yoga that are new. But that one need not concern oneself with in the earlier stages unless one wishes to do so as a matter of mental knowledge.

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Poetry by itself does not bring to the goal, but it can help as a means to express and deepen one's aspiration while it gives the vital an activity which can keep it from rusting and maintains its energy. Otherwise it may droop or go dry or sulk or non-cooperate. What will bring towards the goal is the growth of the psychic being, the increase in bhakti, psychic clarity of vision with regard to one's inner movements and the will to get rid of the vital ego, increase in pure self-giving. Meditation and the rest can bring only partial results or often no results until there has been a sufficient psychic preparation. Even with those who begin with a flood of experiences because of some mental or vital preparation in past lives whose results happen to be near the surface, these lead to nothing definite till the psychic preparation is made; they often have all their struggle

still to go through and some sink with their bag of experiences on their head and a magnified ego on their back. It was this psychic growth that suddenly began in you. Don't let it stop; for through that lies your way. Once that is done, you can meditate and do everything else that may be needful.

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Meditation is one means of the approach to the Divine and a great way, but it cannot be called a short cut—for most it is a long and difficult though very high ascent. It can by no means be short unless it brings a descent and even then it is only a foundation that is quickly laid—afterwards meditation has to build laboriously a big superstructure on that foundation. It is very indispensable, but there is nothing of the short cut about it.

Karma is a much simpler road—provided one's mind is not fixed on the karma to the exclusion of the Divine. The aim must be the Divine and the work can only be a means. The use of poetry etc. is to keep one in contact with one's inner being and that helps to prepare for the direct contact with the inmost, but one must not stop with that, one must go on to the real thing. If one thinks of being a "literary man", a poet, a painter as things worthwhile for their own sake, then it is no longer the Yogic spirit. That is why I have sometimes to say that our business is to be Yogis, not merely poets, painters etc.

Love, bhakti, surrender, the psychic opening are the only short cut to the Divine—or can be; for if the love and bhakti are too vital, then there is likely to be a seesaw between ecstatic expectation and *viraha, abhimāna*, despair, which will make it not a short cut but a long one, a zigzag, not a straight flight, a whirling round one's own ego instead of a running towards the Divine.

Surrender and Self-Giving

I may stress one point, however, that there need not be only one way to realisation of the Divine. If one does not succeed or has not yet succeeded in reaching him, feeling him or seeing him

by the established process of meditation or by other processes like japa, yet one may have made progress towards it by the frequent welling up of bhakti in the heart or a constantly greater enlargement of it in the consciousness or by work for the Divine and dedication in service. You have certainly progressed in these two directions, increased in devotion and shown your capacity for service. You have also tried to get rid of obstacles in your vital nature and so effect a purification, not without success, in several difficult directions. The path of surrender is indeed difficult, but if one perseveres in it with sincerity, there is bound to be some success and a partial overcoming or diminution of the ego which may help greatly a farther advance upon the way. I can see no sufficient reason for the discouragement which so often overtakes you and sometimes makes you think that you are not cut out for the path; to indulge such a thought is always a mistake. A too ready proneness to discouragement and a consequent despondency is one of the weaknesses of your vital nature and to get rid of it would be a great help. One must learn to go forward on the path of Yoga, as the Gita insists, with a consciousness free from despondency — *anirvijnacetasā*. Even if one slips, one must rectify the posture; even if one falls, one has to rise and go undiscouraged on the divine way. The attitude must be, "The Divine has promised himself to me if I cleave to him always; that I will never cease to do whatever may come."

*

It is altogether unprofitable to enquire who or what class will arrive first or last at the goal. The spiritual path is not a field of competition or a race that this should matter. What matters is one's own aspiration for the Divine, one's own faith, surrender, selfless self-giving. Others can be left to the Divine who will lead each according to his nature. Meditation, work, bhakti are each means of preparative help towards fulfilment; all are included in this path. If one can dedicate oneself through work, that is one of the most powerful means towards the self-giving which is itself the most powerful and indispensable element of the sadhana.

To cleave to the path means to follow it without leaving it

or turning aside. It is a path of self-offering of the whole being in all its parts, the offering of the thinking mind and the heart, the will and actions, the inner and the outer instruments so that one may arrive at the experience of the Divine, the Presence within, the psychic and spiritual change. The more one gives of oneself in all ways, the better for the sadhana. But all cannot do it to the same extent, with the same rapidity, in the same way. How others do it or fail to do it should not be one's concern—how to do it faithfully oneself is the one thing important.

Aspiration and Will of Consecration

I have never put any ban on bhakti. Also I am not conscious of having banned meditation either at any time. I have stressed both bhakti and knowledge in my Yoga as well as works, even if I have not given any of them an exclusive importance like Shankara or Chaitanya.

The difficulty you feel or any sadhak feels about sadhana is not really a question of meditation versus bhakti versus works. It is a difficulty of the attitude to be taken, the approach or whatever you may like to call it.

If you can't as yet remember the Divine all the time you are working, it does not greatly matter. To remember and dedicate at the beginning and give thanks at the end ought to be enough for the present. Or at the most to remember too when there is a pause. Your method seems to me rather painful and difficult,—you seem to be trying to remember and work with one and the same part of the mind. I don't know if that is possible. When people remember all the time during work (it can be done), it is usually with the back of their minds or else there is created gradually a faculty of double thought or else a double consciousness—one in front that works, and one within that witnesses and remembers. There is also another way which was mine for a long time—a condition in which the work takes place automatically and without intervention of personal thought or mental action, while the consciousness remains silent in the Divine. The thing, however, does not come so much by trying as by a very

simple constant aspiration and will of consecration — or else by a movement of the consciousness separating the inner from the instrumental being. Aspiration and will of consecration calling down a greater Force to do the work is a method which brings great results, even if in some it takes a long time about it. That is a great secret of sadhana, to know how to get things done by the Power behind or above instead of doing all by the mind's effort. I don't mean to say that the mind's effort is unnecessary or has no result — only if it tries to do everything by itself, that becomes a laborious effort for all except the spiritual athletes. Nor do I mean that the other method is the longed-for short cut; the result may, as I have said, take a long time. Patience and firm resolution are necessary in every method of sadhana.

Strength is all right for the strong — but aspiration and the Grace answering to it are not altogether myths; they are great realities of the spiritual life.

Sadhana, Tapasya, Aradhana, Dhyana

Sadhana is the practice of Yoga. Tapasya is the concentration of the will to get the results of sadhana and to conquer the lower nature. Aradhana is worship of the Divine, love, self-surrender, aspiration to the Divine, calling the name, prayer. Dhyana is inner concentration of the consciousness, meditation, going inside in Samadhi. Dhyana, tapasya and aradhana are all parts of sadhana.

Chapter Two

Combining Work, Meditation and Bhakti

The Place of Work in Sadhana

There is no stage of the sadhana in which works are impossible, no passage in the path where there is no foothold and action has to be renounced as incompatible with concentration on the Divine. The foothold is there always; the foothold is the reliance on the Divine, the opening of the being, the will, the energies to the Divine, the surrender to the Divine. All work done in that spirit can be made a means for the sadhana. It may be necessary for an individual here and there to plunge into meditation for a time and suspend work for that time or make it subordinate; but that can only be an individual case and a temporary retirement. Moreover, a complete cessation of work and entire withdrawal into oneself is seldom advisable; it may encourage a too one-sided and visionary condition in which one lives in a sort of midworld of purely subjective experiences without a firm hold on either external reality or on the highest Reality and without the right use of the subjective experience to create a firm link and then a unification between the highest Reality and the external realisation in life.

Work can be of two kinds — the work that is a field of experience used for the sadhana, for a progressive harmonisation and transformation of the being and its activities, and work that is a realised expression of the Divine. But the time for the latter can be only when the Realisation has been fully brought down into the earth-consciousness; till then all work must be a field of endeavour and a school of experience.

*

I do not mean by work action done in the ego and the ignorance,

for the satisfaction of the ego and in the drive of rajasic desire. There can be no Karmayoga without the will to get rid of ego, rajas and desire, which are the seals of ignorance.

I do not mean philanthropy or the service of humanity or all the rest of the things — moral or idealistic — which the mind of man substitutes for the deeper truth of works.

I mean by work action done for the Divine and more and more in union with the Divine — for the Divine alone and nothing else. Naturally that is not easy at the beginning, any more than deep meditation and luminous knowledge are easy or even true love and bhakti are easy. But like the others it has to be begun in the right spirit and attitude, with the right will in you, then all the rest will come.

Works done in this spirit are quite as effective as bhakti or contemplation. One gets by the rejection of desire, rajas and ego a quietude and purity into which the Peace ineffable can descend; one gets by the dedication of one's will to the Divine, by the merging of one's will in the Divine Will the death of ego and the enlarging into the cosmic consciousness or else the uplifting into what is above the cosmic; one experiences the separation of Purusha from Prakriti and is liberated from the shackles of the outer nature; one becomes aware of one's inner being and feels the outer as an instrument; one feels the universal Force doing one's works and the Self or Purusha watching or witness but free; one feels all one's works taken from one and done by the universal or the supreme Mother or by the Divine Power controlling and acting from behind the heart. By constant reference of all one's will and works to the Divine, love and adoration grow, the psychic being comes forward. By the reference to the Power above we can come to feel it above and its descent and the opening to an increasing consciousness and knowledge. Finally works, bhakti and knowledge join together and self-perfection becomes possible — what we call the transformation of the nature.

These results certainly do not come all at once; they come more or less slowly, more or less completely according to the condition and growth of the being. There is no royal road to

the divine realisation.

This is the Karmayoga as it is laid down in the Gita as I have developed it for the integral spiritual life. It is founded not on speculation and reasoning but on experience. It does not exclude meditation and it certainly does not exclude bhakti, for the self-offering to the Divine, the consecration of all oneself to the Divine which is the essence of this Karmayoga are essentially a movement of bhakti. Only it does exclude a life-fleeing exclusive meditation or an emotional bhakti shut up in its own inner dream taken as the whole movement of the Yoga. One may have hours of pure absorbed meditation or of the inner motionless adoration and ecstasy, but they are not the whole of the integral Yoga.

*

To say that one enters the stream of sadhana through work only is to say too much. One can enter it through meditation or bhakti also, but work is necessary to get into full stream and not drift away to one side and go circling there. Of course all work helps provided it is done in the right spirit.

*

Why argue from your personal experience great or little and turn it into a generalisation? A great many people (the majority perhaps) find it [*sadhana through work*] the easiest of all. Many find it easy to think of the Mother when working; but when they read or write, their mind goes off to the thing read or written and they forget everything else. I think that is the case with most. Physical work on the other hand can be done with the most external part of the mind, leaving the rest free to remember or to experience.

A Defence of Works

In spite of your disclaimer you practically come to the conclusion that all my nonsense about integral Yoga and karma being as much a way to realisation as jnana and bhakti is either

a gleaming chimaera or practicable only by Avatars or else a sheer laborious superfluity — since one can bump straight into the Divine through the open door of Bhakti or sweep majestically in on him by the easy high road of meditation; so why this scramble through the jungle of karma by which nobody ever reached anywhere? The old Yogas are true, are they not? Then why a new-fangled, more difficult Yoga with unheard talk about the supramental and God knows what else? There can be no answer to that; for I can only answer by a repetition of the statement of my own knowledge and experience — that is what I have done in today's answer to X — and that amounts only to a perverse obstinacy in riding my gleaming and dazzling chimaera and forcing my nuisance of a superfluity on a world weary of itself and anxious to get a short easy cut to the Divine. Unfortunately, I don't believe in short cuts — at any rate none ever led me where I wanted to go. However, let it rest there.

I have never disputed the truth of the old Yogas — I have myself had the experience of Vaishnava Bhakti and of Nirvana in the Brahman; I recognise their truth in their own field and for their own purpose — the truth of their experience so far as it goes — though I am in no way bound to accept the truth of the mental philosophies founded on the experience. I similarly find that my Yoga is true in its own field — a larger field, as I think — and for its own purpose. The purpose of the old is to get away from life to the Divine — so, obviously, let us drop karma. The purpose of the new is to reach the Divine and bring the fullness of what is gained into life — for that, Yoga by works is indispensable. It seems to me that there is no mystery about that or anything to perplex anybody — it is rational and inevitable. Only you say that the thing is impossible; but that is what is said about everything before it is done.

I may point out that Karmayoga is not a new but a very old Yoga: the Gita was not written yesterday and Karmayoga existed before the Gita. Your idea that the only justification in the Gita for works is that it is an unavoidable nuisance, so better make the best of it, is rather summary and crude. If that were all, the Gita would be the production of an imbecile and I would

hardly have been justified in writing two volumes on it or the world in admiring it as one of the greatest scriptures, especially for its treatment of the problem of the place of works in spiritual endeavour. There is surely more in it than that. Anyhow your doubt whether works can lead to realisation or rather your flat and sweeping denial of the possibility contradicts the experience of those who have achieved this supposed impossibility. You say that work lowers the consciousness, brings you out of the inner into the outer — yes, if you consent to externalise yourself in it instead of doing works from within; but that is just what one has to learn not to do. Thought and feeling can also externalise one in the same way; but it is a question of linking thought, feeling and act firmly to the inner consciousness by living there and making the rest an instrument. Difficult? Even bhakti is not easy and Nirvana is for most men more difficult than all.

You again try to floor me with Ramakrishna. But one thing puzzles me, as Shankara's stupendous activity of karma puzzles me in the apostle of inaction — you see you are not the only puzzled person in the world. Ramakrishna also gave the image of the jar which ceased gurgling when it was full. Well, but Ramakrishna spent the last years of his life in talking about the Divine and receiving disciples — that was not action, not work? Did Ramakrishna become a half-full jar after being a full one or was he never full? Did he get far away from God and so begin a work? Or had he reached a condition in which he was bound neither to rajasic work and mental prattling nor to inactivity and silence, but could do from the divine realisation the divine work and speak from the inner consciousness the divine word? If the last, perhaps in spite of his dictum, his example at least is rather in my favour.

I do not know why you drag in humanitarianism, activism, philanthropical *sevā* etc. None of these are part of my Yoga or in harmony with my definition of works, so they don't touch me. I never thought that politics or feeding the poor or writing beautiful poems would lead straight to Vaikuntha or the Absolute. If it were so, Romesh Dutt on one side and Baudelaire on the other would be the first to attain the Highest and welcome us

there. It is not the form of the work itself or mere activity but the consciousness and Godward will behind it that are the essence of Karmayoga; the work is only the necessary instrumentation for the union with the Master of works, the transit to the pure Will and power of Light from the will and power of the Ignorance.

Finally, why suppose that I am against meditation or bhakti? I have not the slightest objection to your taking either or both as the means of approach to the Divine. Only I saw no reason why anyone should fall foul of works and deny the truth of those who have reached, as the Gita says, through works perfect realisation and oneness of nature with the Divine, *samsiddhim*, *sadharanyam*, as did "Janaka and others", simply because he himself cannot find or has not yet found their deeper secret—hence my defence of works.

Work and Meditation

Work by itself is only a preparation [for spiritual life], so is meditation by itself, but work done in the increasing Yogic consciousness is a means of realisation as much as meditation is.

I have not said, I hope, that work *only* prepares. Meditation also prepares for the direct contact. If we are to do work only as a preparation and then become motionless meditative ascetics, then all my spiritual teaching is false and there is no use for supramental realisation or anything else that has not been done in the past.

*

The including of the outer consciousness in the transformation is of supreme importance in this Yoga—meditation cannot do it. Meditation can deal only with the inner being. So work is of primary importance—only it must be done with the right attitude and in the right consciousness, then it is as fruitful as any meditation can be.

*

You need not have qualms about the time you give to action and

creative work. Those who have an expansive creative vital or a vital made for action are usually at their best when the vital is not held back from its movement and they can develop faster by it than by introspective meditation. All that is needed is that the action should be dedicated, so that they may grow by it more and more prepared to feel and follow the Divine Force when it moves them. It is a mistake to think that to live in introspective meditation all the time is invariably the best or the only way of Yoga.

*

It is not meditation (thinking with the mind) but a concentration or turning of the consciousness that is important,— and that can happen in work, in writing, in any kind of action as well as in sitting down to contemplate.

*

It does not depend on sitting [*to meditate*]. Many don't sit. They become conscious by working.

*

There are some who cannot meditate and progress through work only. Each has his own nature. But to extend one method to all is always an error.

*

Meditation is best when it comes spontaneously. But there should be full concentration in the work if it is to take the place of meditation.

No Competition between Work and Meditation

There are several sadhaks who have advanced very far by work alone, work consecrated to the Mother or else by work mainly with very little time for meditation. Others have advanced far by meditation mainly, but work also. Those who tried to do meditation alone and became impatient of work (because they could not consecrate it to the Mother) have generally been failures like

X and Y. But one or two may succeed by meditation alone—if it is in their nature or if they have an intense and unshakable faith and bhakti. All depends on the nature of the sadhak.

As for the *purātana mānuṣa* I do not see that the workers have their external being less changed than others. There are some who are where they were or only a little progressive, there are others who have changed a good deal—none is transformed altogether, though some have found a sure and sound spiritual and psychic basis. But that applies equally to workers who do not spend time in meditation and to those who spend a long time in meditation.

Each sadhak must be left to himself and the Mother to find his right way which need not be that of his neighbour. There is in the Asram too much observation of each other by the sadhaks, criticism, discussion of persons, even baseless gossip about each other's character, ideas, sadhana, actions along sometimes with theories and (usually mistaken) advice. All that is not very consistent with the atmosphere of Yoga. People should keep all their energy for their own sadhana—unless of course they are commissioned by the Mother to speak or state anything about the Yoga.

*

The ignorance underlying this attitude [*that meditation is greater than work*] is in the assumption that one must necessarily do only work or only meditation. Either work is the means or meditation is the means, but both cannot be! I have never said, so far as I know, that meditation should not be done. To set up an open competition or a closed one between works and meditation is a trick of the dividing mind and belongs to the old Yoga. Please remember that I have been declaring all along an integral Yoga in which Knowledge, Bhakti, works—light of consciousness, Ananda and love, will and power in works—meditation, adoration, service of the Divine have all their place. Have I written seven volumes of the *Arya* all in vain? Meditation is not greater than Yoga of works nor works greater than Yoga by knowledge—both are equal.

Another thing—it is a mistake to argue from one's own very limited experience, ignoring that of others, and build on it large generalisations about Yoga. This is what many do, but the method has obvious demerits. You have no experience of major realisations through work, and you conclude that such realisations are impossible. But what of the many who have had them—elsewhere and here too in the Asram? That has no value? You kindly hint to me that I have failed to get anything by works? How do you know? I have not written the history of my sadhana—if I had, you would have seen that if I had not made action and work one of my chief means of realisation—well, there would have been no sadhana and no realisation except that, perhaps, of Nirvana.

I shall perhaps add something hereafter as to what works can do, but no time tonight.

Do not conclude however that I am exalting works as the sole means of realisation. I am only giving it its due place.

The Time Given to Work and Meditation

The work should not be diminished for that purpose [*meditation and japa*]. On the other hand it is not necessary for you to work all the time. If the work assigned to you is finished earlier, it does not matter about your not keeping the full office hours.

*

If this arrangement [*in work*] gives no time for meditation—no time for going inside and establishing there the peace, wideness and joy in which you can meet the Divine inside and in work—it seems defective. What I meant is that it is not necessary either to work all the time or to intoxicate the brain by unrelieved meditation as some do. The result of meditation can be obtained by work, but then you must be able or learn to live inwardly even in the work and to do all from within.

*

Half an hour's meditation in the day ought to be possible—if

only to bring a concentrated habit into the consciousness which will help it, first to be less outward in work and, secondly, to develop a receptive tendency which can bear its fruits even in the work.

*

I have not suggested that you are to progress by *dhyāna* alone; but you have a great capacity for that and you cannot progress fully without it. In this Yoga some kind of action is necessary for all—though it need not take the form of some set labour. But for the moment progress through concentration and inner experience is the first necessity for you.

This [*stream of thoughts*] is what we call the activity of the mind, which always comes in the way of the concentration and tries to create doubt and dispersion of the energies. It can be got rid of in two ways, by rejecting it and pushing it out, till it remains as an outside force only—by bringing down the higher peace and light into the physical mind.

Concentration, Meditation and Prayer

What you felt before was in your mental being and consciousness; after coming here you have evidently come out into your external and physical consciousness, that is why you feel as if all you had before was gone. It is only covered over by the obscurity of the physical consciousness and not gone.

As for sadhana, I presume you mean by that some kind of exercise of concentration etc. For work also is sadhana, if done in the right attitude and spirit. The sadhana of inner concentration consists in:

(1) Fixing the consciousness in the heart and concentrating there on the idea, image or name of the Divine Mother, whichever comes easiest to you.

(2) A gradual and progressive quieting of the mind by this concentration in the heart.

(3) An aspiration for the Mother's presence in the heart and the control by her of mind, life and action.

But to quiet the mind and get the spiritual experience it is necessary first to purify and prepare the nature. This sometimes takes many years. Work done with the right attitude is the easiest means for that—i.e. work done without desire or ego, rejecting all movements of desire, demand or ego when they come, done as an offering to the Divine Mother, with the remembrance of her and prayer to her to manifest her force and take up the action so that there too and not only in inner silence you can feel her presence and working.

*

I don't think you understood very well what Mother was trying to tell you. First of all she did not say that prayers or meditation either were no good—how could she when both count for so much in Yoga? What she said was that the prayer must well up from the heart on a crest of emotion or aspiration, the Japa or meditation come in a live push carrying the joy or the light of the thing in it. If done mechanically and merely as a thing that ought to be done (stern grim duty!), it must tend towards want of interest and dryness and so be ineffective. It was what I meant when I said I thought you were doing Japa too much as a means for bringing about a result—I meant too much as a device, a process laid down for getting the thing done. That again was why I wanted the psychological conditions in you to develop, the psychic, the mental—for when the psychic is forward, there is no lack of life and joy in the prayer, the aspiration, the seeking, no difficulty in having the constant stream of bhakti and when the mind is quiet and inturned and upturned there is no difficulty or want of interest in meditation. Meditation by the way is a process leading towards knowledge and through knowledge, it is a thing of the head and not of the heart; so if you want dhyana, you can't have an aversion to knowledge. Concentration in the heart is not meditation, it is a call on the Divine, on the Beloved. This Yoga too is not a Yoga of knowledge alone—knowledge is one of its means, but its base being self-offering, surrender, bhakti, it is based on the heart and nothing can be eventually done without this base. There are plenty of people here who

do or have done Japa and base themselves on bhakti, very few comparatively who have done the “head” meditation; love and bhakti and works are usually the base — how many can proceed by knowledge? Only the few.

Bhakti and Knowledge

To know about the sadhana with the mind is not indispensable. If one has bhakti and aspires in the heart’s silence, if there is the true love for the Divine, then the nature will open of itself, there will be the true experience and the Mother’s power working within you, and the necessary knowledge will come.

Section Two

Sadhana through Work

Chapter One

Work and Yoga

Work as Part of Sadhana

Work alone is not the object; work is a means of sadhana.

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Certainly; work done in the right way and with the consciousness open to the Force is sadhana.

*

Without sadhana the object of Yoga cannot be attained. Work itself must be taken as part of sadhana. But naturally when you are working, you must think of the work, which you will learn to do from the Yogic consciousness as an instrument and with the memory of the Divine.

*

Sadhana and work done disinterestedly as part of the sadhana cannot be incompatible with each other — provided the work is attended to, sadhana can go on very well at the same time.

*

By disinterested work is usually meant work done for the sake of the work or for the sake of others without asking for return, reward or personal fruit or recompense; but in Yoga it means desireless work done for the Divine as an offering without condition or claim — only because it is the Divine's Will or out of love for the Divine.

*

Your object is not only to practise Yoga for your own internal progress and perfection, but also to do a work for the Divine.

*

This is not an Asram like others — the members are not Sannyasis; it is not *mokṣa* that is the sole aim of the Yoga here. What is being done here is a preparation for a work — a work which will be founded on Yogic consciousness and Yoga-Shakti, and can have no other foundation. Meanwhile every member here is expected to do some work in the Asram as part of his spiritual preparation.

*

Recommendation to X not to take you away but to let you realise the Divine first has no meaning. Must one realise the Divine before one can serve him or is not service of the Divine a step on the way to realisation and a help towards it? In any case, the service and the realisation are both necessary for a complete Yoga and one cannot fix an unalterable rule of precedence between the two.

*

X has to learn to consecrate his work and feel the Mother's power working through it. A purely sedentary subjective realisation is only a half realisation.

Work without Personal Motives

The only work that spiritually purifies is that which is done without personal motives, without desire for fame or public recognition or worldly greatness, without insistence on one's own mental motives or vital lusts and demands or physical preferences, without vanity or crude self-assertion or claim for position or prestige, done for the sake of the Divine alone and at the command of the Divine. All work done in an egoistic spirit, however good for people in the world of the Ignorance, is of no avail to the seeker of the Yoga.

*

It is the spirit and the consciousness in which it is done that makes an action Yogic — it is not the action itself.

*

To do anything for a reward is contrary to the rule of Yoga. One must do a thing because it is right or else do it for the Divine, not for a reward.

*

The difficulties will disappear when you have succeeded in consecrating yourself and your work and business entirely and without any internal division to the Divine.

Men usually work and carry on their affairs from the ordinary motives of the vital being, need, desire of wealth or success or position or power or fame or the push to activity and the pleasure of manifesting their capacities, and they succeed or fail according to their capability, power of work and the good or bad fortune which is the result of their nature and their Karma. When one takes up the Yoga and wishes to consecrate one's life to the Divine, these ordinary motives of the vital being have no longer their full and free play; they have to be replaced by another, a mainly psychic and spiritual motive, which will enable the sadhak to work with the same force as before, no longer for himself, but for the Divine. If the ordinary vital motives or vital force can no longer act freely and yet are not replaced by something else, then the push or force put into the work may decline or the power to command success may no longer be there. For the sincere sadhak the difficulty can only be temporary; but he has to see the defect in his consecration or his attitude and to remove it. Then the divine Power itself will act through him and use his capacity and vital force for its ends. In your case it is the psychic being and a part of the mind that have drawn you to the Yoga and were predisposed to it, but the vital nature or at least a large part of it has not yet put itself into line with the psychic movement. There is not as yet the full and undivided consecration of the active vital nature.

The signs of the consecration of the vital in action are these among others:

The feeling (not merely the idea or the aspiration) that all the life and the work are the Mother's and a strong joy of the vital nature in this consecration and surrender. A consequent

calm content and disappearance of egoistic attachment to the work and its personal results, but at the same time a great joy in the work and in the use of the capacities for the divine purpose.

The feeling that the Divine Force is working behind one's actions and leading at every moment.

A persistent faith which no circumstance or event can break. If difficulties occur, they raise not mental doubts or an inert acquiescence, but the firm belief that, with sincere consecration, the Divine Shakti will remove the difficulties, and with this belief a greater turning to her and dependence on her for that purpose. When there is full faith and consecration, there comes also a receptivity to the Force which makes one do the right thing and take the right means and then circumstances adapt themselves and the result is visible.

To arrive at this condition the important thing is a persistent aspiration, call and self-offering, and a will to reject all in oneself or around that stands in the way. Difficulties there will always be at the beginning and for as long a time as is necessary for the change; but they are bound to disappear if they are met by a settled faith, will and patience.

The Karmayoga of the Gita

I do not usually undertake the guidance of any except those who accept my own way of Yoga and show some signs of having a special call to it.

All I can suggest to him is to practise some kind of Karmayoga — remembering the Supreme in all his actions from the smallest to the greatest, doing them with a quiet mind and without ego-sense or attachment and offering them to Him as a sacrifice. He may also try or aspire to feel the presence of the Divine Shakti behind the world and its forces, distinguish between the lower nature of the Ignorance and the higher divine nature whose character is absolute calm, peace, power, Light and Bliss and aspire to be raised and led gradually from the lower to the higher.

If he can do this, he will become fit in time to dedicate

himself to the Divine and lead a wholly spiritual life.

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The line that seems to be natural to him is the Karmayoga and he is therefore right in trying to live according to the teaching of the Gita; for the Gita is the great guide on this path. Purification from egoistic movements and from personal desire and the faithful following of the best light one has are a preliminary training for this path, and so far as he has followed these things he has been on the right way, but to ask for strength and light in one's action must not be regarded as an egoistic movement, for they are necessary in one's inner development.

Obviously, a more systematic and intensive sadhana is desirable or, in any case, a steady aspiration and a more constant preoccupation with the central aim could bring an established detachment even in the midst of outer things and outer activity and a continuous guidance. The completeness, the Siddhi of this way of Yoga — I speak of the separate path of Karma or spiritual action — begins when one is luminously aware of the Guide and the guidance and when one feels the Power working with oneself as the instrument and the participator in the divine work.

*

I gather from X's letter to you that he has been following a very sound method in his practice and has attained some good results. The first step in Karmayoga of this kind is to diminish and finally get rid of the ego-centric position in works, the lower vital reactions and the principle of desire. He must certainly go on on this road until he reaches something like its end. I would not wish to deflect him from that in any way.

What I had in view when I spoke [*in the preceding letter*] of a systematic sadhana was the adoption of a method which would generalise the whole attitude of the consciousness so as to embrace all its movements at a time instead of working only upon details — although that working is always necessary. I may cite as an example the practice of the separation of the Prakriti and the Purusha, the conscious being standing back detached

from all the movements of Nature and observing them as witness and knower and finally as the giver (or refuser) of the sanction and at the highest stage of development, the Ishwara, the pure will, master of the whole nature.

By intensive sadhana I meant the endeavour to arrive at one of the great positive realisations which would be a firm base for the whole movement. I observe that he speaks of sometimes getting a glimpse of some wide calm when he feels the leading of Vyasa. A descent of this wide calm permanently into the consciousness is one of the realisations of which I was thinking. That he feels it at such times seems to indicate that he may have the capacity of receiving and retaining it. If that happened or if the Prakriti-Purusha realisation came, the whole sadhana would proceed on a strong permanent base with a new and entirely Yogic consciousness instead of the purely mental endeavour which is always difficult and slow. I do not however want to press these things upon him; they come in their own time and to press towards them prematurely does not always hasten their coming. Let him continue with his primary task of self-purification and self-preparation; I shall always be ready to give him what silent help I can.

*

I do not know that it is possible for me to give any guidance on the path you have chosen—it is at any rate difficult for me to say anything definite without more precise data than those contained in your letter.

There is no need for you to change the line of life and work you have chosen so long as you feel that to be the way of your nature (*svabhāva*) or dictated to you by your inner being or, for some reason, it is seen to be your proper dharma. These are the three tests and apart from that I do not know if there is any fixed line of conduct or way of work or life that can be laid down for the yoga of the Gita. It is the spirit or consciousness in which the work is done that matters most; the outer form can vary greatly for different natures. This, so long as one does not get the settled experience of the Divine Power taking up one's works and doing

them; afterwards it is the Power which determines what is to be done or not done.

The overcoming of all attachments must necessarily be difficult and cannot come except as the fruit of a long *sādhanā* — unless there is a rapid general growth in the inner spiritual experience which is the substance of the Gita's teaching. The cessation of desire of the fruit, of the attachment to the work itself, the growth of equality to all beings, to all happenings, to good repute or ill repute, praise or blame, to good fortune or ill fortune, the dropping of the ego which are necessary for the loss of all attachments can come completely only when all work becomes a spontaneous sacrifice to the Divine, the heart is offered up to Him and one has the settled experience of the Divine in all things and all beings. This consciousness or experience must come in all parts and movements of the being, *sarvabhāvena*, not only in the mind and idea; then the falling away of all attachments becomes easy. I speak of the Gita's way of yoga, for in the ascetic life one obtains the same object differently, by cutting away from the objects of attachment and the consequent atrophy of the attachment itself through rejection and disuse.

*

If I have not written to you, it is because I could not add anything to what I had already written before to you. I cannot promise that within a given time you will have a result which will enable you either to go out into the world with a stronger spirit or succeed in the Yoga. For the Yoga you yourself say that you have not yet the whole mind for it and without the whole mind success is hardly possible in sadhana. For the other it is hardly the function of sadhana to prepare a man for ordinary life in the world. There is one thing only that could work in a direction which would help you to something which is not that, but still not the whole Yoga for which you intimate that you are not wholly ready. It is if you get the spirit of the Yoga of works as it is indicated in the Gita — forget yourself and your miseries in the aspiration to a larger consciousness, feel the greater Force working in the world and make yourself an instrument for a

work to be done, however small it may be. But, whatever the way may be, you must accept it wholly and put your whole will into it—with a divided and wavering will you cannot hope for success in anything, neither in life nor in Yoga.

*

That is the ordinary Karmayoga in which the sadhak chooses his own work but offers it to the Divine—it is given to him in the sense that he is moved to it through some impulsion of his mind or heart or vital and feels that there is some cosmic power or *the* cosmic Power behind the impulsion and he tries to train himself to see the One Force behind all actions working out in him and others the cosmic Purpose.

Once he has the ideal of the direct surrender he has to find the direct moving or Guidance—that is why he rejects all that he sees to be merely mental, vital or physical impulsions coming from his own or universal Nature. Of course the full significance of the surrender comes out only when he is ready.

*

Any work can be done as a field for the practice of the spirit of the Gita.

*

The ordinary life consists in work for personal aim and satisfaction of desire under some mental or moral control, touched sometimes by a mental ideal. The Gita's Yoga consists in the offering of one's work as a sacrifice to the Divine, the conquest of desire, egoless and desireless action, bhakti for the Divine, an entering into the cosmic consciousness, the sense of unity with all creatures, oneness with the Divine. This Yoga adds the bringing down of the supramental Light and Force (its ultimate aim) and the transformation of the nature.

No Vital Demand in Work

The Mother had spoken to X, after receiving your letter, for

arranging for the increase of your work. But now as you say you do not want the work and have given it up, there is nothing to be done. It is indeed unprofitable to do any work in this spirit of vital demand and unrest and impatience. I may add that the frown in Mother's eyes and her serious face existed only in the imagination of your restless and excited vital mind; the Mother's eyes and face could not have expressed something quite absent from her feelings or intention.

It is because you showed an intention of doing the sadhana in full earnest that we considered it necessary to point out to you that it could not be done without work or by mere solitary meditation, for that is the nature of this sadhana. We did not impose any work on you, but left it to you to choose. You yourself suggested the kitchen work and afterwards asked for an increase of it.

It is not possible to get peace of mind if you indulge in vital ego and the turbulent play of the vital mind, revolt, demand and impatience. Abhiman, revolt, violent insistence on the satisfaction of claims and wishes are foreign to the spirit of the Yoga, they can only bring disturbance and trouble. If you want peace of mind and true sadhana, the first thing you have to do is to cease regarding all these things as justified or justifiable or insisting on them. You must recognise that in allowing all this to rise in you, it is you yourself who have created your own trouble and you must resolutely separate yourself from these things and clear them out of you. Till you are firm in doing that, nothing can be done,— till then no spiritual progress or achievement is possible.

*

That is the most important thing to get over — ego, anger, personal dislikes, self-regarding sensitiveness etc. Work is not only for work's sake, but as a field of sadhana, for getting rid of the lower personality and its reactions and acquiring a full surrender to the Divine. As for the work itself it must be done according to the organisation arranged or sanctioned by the Mother. You must always remember that it is her work and not personally yours.

The Utility of Work

To keep up work helps to keep up the balance between the internal experience and the external development; otherwise one-sidedness and want of measure and balance may develop. Moreover, it is necessary to keep the sadhana of work for the Divine, because in the end that enables the sadhak to bring out the inner progress into the external nature and life and helps the integrality of the sadhana.

*

It is not at all a question of usefulness — although your work is very useful when you put yourself into it. Work is part of the sadhana, and in sadhana the question of usefulness does not arise, that is an outward practical measure of things, though even in the outward ordinary life utility is not the only measure. The question is of aspiration to the Divine, whether that is your central aim in life, your inner need or not. Sadhana for oneself is another matter — one can take it up or leave it. The real sadhana is for the Divine — it is the soul's need and one cannot give it up even if in moments of despondency one thinks one can.

*

Work here and work done in the world are of course not the same thing. The work there is not in any way a divine work in special — it is ordinary work in the world. But still one must take it as a training and do it in the spirit of karmayoga — what matters there is not the nature of the work in itself but the spirit in which it is done. It must be in the spirit of the Gita, without desire, with detachment, without repulsion, but doing it as perfectly as possible, not for the sake of the family or promotion or to please the superiors, but simply because it is the thing that has been given in the hand to do. It is a field of inner training, nothing more. One has to learn in it three things, equality, desirelessness, dedication. It is not the work as a thing for its own sake, but one's doing of it and one's way of doing it that one has to dedicate to the Divine. Done in that spirit it does not matter what the work is. If one trains oneself spiritually

like that, then one will be ready to do in the true way whatever special work directly for the Divine (such as the Asram work) one may any day be given to do.

*

Yes, obviously, that is one great utility of work that it tests the nature and puts the sadhak in front of the defects of his outer being which might otherwise escape him.

*

It will be better to do the work as a sadhana for getting rid of the defects rather than accept the defects as a reason for not doing the work. Instead of accepting these reactions as if they were an unchangeable law of your nature, you should make up your mind that they must come no longer — calling down the aid of the Mother's force to purify the vital and eliminate them altogether. If you believe that the trouble in the body must come, naturally it will come; rather fix in your mind the idea and will that it must not come and will not come. If it tries to come reject it and throw it away from you.

*

The actions are of importance only as expressing what is in the nature. You have to be conscious of whatever in your actions is not in harmony with the Yoga and to get rid of it. But for that what is needed is your own consciousness, the psychic, observing from within and throwing off what is seen to be undesirable.

*

For the sadhak outward struggles, troubles, calamities are only a means of surmounting ego and rajasic desire and attaining to complete surrender. So long as one insists on success, one is doing the work partly at least for the ego; difficulties and outward failures come to warn one that it is so and to bring complete equality. This does not mean that the power of victory is not to be acquired; but it is not success in the immediate work that is all-important; it is the power to receive and transmit

a greater and greater correct vision and inner Force that has to be developed and this must be done quite coolly and patiently without being elated or disturbed by immediate victory or failure.

Right Attitude in Work

The spiritual effectivity of work of course depends on the inner attitude. What is important is the spirit of offering put into the work. If one can in addition remember the Mother in the work or through a certain concentration feel the Mother's presence or force sustaining or doing the work, that carries the spiritual effectivity still farther. But even if one cannot in moments of clouding, depression or struggle do these things, yet there can be behind a love or bhakti which was the original motive power of the work and that can remain behind the cloud and reemerge like the sun after dark periods. All sadhana is like that and it is why one should not be discouraged by the dark moments, but realise that the original urge is there and that therefore the dark moments are only an episode in the journey which will lead to greater progress when they are once over.

*

As for the work, it is a means of preparation, it can also be a means of growing into the inner consciousness. But then it must be done not as work only but as an offering to the Mother, without insisting on the ego, with an aspiration to feel her Force working in one, her Presence presiding over the work, seeking to give all to her, not claiming anything for oneself. That is the spirit of work offered as a sacrifice; done like that, work becomes a sadhana and a Yoga.

*

What you have to realise is that your success or failure depends, first and always, on your keeping in the right attitude and in the true psychic and spiritual atmosphere and allowing the Mother's force to act through you.

If I can judge from your letters, you take its support too much for granted and lay the first stress on your own ideas and plans and words about the work; but these whether good or bad, right or mistaken, are bound to fail if they are not instruments of the true Force. You have to be always concentrated, always referring all difficulties for solution to the force that is being sent from here, always letting it act and not substituting your own mind and separate vital will or impulse.

Proceed with your work, never forgetting the condition of success. Do not lose yourself in the work or in your ideas or plans or forget to keep yourself in constant touch with the true source. Do not allow anybody's mind or vital influence or the influence of the surrounding atmosphere or the ordinary human mentality to come between you and the power and presence of the Mother.

*

You know what is the right thing to do—to take and keep the necessary inner attitude—when there is the openness to the Force and the strength, courage and power in action coming from it, outward circumstances can be met and turned in the right direction.

Equanimity in Work

Helpless acceptance [*of difficulties*] is no part of the Yoga of works—what is necessary is a calm equanimity in the face both of helpful and adverse, fortunate or unfortunate happenings, good or evil fortune, success or failure of effort. One must learn to bear without flinching and disturbance, without rajasic joy or grief, doing all that is necessary, but not dejected if difficulties or failure come—one still goes on doing what can be done, not sinking under the burden of life.

*

To keep this equanimity and absence of reactions and from that calm ground to direct the Yoga-force on things and persons (not

for egoistic aims but for the work to be done) is the position of the Yogi.

*

This is the right inner attitude, of equality — to remain unmoved whatever may outwardly happen. But what is needed for success in the outward field (if you do not use human means, diplomacy or tactics) is the power to transmit calmly a Force that can change men's attitude and the circumstances and make any outward action taken at once the right thing to do and effective.

*

You have to make yourself an instrument of the invisible Force — to be able in a way to direct it to the required point and for the required purpose. But for that samata must be entire — for a calm and luminous use of the Force is necessary. Otherwise the use of the Force, if accompanied by ego-reactions, may raise a corresponding ego-resistance and a struggle.

*

The increase of samata is only a first condition [*for attacks by adverse forces to become impossible in one's work*]. It is when on the basis of samata an understanding Force can be used to make their attacks nugatory that the attacks will become impossible.

The Impersonal Worker

To be impersonal, generally, is not to be ego-centric, not to regard things from the point of view of how they affect oneself, — but to see what things are in themselves, to judge impartially, to do what is demanded by the purpose of things or by the will of the Master of things, not by one's own personal point of view or egoistic interest or ego-formed idea or feeling. In work it is to do what is best for the work, without regard to one's own prestige or convenience, not to regard the work as one's own but as the Mother's, to do it according to rule, discipline, impersonal arrangement, even if conditions are not favourable to do the

best according to the conditions etc. etc. The impersonal worker puts his best capacity, zeal, industry into the work, but not his personal ambitions, vanity, passions. He has always something in view that is greater than his little personality and his devotion or obedience to that dictates his conduct.

*

Your difficulty in work is that you regard it too much as your work and from your personal point of view. So questions of personal convenience, ideas, way of doing things, prestige, demands take a big place — and the result is quarrels. You have to learn to be impersonal. Even in the world work cannot be well done without that. How much more necessary is it for a sadhak of Yoga!

Service of the Divine

There should be no straining after power, no ambition, no egoism of power. The power or powers that come should be considered not as one's own, but as gifts of the Divine for the Divine's purpose. Care should be taken that there should be no ambitious or selfish misuse, no pride or vanity, no sense of superiority, no claim or egoism of the instrument, only a simple and pure psychic instrumentation of the nature in any way in which it is fit for the service of the Divine.

*

To be free from all egoistic motive, careful of truth in speech and action, void of self-will and self-assertion, watchful in all things is the condition for being a flawless servant.

*

Yes, the use to which you have turned your vital capacities in Bengal and Bombay,— to turn them into instruments of service and the Divine Work, is certainly the best possible. Through such action and such use of the vital power, one can certainly progress in Yoga. Vital power is necessary for work and you

have an exceptional amount of it. Of course, to make a full Yogic use of it and of its force for action, the ego must gradually fade out and vital attachments and impulses be replaced by the spiritual motive. Bhakti, devotion to the Divine, and the spirit of service to the Divine are among the most powerful means for this change.

*

Reading and study though they can be useful for preparing the mind, are not themselves the best means of entering the Yoga. It is self-dedication from within that is the means. It is with the consciousness of the Mother that you must unite, a sincere self-consecration in the mind and heart and the Will is the means for it. The work given by the Mother is always meant as field for that self-consecration, it has to be done as an offering to her so that through the self-offering one may come to feel her force acting and her presence.

*

If one went to the Himalayas, the likelihood is that one would make oneself fit for inactive meditation and quite unfit for life and the Mother's service—so in the next life the character would be like that. This is simply the influence of old ideas that have no application in this Yoga. It is here in the life near the Mother, in the work itself that one must become fit to be a perfect instrument of the Mother.

*

All acts are included in action,—work is action regulated towards a fixed end and methodically and constantly done, service is work done for the Mother's purpose and under her direction.

All Work Equal in the Eyes of the Spirit

Self-dedication does not depend on the particular work you do, but on the spirit in which all work, of whatever kind it may be, is done. Any work, done well and carefully as a sacrifice

to the Divine, without desire or egoism, with equality of mind and calm tranquillity in good or bad fortune, for the sake of the Divine and not for the sake of any personal gain, reward or result, with the consciousness that it is the Divine Power to which all work belongs, is a means of self-dedication through Karma.

*

Like the vital disturbance the physical inertia with all its symptoms is an attack of the hostile forces intended to cut short and prevent the higher opening. The ideas that arise to justify it are of no value — it is not true that physical work is of an inferior value to mental culture, it is the arrogance of the intellect that makes the claim. All work done for the Divine is equally divine; manual labour done for the Divine is more divine than mental culture done for one's own development, fame or mental satisfaction.

This inertia, numbness, pain should be thrown off with the same resolution as the vital disturbances. The only peculiarity of it in your case is the persistent violence of the attack as in the case of the vital — otherwise it is what others get also; but each time they reject, call on the Mother and get free, after a little time if the attack is violent, at once if it is of a lesser character.

If there is temporary physical inability, one can take rest but solely for the purpose of recovering the physical energy. The idea of giving up physical work for mental self-development is a creation of the mental ego.

*

Of course the idea of bigness and smallness is quite foreign to the spiritual truth. Spiritually there is nothing big or small. Such ideas are like those of the literary people who think writing a poem is a high work and making shoes or cooking the dinner is a small and low one. But all is equal in the eyes of the Spirit — and it is only the spirit within with which it is done that matters. It is the same with a particular kind of work, there is nothing big or small.

*

In the wider consciousness one can deal with the small as well as the high things, but one comes to deal with them with a larger as well as a profounder, subtler and more accurate view coming from a more and more understanding and luminous consciousness so that the thoughts about small things also cease to be themselves small or trivial, being more and more part of a higher knowledge.

*

One must be able to do the same work always with enthusiasm and at the same time be ready to do something else or enlarge one's scope at a moment's notice.

*

The sadhak ought to be ready to do any work that is needed, not only the work he prefers.

*

It is not that you have to do what you dislike, but that you have to cease to dislike. To do only what you like is to indulge the vital and maintain its domination over the nature—for that is the very principle of the untransformed nature, to be governed by its likes and dislikes. To be able to do anything with equanimity is the principle of karmayoga and to do it with joy because it is done for the Mother is the true psychic and vital condition in this Yoga.

*

There are those who have done the lawyer's work with the Mother's force working in them and grown by it in inward consciousness. On the other hand religious work can be merely external and vital in its nature or influence.

*

I may say however that I do not regard business as something evil or tainted, any more than it was so regarded in ancient spiritual India. If I did, I would not be able to receive money

from X or from those of our disciples who in Bombay trade with East Africa; nor could we then encourage them to go on with their work but would have to tell them to throw it up and attend to their spiritual progress alone. How are we to reconcile X's seeking after spiritual light and his mill? Ought I not to tell him to leave his mill to itself and to the devil and go into some Ashram to meditate? Even if I myself had had the command to do business as I had the command to do politics I would have done it without the least spiritual or moral compunction. All depends on the spirit in which a thing is done, the principle on which it is built and use to which it is turned. I have done politics and the most violent kind of revolutionary politics, *ghoram karma*, and I have supported war and sent men to it, even though politics is not always or often a very clean occupation nor can war be called a spiritual line of action. But Krishna calls upon Arjuna to carry on war of the most terrible kind and by his example encourage men to do every kind of human work, *sarvakarmāṇi*. Do you contend that Krishna was an unspiritual man and that his advice to Arjuna was mistaken or wrong in principle? Krishna goes farther and declares that a man by doing in the right way and in the right spirit the work dictated to him by his fundamental nature, temperament and capacity and according to his and its dharma can move towards the Divine. He validates the function and dharma of the Vaishya as well as of the Brahmin and Kshatriya. It is in his view quite possible for a man to do business and make money and earn profits and yet be a spiritual man, practise Yoga, have an inner life. The Gita is constantly justifying works as a means of spiritual salvation and enjoining a Yoga of works as well as of Bhakti and Knowledge. Krishna, however, superimposes a higher law also that work must be done without desire, without attachment to any fruit or reward, without any egoistic attitude or motive, as an offering or sacrifice to the Divine. This is the traditional Indian attitude towards these things, that all work can be done if it is done according to the dharma and, if it is rightly done, it does not prevent the approach to the Divine or the access to spiritual knowledge and the spiritual life.

There is of course also the ascetic ideal which is necessary for many and has its place in the spiritual order. I would myself say that no man can be spiritually complete if he cannot live ascetically or follow a life as bare as the barest anchorite's. Obviously, greed for wealth and money-making has to be absent from his nature as much as greed for food or any other greed and all attachment to these things must be renounced from his consciousness. But I do not regard the ascetic way of living as indispensable to spiritual perfection or as identical with it. There is the way of spiritual self-mastery and the way of spiritual self-giving and surrender to the Divine, abandoning ego and desire even in the midst of action or of any kind of work or all kinds of work demanded from us by the Divine. If it were not so, there would not have been great spiritual men like Janaka or Vidura in India and even there would have been no Krishna or else Krishna would have been not the Lord of Brindavan and Mathura and Dwarka or a prince and warrior or the charioteer of Kurukshetra, but only one more great anchorite. The Indian scriptures and Indian tradition, in the Mahabharata and elsewhere, make room both for the spirituality of the renunciation of life and for the spiritual life of action. One cannot say that one only is the Indian tradition and that the acceptance of life and works of all kinds, *sarvakarmāṇi*, is un-Indian, European or Western and unspiritual.

Interest in Work

It [*absorption in work*] depends on a certain extension and intensifying of the consciousness by which all activity becomes interesting not for itself but because of the consciousness put into it and, through the intensity of the energy, there is a pleasure in the exercise of the energy, and in the perfect doing of the work, whatever the work may be.

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As a rule, I mean in their unchanged condition, the lower parts get interested and enthusiastic [*about work*] when the ego mixes

with the interest. But the pure enthusiasm can come into them as they get more and more converted and purified and they then become very indispensable forces for the realisation.

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It is natural for the vital or even the mind to feel energised by something new—but for the physical plane the work always repeated is the foundation—so one has to be able at least to take a steady calm interest in it always.

*

There must be the rasa [*in the work*], but it comes when there is the dynamic descent of the Power.

Joy in Work

Part of the physical cannot do without work, another part (more material) finds it an infliction. What gives the force and joy of the work is however not physical but vital.

*

The vital delight in the work is a necessary element for the work itself. Work done without it is much less easy to do and much less easy to offer.

*

Most people do things because they have to, not out of the happiness they find in the things. It is only its hobbies and penchants that the nature finds some happiness in, not usually in work—unless of course the work itself is one's hobby or penchant and can be indulged in or dropped as one likes.

*

Joy and enthusiasm and buoyancy are good things, but it must be on a basis of calm and with the head clear for work.

*

The reason of the difference of result between the two moods in work is that the first mood is that of a vital joy, while the other is that of a psychic quiet. Vital joy, though it is a very helpful thing for the ordinary human life, is something excited, eager, mobile without a settled basis—that is why it soon gets tired and cannot continue. Vital joy has to be replaced by a quiet settled psychic gladness with the mind and vital very clear and very peaceful. When one works on this basis, then everything becomes glad and easy, in touch with the Mother's force and fatigue or depression do not come.

Loss of Inspiration in Work

What you find happening [*a loss of inspiration*] is a common experience in all work. Mother says it is due to the fact that in beginning the work there is an inspiration of what to do and the mind at first acts as a channel for it and all goes well. Afterwards the mind begins to be acting on its own account, without one's noticing it usually unless one is very conscious and accustomed to scrutinise oneself—and do the thing without the original inspiration by its ordinary means. This is felt very clearly in work like poetry and music—for there one feels the inspiration coming and feels it failing and getting mixed up with the ordinary mind. So long as it goes on, everything is done easily and well, but as soon as the mind begins to interfere or to work in its place, then the work is less well done. In work like cooking one does not directly and vividly feel the inspiration, only a brightness and perceptiveness and confidence perhaps—so also one does not notice when the physical mind becomes active. In a thing like poetry one can break off till the inspiration comes again, but in cooking one can't do that, the work has to be finished there and then. I suppose this can be remedied only by one's becoming more conscious within as one does in sadhana, till one can see and counteract the wrong movement of inferior mental activity by bringing down of one's will again the right inspiration and perception.

Thoughts of Sadhana during Work

Thoughts of sadhana can go on very well along with work. To combine the inner spiritual consciousness and its growth with a consecrated outer activity is part of the Yoga.

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I don't think any attempt should be made [*to turn inwards or revert to thoughts of sadhana during work*]. If the thoughts of sadhana come of themselves or the turning inwards or a silent aspiration to sadhana, that is all right.

Chapter Two

Becoming Conscious in Work

Working from Within

You must learn to act always from within — from your inner being which is in contact with the Divine. The outer should be a mere instrument and should not be allowed at all to compel or dictate your speech, thought or action.

*

All should be done quietly from within — working, speaking, reading, writing as part of the real consciousness — not with the dispersed and unquiet movement of the ordinary consciousness.

*

One can work and remain quiet within. Quietude does not mean having an empty mind or doing no action at all.

*

When one is concentrated within, the body can go on doing its work by the Force acting within it. Even the external consciousness can work separately under the motion of the Force while the rest of the consciousness is in concentration.

*

It is a little difficult at first to combine the inward condition with the attention to the outward work and mingling with others, but a time comes when it is possible for the inner being to be in full union with the Mother while the action comes out of that concentrated union and is consciously guided in all its details so that some part of the consciousness can attend to everything outside, even be concentrated upon it and yet feel the inward concentration in the Mother.

*

It is a very good sign that even in spite of full work the inner working was felt behind and succeeded in establishing the silence. A time comes for the sadhak in the end when the consciousness and the deeper experience go on happening even in full work or in sleep, while speaking or in any kind of activity.

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It is probably because at the time of the work the tendency of the consciousness to externalise itself is greater (that is always the case), so the pressure grows stronger in order to produce a contrary inward tendency. This produces some tendency to go inside in the way of a complete internalisation (going into a sort of samadhi); but what should happen during work is a going inside in a wakeful condition and becoming aware of the psychic within as you used to do under the pressure while the outer mind does the work. This is the condition that must eventually come.

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The stress of the Power is all right, but there is really nothing incompatible between the inner silence and action. It is to that combination that the sadhana must move.

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It [*concentration of the inner consciousness*] can happen in several forms. It can become concentrated in silence as the witness — it can become concentrated in the feeling of the Divine Force flowing through it, the work being a result — it can become concentrated in the feeling of the presence of the Divine or the Ananda or love of the Divine while the working goes on separately in front. All this becomes so habitual that it goes on of itself without the need of call or effort or even of the mind's attention — it simply *is* there. There are other possibilities besides those mentioned above, but these are perhaps the most common.

*

It is perfectly possible to do work in an entire emptiness

without any interference or activity of the lower parts of the consciousness.

Working with a Double Consciousness

One can both aspire and attend to the work and do many other things at the same time when the consciousness is developed by Yoga.

*

It [*peace and contact in work, but no aspiration*] is because the energy is put outward in the work. But as the peace and contact grow a double consciousness can develop — one engaged in the work, another behind silent and observing or turned towards the Divine — in this consciousness the aspiration can be maintained even while the external consciousness is turned towards the work.

*

That is how the consciousness must work when it lives in the Divine. One part of the Force in it works and offers the work to the Mother, another part lives in the experience of the Mother, the third hears what the others say and answers without losing the inner consciousness.

*

No — it is only if it [*turning inwards during work*] is an inner absorption that it would come in the way. But what I mean is a sort of stepping backward into something silent and observant within which is not involved in the action, yet sees and can shed its light upon it. There are then two parts of the being, one inner looking at and witnessing and knowing, the other executive and instrumental and doing. This gives not only freedom but power — and in this inner being one can get into touch with the Divine not through mental activity but through the substance of the being, by a certain inward touch, perception, reception, receiving also the right inspiration or intuition of the work.

*

If one feels a consciousness not limited by the work, a consciousness behind supporting that which works, then it is easier [*to keep higher thoughts during work*]. That usually comes either by the wideness and silence fixing and extending itself or by the consciousness of a Force not oneself working through the worker.

*

Before things become pucca in the consciousness, the doing of work does carry the consciousness outward unless one has made it a sadhana to feel the “Force greater than oneself” working through one. That I suppose is why the Shankarites considered work to be in its own nature an operation of the Ignorance and incompatible with a condition of realisation. But as a matter of fact there are three stages there: (I) in which the work brings you to a lower as well as outer consciousness so that you have afterwards to recover the realisation; (II) in which the work brings you out, but the realisation remains behind (or above), not felt while you work, but as soon as the work ceases you find it there just as it was; (III) in which the work makes no difference, for the realisation or spiritual condition remains through the work itself. You seem this time to have experienced No. II.

*

In action it is always more difficult [*to keep a higher state of consciousness*] because the consciousness goes out towards the work or else is at least not wholly held within — it is therefore difficult to remain in an inward state. There is no other obstacle. But if the inward state is strong and habitual, then it gains upon the action also and at first one always feels it behind and afterwards it occupies the whole consciousness, outer included, and the action takes place in it. This is for static states like peace, self-realisation etc. If one has the realisation of the dynamic Force, there is no difficulty — because that can take up the action at once.

Absorption in Work

It is the external mind that gets absorbed in the work and

covers what is behind. There must be a double consciousness, one acting, one behind observing, separate, free to continue the sadhana.

*

The absorption in work is not undesirable—but the difficulty in turning inwards can only be temporary. A certain plasticity in the physical consciousness which is sure to come makes it easy to turn from one concentration to another.

*

It [*meditative absorption during work*] depends on the plasticity of the consciousness. Some are like that, they get so absorbed they don't want to come out or do anything else. One has to keep a certain balance by which the fundamental consciousness remains able to turn from one concentration to another with ease.

*

This tendency [*to be possessed by work*] has its advantage and disadvantage. It gets things done, but it prevents plasticity in the work. One must get free from the “possession” by the urge of the energy, but keep the drive and be able to distribute it at will.

*

Absorption in work is inevitable. It is enough to offer it when beginning and ending and to encourage the attitude to grow = for You and by You.

*

It is a certain inertia in the physical consciousness which shuts it up in the groove of what it is doing so that it is fixed in that and not free to remember [*the Mother*].

Remembering the Presence in Work

It is not at first easy to remember the presence in work; but if one revives the sense of the presence immediately after the work is

over it is all right. In time the sense of the presence will become automatic even in work.

*

All the difficulties you describe are quite natural things common to most people. It is easy for one, comparatively, to remember and be conscious when one sits quiet in meditation; it is difficult when one has to be busy with work. The remembrance and consciousness in work have to come by degrees, you must not expect to have it all at once; nobody can get it all at once. It comes in two ways,—first, if one practises remembering the Mother and offering the work to her each time one does something (not all the time one is doing, but at the beginning or whenever one can remember), then that slowly becomes easy and habitual to the nature. Secondly, by the meditation an inner consciousness begins to develop which, after a time, not at once or suddenly, becomes more and more automatically permanent. One feels this as a separate consciousness from that outer one which works. At first this separate consciousness is not felt when one is working, but as soon as the work stops one feels it was there all the time watching from behind; afterwards it begins to be felt during the work itself, as if there were two parts of oneself — one watching and supporting from behind and remembering the Mother and offering to her and the other doing the work. When this happens, then to work with the true consciousness becomes more and more easy.

It is the same with all the rest. It is by the development of the inner consciousness that all the things you speak of will be set right. For instance it is a part of the being that has *utsāha* for the work, another that feels the pressure of quietude and is not so disposed to work. Your mood depends on which comes up at the time—it is so with all people. To combine the two is difficult, but a time comes when they do get reconciled— one remains poised in an inner concentration while the other is supported by it in its push towards work. The transformation of the nature, the harmonising of all these discordant things in the being are the work of sadhana. Therefore you need not be discouraged by

observing these things in you. There is hardly anybody who has not found these things in himself. All this can be arranged by the action of the inner Force with the constant consent and call of the sadhak. By himself he might not be able to do it, but with the Divine Force working within all can be done.

*

The resistance you speak of and the insufficient receptivity and the inability to continue in communion while doing work, must all be due to some part of the physical consciousness that is still not open to the Light — probably something in the vital physical and the material subconscious which stands in the way of the physical mind being in its mass free and responsive.

There is no harm in raising the aspiration from below to meet the power from above. All that you have to be careful about is not to raise up the difficulty from below before the descending Power is ready to remove it.

There is no necessity of losing consciousness when you meditate. It is the widening and change of the consciousness that is essential. If you mean going inside, you can do that without losing consciousness.

Inner Guidance about Work

It is good that you were able to observe yourself all the time and see the movements and that the intervention of the new consciousness was frequent and automatic. At a later stage you will no doubt get a guidance in the mind also as to how to do the things you want to get done. Evidently your mind was too active — as well as the minds of others also — and so you missed your objective, owing to the excessive multitude of witnesses! However —

*

If you want that [*to become conscious of whether an action is right or not*] very much and aspire for it, it may come in one of several ways —

(1) You may get the habit or faculty of watching your movements in such a way that you see the impulse to action coming and can see too its nature,

(2) a consciousness may come which feels uneasy at once if a wrong thought or impulse to action or feeling is there,

(3) something within you may warn and stop you when you are going to do the wrong action.

*

As for the feeling from within, it depends on being able to go inside. Sometimes it comes of itself with the deepening of the consciousness by bhakti or otherwise; sometimes it comes by practice—a sort of referring the matter and listening for the answer—listening is of course a metaphor but it is difficult to express it otherwise—it doesn't mean that the answer comes necessarily in the shape of words, spoken or unspoken, though it does sometimes or for some; it can take any shape. The main difficulty for many is *to be sure of the right answer*. For that it is necessary to be able to contact the consciousness of the Guru inwardly—that comes best by bhakti. Otherwise it may become a delicate and ticklish job. Obstacles, (1) normal habit of relying on outward means for everything, (2) ego, substituting its suggestions for the right answer, (3) mental activity, (4) intruder nuisances. I think you need not be eager for this, but rely on the growth of the inner consciousness. The above is only by way of general explanation.

*

A constant aspiration for that [*to be constantly governed by the Divine*] is the first thing—next a sort of stillness within and a drawing back from the outward action into the stillness and a sort of listening expectancy, not for a sound but for the spiritual feeling or direction of the consciousness that comes through the psychic.

*

Your difficulty is that you worry yourself and think you have

made mistakes when you have made none. If you want to get the right guidance, you must have more confidence and not always think that what comes to you is wrong and your work is bad and ugly. You generally get things right. If you do make a mistake here and there, it does not matter; everybody makes some mistakes; but by making them one can learn better.

Another thing is that, as I have told you, a thing can be done in several ways, all of which are good — but your mind seems to go on the feeling that one thing is good or true and all the rest is bad or false and, as it were, is seeking for the one only good way and then in everything it does it feels dissatisfied. When you have found a way of doing the work, it is better to do it and not always be worrying yourself for something better.

*

It is always the restlessness that makes you lose touch. If you are not sure about the work, remain quiet and you will get in time the idea of what to do; if you worry and are restless, you get confused and disturbed and can no longer feel connection with the Force, though it is always there above you and supporting you. As to blind selfish feelings, they are still more confusing and disturbing; but here too the only thing is to remain quiet, detach yourself, disown and throw away the feeling. To get upset, disturbed and in despair, is no use; it only prolongs the confusion and unrest and prevents you from feeling the connection.

*

Openness in work means the same thing as openness in the consciousness. The same Force that works in your consciousness in meditation and clears away the cloud and confusion whenever you open to it, can also take up your action and not only make you aware of the defects in it but keep you conscious of what is to be done and guide your mind and hands to do it. If you open to it in your work, you will begin to feel this guidance more and more until behind all your activities you will be aware of the Force of the Mother.

*

Why should you try the same things as the others? What one feels inspired to do, is the best thing for one.

Knowing the Divine Will

There is a consciousness other than mind and vital—if there were not, there would be no use in doing sadhana. The true will belongs to that consciousness.

*

When the mind is pure and the psychic prominent, then one feels what is according to the Divine Will and what is against it.

*

For the actions to be psychic, the psychic must be in front. The observing Purusha can separate himself, but cannot change the Prakriti. But to be the observing Purusha is a first step. Afterwards there must be the action of the Purusha Will as an instrument of the Mother's force. This Will must be founded on a right consciousness which sees what is wrong, ignorant, selfish, egoistic, moved by desire in the nature and puts it right.

*

It needs a quiet mind [*to know the Divine Will*]. In the quiet mind turned towards the Divine the intuition (higher mind) comes of the Divine's Will and the right way to do it.

*

Once the mental silence is attained, then in that the mental thoughts can be replaced by some vision and intuition regarding the work.

*

The transcendental Will for us is the supramental Will. For that to act in you directly, it is necessary to grow upward into the consciousness above the ordinary mind and to bring down these higher ranges into the mind, life and body. Indirectly through

the higher Mind and intuition the supramental Will is already acting on you, but naturally this indirect action does not bring the full power.

*

The true automatic action (full of consciousness and light) begins only when one gets into touch with the supermind. Till then aspiration and tapasya (concentration) are needed; otherwise there is a wrong automatism due to inert passivity in which wrong forces can act.

Freedom in Work

Do? why should he [*a certain Yogi*] want to do anything if he was in the eternal peace or Ananda or union with the Divine? If a man is spiritual and has gone beyond the vital and mind, he does not need to be always “doing” something. The self or spirit has the joy of its own existence. It is free to do nothing and free to do everything — but not because it is bound to action and unable to exist without it.

*

The passage¹ describes the state of consciousness when one is aloof from all things even when in their midst and all is felt to be unreal, an illusion. There are then no preferences or desires, because things are too unreal to desire or to prefer one to another. But at the same time one feels no necessity to flee the world or not to do any action, because being free from the illusion, action or living in the world does not weigh upon one, one is not bound or involved. Those who flee from the world or shun action (the Sannyasis) do so because they would be involved or bound; they believe the world to be unreal, but in fact it weighs on them as a reality so long as they are in it. When one is perfectly free from the illusion of the reality of things, then they cannot weigh on one or bind at all.

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¹ This passage is not available. —Ed.

But the Jivanmukta feels no bondage [*in work*]. In all work and action, he feels perfectly free, because the work is not done by him personally (there is no sense of limited ego) but by the cosmic Force. The limitations of the work are those put by the cosmic Force itself on its own action. He himself lives in communion of oneness with the Transcendent which is above the cosmos and feels no limitation. That is at least how it is felt in the Overmind.

Chapter Three

The Divine Force in Work

Receiving the Divine Power or Force

To be able to receive the Divine Power and let it act through you in the things of the outward life, there are three necessary conditions:

1. Quietude, equality — not to be disturbed by anything that happens, to keep the mind still and firm, seeing the play of forces, but itself tranquil.
2. Absolute faith — faith that what is for the best will happen, but also that if one can make oneself a true instrument, the fruit will be that which one's will guided by the Divine Light sees as the thing to be done — *kartavyam karma*.
3. Receptivity — the power to receive the Divine Force and to feel its presence and the presence of the Mother in it and allow it to work, guiding one's sight and will and action. If this power and presence can be felt and this plasticity made the habit of the consciousness in action, — but plasticity to the Divine Force alone without bringing in any foreign element, — the eventual result is sure.

*

What happened to you shows what are the conditions of that state in which the Divine Power takes the place of the ego and directs the action, making the mind, life and body an instrument. A receptive silence of the mind, an effacement of the mental ego and the reduction of the mental being to the position of a witness, a close contact with the Divine Power and an openness of the being to that one Influence and no other are the conditions for becoming an instrument of the Divine, moved by that and that only.

That there was no mental expectation was all to the good; if there had been an expectation, the mind might have been active

and interfered and either prevented the experience or else stood in the way of its being pure and complete.

The silence of the mind does not of itself bring in the supramental consciousness; there are many states or planes or levels of consciousness between the human mind and the Supermind. The silence opens the mind and the rest of the being to greater things, sometimes to the cosmic consciousness, sometimes to the experience of the silent Self, sometimes to the presence or power of the Divine, sometimes to a higher consciousness than that of the human mind; the mind's silence is the most favourable condition for any of these things to happen. In this Yoga it is the most favourable condition (not the only one) for the Divine Power to descend first upon and then into the individual consciousness and there do its work to transform that consciousness, giving it the necessary experiences, altering all its outlook and movements, leading it from stage to stage till it is ready for the last (supramental) change.

*

What happened is a thing that often happens and — taking your account of it — it reproduced in your case the usual stages. First you sat down in prayer — that means a call to the Above, if I may so express it. Next came the necessary condition for the answer to the prayer to be effective — “little by little a sort of restfulness came”, in other words, the quietude of the consciousness which is necessary before the Power that has to act can act. Then the rush of the Force or Power, “a flood of energy and sense of power and glow” and the natural concentration of the being in inspiration and expression, the action of the Power. This is the thing that used to happen daily to the physical workers in the Asram. Working with immense energy and enthusiasm, with a passion for the work they might after a time feel tired — then they would call the Mother and a sense of rest came into them and with or after it a flood of energy so that twice the amount of work could be done without the least fatigue or reaction. In many there was a spontaneous call of the vital for the Force, so that they felt the flood of energy as soon as they began the work

and it continued so long as the work had to be done.

The vital is the means of effectuation on the physical plane, so its action and energy are necessary for all work — without it, if the mind only drives without the cooperation and instrumentation of the vital, there is hard and disagreeable labour and effort with results which are usually not at all of the best kind. The ideal state for work is when there is a natural concentration of the consciousness in the special energy, supported by an easeful rest and quiescence of the consciousness as a whole. Distraction of the mind by other activities disturbs this balance of ease and concentrated energy, — fatigue also disturbs or destroys it. The first thing therefore that has to be done is to bring back the supporting restfulness and this is ordinarily done by cessation of work and repose. In the experience you had that was replaced by a restfulness that came from above in answer to your station of prayer and an energy that also came from above. It is the same principle as in sadhana — the reason why we want people to make the consciousness quiet so that the higher peace may come in and on the basis of that peace a new Force from above.

It is not effort that brought the inspiration. Inspiration comes from above in answer to a state of concentration which is itself a call to it. Effort on the contrary fatigues the consciousness and therefore is not favourable to the best work; the only thing is that sometimes — by no means always — effort culminates in a pull for the inspiration which brings some answer, but it is not usually so good and effective an inspiration as that which comes when there is the easy and intense concentration of the energy in its work. Effort and expenditure of energy are not necessarily the same thing; the best expenditure of energy is that which flows easily without effort at all — when the Inspiration or Force (any Force) works of itself and the mind and vital and even body are glowing instruments and the Force flows out in an intense and happy working — an almost labourless labour.

The Working of the Force

When you have opened yourself to a higher Force, when you

have made yourself a channel for the energy of its work, it is quite natural that the Force should flow and act in the way that is wanted or the way that is needed and for the effect that is needed. Once the channel is made, the Force that acts is not necessarily bound by the personal limitations or disabilities of the instrument; it can disregard them and act in its own power. In doing so it may use the instrument simply as a medium and, as soon as the work is finished, leave him just what he was before, incapable in his ordinary moments of doing such good work, capable only when he is seized and used and illumined. But also it may by its power of transforming action set the instrument right, accustom it to the necessary intuitive knowledge and movement so that this living perfected instrument can at will call for and receive the action of the Force. In technique, there are two different things,—there is the intellectual knowledge which one has acquired and applies or thinks one is applying—there is the intuitive cognition which acts in its own right, even if it is not actually possessed by the worker so that he cannot give an adequate account of the modes of working or elements of what he has done. Many poets have a very summary theoretic knowledge of metrical or linguistic technique; they have its use but they would not be able to explain how they write or what are the qualities and constituent methods of their successful art, but they achieve all the same things that are perfect in the weaving of sounds and the skill of words, consummate in rhythm and language. Intellectual knowledge of technique is a help but a minor help; it can become a mere device or a rigid fetter. It is an intuitive divination of the right process that is more frequent and a more powerful action—or even it is an inspiration that puts the right sounds or right words without need of even any intuitive choice. This is especially true of poetry, for there are arts—those that work in a more material substance—where perfect work cannot be done without full technical knowledge,—painting, sculpture, architecture.

What the higher Force writes through you is your own in the sense that you have been an instrument of manifestation—as is indeed every artist or worker. When you put your name to

it, it is the name of the instrumental creator; but for sadhana it is necessary to recognise that the real Power, the true Creator was not your surface self, you were simply the living harp on which the Musician played his tune.

The true Ananda of creation is not the pleasure of the ego in having personally done well and in being somebody, that is an extraneous element which attaches itself to the true joy of work and creation. The Ananda comes by the inrush of a larger Might and Delight, *āveśa*; there is the thrill of being possessed and used by a superpersonal Power, the exultation and exaltation of the uplifting of the consciousness, the joy of its illumination and its greatened and heightened action and the joy of the beauty, power or perfection that is being created. How far, how intensely one feels these things, depends on the condition of the consciousness at the time, the temperament, the activity of the vital, the mind's receptivity and response. The Yogi (or even certain strong and calm minds) is not carried away, as the mind and the vital often are, by the Ananda, — he holds and watches it and there is no mere excitement mixed with the divine flow of it through the conscious instrument and the body. There is a greater Ananda of *samarpana*, of spiritual realisation or divine love, but in the spiritual consciousness and life the Ananda of creation has its place.

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To observe whether it [*one's work*] is really well done or not and feel the Ananda of work done for the Mother [*is the right attitude*]. Get rid of the "I". If it is well done, it is the Force that did it and your only part was to be a good or a bad instrument.

*

It is a Force that comes and pushes to work and is as legitimately a part of the spiritual life as others. It is a special Energy that takes hold of the worker in the being and fulfils itself through him. To work with a full energy like this in one is quite salutary. The only thing is not to overdo it — that is to avoid any exhaustion or recoil to a fatigued inertia.

As for the dedication make the *sankalpa* always of offering it, remember and pray when you can (I mean in connection with the work). This is to fix a certain attitude. Afterwards, the Force can take advantage of this key to open the deeper dedication within.

*

I was not [*in using the phrase “allow the Force to work through you”*] speaking of the Force coming down from above, but of the Force from behind doing action through the mind and body as instruments. Very often when the mind and body are inert, their actions still go on by this push from behind.

*

You used the Force for the work, and it supported you so long as you preferred to stick to that work. What is of first importance is not the religious or non-religious character of the work done, but the inner attitude in which it is done. If the attitude is vital and not psychic, then one throws oneself out in the work and loses the inner contact. If it is psychic, the inner contact remains, the Force is felt supporting or doing the work and the sadhana progresses.

*

The Force from above is the Force of the Higher Consciousness. That from behind works as a mental, vital or physical force according to need. When the being is open to it and there is a certain passivity to its working, it takes the place of the personal activity and the Person is a witness of its action.

The Force and the Peace in Action

The dynamic action when it comes acts without disturbing the silence and peace. There is the vast peace and silence and in that the Force or the Will works to do what is necessary—in that also is the action of Agni or the psychic.

*

It is this quiet and spontaneous action that is the characteristic divine action. The aggressive action is only, as you say, when there is resistance and struggle. This does not mean that the quiet force cannot be intense. It can be more intense than the aggressive, but its intensity only increases the intensity of the peace.

*

When you feel the better condition, the peace and force at work, it is better to allow the force to work, keeping yourself still and quiet, and not try to do things by the mind.

When there is the confusion or wrong condition, then you have to call down the quiet, to try to get back to the true position, not listening to the wrong thoughts but rejecting them. If you cannot do that at once, still remain as quiet as possible and aspire and offer yourself. The Divine Force can always do more than the personal effort; so the one thing is to get quiet and call it down or back to the front—for it is always there behind or above you.

Drawing upon the Force for Energy

During the course of the sadhana one can learn to draw upon the universal Life-Force and replenish the energies from it. But usually the best way is to learn to open oneself to the Mother's Force and become conscious of it supporting and moving or pouring into the system and giving the energy needed for the work whether it be mental, vital or physical.

There is naturally a higher Energy above the present universal forces and it is that which will transform the nature and take up the mental, vital, physical energies and change them into its own likeness.

*

If you mean by failure the weakness of the body, it is due probably to your having unduly strained it in obedience to rajasic vital impulses, an effect which was increased by vital relapses

into tamas and the struggle of the vital attacks you had. But also it often happens even in the ordinary course of Yoga that physical strength is replaced by a Yogic strength or Yogic life force which keeps up the body and makes it work, but in the absence of this force the body is denuded of power, inert and tamasic. This can only be remedied by the whole being opening to Yoga shakti in each of its planes — Yogic mind force, Yogic life force, Yogic body force.

*

When doing this work you had the Force in you and the right consciousness filling the vital and physical — afterwards with relaxation the ordinary physical consciousness came up and brought back the ordinary reactions — fatigue, sciatica etc.

*

With the right consciousness always there, there would be no fatigue.

*

It [*the cause of fatigue*] is probably some desire or vital preference — likes and dislikes in the vital. All work given you must be felt as the Mother's and done with joy, opening yourself for the Mother's force to work through you.

*

If there is the full surrender in the work and you feel it is the Mother's and that the Mother's force is working in you, then fatigue does not come.

*

The pain, burning, restlessness, weeping and inability to work which you feel, come when there is some difficulty or resistance in some part of the nature. When it comes call on the Mother and reject these things; turn to her for the peace and quietude to return to your mind and settle in the heart, so that there shall be no place for these other things.

Avoiding Overstrain

Yes, it is a mistake to overstrain as there is a reaction afterwards. If there is energy, all must not be spent, some must be stored up so as to increase the permanent strength of the system.

*

Overstraining brings inertia up. Everybody has inertia in his nature: the question is of its greater or lesser operation.

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When you feel tired, don't overstrain yourself but rest — doing only your ordinary work; restlessly doing something or other all the time is not the way to cure it. To be quiet without and within is what is needed when there is this sense of fatigue. There is always a strength near you which you can call in and it will remove these things, but you must learn to be quiet in order to receive it.

*

If the physical is in this condition and the work creates such reactions in it, it is no use forcing it violently and putting an overstrain upon it. It is better to educate and train the external material being slowly by bringing calm and peace and light and strength persistently into the nervous system and cells of the body. A violent compulsion on the body may well defeat its own object. Probably your sadhana has been too exclusively internal and subjective; but if it is so, this cannot be remedied in a moment. It is better therefore for you not to do heavy physical work like the Bakery's at present.

*

Idleness must of course go — but sometimes I think you have pulled too much the other way. To be able to work with full energy is necessary — but to be able not to work is also necessary.

*

As for working, it depends on what you mean by the word. Desire often leads either to excess of effort, meaning often much labour and a limited fruit, with strain, exhaustion and in case of difficulty or failure despondence, disbelief or revolt; or else it leads to pulling down the force. That can be done, but except for the Yogoically strong and experienced, it is not always safe, though it may be often very effective; not safe, first, because it may lead to violent reactions or bring down contrary or wrong or mixed forces which the sadhak is not experienced enough to distinguish from the true ones. Or else it may substitute the sadhak's own limited power of experience or mental and vital constructions for the free gift and the true leading of the Divine. Cases differ, each has his own way of sadhana. But for you what I would recommend is constant openness, a quiet steady aspiration, no over-eagerness, a cheerful trust and patience.

*

To work all the time is excessive, unless there is need — but the impulse to work in itself is good.

*

If too much work is done, the quality of the work often deteriorates in spite of the zest of the workers.

Chapter Four

Practical Concerns in Work

Order and Rhythm

There can be no physical life without an order and rhythm. When this order is changed it must be in obedience to an inner growth and not for the sake of external novelty. It is only a certain part of the surface lower vital nature which seeks always external change and novelty for its own sake.

It is by a constant inner growth that one can find a constant newness and unfailing interest in life. There is no other satisfying way.

*

In the most physical things you have to fix a programme in order to deal with them, otherwise all becomes a sea of confusion and haphazard. Fixed rules have also to be made for the management of material things so long as people are not sufficiently developed to deal with them in the right way without rules. But in matters of the inner development and the sadhana it is impossible to map out a plan fixed in every detail and say, "Every time you shall stop here, there, in this way, on that line and no other." Things would become so tied up and rigid that nothing could be done; there could be no true and effective movement.

*

Order, harmony and organisation in physical things is a necessary part of efficiency and perfection and make the instrument more fit for whatever work is given to it.

*

The impatience of things going wrong is the defect of a quality — an insistence on accuracy and order. The thing is to keep the quality and get rid of the defect.

Rules, Discipline, Regularity, Thoroughness

Rules are indispensable for the orderly management of work; for without order and arrangement nothing can be properly done, all becomes clash, confusion and disorder.

*

A rule that can be varied by everyone at his pleasure is no rule. In all countries in which organised work is successfully done, (India is not one of them), rules exist and nobody thinks of breaking them, for it is realised that work (or life either) without discipline would soon become a confusion and an anarchic failure. In the great days of India everything was put under rule, even art and poetry, even Yoga. Here in fact rules are much less rigid than in any European organisation. Personal discretion can even in a frame of rules have plenty of play—but discretion must be discreetly used, otherwise it becomes something arbitrary or chaotic.

*

In work there must be a rule and discipline and as much punctuality as possible in regard to time.

*

To be able to be regular is a great force, one becomes master of one's time and one's movements.

*

That is quite necessary for work; efficiency and discipline are indispensable. They can however only partly be maintained by outward means—it really depends, in ordinary life, on the personality of the superior, his influence on the subordinates, his firmness, tact, kindness in dealing with them. But the sadhak depends on a deeper force, that of his inner consciousness and the Force working through him.

*

[*Discipline*:] To act according to a standard of Truth or a rule or law of action (*dharma*) or in obedience to a superior authority or to the highest principles discovered by the reason and intelligent will and not according to one's own fancy, vital impulses and desires. In Yoga obedience to the Guru or to the Divine and the law of the Truth as declared by the Guru is the foundation of discipline.

*

What most want is that things should be done according to their desire without check or reference. The talk of perfection is humbug. Perfection does not consist in everybody being a law to himself. Perfection comes by renunciation of desires and surrender to a higher Will.

*

Thoroughness means to do whatever you do completely, thoroughly, so that it may be entire and perfect, not carelessly or partially done. It refers to internal things as well as to external.

Harmony

When all is in agreement with one Truth or an expression of it, that is harmony.

*

Wherever there is excessive sensitiveness or quickness of temper, occasions of clash and quarrel will arise, no matter with whom one works—and especially where there is the pressure of the *sadhana*, which requires that all such weaknesses should be overcome, occasions are likely to arise which will bring them to the surface. The only way is not to indulge them or act under their influence, but to face them and overcome.

*

The difficulty rises from a certain excess of sensitiveness in the vital nature which feels strongly any want of harmony or

opposition in the work or any untoward happening and, when that comes, one is apt to feel it as if a personal opposition and on the other side also a similar feeling arises and so the difficulty becomes prolonged and leads to conflict. As a matter of fact the difficulty often arises from circumstances, e.g. the B. S. [*Building Service*] with its much reduced staff and a rush of work using up all its men may find it more difficult to accommodate you than before. Or it may arise from people acting according to their view of a matter which does not accord with yours. Or again it may come from the person following his own ideas, view of what is convenient and effective and thus coming up against yours. There need be no personal feeling in all that and it is best not to look for any and not to see it from that point of view. What is needed is always to take a calm view of the thing and a clear vision — not only from one's own standpoint which may be eventually right and yet need modification in detail, but with a vision that sees also the standpoint of others. This broad seeing, quiet and impersonal, is needed in the full Yogic consciousness. Having it one can insist on what has to be insisted on with firmness but at the same time with a consideration and understanding of the other that removes the chance of any clash of personal feeling. Naturally if the other is unreasonable, he may still resent, but then it will be his own fault entirely and it will fall back on him only. It is here that we see the necessity of some change. Loyalty, fidelity, capacity, strength of will and other qualities in the work you have in plenty — a full calm and equality not only in the inner being where it can exist already, but in the outer nervous parts is a thing you have to get completely.

Avoiding Harshness, Severity, Anger

There are always defects on both sides which lead to this disharmony. On your side you have a tendency to too harsh a judgment of others, a readiness to see and stress the faults, defects, weak side of others and not to see enough their good side. This prevents the kindness of outlook which should be there and gives an impression of harshness and critical severity and creates a

tendency to contrariety and revolt which even when it is not there in the minds of the others, acts through their subconscious and creates all these discordant movements. To take advantage of what is good in others, keeping one's eye always on that, and to deal tactfully with their mistakes, faults and defects is the best way; it does not exclude firmness and maintenance of discipline, even severity when severity is due; but the latter should be rare and the others should not feel it as if it were a permanent attitude.

*

The one thing you must try to do in your relations with your fellow-workers is to master your nerves and irritability and take care not to speak roughly, angrily or peevishly to them. It is that that is creating most of the difficulty now. If you have to be firm, you can be firm, but at the same time quiet and even gentle. If you take care on this point, things are likely to improve soon.

If you put yourself in the Mother's hand and reject these vital movements in her strength, there is no reason why you should not pass through all ordeals and progress in the Yoga.

*

In all such dealings with others,¹ you should see not only your own side of the question but the other side also. There should be no anger, vehement reproach or menace, for these things only raise anger and retort on the other side. I write this because you are trying to rise above yourself and dominate your vital and when one wants to do that, one cannot be too strict with oneself in these things. It is best even to be severe to one's own mistakes and charitable to the mistakes of others.

*

The experience of the difference between your inner feelings and your surface reactions shows that you are becoming aware of different parts of your nature which each have their own

¹ In this case the correspondent became angry when his request for help in his work was not promptly met.—Ed.

character. In fact each human being is composed of different personalities that feel and behave in a different way and his action is determined by the one that happens to be prominent at the time. The one that has no feelings against anyone is either the psychic being or the emotional being in the heart, the one that feels anger and is severe is a part of the external vital nature on the surface. This anger and severity is a wrong form of something that in itself has a value, a certain strength of will and force of action and control in the vital being, without which work cannot be done. What is necessary is to get rid of the anger and to keep the force and firm will along with a developed judgment as to what is the right thing to do in any circumstances. For instance, people can be allowed to do things in their own way when that does not spoil the work, when it is only their way of doing what is necessary to be done; when their way is opposed to the discipline of the work, then they have to be controlled, but it should be done quietly and kindly, not with anger. Very often, if one has developed a silent power of putting the Mother's force on the work with one's own will as instrument, that by itself may be sufficient without having to say anything as the person changes his way of himself as if by his own initiative.

*

To discourage anybody is wrong, but to give false encouragement or encouragement of anything wrong is not right. Severity has sometimes to be used (though not overused), when without it an obstinate persistence in what is wrong cannot be set right. Very often, if an inner communication has been established, a silent pressure is more effective than anything else. No absolute rule can be laid down; one has to judge and act for the best in each case.

Working with Subordinates and Superiors

It [*disciplining subordinates*] has to be done in the right spirit and the subordinates generally must be able to feel that it is so, that they are being dealt with in all uprightness and justice and

by a man who has sympathy and insight and not only severity and energy. It is a question of vital tact and a strong and large vital finding always the right way to deal with the others.

*

To be able to see the viewpoint of others and make allowance for their nature — neither being too harsh, authoritative or exacting, nor too weak and accommodating or indulgent, but still, even when firm, combining firmness with tact and sympathy, — is very necessary for one who has to deal with others as his inferiors in position and subject to his authority. It is also necessary when the position is reversed so that there may not be unnecessary clash or friction with official superiors.

*

The root of the difficulty has been in the readiness of the superior officers to accept without examination the things that are said against you. A double action is needed, to destroy the ill-will of the inferiors and to change the mind of the superiors — an invisible action, for in the visible they seem to be too much under the control of the Forces of the Ignorance.

Overcoming the Instinct of Domination

We have been very glad to get your letters with the details which prove how great and rapid a progress you have made in sadhana. All that you write shows a clear consciousness and a new orientation in the lower vital. To have seen clearly the instinct of domination and the pride of the instrument there means that that part of the being is on the right way to change — these defects must now be replaced by their true counterparts — the power to act selflessly on others for the Truth and the Right and the power to be a strong and confident but egoless instrument of the Divine. It is clear also that the physical is effectively opening, but the instinctive physical and vital-physical motions in it, fear in the body, weakness, disposition to ill-health must go also. As to diet, a light quantity of food sufficient for strength and

sustenance is the best for you — meat is not advisable.

Let the wide opening that has come in you develop and your whole being down to the material fill with the true consciousness and the true power.

*

That is true.² As things are, the vital falsehood seems to take a temporary advantage over the superior sattvic nature.

Avoiding Disturbance

Whenever anything untoward happens, it is essential not to allow any vibrations of disturbance or unrest in either the physical mind or the nerves. One must remain calm and open to the Light and Force, then one will be able to act in the right way.

*

From the point of view of sadhana — you must not allow yourself to be in the least disturbed by these things [*lack of sympathy and support in one's work*]. What you have to do, what is right to be done, should be done in perfect calmness with the support of the Divine Force. All that is necessary for a successful result, can be done — including the securing of the support of those who are able to help you. But if this outer support is not forthcoming, you have not to be disturbed but to proceed calmly on your way. If there is any difficulty or unsuccess anywhere not due to your own fault, you have not to be troubled. Strength, unmoved calm, quiet, straight and right dealing with all things you have to deal with must be the rule of your action.

*

Keep unmoved, unoffended, do your work without being discouraged, call on the Force to act for you. It is a field of trial for you — the inward result is more important than the outward.

*

² *The correspondent remarked that people full of vital ego often override, deceive and even injure people with less egoistic push but greater capacity. — Ed.*

As for the work, I have already told you that it is not by your going away that there will be harmony and peace. Wherever there are human beings working together, differences and disagreements and incompatibilities of temper will always be there. It is only if the human nature changes that it will be otherwise, but that cannot be done at once. One has to go on quietly and patiently doing the work for the Mother's sake until the change can be made in yourself and others.

Avoiding Restlessness, Worry and Anxiety

As for quietude and work, quietude is the proper basis for work — not restlessness. You speak as if quietude and being alive and working were not compatible! The Mother and myself do plenty of work, I suppose, and we are quite alive, but it is out of quietude that we do it. To worry and be restless and think always "I am not doing well my work" is not the way; you have to be quiet, conscious more and more of a greater Force than your own working in you: that Force will hereafter take up your work and do it for you.

*

The difficulty you find results very much from your always worrying with your mind about things, thinking "This is wrong, that is wrong in me or my work" and, as a result, "I am incompetent, I am bad, nothing can be done with me." Your embroidery work, your lampshades etc. have always been very good, and yet you are always thinking "This is bad work, that is wrong" and by doing so, confuse yourself and get into a muddle. Naturally, you make a mistake now and then, but more when you worry like that than when you do things simply and confidently.

It is better whether with work or with sadhana to go on quietly, allowing the Force to act and doing your best to let it work rightly, but without this self-tormenting and constant restless questioning at every point. Whatever defects there are would go much sooner, if you did not harp on them too much; for by dwelling on them so much you lose confidence in yourself

and in your power of openness to the Force—which is there all the same—and put unnecessary difficulties in the way of its working.

*

There is nothing really wrong with your work; it is very well done. It is only your imagination that makes you always think it is defective here and defective there. There may be slight mistakes sometimes, but that is the case with everybody. You have only to work quietly, getting the best inspiration you can and, if there is any difficulty, to be quiet and the right thing will come. To be true to the inner feeling, remaining turned towards us for help is absolutely the right way; to trouble and doubt and fret is quite the wrong way.

*

Do not worry about mistakes in work. Often you imagine that things are badly done by you when really you have done them very well; but even if there are mistakes, it is nothing to be sad about. Let the consciousness grow—only in the divine consciousness is there an entire perfection. The more you surrender to the Divine, the more will there be the possibility of perfection in you.

*

Do not attach too much importance to such mistakes or get upset about them. It is the nature of the mind to make such mistakes. It is only a higher consciousness that can set them right—the mind can be sure only after a very long training in each particular action and even then it has only to be off-guard for something untoward to occur. Do as well as you can, and for the rest let the higher consciousness grow till it can enlighten all the movements of the physical mind.

*

Skill in works will come when there is the opening in the physical mind and the body. There is no need to be anxious about that now. Do your best and do not be anxious about it.

Compliments and Criticism

That is a great error of the human vital — to want compliments for their own sake and to be depressed by their absence and imagine that it means there is no capacity. In this world one starts with ignorance and imperfection in whatever one does — one has to find out one's mistakes and to learn, one has to commit errors and find out by correcting them the right way to do things. Nobody in the world has ever escaped from this law. So what one has to expect from others is not compliments all the time, but praise of what is right or well done and criticism of errors and mistakes. The more one can bear criticism and see one's mistakes, the more likely one is to arrive at the fullness of one's capacity. Especially when one is very young — before the age of maturity — one cannot easily do perfect work. What is called the juvenile work of poets and painters — work done in their early years — is always imperfect, it is a promise and has qualities — but the real perfection and full use of their powers comes afterwards. They themselves know that very well, but they go on writing or painting because they know also that by doing so they will develop their powers.

As for comparison with others, one ought not to do that. Each one has his own lesson to learn, his own work to do and he must concern himself with that, not with the superior or inferior progress of others in comparison with himself. If he is behind today, he can be in full capacity hereafter and it is for that future perfection of his powers that he must labour. You are young and have everything yet to learn — your capacities are yet only in bud, you must wait and work for them to be in full bloom — and you must not mind if it takes months and years even to arrive at something satisfying and perfect. It will come in its proper time, and the work you do now is always a step towards it.

But learn to welcome criticism and the pointing out of imperfections — the more you do so, the more rapidly you will advance.

*

Someone who is learning to paint or play music or write and does not like to have his mistakes pointed out by those who already know — how is he to learn at all or reach any perfection of technique?

Thinking about Work

Think of your work only when it is being done, not before and not after.

Do not let your mind go back on a work that is finished. It belongs to the past and all rehandling of it is a waste of power.

Do not let your mind labour in anticipation on a work that has to be done. The Power that acts in you will see to it at its own time.

These two habits of the mind belong to a past functioning that the transforming Force is pressing to remove and the physical mind's persistence in them is the cause of your strain and fatigue. If you can remember to let your mind work only when its action is needed, the strain will lessen and disappear. This is indeed the transitional movement before the supramental working takes possession of the physical mind and brings into it the spontaneous action of the Light.

Dealing with Physical Things

Material things are not to be despised — without them there can be no manifestation in the material world.

*

Physical things have a life and value of their own which does not depend upon their price. To respect physical things and make a careful and scrupulous use of them is a part of the Yoga, for without that the mastery over matter cannot come.

*

What you feel about physical things is true — there is a consciousness in them, a life which is not the life and consciousness

of man and animal which we know, but still secret and real. That is why we must have a respect for physical things and use them rightly, not misuse and waste, ill-treat or handle with a careless roughness. This feeling of all being conscious or alive comes when our own physical consciousness—and not the mind only—awakes out of its obscurity and becomes aware of the One in all things, the Divine everywhere.

*

It is very true that physical things have a consciousness within them which feels and responds to care and is sensitive to careless touch and rough handling. To know or feel that and learn to be careful of them is a great progress in consciousness.

*

There is a consciousness in each physical thing with which one can communicate. Everything has an individuality of a certain kind, houses, cars, furniture etc. The ancient peoples knew that and so they saw a spirit or “genius” in every physical thing.

*

The rough handling and careless breaking or waste and misuse of physical things is a denial of the Yogic Consciousness and a great hindrance to the bringing down of the Divine Truth to the material plane.

*

Wanton waste, careless spoiling of physical things in an incredibly short time, loose disorder, misuse of service and materials due either to vital grasping or to tamasic inertia are baneful to prosperity and tend to drive away or discourage the Wealth-Power. These things have long been rampant in the society and, if that continues, an increase in our means might well mean a proportionate increase in the wastage and disorder and neutralise the material advantage. This must be remedied if there is to be any sound progress.

Asceticism for its own sake is not the ideal of this Yoga, but

self-control in the vital and right order in the material are a very important part of it — and even an ascetic discipline is better for our purpose than a loose absence of true control. Mastery of the material does not mean having plenty and profusely throwing it out or spoiling it as fast as it comes or faster. Mastery implies in it the right and careful utilisation of things and also a self-control in their use.

Chapter Five

Creative Activity

The Arts and the Spiritual Life

There is no incompatibility between spirituality and creative activity—they can be united.

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Any activity can be taken as part of the sadhana if it is offered to the Divine or done with the consciousness or faith that it is done by the Divine Power. That is the important point.

*

Literature, poetry, science and other studies can be a preparation of the consciousness for life. When one does Yoga they can become part of the sadhana only if done for the Divine or taken up by the Divine Force, but then one should not want to be a poet for the sake of being a poet only, or for fame, applause, etc.

*

The spiritual life and one's own inner psychic and spiritual change should be the first preoccupation of a sadhak—poetry or painting is something quite subordinate and even then it should be done not to be a great poet or artist but as a help to the inner sadhana. It is time that everyone got away from the vital view of things to the psychic and spiritual on which alone can stand Yoga and the spiritual life.

*

Every artist almost (there are rare exceptions) has got something of the “public” man in him, in his vital physical parts, the need of the stimulus of an audience, social applause, satisfied vanity or fame. That must go absolutely if he wants to be a Yogi and

his art a service not of man or of his own ego but of the Divine.

*

Well, that [*acting as a great musician etc.*] is an almost universal human weakness, especially with artists, poets, musicians and the whole splendid tribe—I have known even great Yogis suffer from just a touch of it! If one can see mentally the humour of it, it will fall off in the end.

Literature

To be a literary man is not a spiritual aim; but to use literature as a means of spiritual expression is another matter. Even to make expression a vehicle of a superior power helps to open the consciousness. The harmonising rests on that principle.

*

A “literary man” is one who loves literature and literary activity for their own separate sake. A Yogi who writes is not a literary man for he writes only what the inner Will and Word wants him to express. He is a channel and an instrument of something greater than his own literary personality.

*

The use of your writing is to keep you in touch with the inner source of inspiration and intuition, so as to wear thin the crude external crust in the consciousness and encourage the growth of the inner being.

*

Mother does not disapprove of your writing the book — what she does not like is your being so lost in it that you can do nothing else. You must be master of what you do and not possessed by it. She quite agrees to your finishing and offering the book on your birthday if that can be done. But you must not be carried away — you must keep your full contact with higher things.

*

I repeat that we do not object to your writing — whether it be poetry or short stories or novels. What we felt was that this kind of total absorption and possession by it was not good for your spiritual condition and that it put a lesser thing in front, even occupying the *whole* front of the consciousness for most of the time instead of putting it in its proper place in a sound spiritual harmony.

*

You can try [*writing a novel*], if you like. The difficulty is that the subject matter of a novel belongs mostly to the outer consciousness, so that a lowering or externalising can easily come. This apart from the difficulty of keeping the inner poise when putting the mind into outer work. If you could get an established poise within, then it would be possible to do any work without disturbing or lowering the consciousness.

*

As for the French writing, you should not think so much of expressing things — it does not matter whether others have written the same things and done it better. What you should aim at is simply to learn to write French perfectly, to get full use of the French language as an instrument. If the Force wants to express anything through you hereafter or not, is a thing you should leave to the Divine Will; once you give yourself into its hands in the true consciousness, it will know what to do or not to do through you and will make full use of whatever instrumentation you can put at its disposal.

Painting

Painting also is sadhana; so it is perfectly possible to make them one. It is a matter of dedicating the painting and feeling the force that makes you paint as the Mother's force.

*

Of course everybody is here for Yoga and not for painting.

Painting or any other activity has to be made here a part of Yoga and cannot be pursued for its own sake. If it stands insuperably in the way, then it has to be given up; but there is no reason why it should if it be pursued in the proper spirit, as a field or aid for spiritual growth, or as a work done for the Mother.

*

You have painting and music in you and if you apply yourself they will develop in you. Only it is best to do it as an instrument of the Mother and as an offering to her, and not allow any personal desire for fame or appreciation by others or any personal pride to be the motives—for it is that that gives trouble. All work done as an offering is a great help and does not give trouble.

*

What do you mean by vital excitement [*while painting*]? There is an intensity and enthusiasm of the vital without which it would be difficult to do any poem, picture or music of a creative kind. That intensity is not harmful.

*

You have been progressing of course, but what Mother told you and tells everyone is true that to be a real artist needs hard work for years together. But your mistake is to put stress on these things and get discouraged by any check or difficulty in them. The one thing to be done is to open your consciousness to what is coming down, to let the change operate so that the consciousness becomes a consciousness of peace and light and power and joy full of the Divine Presence. When that is there, then what the Divine wants to get done through you or developed in you will be done or developed with a rapidity and perfection which at present is impossible. The one thing needful first, all the rest is only now a field of exercise for the development of the one thing needful.

Singing

What you write about the singing is perfectly correct. You sing your best only when you forget yourself and let it come out from within without thinking of the need of excellence or the impression it may make. The famous singer should indeed disappear into the past,—it is only so that the inner singer can take her place.

*

I meant exactly the same thing as when I wrote to you that the “famous singer” must disappear and the “inner singer” take her place. “The old psychological lines” means the mental and vital aesthetic source of the singing, the desire of fame or success, singing for an audience — the singing must come from the soul within and it must be for the Divine. . . .

As for your singing, I was not speaking of any new creation from the aesthetic point of view, but of the spiritual change — what form it takes must depend on what you find *within* you when the deeper basis is there.

I do not see any necessity for giving up singing altogether; I only meant,—it is the logical conclusion from what I have written to you not now only but before,—that the inner change must be the first consideration and the rest must arise out of that. If singing to an audience pulls you out of the inner condition, then you could postpone that and sing for yourself and the Divine until you are able, even in facing an audience, to forget the audience. If you are troubled by failure or exalted by success, that also you must overcome.

Section Three

Sadhana through Concentration, Meditation and Japa

Chapter One

Concentration and Meditation

The Meaning of Concentration and Meditation

Concentration, for our Yoga, means when the consciousness is fixed in a particular state (e.g. peace) or movement (e.g. aspiration, will, coming into contact with the Mother, taking the Mother's name); meditation is when the inner mind is looking at things to get the right knowledge.

*

Concentration means fixing the consciousness in one place or on one object and in a single condition. Meditation can be diffusive, e.g. thinking about the Divine, receiving impressions and discriminating, watching what goes on in the nature and acting upon it etc.

*

Concentration is a gathering together of the consciousness and either centralising at one point or turning on a single object, e.g. the Divine — there can also be a gathered condition throughout the whole being, not at a point. In meditation it is not indispensable to gather like this, one can simply remain with a quiet mind thinking of one subject or observing what comes in the consciousness and dealing with it.

*

Meditation means thinking on one subject in a concentrated way. In concentration proper there is not a series of thoughts, but the mind is silently fixed on one object, name, idea, place etc.

There are other kinds of concentration, e.g. concentrating the whole consciousness in one place, as between the eyebrows, in the heart, etc. One can also concentrate to get rid of thought altogether and remain in a complete silence.

**The Role of Concentration and Meditation
(Dhyana) in Sadhana**

In the beginning for a long time concentration is necessary even by effort because the nature, the consciousness are not ready. Even then the more quiet and natural the concentration, the better. But when the consciousness and nature are ready, then concentration must become spontaneous and easily possible without effort at all times. Even at last it becomes the natural and permanent condition of the being—it is then no longer concentration, but the settled poise of the soul in the Divine.

It is true that to be concentrated and do an outward action at the same time is not at first possible. But that too becomes possible. Either the consciousness divides into two parts, one the inner poised in the Divine, the other the outer doing the outer work—or else the whole is so poised and the force does the work through the passive instrument.

*

Concentration is necessary. By dhyana you awake the inner being; by concentration in life, in work, in the outer consciousness you make the outer being also fit to receive the Divine Light and Force.

*

It is in the waking consciousness that all has to be realised. But that cannot be done without a full preparation in the inner being and it is this preparation that is being done for you in *dhyāna*.

*

You have not to remain in dhyana all the time, but to bring into the waking state the consciousness you get there and you have to live in that all the time.

*

It is very good, and by regular meditation you are sure to make much progress. But I do not think to spend all the night in

meditation would be good. The body needs sleep also. One hour meditation daily is already a very good result and it can be increased slowly to two.

*

Certainly, if all one's life one did nothing but meditate, it would be a one-sided affair. But at times to give the first place or a lion's share to meditation may be necessary. It is especially when things are coming down and have to be fixed.

*

The ease and peace are felt very deep and far within because they are in the psychic and the psychic is very deep within us, covered over by the mind and vital. When you meditate you open to the psychic, become aware of your psychic consciousness deep within and feel these things. In order that this ease and peace and happiness may become strong and stable and felt in all the being and in the body, you have to go still deeper within and bring out the full force of the psychic into the physical. This can most easily be done by regular concentration and meditation with the aspiration for this true consciousness. It can be done by work also, by dedication, by doing the work for the Divine only without thought of self and keeping the idea of consecration to the Mother always in the heart. But this is not easy to do perfectly.

*

Sir, is the Presence [*of the Divine*] of a physical nature or a spiritual fact? And is the physical sense accustomed or able to see or feel spiritual things—a spiritual Presence, a non-material Form? To see the Brahman everywhere is not possible unless you develop the inner vision—so to do that you have to concentrate. To see non-material forms is indeed possible for a few, because they have the gift by nature, but most can't do it without developing the subtle sight. It is absurd to expect the Divine to manifest his Presence without your taking any trouble to see it, — you have to concentrate.

The Object of Meditation

What do you call meditation? Shutting the eyes and concentrating? It is only one method for calling down the true consciousness. To join with the true consciousness or feel its descent is the only thing important and if it comes without the orthodox method, as it always did with me, so much the better. Meditation is only a means or device, the true movement is when even walking, working or speaking one is still in sadhana.

*

What is most important [*in meditation*] is the change of consciousness of which this feeling of oneness is a part. The going deep in meditation is only a means and it is not always necessary if the great experiences come easily without it.

*

The best help for concentration is to receive the Mother's calm and peace into your mind. It is there above you — only the mind and its centres have to open to it. It is what the Mother is pushing upon you in the evening meditation.

*

The object of meditation is to open to the Mother and grow through many progressive experiences into a higher consciousness in union with the Divine.

*

To enter into a deeper or higher consciousness or for that deeper or higher consciousness to descend into you — that is the true success of meditation.

Meditation Not Necessary for All

One can have no fixed hours of meditation and yet be doing sadhana.

*

Meditation is not indispensable. There are some who do not meditate and yet progress.

*

Then how is it [*meditation*] necessary for all, if some are asked not to do it? Much meditation is for those who can meditate much. It does not follow that because such meditation is good, therefore nobody should do anything else.

Methods of Meditation and Concentration

The attitude of spiritual meditation is to concentrate so as to receive or attain the spiritual truth—what means one takes depends upon the way, the path, the person.

*

If the difficulty in meditation is that thoughts of all kinds come in, that is not due to hostile forces but to the ordinary nature of the human mind. All sadhaks have this difficulty and with many it lasts for a very long time. There are several ways of getting rid of it. One of them is to look at the thoughts and observe what is the nature of the human mind as they show it but not to give any sanction and to let them run down till they come to a standstill—this is a way recommended by Vivekananda in his *Rajayoga*. Another is to look at the thoughts as not one's own, to stand back as the witness Purusha and refuse the sanction—the thoughts are regarded as things coming from outside, from Prakriti, and they must be felt as if they were passers-by crossing the mind-space with whom one has no connection and in whom one takes no interest. In this way it usually happens that after a time the mind divides into two, a part which is the mental witness watching and perfectly undisturbed and quiet and a part which is the object of observation, the Prakriti part in which the thoughts cross or wander. Afterwards one can proceed to silence or quiet the Prakriti part also. There is a third, an active method by which one looks to see where the thoughts come from and finds they come not from oneself, but from outside the head as

it were; if one can detect them coming, then, *before they enter*, they have to be thrown away altogether. This is perhaps the most difficult way and not all can do it, but if it can be done it is the shortest and most powerful road to silence.

*

If you try to apply everything you read, there will be no end to your new beginnings. One can stop thinking by rejecting the thoughts and in the silence discover oneself. One can do it by letting the thoughts run down while one detaches oneself from them. There are a number of other ways. This one related in Brunton's book seems to me the Adwaita-jnani method of separating oneself from body, vital, mind, by *viveka*, discrimination, "I am not the body, I am not the life, I am not the mind" till he gets to the self, separate from mind, life and body. That also is one way of doing it. There is also the separation of Purusha from Prakriti till one becomes the witness only and feels separate from all the activities as the Witness Consciousness. There are other methods also.

*

The method of gathering of the mind is not an easy one. It is better to watch and separate oneself from the thoughts till one becomes aware of a quiet space within into which they come from outside.

*

All thoughts really come from outside, but one is not conscious of their coming. You have become conscious of this movement. There are different ways of getting rid of them; one is to reject them one by one before they can come in; another is to look at them with detachment till they fade away.

*

It is of course because of the old habit of the mental consciousness that it goes on receiving the thoughts from outside in spite of its being a fatigue—not that it wants them, but that they

are accustomed to come and the mind mechanically lets them in and attends to them by force of habit. This is always one of the chief difficulties in Yoga when the experiences have begun and the mind wants to be always either concentrated or quiet. Some do what you propose [*direct rejection of thoughts*] and after a time succeed in quieting the mind altogether or the silence comes down from above and does it. But often when one tries this, the thoughts become very active and resist the silencing process and that is very troublesome. Therefore many prefer to go on slowly letting the mind quiet down little by little, the quietness spreading and remaining for longer periods until the unwanted thoughts fall away or recede and the mind is left free for knowledge from within and above.

What you might do is to try and see what results — if the thoughts attack too much and trouble, you could stop — if the mind quiets down quickly or more and more, then continue.

*

The mind is always in activity, but we do not observe fully what it is doing, but allow ourselves to be carried away in the stream of continual thinking. When we try to concentrate, this stream of self-moved mechanical thinking becomes prominent to our observation. It is the first normal obstacle (the other is sleep during meditation) to the effort towards Yoga.

The first thing to do is to realise that this thought-flow is not yourself, it is not you who are thinking, but thought that is going on in the mind. It is Prakriti with its thought-energy that is raising all this whirl of thought in you, imposing it on the Purusha. You as the Purusha must stand back as the witness observing the action, but refusing to identify yourself with it. The next thing is to exercise a control and reject the thoughts — though sometimes by the very act of detachment the thought-habit falls away or diminishes during the meditation and there is a sufficient silence or at any rate a quietude which makes it easy to reject the thoughts that come and fix oneself on the object of meditation. If one becomes aware of the thoughts as coming from outside, from the universal Nature, then one can throw

them away before they reach the mind; in that way the mind finally falls silent. If neither of these things happens, a persistent practice of rejection becomes necessary — there should be no struggle or wrestling with the thoughts, but only a quiet self-separation and refusal. Success does not come at first, but if consent is constantly withheld, the mechanical whirl eventually lessens and begins to die away and one can then have at will an inner quietude or silence.

It should be noted that the result of the Yogic processes is not, except in rare cases, immediate and one must apply them with patience till they give a result which is sometimes long in coming if there is much resistance in the outer nature.

How can you fix the mind on the higher Self so long as you have no consciousness or experience of it? You can only concentrate on the idea of the Self. Or else one can concentrate on the idea of the Divine or the Divine Mother or on an image or on the feeling of devotion, calling the presence in the heart or the Force to work in the mind and heart and body and liberate the consciousness and give the self-realisation. If you concentrate on the idea of the Self, it must be with the conception of the Self as something different from mind and its thoughts, the vital and its feelings, the body and its actions — something standing back from all these, something that you can come to feel concretely as an Existence or Consciousness, separate from all that yet freely pervading all without being involved in these things.

*

You have to separate yourself from the mind also. You have to feel yourself even in the mental, vital, physical levels (not only above) a consciousness that is neither mind, life, nor body.

*

For the buzz of the physical mind, reject it quietly, without getting disturbed, till it feels discouraged and retires shaking its head and saying, "This fellow is too calm and strong for me." There are always two things that can rise up and assail the silence, — vital suggestions, the physical mind's mechanical

recurrences. Calm rejection for both is the cure. There is a Purusha within who can dictate to the nature what it shall admit or exclude, but its will is a strong, quiet will; if one gets perturbed or agitated over the difficulties, then the will of the Purusha cannot act effectively as it would otherwise.

The dynamic realisation will probably take place when the higher consciousness comes fully down into the vital. When it comes into the mental it brings the peace of the Purusha and liberation and it may bring also knowledge. It is when it comes into the vital that the dynamic realisation becomes present and living.

Concentration on the Idea

If one concentrates on a thought or a word, one has to dwell on the essential idea contained in the word with the aspiration to feel the thing which it expresses.

*

I have not the original chapter before me just now; but from the sentences quoted¹ it seems to be the essential mental Idea. As for instance in the method of Vedantic knowledge one concentrates on the idea of Brahman omnipresent — one looks at a tree or other surrounding objects with the idea that Brahman is there and the tree or object is only a form. After a time if the concentration is of the right kind, one begins to become aware of a presence, an existence, the physical tree form becomes a shell and that presence or existence is felt to be the only reality. The idea then drops, it is a direct vision of the thing that takes its place — there is no longer any necessity of concentrating on the

¹ *The correspondent sent to Sri Aurobindo a passage from The Synthesis of Yoga: "This concentration proceeds by the Idea . . . ; for it is through the Idea that the mental being rises beyond all expression to that which is expressed, to that of which the Idea itself is only the instrument. By concentration upon the Idea the mental existence which at present we are breaks open the barrier of our mentality and arrives at the state of consciousness, the state of being, the state of power of conscious-being and bliss of conscious-being to which the Idea corresponds and of which it is the symbol, movement and rhythm."* THE COMPLETE WORKS OF SRI AUROBINDO, vol. 23, p. 321.

idea, one sees with a deeper consciousness, *sa paśyati*. It should be noted that this concentration on the idea is not mere thinking, *mananam* — it is an inner dwelling on the essence of the Idea.

Centres for Concentration

The nature of the meditation depends on the part of the being in which one is centred at the time. In the body (rather the subtle body than the physical, but connected with the corresponding parts in the gross physical body also) there are centres proper to each level of the being. There is a centre at the top of the head and above it which is that of the above-mind or higher consciousness; a centre in the forehead between the eyebrows which is that of the thinking mind, mental will, mental vision; a centre in the throat which is that of the expressive or externalising mind: these are the mental centres. Below comes the vital — the heart (emotional), the navel (the dynamic life-centre), another below the navel in the abdomen which is the lower or sensational vital centre. Finally, at the bottom of the spine is the Muladhara or physical centre. Behind the heart is the psychic centre. If one concentrates in the head as many do it is a mental-spiritual meditation one seeks for, if in the heart it is a psychic meditation; these are the usual places where one concentrates. But what rises up first or opens first may not be the mental or psychic, but the emotional or the vital; that depends on the nature — for whatever is easiest to open in it, is likely to open first. If it is in the vital, then the meditation tends to project the consciousness into the vital plane and its experiences. But from that one can get to the psychic by drawing more and more inwards, not getting absorbed into the vital experiences but separating oneself and looking at them with detachment as if one were deep inside and observing things outside oneself. Similarly one can get the mental experiences by concentrating in the thought and by it bringing a corresponding experience, e.g. the thought of all being the Brahman, or one can draw back from the thought also and observe one's own thoughts as outside

things until one enters into the silence and the pure spiritual experience.

*

One can concentrate in any of the three centres which is easiest to the sadhak or gives most result. The power of the concentration in the heart-centre is to open that centre and by the power of aspiration, love, bhakti, surrender remove the veil which covers and conceals the soul and bring forward the soul or psychic being to govern the mind, life and body and turn and open them all—fully—to the Divine, removing all that is opposed to that turning and opening.

This is what is called in this Yoga the psychic transformation. The power of concentration above the head is to bring peace, silence, liberation from the body sense, the identification with mind and life and open the way for the lower (mental-vital-physical) consciousness to rise up to meet the higher Consciousness above and for the powers of the higher (spiritual or divine) Consciousness to descend into mind, life and body. This is what is called in this Yoga the spiritual transformation. If one begins with this movement, then the Power from above has in its descent to open all the centres (including the lowest centre) and to bring out the psychic being; for until that is done there is likely to be much difficulty and struggle of the lower consciousness obstructing, mixing with or even refusing the Divine Action from above. If the psychic being is once active this struggle and these difficulties can be greatly minimised.

The power of concentration in the eyebrows is to open the centre there, liberate the inner mind and vision and the inner or Yogic consciousness and its experiences and powers. From here also one can open upwards and act also in the lower centres; but the danger of this process is that one may get shut up in one's mental spiritual formations and not come out of them into the free and integral spiritual experience and knowledge and integral change of the being and nature.

*

I was very glad to get your letter and especially to know that you are more at peace. That is what is first needed, the settling down of a natural peace and quiet in the nature — the spiritual peace is a bigger thing that can come afterwards.

Then as to concentration. Ordinarily the consciousness is spread out everywhere, dispersed, running in this or that direction, after this subject and that object in multitude. When anything has to be done of a sustained nature, the first thing one does is to draw back all this dispersed consciousness and concentrate. It is then, if one looks closely, found to be concentrated in one place and on one occupation, subject or object — as when you are composing a poem or a botanist is studying a flower. The place is usually somewhere in the brain, if it is the thought, in the heart if it is the feeling in which one is concentrated. The Yogic concentration is simply an extension and intensification of the same thing. It may be on an object as when one does tratak on a shining point — then one has to concentrate so that one sees only that point and has no other thought but that. It may be on an idea or a word or a name, the idea of the Divine, the word OM, the name Krishna, or a combination of idea and word or idea and name. But, farther, in Yoga one also concentrates in a particular place. There is the famous rule of concentrating between the eyebrows — the centre of the inner mind, of occult vision, of the will is there. What you do is to think firmly from there on whatever you make the object of your concentration or else try to see the image of it from there. If you succeed in this, then after a time you feel that your whole consciousness is centred there in that place — of course for the time being. After doing it for some time and often, it becomes easy and normal.

I hope this is clear. Well, in this Yoga, you do the same, not necessarily at that particular spot between the eyebrows, but anywhere in the head or at the centre of the chest where the physiologists have fixed the cardiac centre. Instead of concentrating on an object, you concentrate in the head in a will, a call for the descent of the peace from above or, as some do, an opening of the unseen lid and an ascent of the consciousness above. In the heart-centre one concentrates in an aspiration, for

an opening, for the presence or living image of the Divine there or whatever else is the object. There may be japa of a name but, if so, there must also be a concentration on it and the name must repeat itself there in the heart-centre.

It may be asked what becomes of the rest of the consciousness when there is this local concentration? Well, it either falls silent as in any concentration or, if it does not, then thoughts or other things may move about, as if outside, but the concentrated part does not attend to them or notice. That is when the concentration is reasonably successful.

One has not to fatigue oneself at first by long concentration if one is not accustomed, for then in a jaded mind it loses its power or value. One can "relax" and meditate instead of concentrating. It is only as the concentration becomes normal that one can go on for a longer and longer time.

*

There is no harm in concentrating sometimes in the heart and sometimes above the head. But concentration in either place does not mean keeping the attention fixed on a particular spot; you have to take your station of consciousness in either place and concentrate there not on the place, but on the Divine. This can be done with eyes shut or with eyes open, according as it best suits you.

You can concentrate on the sun, but to concentrate on the Divine is better than to concentrate on the sun.

*

You can concentrate the consciousness anywhere in any centre. You have only to think of yourself as centrally there and try to fix and keep that. A strain or any effort to do so is not necessary but a quiet and steady dwelling in the idea.

Most people associate consciousness with the brain or mind because that is the centre for intellectual thought and mental vision, but consciousness is not limited to that kind of thought or vision. It is everywhere in the system and there are several centres of it, e.g., the centre for inner concentration is not in the

brain but in the heart,—the originating centre of vital desire is still lower down.

The two main places where one can centre the consciousness for Yoga are in the head and in the heart—the mind-centre and the soul-centre.

*

One has to open through concentration in the heart centre or above the head, in the former case to the psychic, in the latter to the higher Truth. But without the psychic preparation or at least a thorough purification of the being, the latter course is not safe.

*

It may be better to concentrate in the heart rather than in the mind, offer yourself from there and call the Mother into the heart leaving the thoughts to fall silent of themselves. Otherwise with the present method you have simply to persevere till the present brief and imperfect stillings of the mind become longer and deeper.

*

The concentration in the heart is what brings about the opening of the psychic which is your principal need. If the concentration has brought about a feeling which makes you judge clearly all the other movements and see their nature, then the psychic is already in action. For this is the psychic feeling which brings with it a clear insight into the nature of all movements that come and makes it easy to reject what has to be rejected and keep the right attitude and perception. It does not matter about the image of the Mother. It is her presence whether in form or not that has to be felt always and this the psychic opening will surely bring.

*

It [*concentration in the heart*] is the best to “start with”—but as you have already started with success on the two higher centres, there is no reason why you should discontinue that. The

other you may try from time to time when you find a sufficient quietude. Concentration there leads—or should lead—to the psychic opening.

*

Concentration in the heart is best aided if possible by the power and light descending from above the head.

*

At the top of the head or above it is the right place for Yogic concentration in reading or thinking.

*

Brain concentration is always a tapasya and necessarily brings a strain. It is only if one is lifted out of the brain mind altogether that the strain of mental concentration disappears.

Postures for Concentration or Meditation

The sitting motionless posture is the natural posture for concentrated meditation—walking and standing are active conditions suited for the dispense of energy and the activity of the mind. It is only when one has gained the enduring rest and passivity of the consciousness that it is easy to concentrate and receive when walking or doing anything. A fundamental passive condition of the consciousness gathered into itself is the proper poise for concentration and a seated gathered immobility in the body is the best for that. It can be done also lying down, but that position is too passive, tending to be inert rather than gathered. This is the reason why Yogis always sit in an asana. One can accustom oneself to meditate walking, standing, lying, but sitting is the first natural position.

*

One can meditate very well when walking.

*

It is as each finds convenient. Some meditate better walking, some sitting.

*

The rigidity [*of the body during meditation*] comes very often when there is the descent of the higher consciousness into the body.

Regularity, Length and Other Conditions

If it is possible to keep a fixed period for meditation and stick to it, it would certainly be desirable.

*

To keep the consciousness awake you must set apart a certain time every day for concentration and remembering the Mother and keeping yourself in contact with us. What is gained is not lost by interruption, but it goes behind and may take time to come out again — so the thread should not be cut.

*

It is not the length of the meditations that makes the difference [*in making one vitally and physically strong*]. It is a concentration of the will that is needed.

*

It is better to make the deeper concentration when you are alone or quiet. Outward sounds ought not to disturb you.

*

In external things all men of action have to do that [*shift their concentration quickly from one thing to another*] — otherwise they would not be able to cope with their work. In respect to inner concentration, it is not so easy because people bring other vibrations which interfere with the poise of the consciousness — a mere mental interruption ought not to be difficult to recover from; but if the consciousness itself gets invaded or else drawn

out, it takes time to get back. In the end a condition develops in which the inner consciousness is always concentrated and in a poise, *samāhitah*, and outside things take place only on the outermost surface. Then it becomes easy.

*

It is quite natural that at first there should be the condition of calm and peace only when you sit for concentration. What is important is that there should be this condition whenever you sit and the pressure for it always there. But at other times the result is at first only a certain mental quiet and freedom from thoughts. Afterwards when the condition of peace is quite settled in the inner being—for it is the inner into which you enter whenever you concentrate—then it begins to come out and control the outer, so that the calm and peace remain even when working, mixing with others, talking or other occupations. For then whatever the outer consciousness is doing, one feels the inner being calm within—indeed one feels the inner being as one's real self while the outer is something superficial through which the inner acts on life.

*

The gaze should not be fixed for a long time as it overstrains the eyes (unless one has a long practice in Tratak). The fixing of the eyes is not necessary—a natural gaze is sufficient and it should be varied by meditation with closed eyes.

*

When the meditation is done with the photo, it is better done with open eyes.

Coming out of Concentration or Meditation

You enter into a condition of deep inwardness and quiet. But if one comes too suddenly out of it into the ordinary consciousness, then there may be a slight nervous shock or a beating of the heart such as you describe, for a short time. It is always best to remain

quiet for a few moments before opening the eyes and coming out of this inwardness.

*

It is certainly much better to remain silent and collected for a time after the meditation. It is a mistake to take the meditation lightly — by doing that one fails to receive or spills what is received or most of it.

*

Your meditation is all right, as Mother saw — but when you came out of it, you fell into the ordinary consciousness, that is the difficulty. You must try to keep the true consciousness always, even in activity — then the sadhana will begin to be there all the time and your difficulty will disappear.

The Difficulty of the Mechanical Mind

That [*the constant recurrence of trivial thoughts*] is the nature of the mechanical mind — it is not due to any sensitiveness in it. Only as the other parts of the mind are more silent and under control, this activity looks more prominent and takes more space. It usually wears itself out, if one goes on rejecting it.

*

It was rather that the active mind became more quiet so that the movements of the mechanical mind became more evident — that is what often happens. What has to be done in that case is to detach oneself from these movements and concentrate without farther attention to them. They are then likely to sink into quietude or fall away.

*

To be able to detach oneself from the action of the mechanical mind is the first necessity so that it may be like a noise in the street which passes and which one can ignore. It is easier then

for the quiet and peace of the mind to remain undisturbed by this action even if it occurs.

If the peace and silence continue to come down, they usually become so intense as to seize the physical mind also after a time.

*

You are probably paying too much attention to them [*mechanical thoughts*]. It is quite possible to concentrate and let the mechanical activity pass unnoticed.

*

The more the psychic spreads in the outer being, the more all these things [*the mechanical activities of the subconscious mind*] fall quiet. That is the best way. Direct efforts to still the mind are a difficult method.

Surface Thoughts and Imaginations

That [*a state in which the outer being responds to surface thoughts while the inner being is “engrossed in meditation”*] is not called meditation—it is a divided state of consciousness. Unless the consciousness is really engrossed and the surface thoughts are only things that come across and touch and pass, it can hardly be called meditation (dhyana). I don't see how the inner being can be “engrossed” while thoughts and imaginations of another kind are rampaging about in the consciousness. One can remain separate and see the thoughts and imaginations pass without being affected, but that is not being plunged or engrossed in meditation.

Straining and Concentration

Straining and concentration are not the same thing. Straining implies an over-eagerness and violence of effort, while concentration is in its nature quiet and steady. If there is restlessness or over-eagerness, then that is not concentration.

*

Effort means straining endeavour. There can be an action with a will in it in which there is no strain of effort.

*

It was by your personal efforts without guidance that you got into difficulties and into a heated condition in which you could not meditate etc. I asked you to drop the effort and remain quiet and you did so. My intention was that by your remaining quiet, it would be possible for the Mother's Force to work in you and establish a better starting-point and a course of initial experiences. It was what was beginning to come; but if your mind again becomes active and tries to arrange the sadhana for itself, then disturbances are likely to come. The Divine Guidance works best when the psychic is open and in front (yours was beginning to open), but it can also work even when the sadhak is either not conscious of it or else knows it only by its results. As for Nirvikalpa Samadhi, even if one wants it, it is only the result of a long sadhana in a consciousness prepared for it—it is no use thinking of it when the inner consciousness is only just beginning to open to Yogic experience.

Relaxation and Concentration

There are two different states, that which the consciousness takes in concentration and that which it takes in relaxation—the latter is the ordinary consciousness (ordinary for the sadhak, though not perhaps the ordinary consciousness of the average man), the former is what he is attaining to by tapas of concentration in sadhana. To go into the Akshara and witness experiences from there is easy for the sadhak who has got so far. He can also concentrate and maintain the unification of the main aspects of his being, although with more difficulty—but a relaxation there brings him back to the relaxed “ordinary” consciousness. It is only when what is gained by sadhana becomes normal to the ordinary consciousness that this can be avoided. In proportion as this is done, it becomes possible not only to experience the truth subjectively, but make it manifest in action.

Passive Meditation and Concentration

What happened in the beginning of his sadhana must have been that he made the mistake of entering into a passive meditation instead of into a concentration proper. This kind of passive meditation can bring a great peace and quiet and joy. The Light also may come and other spiritual experiences. But it leaves the vital and body passive and without defence against inertia, illness etc. instead of bringing it either a dynamic force or a strong self-contained peace. The consciousness instead of being concentrated gets widely diffused and loosely extended. From the passivity came the weakness and disinclination for the worldly duties; from the diffusion the play of activity in the mind which prevented sleep and could not be controlled in a tendency also for the subtle being to go out of the body in the waking condition instead of through sleep as it ordinarily does, whence the beating of the heart and the cold feet. Concentration must in the earlier stages be active and dynamic with the consciousness gathered and capable of turning the will in any direction.

The concentration in this Yoga must be in the head or in the heart-centre, not in the centre at the base of the spinal cord—that can only come afterwards when all the other centres have been opened.

It is sometimes a little difficult to correct the effects of a wrong start. At any rate he may try the effects of an active concentration in either the head (forehead centre) or heart. The latter may be safer so as to avoid the return of the heating of the head which came from that first concentration. If there are any disturbing results, the concentration should not be continued and all should be turned towards a purification of the being such as he speaks of having practised and only when this is sufficiently advanced, should the concentration be resumed.

Inertia, Laziness, Tiredness in Meditation

It is not a fact that when there is obscurity or inertia, one cannot concentrate or meditate. If one has in the inner being the steady

will to do it, it can be done.

*

It is quite natural to want to meditate while reading Yogic literature — that is not the laziness.

The laziness of the mind consists in not meditating when the consciousness wants to do so.

*

Ego, I suppose, or inertia [*binders the feeling of satisfied peace or quiet release in meditation*]. If higher meditation or being above keeps you dull and without any kind of satisfaction or peace in sadhana, these are the only two reasons I can think of.

*

If the mind gets tired, naturally it is difficult to concentrate — unless you have become separated from the mind.

*

Naturally one does not get tired if the meditation has become natural. But if the capacity is not there yet, then many cannot go on without a strain which brings fatigue.

*

Concentration is very helpful and necessary — the more one concentrates (of course in the limits of the body's capacity without straining it), the more the force of the Yoga grows. But you must be prepared for the meditation being sometimes not successful and not get upset by it — for that variability of the meditations happens to everybody. There are different causes for it. But it is mostly something physical that interferes, either the need of the body to take time to assimilate what has come or been done or sometimes inertia or dullness due to causes such as those you mention or others. The best thing is to remain quiet and not get nervous or dejected — till the force acts again.

Meditation, Sleep and Samadhi

When one tries to meditate, there is a pressure to go inside, lose the waking consciousness and wake inside, in a deep inner consciousness. But at first the mind takes it for a pressure to go to sleep, since sleep is the only kind of inner consciousness to which it has been accustomed. In Yoga by meditation sleep is therefore often the first difficulty—but if one perseveres then gradually the sleep changes to an inner conscious state.

*

I think the sleepiness is a stage which everybody goes through—a sort of mechanical reaction of the physical to the pressure for including it in the concentration of the sadhana. It is best not to mind it; it will go of itself as the consciousness increases and takes the physical into its poise. It is better to let us know about any physical troubles.

*

The sleep does come like that when one tries to meditate. It has to be dealt with, where that is possible, by turning it into a conscious inner and indrawn state and, where not, by remaining in a quietly concentrated wakefulness open (without effort) to receive.

*

This tendency to sit and be perfectly quiet and this pressure of sleep are not at all due to laziness. You must put that idea out of your head. It is due to the tendency to quiet, peace, going inside; when the sadhana begins with some intensity, it is most often like that for a time. Afterwards there is a more even balance between the inner and the outer consciousness or rather the outer begins to change and become of one piece with the inner. So do not let this trouble you.

*

When the pressure gives a tendency to insideness (samadhi), the

physical being, not being accustomed to go inside except in the way of sleep, translates this into a sense of sleepiness.

*

It [*the tendency to fall asleep during meditation*] is a common obstacle with all who practise Yoga at the beginning. This sleep disappears gradually in two ways—(1) by the intensifying of the force of concentration—(2) by the sleep itself becoming a kind of *swapna samadhi* in which one is conscious of inner experiences that are not dreams (i.e. the waking consciousness is lost for the time, but it is replaced not by sleep but by an inward conscious state in which one moves in the supraphysical of the mental or vital being).

*

The Yogic sleep is good only when it is Yogic enough to contain something, to be an inner consciousness or an experience of other planes. The *jāgarti* is important—to be conscious in the sleep, an inner waking. But when the mind is not accustomed, it tends to respond to the impulse towards this “going inside” into an inner consciousness caused by meditation by simply falling into the usual sleep to which it is accustomed. *Nidrā* is one of the recognised difficulties of Yoga—*nidrā* refusing to turn into *samadhi*, whether *svapna-samādhi* or *susupti*. So the force is necessary and I will try to send it. I only wish people would give me more time for this inner work both for myself and them! but that seems past hoping for.

*

It is probably that [*in meditation*] you go inside into a sort of *samadhi* but are not yet conscious there (hence the idea of sleep). X is not asleep, but he has when he goes inside no control of his body. Many Yogis have this difficulty and use a contrivance which is put under the chin to hold up the head and with it the body during this inward-going concentration.

*

There is no harm in the deep sleep that comes — as I have told you, it is the tendency to go deep inside that brings it and it is necessary to go deep inside in order to establish the full connection between the psychic and the rest of the nature.

Chapter Two

Mantra and Japa

The Word

The word is a sound expressive of the idea. In the supra-physical plane when an idea has to be realised, one can by repeating the word-expression of it, produce vibrations which prepare the mind for the realisation of the idea. That is the principle of the Mantra and of japa. One repeats the name of the Divine and the vibrations created in the consciousness prepare the realisation of the Divine. It is the same idea that is expressed in the Bible, "God said, Let there be Light, and there was Light." It is creation by the Word.

*

The Word has power—even the ordinary written word has a power. If it is an inspired word it has still more power. What kind of power or power for what depends on the nature of the inspiration and the theme and the part of the being it touches. If it is the Word itself,—as in certain utterances of the great Scriptures—Veda, Upanishads, Gita,—it may well have a power to awaken a spiritual impulse, an uplifting, even certain kinds of realisation. To say that it cannot contradict spiritual experience.

The Vedic poets regarded their poetry as *mantras*, they were the vehicles of their own realisations and could become vehicles of realisation for others. Naturally, these mostly would be illuminations, not the settled and permanent realisation that is the goal of Yoga—but they could be steps on the way or at least lights on the way. Many have such illuminations, even initial realisations while meditating on verses of the Upanishads or the Gita. Anything that carries the Word, the Light in it, spoken or written, can light this fire within, open a sky, as it were, bring the effective vision of which the Word is the body. In all ages spiritual seekers have expressed their aspirations or their experiences in

poetry or inspired language and it has helped themselves and others. Therefore there is nothing absurd in my assigning to such poetry a spiritual or psychic value and effectiveness to poetry of a psychic or spiritual character.

Mantras

Mantras come to many people in meditation. The Rishis say in the Veda that they had the Truth by vision and inspiration, “truth-hearing seers”, *kavayaḥ satyaśrutas*—Veda is śruti got by inner hearing.

*

When one repeats a mantra regularly, very often it begins to repeat itself within, which means that it is taken up by the inner being. In that way it is more effective.

*

It [*the effect of japa*] depends on the way in which the japa is done.

If rightly done, the mantra is a means of opening to the light and knowledge etc. from above and it ceases as soon as that is done.

*

I do not believe a mantra can change the physical consciousness. What it does, if it is effective, is to open the consciousness and to bring into it the power of that which the mantra represents.

*

There is such a thing as mantra-shakti; but it acts only on certain conditions.

The Mantra OM

OM is the mantra, the expressive sound-symbol of the Brahman Consciousness in its four domains from the Turiya to the external or material plane. The function of a mantra is to create

vibrations in the inner consciousness that will prepare it for the realisation of what the mantra symbolises and is supposed indeed to carry within itself. The mantra OM should therefore lead towards the opening of the consciousness to the sight and feeling of the One Consciousness in all material things, in the inner being and in the supraphysical worlds, in the causal plane above now superconscious to us and, finally, the supreme liberated transcendence above all cosmic existence. The last is usually the main preoccupation with those who use the mantra.

In this Yoga there is no fixed mantra, no stress is laid on mantras, although sadhaks can use one if they find it helpful or so long as they find it helpful. The stress is rather on an aspiration in the consciousness and a concentration of the mind, heart, will, all the being. If a mantra is found helpful for that, one uses it. OM if rightly used (not mechanically) might very well help the opening upwards and outwards (cosmic consciousness) as well as the descent.

*

It [*Pranava japa*] is supposed to have a force of its own although that force cannot fully work without the meditation on the meaning. But my experience is that in these things there is no invariable rule and that most depends on the consciousness or the power of response in the sadhak. With some it has no effect, with some it has a rapid and powerful effect even without meditation — for others the meditation is necessary for any effect to come.

The Mantra *So'ham*

A divine Name or a Mantra (like the *So'ham*) can enter the adhara and move in the breathing as in your experience. When it does so, that is not the opening of which I speak in the sentence you quote, but it may come to make the aspiration effective by helping in the opening — by removing something that prevents the opening and by leading to the experience it carries in it.

The experience to which the *So'ham* mantra leads is the

realisation of one Being everywhere, all as the Divine, oneself and all as essentially one with that Divine. It is an experience in which one's separate personal existence shut up in the body ceases to be the normal thing; one feels the body as a point or small thing in a vast existence, consciousness or Ananda that is the Divine and oneself as spread out in that vast consciousness — as if the world were within us and not we inside the world or as if the world were one with us and one with the Divine. It is the "cosmic consciousness" that comes by this mantra. For our Yoga this is a beginning only, not the end as it is in the ordinary Yoga, — a liberation, not the Siddhi.

The Gayatri Mantra

The power of the Gayatri is the Light of the divine Truth. It is a mantra of Knowledge.

*

The Gayatri mantra is the mantra for bringing the light of Truth into all the planes of the being. The other [*Sri Aurobindo Mira*] has a general power.

*

It is not necessary to give up Gayatri Japa or the process which you are following at present. Concentration in the heart is one method, concentration in the head (or above) is another; both are included in this Yoga and one has to do whichever one finds easiest and most natural. The object of the concentration in the heart is to open the centre there (heart-lotus), to feel the presence of the Divine Mother in the heart and to become aware of one's soul or psychic being which is a portion of the Divine. The object of the concentration in the head is to rise to the Divine Consciousness and bring down the Light of the Mother or her Force or Ananda into all the centres. This movement of ascent and descent is implied in the process of your japa and it is not therefore necessary to renounce it.

There is a level corresponding to the Satya Loka in the head

but the consciousness has at a certain stage to rise above the head freely to meet the same level in the universal Consciousness above.

Mantras in the Integral Yoga

The idea of your friend that it is necessary to receive a mantra from here and for that he must come is altogether wrong. There is no mantra given in this Yoga. It is the opening of the consciousness to the Mother from within that is the true initiation and that can only come by aspiration and rejection of restlessness in the mind and vital.

*

We do not usually give any mantra. Those who repeat something in meditation call on the Mother.

*

As a rule the only mantra used in this sadhana is that of the Mother or of my name and the Mother. The concentration in the heart and the concentration in the head can both be used — each has its own result. The first opens up the psychic being and brings bhakti, love and union with the Mother, her presence within the heart and the action of her Force in the nature. The other opens the mind to self-realisation, to the consciousness of what is above mind, to the ascent of the consciousness out of the body and the descent of the higher consciousness into the body.

*

There is not necessarily any difference of Force.¹ Usually the Mother's name has the full power in it; but in certain states of consciousness the double Name may have a special effect.

¹ *The correspondent asked whether there is any difference of Force when one repeats only the Mother's name and when one repeats both the names of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother together.—Ed.*

Namajapa or Repetition of the Name

The name of the Divine is usually called in for protection, for adoration, for increase of bhakti, for the opening up of the inner consciousness, for the realisation of the Divine in that aspect. As far as it is necessary to work in the subconscious for that, the Name must be effective there.

*

It [*the effectiveness of namajapa*] depends on the person and how he does it. The Name of the Divine is in itself a power, if it is taken with the right faith and in the right attitude.

*

Namajapa has a great power in it.

*

Namochcharana has power but only if it comes from the heart and the soul; mere repetition with the mind is not enough.

*

Whatever name is called the Power that answers is the Mother. Each name indicates a certain aspect of the Divine and is limited by that aspect; the Mother's Power is universal.

*

Naturally, whatever name one concentrates on [*while awake*] will repeat itself [*in sleep*], if any does. But the calling of Mother in sleep is not necessarily a repetition — it is the inner being that often calls to her in difficulty or in need.

*

I did not encourage the name with the breathing because that seemed like pranayam. Pranayam is a very powerful thing, but if done haphazardly it may lead to the raising of obstructions and even in extreme cases illness in the body.

Verses of the Gita Used as Japa

Verses of the Gita can be used as japa, if the object is to realise the Truth that the verses contain in them. If X's father has taken the salient verses containing the heart of the teaching for that purpose, then it is all right. Everything depends on the selection of the verses. A coherent summary of the Gita's teaching cannot easily be put together by putting together some verses, but that is not necessary for a purpose of this kind which could only be to put the key truths together—not for intellectual exposition but for grasping in realisation which is the object of japa.

Success in Japa

I am sorry the old reaction to the japa has recurred. Perhaps the mind is doing it too much as a means for a result. The japa is usually successful only on one of two conditions,—if it is repeated with a sense of its significance, a dwelling of something in the mind on the nature, power, beauty, attraction of the Godhead it signifies and is to bring into the consciousness, that is the mental way,—or if it comes up from the heart or rings in it with a certain sense or feeling of bhakti making it alive, that is the emotional way. Either the mind or the vital has to give it support or sustenance. But if it makes the mind dry and the vital restless, it must be missing that support and sustenance. There is of course a third way, the reliance on the power of the mantra or name in itself, but then one has to go on till that power has sufficiently impressed its vibrations on the inner being to make it at a given moment suddenly open to the Presence or the Touch. But if there is a struggling or insistence for the result, then this effect which needs a quiet receptivity in the mind is impeded. That is why I insisted so much on mental quietude and on not too much straining or effort—to give time to allow the psychic and the mind to develop the necessary condition of receptivity—a receptivity as natural as when one receives an inspiration for poetry and music. It is also why I do not want you to discontinue your poetry—it helps and does not

hinder the preparation because it is a means of developing the right position of receptivity and bringing out the bhakti which is there in the inner being. To spend all the energy on japa or meditation is a strain which even those who are accustomed to successful meditation find it difficult to do — unless in periods when there is an uninterrupted flow of experiences from above.

*

It is very good news that you got rid of the attack and it was the japa that helped you to do it. This and past experience also shows that if you can overcome the old association of the japa with sterility and sorrow, it can do its natural function of creating the right consciousness — for that is what the japa is intended to do. It first changes the vibrations of the consciousness, brings into it the right state and the right responses and then brings in the power or the presence of the Deity. Several times before you wrote to me that by doing japa you got rid of the old impulse and recovered calm and the right turn of the consciousness and now it has helped you to get rid of the invasion of sorrow and despondency. Let us hope that this last will also soon lose its strength like the impulse and calm and serenity begin to establish itself in the whole nature.

Section Four

Sadhana through Love and Devotion

Chapter One

Divine Love, Psychic Love and Human Love

Divine Love and Its Manifestation

To bring the Divine Love and Beauty and Ananda into the world is, indeed, the whole crown and essence of our Yoga. But it has always seemed to me impossible unless there comes as its support and foundation and guard the Divine Truth—what I call the Supramental—and its Divine Power. Otherwise Love itself blinded by the confusions of this present consciousness may stumble in its human receptacles and, even otherwise, may find itself unrecognised, rejected or rapidly degenerating and lost in the frailty of man's inferior nature. But when it comes in the Divine Truth and Power, Divine Love descends first as something transcendent and universal and out of that transcendence and universality it applies itself to persons according to the Divine Truth and Will, creating a vaster, greater, purer personal love than any the human mind or heart can now imagine. It is when one has felt this descent that one can be really an instrument for the birth and action of the Divine Love in the world.

*

It [*the Divine Truth*] can come solely as knowledge or as knowledge + calm and peace or knowledge with power. It is not always accompanied by Ananda.

What was meant [*in the preceding letter*] was that it is possible to have some kind of Ananda on all the planes, vital, mental, physical; but if one wants to live securely in the highest divine Ananda it can only be done by bringing down the (supramental) Truth and living first in the supramental Light. But this is the eventual aim of the Yoga; it does not debar one from accepting whatever Ananda comes on the way. Only, mere pleasure or vital

excitement and gratification must not be mistaken for Ananda.

*

The human form is naturally unable to bear the Divine Love or contain it, because it is itself a creation of the ignorance, weak and impure. It must be transformed in order to be capable of that; it must become strong and pure. First of all, it must have the strength to love the Divine alone and turn away from all other ties. But besides that a new consciousness must be created in it—first a consciousness of pure and purifying Divine Peace from above which must take hold of all down to the most physical—then in that peace an increasing inner strength pure and unegoistic—then the Divine Light and Knowledge transforming all the consciousness and movements. When this has been done, then the human form can contain the Divine Love and Ananda. Till then the touches of the Divine Love and Ananda are usually momentary or brief, they cannot remain. In an impure consciousness the Divine Love if it came in would create a perturbation and possibly be attacked by a mixture which would make it impossible for it to stay. It is therefore that touches only can come.

*

I understand that it is the physical consciousness which has come up forcibly with the old vital human movements and feelings and this has clouded for the moment the sense of higher things and the aspiration for Truth and Purity that is their atmosphere. The Divine Love may not be able yet to manifest on the physical plane, humanity being what it is, as fully and freely as it would otherwise do, but that does not make it less close or intense than the human. It is there waiting to be understood and accepted and meanwhile giving all the help you can receive to raise and widen you into the consciousness in which it will be no longer possible for these difficulties and these misunderstandings to recur—the state in which there is possible the full and perfect union.

*

It [*the Divine Love*] exists in itself and does not depend on outer contact or outer expression. Whether it shall express itself outwardly or how it will express itself outwardly depends on the spiritual truth that has to be manifested.

*

There is the one divine Love secret in all things, but the manifestation [*of it in matter and in forms of life*] depends upon the state of consciousness and its organisation.

*

I do not exactly know what you mean by the Divine Love being established down to the subconscious. What love? the soul's love for the Divine? or the principle of the Divine Love and Ananda which is the highest thing that can be reached? To establish the latter down to the subconscious is a thing which would mean the entire transformation of the whole being and it cannot be done except as the result of the supramental change which is as yet far away. The other may be established even now in principle, but to make it living and complete in the whole being would mean the psychic transformation completed with the spiritual also well under way already.

*

The Intuitive or Overmind are more open to the truth of Divine Love and more capable of universalising love than the mind ordinarily is — love there is also more calm in its intensity, less ego-bound than in the mental parts. But the mind can also approach their quality of love, if the love in it grows psychic and spiritual.

*

By becoming divine in nature [*one can love divinely*]; there is no other way.

Divine Love and Psychic Love

The Divine's love is that which comes from above poured down from the Divine Oneness and its Ananda on the being — psychic love is a form taken by divine love in the human being according to the needs and possibilities of the human consciousness.

*

If love is psychic in its nature, it always brings the sense of oneness or at least of an inner intimate closeness of being. The Divine Love is based upon oneness and the psychic derives from the Divine Love.

*

The psychic love is pure and full of self-giving without egoistic demand, but it is human and can err and suffer. The Divine Love is something much vaster and deeper and full of light and ananda.

Psychic Love

When there is no demand or desire, only love and self-giving, that is the psychic love.

*

Psychic love is quite satisfying, and it can change even the vital love into something great and beautiful.

*

Why do you want something remarkable? The love of the soul is the true thing, simple and absolute — the rest is good only if it is a means of manifestation of the soul's love.

*

The soul's love and joy come from within from the psychic being. What comes from above is the Ananda of the higher consciousness.

*

The love that belongs to the spiritual planes is of a different kind — the psychic has its own more personal love, bhakti, surrender. Love in the higher or spiritual mind is more universal and impersonal. The two must join together to make the highest divine love.

*

The psychic realisation is one of diversity in unity (the portion and the whole); it is not one of dissolving like a drop of water in the sea — for then no love or devotion is possible unless it is love of oneself, devotion to oneself.

Universal Love and Psychic Love

Universal love is always universal — psychic love can individualise itself.

*

Cosmic love depends on the realisation of oneness of self with all. Psychic love or feeling for all can exist without this realisation.

*

The oneness with all in its basis is something self-existent and self-content which does not *need* expression. When it does express itself as love, it is something wide and universal, untroubled and firm even when it is intense. This is in the basic cosmic oneness. There is also the surface cosmic consciousness which is an awareness of the play of cosmic forces — here anything may rise, sex also. It is this part that needs the perfect psychisation, otherwise one cannot even hold, contain and deal with it in the proper way.

*

I do not quite understand X's question. Does he mean to ask whether one can become conscious of the Divine's Love for all creatures before one is oneself filled with the universal love for others? If that is the meaning, then one can certainly become

conscious of the Divine's Love before one has oneself the universal love — one can become conscious of it by contact with the Divine in oneself. Naturally the consciousness of it should lead to the development of a universal love for all. But if he means a love that is divine, not tainted by the lower movements, then it is true that until there comes the peace, purity, freedom from ego, wideness, light of the universal consciousness which is the basis of the universal love, it is difficult to have a love that is free from all the defects, limitations, taints of ordinary human love. The more one has of the universality the more one tends to be freed from these things.

Love for the Divine

The love which is turned towards the Divine ought not to be the usual vital feeling which men call by that name; for that is not love, but only a vital desire, an instinct of appropriation, the impulse to possess and monopolise. Not only is this not the divine Love, but it ought not to be allowed to mix in the least degree in the Yoga. The true love for the Divine is a self-giving, free of demand, full of submission and surrender; it makes no claim, imposes no condition, strikes no bargain, indulges in no violences of jealousy or pride or anger — for these things are not in its composition. In return the Divine Mother also gives herself, but freely — and this represents itself in an inner giving — her presence in your mind, your vital, your physical consciousness, her power re-creating you in the divine nature, taking up all the movements of your being and directing them towards perfection and fulfilment, her love enveloping you and carrying you in its arms Godwards. It is this that you must aspire to feel and possess in all your parts down to the very material, and here there is no limitation either of time or of completeness. If one truly aspires and gets it, there ought to be no room for any other claim or for any disappointed desire. And if one truly aspires, one does unfailingly get it, more and more as the purification proceeds and the nature undergoes its needed change.

Keep your love pure of all selfish claim and desire; you will

find that you are getting all the love that you can bear and absorb in answer.

Realise also that the Realisation must come first, the work to be done, not the satisfaction of claim and desire. It is only when the Divine Consciousness in its supramental Light and Power has descended and transformed the physical that other things can be given a prominent place — and then too it will not be the satisfaction of desire, but the fulfilment of the Divine Truth in each and all and in the new life that is to express it. In the divine life all is for the sake of the Divine and not for the sake of the ego.

I should perhaps add one or two things to avoid misapprehensions. First, the love for the Divine of which I speak is not a psychic love only; it is the love of all the being, the vital and vital-physical included, — all are capable of the same self-giving. It is a mistake to believe that if the vital loves, it must be a love that demands and imposes the satisfaction of its desire; it is a mistake to think that it must be either that or else the vital, in order to escape from its “attachment”, must draw away altogether from the object of its love. The vital can be as absolute in its unquestioning self-giving as any other part of the nature; nothing can be more generous than its movement when it forgets self for the Beloved. The vital and physical should both give themselves in the true way — the way of true love, not of ego-desire.

*

I suppose “love” expresses something more intense than *bhālobāshā* which can include mere liking or affection. But whether love or *bhālobāshā*, the human feeling is always either based on or strongly mixed with ego, — that is why it cannot be pure. It is said in the Upanishad, “One does not love the wife for the sake of the wife” or the child or friend etc. as the case may be “but for one’s self’s sake one loves the wife”. There is usually a hope of return, of benefit or advantage of some kind, or of certain pleasures and satisfactions, mental, vital or physical, that the person loved can give. Remove these things and the love very

soon sinks, diminishes or disappears or turns into anger, reproach, indifference or even hatred. But there is also an element of habit, something that makes the presence of the person loved a sort of necessity because it has always been there—and this is sometimes so strong that even in spite of entire incompatibility of temper, fierce antagonism, something like hatred, it lasts and even these gulfs of discord are not enough to make the persons part; in other cases this feeling is more tepid and after a time one gets accustomed to separation or accepts a substitute. There is again often the element of some kind of spontaneous attraction or affinity, mental, vital or physical, which gives a stronger cohesion to the love. Lastly, there is in the highest or deepest kind of love the psychic element, which comes from the inmost heart and soul, a kind of inner union or self-giving or at least a seeking for that, a tie or an urge independent of other conditions or elements, existing for its own sake and not for any mental, vital or physical pleasure, satisfaction, interest or habit. But usually the psychic element in human love, even where it is present, is so much mixed, overloaded and hidden under the others that it has little chance of fulfilling itself or achieving its own natural purity and fullness. What is called love is therefore sometimes one thing, sometimes another, most often a confused mixture, and it is impossible to give a general answer to the questions you put as to what is meant by love in such and such a phrase. It depends on the persons and the circumstances.

When the love goes towards the Divine, there is still this ordinary human element in it. There is the call for a return and if the return does not seem to come, the love may sink; there is the self-interest, the demand for the Divine as a giver of all that the human being wants and, if the demands are not acceded to, abhimana against the Divine, loss of faith, loss of fervour. Etc. etc. But the true love for the Divine is in its fundamental nature not of this kind, but psychic and spiritual. The psychic element is the need of the inmost being for self-giving, love, adoration, union which can only be fully satisfied by the Divine. The spiritual element is the need of the being for contact, merging, union with its own highest and whole self and source of being and

consciousness and bliss, the Divine. These two are two sides of the same thing. The mind, vital, physical can be the supports and recipients of this love, but they can be fully that only when they become remoulded into harmony with the psychic and spiritual elements of the being and no longer bring in the lower insistences of the ego.

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Love for the Divine must be there in all the being—not only in the spirit and the psychic heart, but in the vital and the physical consciousness also.

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The influence of the love for the Divine when it takes hold of any part is to turn it towards the Divine—as you describe it “concentration on the Mother”—and in the end all is gathered and harmonised around this central turn of the being. The difficulty is with the mechanical parts of the being in which the old thoughts go on recurring by habit. If the concentration continues to grow, this becomes a thing of little importance at the circumference of the mind and in the end drops away to be replaced by things that belong to the new consciousness.

Human Love in the Sadhana

And first about human love in the sadhana. The soul's turning through love to the Divine must be through a love that is essentially divine, but as the instrument of expression at first is a human nature, it takes the forms of human love and bhakti. It is only as the consciousness deepens, heightens and changes that that greater eternal love can grow in it and openly transform the human into the divine. But in human love itself there are several kinds of motive-forces. There is a psychic human love which rises from deep within and is the result of the meeting of the inner being with that which calls it towards a divine joy and union; it is, once it becomes aware of itself, something lasting, self-existent, not dependent upon external satisfactions,

not capable of diminution by external causes, not self-regarding, not prone to demand or bargain but giving itself simply and spontaneously, not moved to or broken by misunderstandings, disappointments, strife and anger, but pressing always straight towards the inner union. It is this psychic love that is closest to the divine and it is therefore the right and best way of love and bhakti. But that does not mean that the other parts of the being, the vital and physical included, are not to be used as means of expression or that they are not to share in the full play and the whole meaning of love, even of divine love. On the contrary, they are a means and can be a great part of the complete expression of divine love,— provided they have the right and not the wrong movement. There are in the vital itself two kinds of love,— one full of joy and confidence and abandon, generous, unbargaining, ungrudging and very absolute in its dedication and this is akin to the psychic and well-fitted to be its complement and a means of expression of the divine love. And neither does the psychic love or the divine love despise a physical means of expression wherever that is pure and right and possible: it does not depend upon that, it does not diminish, revolt or go out like a snuffed candle when it is deprived of any such means; but when it can use it, it does so with joy and gratitude. Physical means can be and are used in the approach to divine love and worship; they have not been allowed merely as a concession to human weakness, nor is it the fact that in the psychic way there is no place for such things. On the contrary they are one means of approaching the Divine and receiving the Light and materialising the psychic contact, and so long as it is done in the right spirit and they are used for the true purpose they have their place. It is only if they are misused or the approach is not right because tainted by indifference and inertia, or revolt or hostility, or some gross desire, that they are out of place and can have a contrary effect.

But there is another way of vital love which is more usually the way of human nature and that is a way of ego and desire. It is full of vital craving, desire and demand; its continuance depends upon the satisfaction of its demands; if it does not get what it

craves, or even imagines that it is not being treated as it deserves — for it is full of imaginations, misunderstandings, jealousies, misinterpretations — it at once turns to sorrow, wounded feeling, revolt, pride, anger, all kinds of disorder, finally cessation and departure. A love of this kind is in its very nature ephemeral and unreliable and it cannot be made a foundation for divine love. There has been too much of this kind in the relations of the sadhaks with the Mother — approaching her, I suppose, as a human mother with all the reactions of the lower vital nature. For a long time it was perforce tolerated — and this was the concession made to human weakness — even accepted in the beginning as a thing too prominent in the human being not to be there to some extent but to be transformed by degrees; but too often, it has refused to transform itself and has made itself a source of confusion, disorder, *asiddhi*, sometimes complete disaster. It is for this reason that we discourage this lower vital way of human love and would like people to reject and eliminate these elements as soon as may be from their nature. Love should be a flowering of joy and union and confidence and self-giving and Ananda, — but this lower vital way is only a source of suffering, trouble, disappointment, disillusion and disunion. Even a slight element of it shakes the foundations of peace and replaces the movement towards Ananda by a fall towards sorrow, discontent and Nirananda.

In your own case you often write in your wrong moods as if human love, even with some of these lower ingredients, were the only thing possible to you. But that is not so at all, for it contradicts your own deepest experiences. Always what your inner being has asked is Love, Bhakti, Ananda and whenever it comes to the surface it is, even if only in a first elementary form, the divine love which it brings with it. A basis of deep and intense calm and stillness, a great intensity of emotion and Bhakti, an inrush of Ananda, this is in these moments your repeated experience. On the other hand when you insist too much on the love which exists by external cravings, what comes is the other movement — fits of despondency, sorrow, Nirananda. In stressing on the psychic basis, in wishing you to conquer this

other movement, I am only pointing you to the true way of your own nature—of which the psychic bhakti, the true vital love are the real moving forces, and the other is only a superficial immixture.

Human Love and Divine Love

May I put in a plea for my poor Supramental against which you seem to have something like a grudge? I should like to say that the Supramental is not something cold, distant and remote; on the contrary, when it descends into the physical, it will mean the full outflow and full completeness and expression of love on the vital and physical as well as on every other plane. And it is because I know it means this and many other desirable things that I am so insistent on bringing it down as soon as possible.

And let me say also that, as regards human love and divine love, I admitted the first as that from which we have to proceed and to arrive at the other, intensifying and transforming into it, not eliminating, human love. Divine Love, in my view of it, is again not something ethereal, cold and far, but a love absolutely intense, intimate and full of unity, closeness and rapture using all the nature for its expression. Certainly, it is without the confusions and disorders of the present lower vital nature which it will change into something entirely warm, deep and intense; but that is no reason for supposing that it will lose anything that is true and happy in the elements of love.

*

Love cannot be cold—for there is no such thing as cold love, but the love of which the Mother speaks in that passage¹ is something very pure, fixed and constant; it does not leap like fire and sink for want of fuel, but is steady and all-embracing

¹ “It [the being] knows that this active state of love should be constant and impersonal, that is, absolutely independent of circumstances and persons, since it cannot and must not be concentrated upon any one thing in particular. . . .” *The Mother, Prayers and Meditations*, (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 2003), *Collected Works of the Mother (second edition)*, vol. 1, p. 335.

and self-existent like the light of the sun. There is also a divine love that is personal, but it is not like the ordinary personal human love dependent on any return from the person—it is personal but not egoistic,—it goes from the real being in the one to the real being in the other. But to find that, liberation from the ordinary human way of approach is necessary.

*

The Divine Love, unlike the human, is deep and vast and silent; one must become quiet and wide to be aware of it and reply to it. X must make it his whole object to be surrendered so that he may become a vessel and instrument—leaving it to the Divine Wisdom and Love to fill him with what is needed. Let him also fix this in the mind not to insist that in a given time he must progress, develop, get realisation; whatever time it takes, he must be prepared to wait and persevere and make his whole life an aspiration and an opening for the one thing only, the Divine. To give oneself is the secret of sadhana, not to demand and acquire. The more one gives oneself, the more the power to receive will grow. But for that all impatience and revolt must go; all suggestions of not getting, not being helped, not being loved, going away, of abandoning life or the spiritual endeavour must be rejected.

*

The Mother did not tell you that love is not an emotion, but that Divine Love is not an emotion,—a very different thing to say. Human love is made up of emotion, passion and desire,—all of them vital movements, therefore bound to the disabilities of the human vital nature. Emotion is an excellent and indispensable thing in human nature, in spite of all its shortcomings and dangers,—just as mental ideas are excellent and indispensable things in their own field in the human stage. But our aim is to go beyond mental ideas into the light of the supramental Truth, which exists not by ideative thought but by direct vision and identity. In the same way our aim is to go beyond emotion to the height and depth and intensity of the Divine Love and there feel

through the inner psychic heart an inexhaustible oneness with the Divine which the spasmodic leapings of the vital emotions cannot reach or experience.

As supramental Truth is not merely a sublimation of our mental ideas, so Divine Love is not merely a sublimation of human emotions; it is a different consciousness, with a different quality, movement and substance.

*

Human love is mostly vital and physical with a mental support — it can take an unselfish, noble and pure form and expression only if it is touched by the psychic. It is true, as you say, that it is more usually a mixture of ignorance, attachment, passion and desire. But whatever it may be, one who wishes to reach the Divine must not burden himself with human loves and attachments, for they form so many fetters and hamper his steps, turning him away besides from the concentration of his emotions on the one supreme object of love.

There is such a thing as psychic love, pure, without demand, sincere in self-giving, but it is not usually left pure in the attraction of human beings to one another. One must also be on one's guard against the profession of psychic love when one is doing sadhana,— for that is most often a cloak and justification for yielding to a vital attraction or attachment.

Universal love is the spiritual founded on the sense of the One and the Divine everywhere and the change of the personal into a wide universal consciousness, free from attachment and ignorance.

Divine love is of two kinds — the Divine love for the creation and the souls that are part of itself and the love of the seeker and love for the Divine Beloved; it has both a personal and impersonal element, but the personal is free here from all lower elements or bondage to the vital and physical instincts.

*

If I am to take some expressions in one of your letters at their face value you seem to put forward — at least as a poet

—three notions about spiritual seeking which are somewhat extraordinary.

1. “It is the *same* love which is addressed towards a ‘carnal prize’ and towards the Divine.” I should imagine that one who approached the Divine with a “carnal” or an untransformed vital love would embrace something of the vital world but certainly get nowhere near the Divine.

2. The Divine in itself is something cold and empty and dark—only human love gives it some warmth and attraction. I always thought that the Divine was the supreme ineffable Ananda of which human love and delight is only a clouded and fallen ray—most often hardly even that—compared with the empyrean of ethereal fire. How can the luminous eternal Ananda be something cold and dark, I should like to know?

3. Or perhaps you only mean that the Divine Infinite which the calm sages seek is by the very fact of their calm and wisdom something cold, dark, empty, gloomy. Has it not occurred to you that if they really sought for something cold, dark and gloomy as the supreme good, they would not be sages but asses? The sages sought after the Divine as the supreme existence, consciousness and Bliss, the Light beyond lights by which all this shineth, the joy beyond all other joys. Even the seekers of the Absolute Indefinable find in it the peace that passeth all understanding and that is nothing cold, dark or gloomy. The Nihilistic Buddhists? But they did not believe in the Divine or in Eternity, only in Non-existence and what they sought was not the supreme good, but self-extinction and the end of suffering—an intelligible aim, but something quite different from the stress towards the Eternal.

The Vital and Love for the Divine

When the vital joins in the love for the Divine, it brings into it heroism, enthusiasm, intensity, absoluteness, exclusiveness, the spirit of self-sacrifice, the total and passionate self-giving of all the nature. It is the vital passion for the Divine that creates the spiritual heroes, conquerors or martyrs.

*

I have never said that the vital is to have no part in the love for the Divine, only that it must purify and ennoble itself in the light of the psychic being. The results of self-loving love between human beings are so poor and contrary in the end — that is what I mean by the ordinary vital love — that I want something purer and nobler and higher in the vital also for the movement towards the Divine.

*

The outer being has to learn to love in the psychic way without ego. If it loves in the egoistic vital way, then it only creates difficulties for itself and for the sadhana and for the Mother.

*

Yes, that is the nature of vital love. It is based on desire and the sense of claim or sense of possession; psychic love is based on self-giving.

*

If the love is absolute and complete and there has never been any vital demand connected with it, then suggestions of revolt cannot come.

*

Formerly whenever the opening of the heart came you began to associate it with vital enjoyment and turned it upon others instead of turning the love towards the Divine and keeping its essential purity — so also the higher consciousness when it came down was being dispersed in mental movements. This time they were both coming in a purer form, but the danger of the mental and vital forces catching hold of them is still there and then both are likely to stop or break down. So you must be careful to allow no vital deviation this time.

*

Your difficulty is that the vital has not yet arrived at the secret of the self-existent Ananda of love, the Ananda of love's own pure

truth, the inner beauty of it for its own sake, the secret of the inner abiding ecstasy; it cannot yet believe that the thing exists. But it is travelling towards it and this feeling was probably a stage — a groping after a purer vital emotion on the way to the purest of all which is one with the Divine.

*

What he describes² is a vital demand of the ego for emotional self-satisfaction; it is Maya. It is not true love, for true love seeks for union and self-giving and that is the love one must bring to the Divine. This vital (so-called) love brings only suffering and disappointment; it does not bring happiness; it never gets satisfied and, even if it is granted something that it asks for, it is never satisfied with it.

It is perfectly possible to get rid of this Maya of the vital demand, if one wishes to do it, — but the will to do it must be sincere. If he is sincere in his will, he will certainly get help and protection.

*

Generally when people speak of vital intimacy they mean something very external which does not need to be brought down since it is common in human life. If it is the inner vital intimacy with the Divine, then of course that makes the union more complete, provided it is based on the psychic.

² The correspondent wrote, "I want a heart that can respond to all my moods, that can understand me, that can do me justice, that can love me intensely and exclusively." Sri Aurobindo's reply was written to his secretary, who answered the enquirer. — Ed.

Chapter Two

Bhakti, Devotion, Worship

Turning the Emotions towards the Divine

It is no part of this Yoga to dry up the heart; but the emotions must be turned towards the Divine. There may be short periods in which the heart is quiescent, turned away from the ordinary feelings and waiting for the inflow from above; but such states are not states of dryness but of silence and peace. The heart in this Yoga should in fact be the main centre of concentration until the consciousness rises above.

*

Emotion is a good element in Yoga; but emotional *desire* becomes easily a cause of perturbation and an obstacle.

Turn your emotions towards the Divine, aspire for their purification; they will then become a help on the way and no longer a cause of suffering.

Not to kill emotion, but to turn it towards the Divine is the right way of the Yoga.

But it must become pure, founded upon spiritual peace and joy, capable of being transmuted into Ananda. Equality and calm in the mind and vital parts, an intense psychic emotion in the heart can perfectly go together.

Awake by your aspiration the psychic fire in the heart that burns steadily towards the Divine—that is the one way to liberate and fulfil the emotional nature.

*

Emotion is necessary in the Yoga and it is only the excessive emotional sensitiveness which makes one enter into despondency over small things that has to be overcome. The very basis of this Yoga is bhakti and if one kills one's emotional being there can be no bhakti. So there can be no possibility of emotion

being excluded from the Yoga.

*

It is only the ordinary vital emotions, which waste the energy and disturb the concentration and peace, that have to be discouraged. Emotion itself is not a bad thing; it is a necessary part of the nature, and psychic emotion is one of the most powerful helps to the sadhana. Psychic emotion, bringing tears of love for the Divine or tears of ananda, ought not to be suppressed: it is only a vital mixture that brings disturbance in the sadhana.

*

It is quite true that by going above one can get out of all problems, for they no longer exist, but the problems are there below and it is difficult to be always above with so much unsolved and calling for solution. But just as one can go high above, so one can go deep within and it is this going deep within that is needed. What happened was at the surface of the emotional being and if one simply stays there the difficulties of the emotional can come, but what has to be done is not to stay on the surface but go deep within. For the psychic is there behind the emotional surface, deep behind the heart centre. Once one reaches it, these things can no longer touch; what will be there is the inner peace and happiness, the untroubled aspiration, the presence or nearness of the Mother.

*

To indulge in the emotions, love, grief, sorrow, despair, emotional joy etc. for their own sake with a sort of mental-vital over-emphasis on them is what is called sentimentalism. There should be even in deep feeling a calm, a control, a purifying restraint and measure. One should not be at the mercy of one's feelings and sentiments, but master of oneself always.

*

When the consciousness indulges in these things [*joy and sorrow*] and wallows in the excitement of emotional joy or

suffering, that is called sentimentalism. There is another kind in which the mind enjoys its perceptions of emotion, love and suffering etc. and plays with them, but that is a less violent and more superficial sentimentalism.

Bhakti or Devotion

Bhakti is not an experience, it is a state of the heart and soul. It is a state which comes when the psychic being is awake and prominent.

*

The very object of Yoga is a change of consciousness—it is by getting a new consciousness or by unveiling the hidden consciousness of the true being within and progressively manifesting and perfecting it that one gets first the contact and then the union with the Divine. Ananda and bhakti are part of that deeper consciousness, and it is only when one lives in it and grows in it that ananda and bhakti can be permanent. Till then, one can only get experiences of ananda and bhakti, but not the constant and permanent state. But the state of bhakti and constantly growing surrender does not come to all at an early stage of the sadhana; many, most indeed, have a long journey of purification and tapasya to go through before it opens, and experiences of this kind, at first rare and interspaced, afterwards frequent, are the landmarks of their progress. It depends on certain conditions, which have nothing to do with superior or inferior Yoga capacity, but rather with a predisposition in the heart to open, as you say, to the Sun of the divine Influence.

*

You are no doubt right about asking for the bhakti, for I suppose it is the master-claim of your nature: for that matter, it is the strongest motive force that sadhana can have and the best means for all else that has to come. It is why I said that it is through the heart that spiritual experience must come to you. The loyalty and the rest that you have for me and the Mother

may not, as you say, be part of the bhakti itself, but they could not be there were not the bhakti deep inside. It is its coming out in full force into the surface consciousness that is to be brought about and it seems to me that it is inevitable that it should come as the outer coverings fall off. What is within must surely make its way to the surface.

*

You believe in traditional ideas of Yoga — well, according to traditional ideas also, the one easiest method is that of bhakti, reliance, self-giving, *bhakti, nirbhara, samarpāna*. What still stands in your way — for it was and is growing towards that in you, is an old confusion in mind and vital. The heart says, “I want bhakti”, the mind says, “No, no, let us reason”, the vital says, “Nonsense, I can’t surrender.” What you need is to quiet down that confusion created by the mind’s past sanskaras and either fix on the one thing or harmonise. Bhakti as the basic force, knowledge, strength and joy in the Divine as the result — that is the harmony proposed in this Yoga. But in either way, if either is done, then peace becomes easily possible.

*

What I meant by the change was the great improvement in your mental and vital attitude and reactions to outward things and to life which was very evident in your letters and account of happenings and gave them quite a new atmosphere warm and clear and psychic. Naturally the change is not yet absolute and integral, but it does seem to be fundamental. Moreover, it is certainly due to a growing bhakti within, especially an acceptance of bhakti as your path and of the implications of that acceptance. The mind has taken a new poise less intellectual and more psychic. What prevents you from seeing the growth of bhakti (sometimes you have seen it and written about it) is a continuance of the physical mind which sets going with a constant repetitionary whirl of its fixed ideas whenever there is any touch of depression. One of these ideas is that you don’t progress, will not progress and can never progress, the old thing

that used to say, "Yoga is not for the likes of me" etc. The activity of the physical mind (next to the wrong activity of the vital) is what most keeps one's consciousness on the surface and prevents it from being conscious within and of what goes on within; it can see something of what happens on the surface of the nature, the results of the inner movement but not the cause of the happenings, which is the inner movement itself. That is one reason why I like to see the physical mind occupied in poetry and music etc. and other salubrious activities which help the inner growth and in which the inner bhakti can express itself, for that keeps the physical mind busy, unoccupied with the mechanical rotatory movement and allows and helps the inner growth. The rotatory movement is less than it was before and I expect it one of these days to get tired of itself and give up altogether.

*

What you felt about replacement is quite true. The transformation proceeds to a large extent by a taking away or throwing out of the old superficial self and its movements and replacing them by a new deeper self and its true action.

It does not matter if the higher feelings, devotion etc. seem to you sometimes like an influence or colouring. It looks like that when you feel yourself in the external physical or outer vital or outer mind. These feelings really are those of your inmost self, your soul, the psychic in you and when you are in the psychic consciousness, they become normal and natural. But when your consciousness shifts and becomes more external, then these workings of the soul or of the divine consciousness are felt as themselves external, as merely an influence. All the same, you have to open yourself to them constantly and they will then more and more either soak in steadily or come in successive waves or floods and go on till they have filled the mind, the vital, the body. You will then feel them always as not only normal but as part of your very self and the true substance of your nature.

*

The flow of devotion and love is a thing which the more it repeats

or awakens is bound to overflow to all the parts of being and have its effect on them.

*

If it is the way of *ahaitukī bhakti* that you want to follow, that can be no obstacle; for there can be none better. For in that way everything can be made a means—poetry and music for instance become not merely poetry and music and not merely even an expression of bhakti, but themselves a means of bringing the experience of love and bhakti. Meditation itself becomes not an effort of mental concentration, but a flow of love and adoration and worship. If simply and sincerely followed, the way of *ahaitukī bhakti* can lead as far as any other.

*

There can be no such thing as a mechanical and artificial devotion—there is either devotion or there is not. Devotion may be intense or not intense, complete or incomplete, sometimes manifest and sometimes veiled, but mechanical or artificial devotion is a contradiction in terms.

*

These [*arguments against external bhakti*] are the exaggerations made by the mind taking one side of Truth and ignoring the other sides.¹ The inner bhakti is the main thing and without it the external becomes a form and mere ritual, but the external has its place and use when it is straightforward and sincere.

*

Bhakti should be for the Divine only—the sadhaks are sadhaks, trying to reach the Divine, but still full of faults and struggles.

*

A “bhakti” which claims everything from the Divine and does not give itself is not real bhakti.

¹ *The correspondent had been asked by a fellow-sadhak, “Why do you want to meditate on a photograph of Sri Aurobindo? If you can meditate within, this external form of bhakti is not necessary.” — Ed.*

Bhakti and Love

The nature of bhakti is adoration, worship, self-offering to what is greater than oneself—the nature of love is a feeling or seeking for closeness and union. Self-giving is the character of both; both are necessary in the Yoga and each gets its full force when supported by the other.

*

Love is not a name of the Divine, it is a power of his consciousness and being. Bhakti and love are not quite the same thing, but love is one of the elements of bhakti. There are different kinds of bhakti and that which is of the nature of love is the strongest and is considered the highest, most intense and ecstatic of all. Also in love itself that form of it which is made of self-giving; surrender, absolute adoration, urge towards a selfless union is the true kind of bhakti that is love. “Conquering love” or “Love the victor”² means love prevailing over all that stands in the way of its reign, over ignorance, falsehood, selfishness, ego, passion and lust, outward or self-regarding desires and all else till it reigns alone and victorious, bringing down all the other gifts of the Divine Consciousness. It is by force of love and selflessness and self-giving that the sadhak can help Love to conquer.

*

I suppose it [*premabhakti*] is bhakti with love as its basis; there can be bhakti of worship, submission, reverence, obedience etc. but without love.

*

Selflessness, self-giving, entire faith and confidence, absence of demand and desire, surrender to the Divine Will, love concentrated on the Divine—are some of the main signs [of *true love and bhakti*].

² These are probably the names of two roses named by the Mother according to their significance.—Ed.

Emotional Bhakti

It is a misunderstanding to suppose that I am against Bhakti or against emotional Bhakti—which comes to the same thing, since without emotion there can be no Bhakti. It is rather the fact that in my writings on Yoga I have given Bhakti the highest place. All that I have said at any time which could account for this misunderstanding was against an *unpurified* emotionalism which, according to my experience, leads to want of balance, agitated and disharmonious expression or even contrary reactions and, at its extreme, nervous disorder. But the insistence on purification does not mean that I condemn true feeling and emotion any more than the insistence on a purified mind or will means that I condemn thought and will. On the contrary, the deeper the emotion, the more intense the Bhakti, the greater is the force for realisation and transformation. It is oftenest through intensity of emotion that the psychic being awakes and there is an opening of the inner doors to the Divine.

*

If one does not encourage the devotion of the emotional being merely because the lower vital is not yet under control and acts differently, then how is the devotion to grow and how is the lower vital to change? Until the final clarification and harmonising of the nature there are always contradictions in the being, but that is not a reason for in any way suppressing the play of the better movements—on the contrary it is these that should be cultivated and made to increase.

*

It [*emotion*] has its place, only it must not be always thrown outward but pressed inward so as to open fully the psychic doors.

*

The emotional [*devotion*] is more outward than the psychic [*devotion*]—it tends towards outward expression. The psychic is

inward and gives the direction to the whole inner and outer life. The emotional can be intense, but is neither so sure in its basis nor powerful enough to change the whole direction of the life.

Vital Bhakti

Vital bhakti is usually full of desires and demands,—it expects a return for what it gives; it loves the Divine more for its own sake than for the sake of the Divine. If it does not get what it wants, it is capable of revolting or turning elsewhere. It is often pursued by jealousy, misunderstanding, unfaithfulness, anger etc.,—the usual imperfections of human love, and can turn these against its object of bhakti. On the other hand, if there is vital bhakti governed by the psychic, these defects disappear and the vital gives an ardour and enthusiasm to the love and bhakti which gives it a greater push for effectuation in action and life. The vital should always be the instrument of the soul for self-expression in life and not act on its own account (ego, desire) or on its own separate impulse.

*

The vital bhakti is egoistic, usually full of claims and demands on the Divine and revolting when they are not satisfied. The mental is simply a worship in the thought and idea without love in the heart.

*

It [*an inner state of dryness*] is because it is the analysing mind that is active — that always brings a certain dryness; the higher mind or the intuition bring a much more spontaneous and complete knowledge — the beginning of the real Jnana without this effect. The bhakti which you feel is psychic, but with a strong vital tinge; and it is the mind and the vital between them that bring in the opposition between the bhakti and the Jnana. The vital concerned only with emotion finds the mental knowledge dry and without rasa, the mind finds the bhakti to be a blind emotion fully interesting only when its character has been analysed and understood. There is no such opposition when the psychic

and the higher plane knowledge act together predominantly—the psychic welcomes knowledge that supports its emotion, the higher thought consciousness rejoices in the bhakti.

*

It is a mistake to think that a constant absence of *vyākulatā* is a sign that the aspiration or will for the Divine is not true. It is only in certain exclusive forms of Bhakti Yoga that a constant *vyākulatā* or weeping or *hāhākāra* (the latter is more often vital than psychic) is the rule. Here though the psychic yearning may come sometimes or often in intense waves, what comes as the basis is a quietude of the being and in that quietude a more and more steady perception of the truth and seeking for the Divine and need of the Divine so that all is turned towards that more and more. It is into this that the experience and growing realisation come. Because the opening is growing in you, you are getting this *ābhāsa* of the presence (beyond form) of the Mother. It is as the inner realisation grows that the presence in the physical form takes its full value.

Viraha or Pangs of Separation

Viraha is a transitional experience on the plane of the vital seeking for the Spirit—there is no reason why it should not be possible at a quite early stage. It is the realisations without any uneasiness, realisations in pure Ananda that belong to the more developed sadhana.

*

The pure feeling of *viraha* is psychic—but if rajasic or tamasic movements come in (such as depression, complaint, revolt etc.) then it becomes tamasic or rajasic.

*

Pangs of separation belong to the vital, not to the psychic; the psychic having no pangs need not express them. The psychic is always turned towards the Divine in faith, joy and confidence

—whatever aspiration it has is full of trust and hope.

Enmity to the Divine

I have not had time yet to write about the enmity theory. I will do so more fully in two or three days. But I may say at once that the idea does not seem to me at all true that by enmity to the Divine one can reach the Divine and that too more quickly than by bhakti. The idea is contrary to the spiritual truth of things, to reason, to nature and to experience.

*

As regards your defence of X, they sound like X's own ideas and very queer ideas they are. If they are right, we should have to come to the following conclusions —

1. Sattwa is not the best passage towards realisation, Rajas is the best way to become spiritual. It is the rajasic man with his fierce ego and violent passions who is the true sadhak of the Divine.

2. The Asura is the best bhakta. The Gita is quite wrong in holding up the Deva nature as the condition of realisation and the Asura nature as contrary to it. It is the other way round.

3. Ravana, Hiranyakashipu, Shishupala were the greatest devotees of the Divine because they were capable of hostility to the Divine and so were liberated in a few lives — compared with them the great Rishis and Bhaktas were very poor spiritual vessels. I am aware of the paradox about Ravana in the Purana, but let me point out that these Asuras and Rakshasas did not pretend to be disciples or worshippers of Rama or Krishna or Vishnu or use their position as disciples to get moksha by revolt — they got it by being enemies and getting killed and absorbed into the Godhead.

4. Obedience to the Guru, worship of the Divine are all tommy rot and fit only for sheep, not men. To turn round furiously on the Guru or the Divine, abuse him, express contempt, challenge his sincerity, declare his actions to be wrong, foolish or a trick — to assert oneself as right at every point and his

judgment as mistaken, prejudiced, absurd, false, a support of devils etc. etc. is the best way of devotion and the true relation between Guru and Shishya. Disobedience is the highest respect to the Guru, anger and revolt are the noblest worship one can give to the Divine.

5. One who takes the blows of Mahakali with joy as a means of discovering his faults and increasing in light and strength and purity is a sheep and unworthy of disciplehood — one who responds to the quietest pressure to change by revolt and persisting in his errors is a strong man and a mighty adhar and a noble disciple on the way to perfection.

I could go on multiplying the consequences, but I have no time. Do you really believe all these things? They are the natural consequences of X's theory or of this theory of revolt as the way to perfection. If you accept the premiss, you have to accept the logical consequences. That is what X did — only he called his errors Truth and the way prescribed by me was falsehood explicable only by the fact that I was a "Master who had forgotten his higher self". And the consequences led to his departure, not willed by us, but by his own choice — and under such circumstances that he has made it a practical impossibility for me to let him come back unless he undergoes a change which the experience of the past does not warrant me in thinking possible.

Contact with the Divine

Aspiration and devotion are the natural and easy means for getting the contact. The other way by effort is laborious, slow and not sure. The mind must open, but it will open best by the power of devotion and aspiration.

*

The more the calm, peace, joy and happiness descend and take possession, the stronger the foundation. It is the sign of the contact.

The other thing needed is the descent of the consciousness which you felt in the heart and breast. That will come of itself,

if this devotion and sole dependence on the Light continues.

*

The psychic contact does not bring mental knowledge, but it brings true perception and true feeling and it can bring down also, if you aspire from the psychic centre, a knowledge higher and truer than intellectual knowledge.

*

Quietude and surrender are the first things to be established. In that must come the full contact. By that contact, if well established, will come a steady progressive sadhana, not the old confused sadhana.

*

When you fall from the contact, the first and only thing you have to do is to reestablish it—to remain quiet and open yourself. Everything else you must detach yourself from and reject. It is because you listen to ideas and suggestions of all kinds and still attach value to the old kind of “experiences”, that you cannot reestablish the contact.

*

As for not having it [*contact*] always, it is because there are parts of the being that are still unconscious or perhaps states of unconsciousness come. For instance, people write letters to each other, but they are quite unconscious that they are exchanging forces in doing so. You have become conscious of it, because of the development of your inner consciousness by Yoga—and yet there are likely to be times when you still write from the external awareness only, and then you will see the words only without being aware of what is behind. So owing to the development of the inner consciousness, you are able to understand what contacts are and get the true contact, but at times the external consciousness may be stronger than the inner one, then you are no longer (for the time being) able to get the contact.

*

The photograph is a vehicle only³ — but if you have the right consciousness, then you can bring something of the living being into it or become aware of the being for which it stands and can make it a means of contact. It is like the *prāṇapratisthā* in the image in the temple.

Contact and Union with the Divine

Seeing is of many kinds. There is a superficial seeing which only erects or receives momentarily or for some time an image of the Being seen; that brings no change, unless the inner bhakti makes it a means for change. There is also the reception of the *living* image of the Divine in one of his forms into oneself, — say, in the heart, — that can have an immediate effect or initiate a period of spiritual growth. There is also the seeing outside oneself in a more or less objective and subtle physical or physical way.

As for *milana*, the abiding union is within and that can be there at all times; the outer *milana* or contact is not usually abiding. There are some who often or almost invariably have the contact whenever they worship; the Deity may become living to them in the picture or other image they worship, may move and act through it; others may *feel* him always present, outwardly, subtle-physically, abiding with them where they live or in the very room; but sometimes this is only for a period. Or they may feel the Presence with them, see it frequently in a body (but not materially except sometimes), feel its touch or embrace, converse with it constantly, — that is also one kind of *milana*. The greatest *milana* is one in which one is constantly aware of the Deity constantly abiding in oneself, in everything in the world, holding all the world in him, identical with existence and yet supremely beyond the world — but in the world too one sees, hears, feels nothing but him, so that the very senses bear witness to him alone — and this does *not* exclude such specific personal manifestations as those vouchsafed to Krishnaprem

³ While looking at a photograph of Sri Aurobindo, the correspondent felt that he was looking at a living being with eyes “as living as real eyes”. — Ed.

and his guru. The more ways there are of the union, the better.

*

Adesh and darshan are elements of a stage of sadhana in which there is still much distance from the closer state of union. The mind and vital seek the contact through darshan and the guidance through Adesh. What we aim at in our Yoga is the constant union and presence and control of the Divine at every moment. But on the mental and vital level this usually remains imperfect and there is much chance of error. It is by the supramentalisation that the perfect Truth of this Divine Union in action can come.

Outer Worship

There is no restriction in this Yoga to inward worship and meditation only. As it is a Yoga for the whole being, not for the inner being only, no such restriction could be intended. Old forms of the different religions may fall away, but absence of all forms is not the rule of the sadhana.

*

I was thinking [*in writing “Old forms . . . may fall away”*] not of Pranam etc. which have a living value, but of old forms which persist although they have no longer any value—e.g. Sraddha for the dead. Also here forms which have no relation to this Yoga—for instance Christians who cling to the Christian forms or Mahomedans to the Namaz or Hindus to the Sandhyavandana in the old way may soon find them either falling off or else an obstacle to the free development of their sadhana.

*

What is meant by *bāhyapūjā*? If it is purely external, then of course it is the lowest form; but if done with the true consciousness inside, it can bring the greatest completeness of the adoration by allowing the body and the most external consciousness to share in the spirit and act of worship.

*

What you say is no doubt true, but it is better not to take away the support that may still be there for the faith of those who need such supports. These visions and images and ceremonies are meant for that. It is a spiritual principle not to take away any faith or support of faith unless the persons who have it are able to replace it by something larger and more complete.

If the *prāṇapratīṣṭhā* brings down a powerful Presence [*into an image*], that may remain there long after the one who has brought it has left his body. Usually it is maintained by the bhakti of the officiant and the sincerity of belief and worship of those who come to the temple for adoration. If these fail there is likely to be a withdrawal of the Presence.

*

The “scientific” explanation [*for the disappearance of food offered to a deity in a temple*] would be that somebody, a servant perhaps, disregarding prohibitions got secretly in and polished off the food of offering when there was nobody to see! That however assumes that occult manifestations are impossible, which is not the case; it is besides only a probable inference or theory. Occultists, or some of them, hold that the food offered to unseen beings is sometimes (but not by any means always) taken in its subtle elements, leaving the outward body of the food as it was. The actual taking of the food, physically, is rare, but instances are believed to have happened where the bhakti was very strong.

Prayer

Prayer and aspiration are a part of the spiritual life and do not conflict with surrender, provided one is not disturbed in either way by the fulfilment or unfulfilment of the prayer and keeps one’s faith and quietude all the same. In the ordinary life prayer is one of the chief elements of human relation with the Divine and is often but not always answered; when it is not answered the religious man keeps his faith in the Divine and either understands that to answer was not the Divine Will or else he prays

more fervently till his prayer is heard—that depends on the man and the circumstances. A sadhak can intercede internally for others in their affairs, provided he remains unattached and equal-minded, but he is not bound to intervene.

*

Of course all prayer is not heard—the world would be a still more disastrous affair than it is, if everybody's prayers were heard, however sincere. Even the Godward prayer is not always heard—at once, even as faith is not always justified at once. Both prayer and faith are powers towards realisation which have been given to man to aid him in his struggle—without them, without aspiration and will and faith (for aspiration is a prayer) it would be difficult for him to get anywhere. But all these things are merely means for setting the Divine Force in action—and it sometimes takes long, very long even, before the forces come into action or at least before they are seen to be in action or bear their result. The ecstasist is not altogether wrong even when he overstates his case. Even the overstatements sometimes help to convince the Cosmic Power, so that it says "Oh well, if it is like that all right—".

*

As for prayer, no hard and fast rule can be laid down. Some prayers are answered, all are not. You may ask, why should not then all prayers be answered? But why should they be? It is not a machinery: put a prayer in the slot and get your asking. Besides, considering all the contradictory things mankind is praying for at the same moment, God would be in a rather awkward hole if he had to grant all of them; it wouldn't do.

*

If one lives in the world one can offer such prayers [*for help in resolving worldly problems*]; but one must not expect that the Divine shall fulfil all those prayers or think that he is bound to do so. When one is a sadhak the prayer should be for the inner things belonging to the sadhana and for outer things only so far

as they are necessary for that and for the divine work.

*

What you say about prayer is correct. That [*impersonal prayer*] is the highest kind of prayer, but the other kind also (i.e. the more personal) is permissible and even desirable. All prayer rightly offered brings us closer to the Divine and establishes a right relation with Him.

*

As for the prayers, the fact of praying and the attitude it brings, especially unselfish prayer for others, itself opens you to the higher Power, even if there is no corresponding result in the person prayed for. Nothing can be positively said about that, for the result must necessarily depend on the persons, whether they are open or receptive or something in them can respond to any Force the prayer brings down.

*

Prayers should be full of confidence and without sorrow or lamenting.

Part Three

The Integral Yoga and Other Spiritual Paths

Section One

A Yoga of Transformation

Chapter One

Distinctive Features of the Integral Yoga

The Meaning of Purna Yoga

Purna Yoga means (1) that instead of approaching the Divine through the mind alone (Jnana) or the heart alone (Bhakti) or through will and works alone (Karma Yoga), one seeks the Divine with all the parts and powers of the consciousness and the being, uniting these three ways and many others in a single Yoga (way of union with the Divine) and receives the Divine in His presence, consciousness, force, light and bliss in all the consciousness and the being.

(2) That one seeks not only the realisation of the Divine in the soul and self but also in the whole nature (that means the transformation of this lower human into the Divine spiritual nature).

(3) That one seeks the Divine not only beyond life (by the cessation of birth) but for life, so that life also may become a realisation of the Divine and a manifestation of the Divine Nature.

*

As for the book itself,¹ I am unfortunately ignorant of the Telugu language and cannot read the original, but from the account given in English I have formed some idea of the substance. I gather that it is in the main a statement and justification of the Purna Yoga and of my message; I believe you have rightly stated the two main elements of it,—first, the acceptance of the world as a manifestation of the Divine Power, not its rejection as a mistake or an illusion, and, secondly, the character of this manifestation as a spiritual evolution with Yoga as a means for

¹ A book by a disciple living outside the Ashram. — Ed.

the transformation of mind, life and body into the instruments of a spiritual and supramental perfection. The universe is not only a material but a spiritual fact, life not only a play of forces or a mental experience, but a field for the evolution of the concealed spirit. Human life will receive its fulfilment and transformation into something beyond itself only when this truth is seized and made the motive force of our existence and the means of its effective realisation discovered. The means of realisation is to be found in an integral Yoga, a union in all the parts of our being with the Divine and a consequent transmutation of all their now jarring elements into the harmony of a higher divine consciousness and existence.

This-Worldliness and Other-Worldliness

One thing I feel I must say in connection with your remark about the soul of India and X's observation about "this stress on this-worldliness to the exclusion of other-worldliness". I do not quite understand in what connection his remark was made or what he meant by this-worldliness, but I feel it necessary to state my own position in the matter. My own life and my Yoga have always been, since my coming to India, both this-worldly and other-worldly without any exclusiveness on either side. All human interests are, I suppose, this-worldly and most of them have entered into my mental field and some, like politics, into my life, but at the same time, since I set foot on Indian soil on the Apollo Bunder in Bombay, I began to have spiritual experiences, but these were not divorced from this world but had an inner and intimate bearing on it, such as a feeling of the Infinite pervading material space and the Immanent inhabiting material objects and bodies. At the same time I found myself entering supraphysical worlds and planes with influences and an effect from them upon the material plane, so I could make no sharp divorce or irreconcilable opposition between what I have called the two ends of existence and all that lies between them. For me all is the Brahman and I find the Divine everywhere. Everyone has the right to throw away this-worldliness and choose other-worldliness

only and if he finds peace by that choice he is greatly blessed. I, personally, have not found it necessary to do this in order to have peace. In my Yoga also I found myself moved to include both worlds in my purview, the spiritual and the material, and to try to establish the divine Consciousness and the divine Power in men's hearts and in earthly life, not for personal salvation only but for a life divine here. This seems to me as spiritual an aim as any and the fact of this life taking up earthly pursuits and earthly things into its scope cannot, I believe, tarnish its spirituality or alter its Indian character. This at least has always been my view and experience of the reality and nature of the world and things and the Divine: it seemed to me as nearly as possible the integral truth about them and I have therefore spoken of the pursuit of it as the integral Yoga. Everyone is, of course, free to reject and disbelieve in this kind of integrality or to believe in the spiritual necessity of an entire other-worldliness excluding any kind of this-worldliness altogether, but that would make the exercise of my Yoga impossible. My Yoga can include indeed a full experience of the other worlds, the plane of the supreme Spirit and the other planes in between and their possible effects upon our life and material world; but it will be quite possible to insist only on the realisation of the supreme Being or Ishwara even in one aspect, Shiva, Krishna as Lord of the world and Master of ourselves and our works or else the universal Sachchidananda, and attain to the essential results of this Yoga and afterwards to proceed from them to the integral results if one accepted the ideal of the divine life and this material world conquered by the Spirit. It is this view and experience of things and of the truth of existence that enabled me to write *The Life Divine* and *Savitri*. The realisation of the Supreme, the Ishwara, is certainly the essential thing; but to approach him with love and devotion and bhakti, to serve him with one's works and to know him, not necessarily by the intellectual cognition, but in a spiritual experience, is also essential in the path of the integral Yoga.

The Importance of Descent in the Yoga

I meant by it [*the phrase “a far greater Truth”*] the descent of the supramental Consciousness upon earth; all truths below the supramental (even that of the highest spiritual on the mental plane, which is the highest that has yet manifested) are either partial or relative or otherwise deficient and unable to transform the earthly life, they can only at most modify and influence it. The supermind is the vast Truth-consciousness of which the ancient seers spoke; there have been glimpses of it till now, sometimes an indirect influence or pressure, but it has not been brought down into the consciousness of the earth and fixed there. To so bring it down is the aim of our Yoga.

But it is better not to enter into sterile intellectual discussions. The intellectual mind cannot even realise what the supermind is; what use, then, can there be in allowing it to discuss what it does not know? It is not by reasoning, but by constant experience, growth of consciousness and widening into the Light that one can reach those higher levels of consciousness above the intellect from which one can begin to look up to the Divine Gnosis. Those levels are not yet the supermind, but they can receive something of its knowledge.

The Vedic Rishis never attained to the supermind for the earth or perhaps did not even make the attempt. They tried to rise individually to the supramental plane, but they did not bring it down and make it a permanent part of the earth-consciousness. Even there are verses of the Upanishad in which it is hinted that it is impossible to pass through the gates of the Sun (the symbol of the supermind) and yet retain an earthly body. It was because of this failure that the spiritual effort of India culminated in Mayavada. Our Yoga is a double movement of ascent and descent; one rises to higher and higher levels of consciousness, but at the same time one brings down their power not only into mind and life, but in the end even into the body. And the highest of these levels, the one at which it aims is the supermind. Only when that can be brought down is a divine transformation possible in the earth-consciousness.

*

I never heard of silence descending in other Yogas — the mind goes into silence. Since however I have been writing of ascent and descent, I have been told from several quarters that there is nothing new in this Yoga — so I am wondering whether people were not getting ascents and descents without knowing it! or at least without noticing the process. It is like the rising above the head and taking the station there — which I and others have experienced in this Yoga. When I spoke of it first, people stared and thought I was talking nonsense. Wideness must have been felt in the old Yogas because otherwise one could not feel the universe in oneself or be free from the body consciousness or unite with the Anantam Brahman. But generally as in Tantrik Yoga one spoke of the consciousness rising to the Brahmarandhra, top of the head, as the summit. Rajayoga of course lays stress on Samadhi as the means of the highest experience. But obviously if one has not the Brahmi sthiti in the waking state, there is no completeness in the realisation. The Gita distinctly speaks of being *samāhita* (which is equivalent to being in samadhi) and the Brahmi sthiti as a waking state in which one lives and does all actions.

*

It happens that people may get the descent without noticing that it is a descent because they feel the result only. The ordinary Yoga does not go beyond the spiritual mind — people feel at the top of the head the joining with the Brahman, but they are not aware of a consciousness above the head. In the same way in the ordinary Yoga one feels the ascent of the awakened inner consciousness (Kundalini) to the *brahmarandhra* where the Prakriti joins the Brahman-consciousness, but they do not feel the descent. Some may have had these things, but I don't know that they understood their nature, principle or place in a complete sadhana. At least I never heard of these things from others before I found them out in my own experience. The reason is that the old Yogins when they went above the spiritual mind passed into samadhi, which means that they did not attempt to be conscious in these higher planes — their aim being to pass away into the

Superconscient and not to bring the Superconscient into the waking consciousness, which is that of my Yoga.

*

I explain this absence of the descent experiences myself by the old Yogas having been mainly confined to the psycho-spiritual-occult range of experience—in which the higher experiences come into the still mind or the concentrated heart by a sort of filtration or reflection—the field of this experience being from the Brahmarandhra downward. People went above this only in samadhi or in a condition of static mukti without any dynamic descent. All that was dynamic took place in the region of the spiritualised mental and vital-physical consciousness. In this Yoga the consciousness (after the lower field has been prepared by a certain amount of psycho-spiritual-occult experience) is drawn upwards above the Brahmarandhra to ranges above belonging to the spiritual consciousness proper and instead of merely receiving from there has to live there and from there change the lower consciousness altogether. For there is a dynamism proper to the spiritual consciousness whose nature is Light, Power, Ananda, Peace, Knowledge, infinite Wideness and that must be possessed and descend into the whole being. Otherwise one can get mukti but not perfection or transformation (except a relative psycho-spiritual change). But if I say that, there will be a general howl against the unpardonable presumption of claiming to have a knowledge not possessed by the ancient saints and sages and pretending to transcend them. In that connection I may say that in the Upanishads (notably the Taittiriya) there are some indications of these higher planes and their nature and the possibility of gathering up the whole consciousness and rising into them. But this was forgotten afterwards and people spoke only of the buddhi as the highest thing with the Purusha or Self just above, but there was no clear idea of these higher planes. Ergo, ascent possibly to unknown and ineffable heavenly regions in samadhi, but no descent possible—therefore no resource, no possibility of transformation here, only escape

from life and mukti in Goloka, Brahmaloka, Shivaloka or the Absolute.

*

Perhaps you are of the opinion of Ramana Maharshi, "The Divine is here, how can he descend from anywhere?" The Divine may be here, but if he has covered here his Light with darkness of Ignorance and his Ananda with suffering, that, I should think, makes a big difference to the plane and, even if one enters into that sealed Light etc., it makes a difference to the Consciousness but very little to the Energy at work in this plane which remains of a dark or mixed character.

The Inclusiveness of the Yoga

I don't know why it [*a comparison between Sri Aurobindo's Yoga and someone else's*] should be disparaging to my Yoga. My Yoga takes up all the Yoga of the past and goes beyond.

*

One can feel the experiences of any sadhana as a part of this one.

Chapter Two

Asceticism and the Integral Yoga

Not an Ascetic Path

It is not indispensable to be an ascetic—it is enough if one can learn to live within in the inner being instead of on the surface, discover the soul or true individuality which is veiled by the surface mind and life forces and open the being to the superconscious Reality. But in this one cannot succeed unless one is wholly sincere and one-pointed in the effort.

As to the second question, participation in Sri Aurobindo's¹ mission depends on capacity to do a difficult Yoga or on a call to devote oneself to that ideal without thought of the claims of the ego or the vital desires. Otherwise it is better not to think of it.

*

It is good that you have decided to concentrate on the true object of your coming here, but while absorption in mental work and social contacts is not favourable for Yoga, excessive seclusion has also its spiritual disadvantage. An inner concentration supported by a limitation of external contacts is sufficient. Some kind of activity and service to the Divine is also a very necessary element in the integral spiritual life.

*

To be by oneself very much needs a certain force of inner life. It may be better to vary solitude with some sort of its opposite. But each has its advantages and disadvantages and it is only by being vigilant and keeping an inner poise that one can avoid the latter.

*

¹ In this letter to an enquirer living outside the Ashram, Sri Aurobindo refers to himself in the third person.—Ed.

I think there is still a misunderstanding in your mind about the demands of the Yoga. The Divine does *not* demand a complete solitude, aloof and lonely — it is only a few whose nature needs such concentration within to find themselves who have to do that and even for them a complete segregation is not likely to be helpful except perhaps for a time. All that is necessary is a total turning of the life to the Divine and it can be done by degrees without too much forcing of the nature. Literature, poetry, music can be as much a part of Yoga as anything else.

One can meet the Divine in speaking as well as in silence, in action as well as in physical solitude and quietude. An entire retirement can only be a personal case — and as a condition for an inward or outward work, but it is no general rule indispensable for the sadhana. In many cases, most indeed, it would do more harm than good as has been seen in many cases where it has been unduly attempted. A cheerful and sunny life is as good an atmosphere for Yoga as any the Himalayas can give.

Why then this depression and despair?

*

I may say that I am not responsible for your loss of zest in the vital. This vairagya, or loss of zest, as you have yourself said, began before you came here. I have indeed laid some stress on the conquest of sex, for obvious reasons; but I have hardly laid a compulsory stress on anything else. Certainly, I have not encouraged you to lose joy in vital creativeness; I have only held up the ideal of turning it towards the Divine and away from the ego. To keep the vital full of life and energy and to trust mainly to the inner growth and the descent of a higher consciousness for a change, using the will too but for self-mastery, not for suppression, but for subordination of the lower to the higher, has been my teaching. The turn to vairagya, to tapasya of an ascetic kind was the impulse of something in your own nature; it insisted on its necessity just as a part of the vital insisted on its opposite: even it condemned my suggestion of something less grim and strenuous as an easy-going absence of aspiration etc. I do not say that vairagya and tapasya are not ways to reach

the Divine, but done like that they are painful ways and long; if one takes them, one must be determined and go through. For one part to push all zest out of the vital and for the other to regret and say, why did I ever do it, will never do. And it is in this kind of tapasya that perfection or at least perfect purification is demanded before there can be any realisation. I have never said that for my Yoga; the only thing I insist upon is some faith, inner surrender and opening of oneself to receive, —not absolute, but just sufficient. Experience has to begin long before perfect purification and from experience to experience one comes to realisation and through realisation to more and more perfection; anything that can be called real perfection can only come at the end. But there is something in you that is impatient of gradualness, of small mercies; its motto seems to be all or nothing.

*

I am rather aghast as I stare at the detailed proposals made by you! Fastings? I don't believe in them, though I have done them myself. You would only eat like an ogre afterwards. Shaved head! Great heavens! have you realised the consequences? I pass over the aesthetic shock to myself from which I might not recover—but the row that would arise from Cape Comorin to the Himalayas! You would be famous in a new way which would cast all your previous Glories into the shade. And just when you are turning away from fame and all the things of the ego! No, no—too dangerous by half. Sleep without the mosquito net? That would mean no sleep which is as bad as no eating. Not only your eyes would become weak, but yourself also—and to boot gloomy, grey and gruesome, more gruesome than the Supramental of your worst apprehensions. No and no again. As for the rest, I placed some of them before the Mother and she eyed them without favour.

After all real asceticism is hardly possible except in a hut or on the Himalayas. The heart of asceticism, besides, is having no desires or attachment, being indifferent, able to do without things, satisfied with whatever comes. If you asceticise outwardly

it becomes a rule of life and you keep it up because it is a rule, for the principle of the thing or for the *kudos* of it or as a point of honour. But I have noticed about the ascetics by rule that when you remove the curb they become just like others—with a few exceptions, of course,—which proves that the transformation was not real. A more subtle method used by some is to give up for a time, then try the object of desire again and so go on till you have thoroughly tested yourself! E.g. you give up your potatoes and eat only Asram food for a time—if a call comes for the potatoes or from them, then you are not cured; if no call comes, still you cannot be sure till you have tried the potatoes again and seen whether the desire, attachment or sense of need revives. If it does not and the potatoes fall away from you of themselves, then there is some hope that the thing is done!

However, all this will make you think that I am hardly fit to be a guru in the path of asceticism and you will probably be right. You see, I have such a strong penchant for the inner working and am so persuaded that if you give the psychic a chance, it will get rid of the vital bonds without all this sternness and trouble.

*

Rules like these [*not reading newspapers, eating a fixed diet, keeping only a few things*] are intended to help the vital and physical to come under the discipline of sadhana and not get dispersed in fancies, impulses, self-indulgences; but they must be done simply, not with any sense of superiority or ascetic pride, but as a mere matter of course. It is true also that they can be made the occasion of a too great mental rigidity—as if they were things of supreme importance *in themselves* and not only a means. Put in their right place and done in the right spirit, they can be very helpful for their purpose.

Asceticism and Detachment

This is a feeling (the unimportance of things in Time) that the ascetic discipline sometimes uses in order to get rid of attachment

to the world—but it is not good for any positive or dynamic spiritual purpose.

*

Sannyasa does not take away attachment—it amounts only to running away from the object of attachment which may help but cannot by itself alone be the radical cure.

*

After realisation whatever the Higher Will demands is the best—but first detachment is the rule. To reach the Freedom without the discipline and detachment is given to few.

Two Methods of Living in the Supreme

There are always two methods of living in the Supreme. One is to draw away the participation of the consciousness from things altogether and go so much inwards as to be separated from existence and live in contact with that which is beyond it. The other is to get to that which is the true Essence of all things, not allowing oneself to be absorbed and entangled by the external forms. Desire, attachment, slavery to the attractions of the external sense are the chief obstacles to this movement—so in either way they have to be got rid of. But it is quite possible to see the Supreme before the attraction of external sense is gone—only one cannot live securely in It if there is desire and external attachment because that is always taking one away from the inner poise.

*

This Yoga does not mean a rejection of the powers of Life, but an inner transformation and a change of the spirit in the life and the use of the powers. These powers are now used in an egoistic spirit and for undivine ends; they have to be used in a spirit of surrender to the Divine and for the purposes of the divine Work. That is what is meant by conquering them back for the Mother. If anyone feels himself too weak to resist the clutch of the egoistic money-force he need not make the endeavour.

The Human Approach to the Divine

I send you the promised letter today;² you will see that it is less a reply to the exact terms of your letter than a “Defence of the gospel of divinisation of life” against the strictures and the incomprehensions of the mentality (or more often the vitality) that either misunderstands or shrinks from it—or perhaps misunderstands because it shrinks, and shrinks too because it misunderstands both my method and my object. It is not a complete defence, but only raises or answers a main point here and there. The rest will come hereafter.

But all language is open to misunderstanding; so I had better in sending on the letter make or try to make certain things clear.

1. Although I have laid stress on things divine in answer to an excessive (because contrary) insistence on things human, it must not be understood that I reject everything human,—human love or worship or any helpful form of human approach as part of the Yoga. I have never done so, otherwise the Asram could not be in existence. The sadhaks who enter the Yoga are human beings, and if they were not allowed a human approach at the beginning and long after, they would not be able to start the Yoga or would not be able to continue it. The discussion arises only because the word “human” is used in practice, not only as identical with the human vital (and the outward mind), but with certain forms of the human vital ego-nature. But the human vital has many other things in it and is full of excellent material. All that is asked by the Yoga is that this material should be utilised in the right way and with the right spiritual attitude and, also, that the human approach to the Divine should not be constantly turned into a human revolt and reproach against it. And that too we ask only for the sake of the success of the approach itself and of the human being who is making it.

2. Divinisation itself does not mean the destruction of the human elements; it means taking them up, showing them the way to their own perfection, raising them by purification and

² See the letter beginning “Even if things” on pages 475–83.—Ed.

perfection to their full power and Ananda. And that means the raising of the whole of earthly life to its full power and Ananda.

3. If there were not a resistance in vital human nature, a pressure of forces adverse to the change, forces which delight in imperfection and even in perversion, this change would effect itself without difficulty by a natural and painless flowering—as, for example, your own powers of poetry and music have flowered out here with rapidity and ease under the light and rain of a spiritual and psychic influence—because everything in you desired that change and your vital was willing to recognise imperfections, to throw away any wrong attitude—e.g., the desire for mere fame—and to be dedicated and perfect. Divinisation of life means, in fact, a greater art of life; for the present art of life produced by ego and ignorance is something comparatively mean, crude and imperfect (like the lower forms of art, music and literature which are yet more attractive to the ordinary human mind and vital), and it is by a spiritual and psychic opening and refinement that it has to reach its true perfection. This can only be done by its being steeped in the divine Light and Flame in which its material will be stripped of all heavy dross and turned into the true metal.

4. Unfortunately, there *is* the resistance, a very obscure and obstinate resistance. That necessitates a “negative” element in the Yoga, an element of rejection of things that stand in the way and of pressure upon those forms that are crude and useless to disappear, on those that are useful but imperfect or have been perverted to attain or to recover their true movement. To the vital this pressure is very painful, first, because it is obscure and does not understand and, secondly, because there are parts of it that want to be left to their crude motions and not to change. That is why the intervention of a psychic attitude is so helpful. For the psychic has the happy confidence, the ready understanding and response, the spontaneous surrender; it knows that the touch of the Guru is meant to help and not to hurt, or, like Radha in the poem, that whatever the Beloved does is meant to lead to the Divine Rapture.

5. At the same time, it is not from the negative part of the

movement that you have to judge the Yoga, but from its positive side; for the negative part is temporary and transitional and will disappear, the positive alone counts for the ideal and for the future. If you take conditions which belong to the negative side and to a transitional movement as the law of the future and the indication of the character of the Yoga, you will commit a serious misjudgment, a grave mistake. This Yoga is not a rejection of life or of closeness and intimacy between the Divine and the sadhaks. Its ideal aims at the greatest closeness and unity on the physical as well as the other planes, at the most divine largeness and fullness and joy of life.

Vairagya

Vairagya means a positive detachment from things of this life — but it does not *immediately* carry with it a luminous aspiration except for a few fortunate people. For the positive detachment is often a pulling away by the soul while the vital clings and is gloomy and reluctant.

*

Vairagya is certainly one way of progressing towards the goal — the traditional way and a drastic if painful one. To lose the desire for human vital enjoyments, to lose the passion for literary or other success, praise, fame, to lose even the insistence on spiritual success, the inner bhoga of Yoga, have always been recognised as steps towards the goal — provided one keeps the one insistence on the Divine. I prefer myself the calmer way of equality, the way pointed out by Krishna, than the more painful one of Vairagya. But if the compulsion in one's nature — or the compulsion of one's inner being forcing its way by that means through the difficulties of the nature — is on that line, it must be recognised as a valid line. What has to be got rid of in that case is the note of despair in the vital which responds to the cry you speak of — that it will never gain the Divine because it has not yet got the Divine or that there has been no progress. There has certainly been a progress, the greater push of the psychic, this

very detachment itself always growing somewhere in you. The thing is to hold on, not to cut the cord which is pulling you up because it hurts the hands. To keep the one insistence if all the others fall away from you.

It is evident that something in you, perhaps continuing the unfinished curve of a past life, is pushing you on this path of vairagya and the more stormy way of bhakti—in spite of our preference for a less painful one and yours also—something that is determined to be drastic with the outer nature so as to make itself free to fulfil its secret aspiration. But do not listen to these suggestions of the voice that says, “You shall not succeed and it is no use trying.” That is a thing that need never be said in the Way of the Spirit, however difficult it may seem at the moment to be. Keep through all the aspiration which you express so beautifully in your poem; for it is certainly there and comes out from the depths, and if it is the cause of suffering—as great aspirations usually are in a world and nature where there is so much to oppose them—it is also the promise and surety of emergence and victory in the future.

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I quite acknowledge the utility of a temporary state of vairagya as an antidote to the too strong pull of the vital. But vairagya always tends to a turning away from life and a tamasic element in vairagya, despair, depression etc., often dilapidates the force of the being and may even lead in some cases to falling between two stools so that one loses earth and misses heaven. I therefore prefer to replace vairagya by a firm and quiet rejection of what has to be rejected, sex, vanity, ego-centrism, attachment, etc. etc.; but that does not include rejection of the activities and powers that can be made instruments of the sadhana and the divine work, such as art, music, poetry etc.—Yoga can be done without the rejection of life, without killing or impairing the life-joy and the vital force.

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I have objected in the past to vairagya of the ascetic kind and the

tamasic kind — and by the tamasic kind I mean that spirit which comes defeated from life, not because it is really disgusted with life but because it could not cope with it or conquer its prizes; for it comes to Yoga as a kind of asylum for the maimed or weak and to the Divine as a consolation prize for the failed boys in the world-class. The vairagya of one who has tasted the world's gifts or prizes but found them insufficient or, finally, tasteless and turns away towards a higher and more beautiful ideal or the vairagya of one who has done his part in life's battles but seen that something greater is demanded of the soul, is perfectly helpful and a good gate to the Yoga. Also the sattwic vairagya which has learned what life is and turns to what is above and behind life. By the ascetic vairagya I mean that which denies life and world altogether and wants to disappear into the Indefinite — and I object to it for those who come to this Yoga because it is incompatible with my aim which is to bring the Divine into life. But if one is satisfied with life as it is, then there is no reason to seek to bring the Divine into life, — so vairagya in the sense of dissatisfaction with life as it is is perfectly admissible and even in a certain sense indispensable for my Yoga.

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There is the sattwic vairagya — but many people have the rajasic or tamasic kind. The rajasic is carried by a revolt against the conditions of one's own life, the tamasic arises from dissatisfaction, disappointment, a feeling of inability to succeed or face life, a crushing under the grips and pains of life. These bring a sense of the vanity of existence, a desire to seek something less miserable, more sure and happy or else to seek a liberation from existence here, but they do not bring immediately a luminous aspiration or pure aspiration with peace and joy for the spiritual attainment.

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No, I didn't say that you chose the rajasic or tamasic vairagya. I only explained how it came, of itself, as a result of a movement of the vital in place of the sattwic vairagya which is supposed to precede and cause or accompany or result from a turning away

from the world to seek the Divine. The tamasic vairagya comes from the recoil of the vital when it feels that it has to give up the joy of life and becomes listless and joyless; the rajasic comes when the vital begins to lose the joy of life but complains that it is getting nothing in its place. Nobody chooses such movements; they come independently of the mind as habitual reactions of the human nature. To replace these things by detachment, an increasing quiet aspiration, a pure bhakti, an ardent surrender to the Divine, was what I suggested as the true forward movement.

Chapter Three

A Realistic Adwaita

The World Not an Illusion

I do not agree with the view that the world is an illusion, *mithyā*. The Brahman is here as well as in the supracosmic Absolute. The thing to be overcome is the Ignorance which makes us blind and prevents us from realising Brahman in the world as well as beyond it and the true nature of existence.

Shankara, Buddhism, Evolution

I don't know that I can help you very much with an answer to your friend's questions. I can only state my own position with regard to these matters.

1. Shankara's explanation of the universe.

It is rather difficult to say nowadays what really was Shankara's philosophy: there are numberless exponents and none of them agrees with any of the others. I have read accounts given by some scores of his exegetes and each followed his own line. We are even told by some that he was no Mayavadin at all although he has always been famed as the greatest exponent of the theory of Maya, but rather, the greatest Realist in philosophical history. One eminent follower of Shankara even declared that my philosophy and Shankara's were identical, a statement which rather took my breath away. One used to think that Shankara's philosophy was this that the Supreme Reality is a spaceless and timeless Absolute (Parabrahman) which is beyond all feature or quality, beyond all action or creation, and that the world is a creation of Maya, not absolutely unreal but real only in time and while one lives in time; once we get into a knowledge of the Reality we perceive that Maya and world and all in it have no abiding or true existence. It is, if not non-existent, yet false, *jagan mithyā*; it is a mistake of the consciousness, it is

and it is not; it is an irrational and inexplicable mystery in its origin, though we can see its process or at least how it keeps itself imposed on the consciousness. Brahman is seen in Maya as Ishwara upholding the works of Maya and the apparently individual soul is really nothing but Brahman itself. In the end, however, all this seems to be a myth of Maya, *mithyā*, and not anything really true. If that is Shankara's philosophy, it is to me unacceptable and incredible, however brilliantly ingenious it may be and however boldly and incisively reasoned; it does not satisfy my reason and it does not agree with my experience.

I don't know exactly what is meant by this *yuktivāda*. If it is meant that it is merely for the sake of arguing down opponents, then this part of the philosophy has no fundamental validity; Shankara's theory destroys itself. Either he meant it as a sufficient explanation of the universe or he did not. If he did, it is no use dismissing it as *yuktivāda*. I can understand that thoroughgoing Mayavadin's declaration that the whole question is illegitimate, because Maya and the world do not really exist; in fact the problem how the world came into existence is only a part of Maya, is like Maya unreal and does not truly arise; but if an explanation is to be given it must be a real and valid satisfying explanation. If there are two planes and in putting the question we are confusing the two planes, that argument can only be of value if both planes have some kind of existence and the reasoning and explanation are true in the lower plane but cease to have any meaning for a consciousness which has passed out of it.

2. Adwaita.

People are apt to speak of the Adwaita as if it were identical with Mayavada monism, just as they speak of Vedanta as if it were identical with Adwaita only; that is not the case. There are several forms of Indian philosophy which base themselves upon the One Reality, but they admit also the reality of the world, the reality of the Many, the reality of the differences of the Many as well as the sameness of the One (*bhedābheda*). But the Many exist in the One and by the One, the differences are variations in manifestation of that which is fundamentally ever the same. This

we actually see as the universal law of existence where oneness is always the basis with an endless multiplicity and difference in the oneness; as for instance there is one mankind but many kinds of man, one thing called leaf or flower but many forms, patterns, colours of leaf and flower. Through this we can look back into one of the fundamental secrets of existence, the secret which is contained in the one Reality itself. The oneness of the Infinite is not something limited, fettered to its unity; it is capable of an infinite multiplicity. The Supreme Reality is an Absolute not limited by either oneness or multiplicity but simultaneously capable of both; for both are its aspects, although the oneness is fundamental and the multiplicity depends upon the oneness.

There is possible a realistic as well as an illusionist Adwaita. The philosophy of *The Life Divine* is such a realistic Adwaita. The world is a manifestation of the Real and therefore is itself real. The reality is the infinite and eternal Divine, infinite and eternal Being, Consciousness-Force and Bliss. This Divine by his power has created the world or rather manifested it in his own infinite Being. But here in the material world or at its basis he has hidden himself in what seem to be his opposites, Non-Being, Inconscience and Insentience. This is what we nowadays call the Inconscient which seems to have created the material universe by its inconscient Energy; but this is only an appearance, for we find in the end that all the dispositions of the world can only have been arranged by the working of a supreme secret intelligence. The Being which is hidden in what seems to be an inconscient void emerges in the world first in Matter, then in Life, then in Mind and finally as the Spirit. The apparently inconscient Energy which creates is in fact the Consciousness-Force of the Divine and its aspect of consciousness, secret in Matter, begins to emerge in Life, finds something more of itself in Mind and finds its true self in a spiritual consciousness and finally a supramental consciousness through which we become aware of the Reality, enter into it and unite ourselves with it. This is what we call evolution which is an evolution of consciousness and an evolution of the Spirit in things and only outwardly an evolution of species. Thus also, the delight of existence emerges from the

original insentience first in the contrary forms of pleasure and pain and then has to find itself in the bliss of the Spirit or as it is called in the Upanishads, the bliss of the Brahman. That is the central idea in the explanation of the universe put forward in *The Life Divine*.

3. Nirguna and Saguna.

In a realistic Adwaita there is no need to regard the Saguna as a creation from the Nirguna or even secondary or subordinate to it: both are equal aspects of the one Reality, its position of silent status and rest and its position of action and dynamic force; a silence of eternal rest and peace supports an eternal action and movement. The one Reality, the Divine Being is bound by neither since it is in no way limited; it possesses both. There is no incompatibility between the two, as there is none between the Many and the One, the sameness and the difference. They are all eternal aspects of the universe which could not exist if either of them were eliminated, and it is reasonable to suppose that they both came from the Reality which has manifested the universe and are both real. We can only get rid of the apparent contradiction—which is not really a contradiction but only a natural concomitance—by treating one or the other as an illusion. But it is hardly reasonable to suppose that the eternal Reality allows the existence of an eternal illusion with which it has nothing to do or that it supports and enforces on being a vain cosmic illusion and has no power for any other and real action. The force of the Divine is always there in silence as in action, inactive in silence, active in the manifestation. It is hardly possible to suppose that the Divine Reality has no power or force or that its only power is to create a universal falsehood, a cosmic lie—*mithyā*.

4. Compounds and Disintegration.

No doubt all compounds, being not integral things in themselves but integrations, can disintegrate. Also it is true of life, though not a physical compound, that it has a curve of birth or integration and, after it reaches a certain point, of disintegration, decay and death. But these ideas or this rule of existence cannot be safely applied to things in themselves. The soul is not

a compound but an integer, a thing in itself; it does not disintegrate, but at most enters into manifestation and goes out of manifestation. That is true even of forms other than constructed physical or constructed life-forms; they do not disintegrate but appear and disappear or at most fade out of manifestation. Mind itself as opposed to particular thoughts is something essential and permanent; it is a power of the Divine Consciousness. So is life, as opposed to constructed living bodies; so I think is what we call material energy which is really the force of essential substance in motion, a power of the Spirit. Thoughts, lives, material objects are formations of these energies, constructed or simply manifested according to the habit of the play of the particular energy. As for the elements, what is the pure natural condition of an element? According to modern Science what used to be called elements turn out to be compounds and the pure natural condition, if any, must be a condition of pure energy; it is that pure condition into which compounds including what we call elements must go when they pass by disintegration into Nirvana.

5. Nirvana.

What then is Nirvana? In orthodox Buddhism it does mean a disintegration, not of the soul — for that does not exist — but of a mental compound or stream of associations or *samskāras* which we mistake for ourself. In illusionist Vedanta it means not a disintegration but a disappearance of a false and unreal individual self into the one real self or Brahman; it is the idea and experience of individuality that so disappears and ceases, — we may say a false light that is extinguished (*nirvāna*) in the true Light. In spiritual experience it is sometimes the loss of all sense of individuality in a boundless cosmic consciousness; what was the individual remains only as a centre or a channel for the flow of a cosmic consciousness and a cosmic force and action. Or it may be the experience of the loss of individuality in a transcendent being and consciousness in which the sense of cosmos as well as the individual disappears. Or again, it may be in a transcendence which is aware of and supports the cosmic action. But what do we mean by the individual? What we usually call by that name is a natural ego, a device of Nature which holds

together her action in the mind and body. This ego has to be extinguished, otherwise there is no complete liberation possible; but the individual self or soul is not this ego. The individual soul is the spiritual being which is sometimes described as an eternal portion of the Divine but can also be described as the Divine himself supporting his manifestation as the Many. This is the true spiritual individual which appears in its complete truth when we get rid of the ego and our false separative sense of individuality, realise our oneness with the transcendent and cosmic Divine and with all beings. It is this which makes possible the Divine Life. Nirvana is a step towards it; the disappearance of the false separative individuality is a necessary condition for our realising and living in our true eternal being, living divinely in the Divine. But this we can do in the world and in life.

6. Rebirth.

If evolution is a truth and is not only a physical evolution of species, but an evolution of consciousness, it must be a spiritual and not only a physical fact. In that case, it is the individual who evolves and grows into a more and more developed and perfect consciousness and obviously that cannot be done in the course of a brief single human life. If there is the evolution of a conscious individual, then there must be rebirth. Rebirth is a logical necessity and a spiritual fact of which we can have the experience. Proofs of rebirth, sometimes of an overwhelmingly convincing nature, are not lacking, but as yet they have not been carefully registered and brought together.

7. Evolution.

In my explanation of the universe I have put forward this cardinal fact of a spiritual evolution as the meaning of our existence here. It is a series of ascents from the physical being and consciousness to the vital, the being dominated by the life-self, thence to the mental being realised in the fully developed man and thence into the perfect consciousness which is beyond the mental, into the Supramental consciousness and the Supramental being, the Truth-Consciousness which is the integral consciousness of the spiritual being. Mind cannot be our last conscious expression because mind is fundamentally

an ignorance seeking for knowledge; it is only the Supramental Truth-Consciousness that can bring us the true and whole Self-Knowledge and world-Knowledge; it is through that only that we can get to our true being and the fulfilment of our spiritual evolution.

Chapter Four

Transformation in the Integral Yoga

The Meaning of Transformation

By transformation I do not mean some change of the nature—I do not mean for instance sainthood or ethical perfection or Yogic siddhis (like the Tantrik's) or a transcendental (*cin-maya*) body. I use transformation in a special sense, a change of consciousness radical and complete and of a certain specific kind which is so conceived as to bring about a strong and assured step forward in the spiritual evolution of the being, an advance of a greater and higher kind and of a larger sweep and completeness than that smaller though decisive achievement of the emerging Consciousness when a mentalised being first appeared in a vital and material animal world. If anything short of that takes place or at least if a real beginning is not made on that basis, a fundamental progress towards this fulfilment, then my object is not accomplished. A partial realisation, something mixed and inconclusive, does not meet the demand I make on life and Yoga.

Light of realisation is not the same thing as Descent. Realisation by itself does not necessarily transform the being as a whole; it may bring only an opening or heightening or widening of the consciousness at the top so as to realise something in the Purusha part without any radical change in the parts of Prakriti. One may have some light of realisation at the spiritual summit of the consciousness but the parts below remain what they were. I have seen any number of instances of that. There must be a descent of the light not merely into the mind or part of it but into all the being down to the physical and below before a real and total transformation can take place. A light in the mind may spiritualise or otherwise change the mind or part of it in one way or another, but it need not change the vital nature; a light in the vital may purify and enlarge the vital movements or else silence and immobilise the vital being, but leave the body

and the physical consciousness as it was, or even leave it inert or shake its balance. And the descent of Light is not enough, it must be the descent of the whole higher consciousness, its Peace, Power, Knowledge, Love, Ananda. Moreover, the descent may be enough to liberate, but not to perfect, or it may be enough to make a great change in the inner being, while the outer remains an imperfect instrument, clumsy, sick or unexpressive. Finally, the transformation effected by the sadhana cannot be complete unless it is a supramentalisation of the being. Psychisation is not enough, it is only a beginning; spiritualisation and the descent of the higher consciousness is not enough, it is only a middle term; the ultimate achievement needs the action of the supramental Consciousness and Force. Something less than that may very well be considered enough by the individual, but it is not enough for the earth-consciousness to take the definitive stride forward it must take at one time or another.

I have never said that my Yoga was something brand new in all its elements. I have called it the integral Yoga and that means that it takes up the essence and many processes of the old Yogas — its newness is in its aim, standpoint and the totality of its method. In the earlier stages which is all I deal with in books like the *Riddle* or the *Lights*¹ there is nothing in it that distinguishes it from the old Yogas except the aim underlying its comprehensiveness, the spirit in its movements and the ultimate significance it keeps before it — also the scheme of its psychology and its working, but as that was not and could not be developed systematically or schematically in these letters, it has not been grasped by those who are not already acquainted with it by mental familiarity or some amount of practice. The detail or method of the later stages of the Yoga which go into little known or untrodden regions, I have not made public and I do not at present intend to do so.

I know very well also that there have been seemingly allied ideals and anticipations — the perfectibility of the race, certain

¹ The Riddle of This World and Lights on Yoga, two small books of letters published in 1933 and 1935 respectively. A third such book, Bases of Yoga, was published in 1936.
— Ed.

Tantric sadhanas, the effort after a complete physical siddhi by certain schools of Yoga, etc. etc. I have alluded to these things myself and have put forth the view that the spiritual past of the race has been a preparation of Nature not merely for attaining to the Divine beyond this world, but also for this very step forward which the evolution of the earth-consciousness has still to make. I do not therefore care in the least,—even though these ideals were, up to some extent parallel, yet not identical with mine,—whether this Yoga and its aim and method are accepted as new or not; that is in itself a trifling matter. That it should be recognised as true in itself by those who can accept or practise it and should make itself true by achievement, is the one thing important; it does not matter if it is called new or a repetition or revival of the old which was forgotten. I laid emphasis on it as new in a letter to certain sadhaks so as to explain to them that a repetition of the aim and idea of the old Yogas was not enough in my eyes, that I was putting forward a thing to be achieved that has not yet been achieved, not yet clearly visualised, even though it is one natural but still secret destined outcome of all the past spiritual endeavour.

It is new as compared with the old Yogas:

(1) Because it aims not at a departure out of world and life into a Heaven or a Nirvana, but at a change of life and existence, not as something subordinate or incidental, but as a distinct and central object. If there is a descent in other Yogas, yet it is only an incident on the way or resulting from the ascent—the ascent is the real thing. Here the ascent is indispensable, but what is decisive, what is finally aimed at is the resulting descent. It is the descent of the new consciousness attained by the ascent that is the stamp and seal of the sadhana. Even Tantra and Vaishnavism end in the release from life; here the object is the divine fulfilment of life.

(2) Because the object sought after is not an individual achievement of divine realisation for the sole sake of the individual, but something to be gained for the earth-consciousness here, a cosmic, not solely a supra-cosmic achievement. The thing to be gained also is the bringing in of a Power of consciousness

(the supramental) not yet organised or active directly in earth-nature, even in the spiritual life, but yet to be organised and made directly active.

(3) Because a method has been preconised for achieving this purpose which is as total and integral as the aim set before it, viz. the total and integral change of the consciousness and nature, taking up old methods but only as a part action and passing on to others that are distinctive. I have not found this method (as a whole) or anything like it in its totality proposed or realised in the old Yogas. If I had I should not have wasted my time in hewing out a road and in thirty years of search and inner creation when I could have hastened home safely to my goal in an easy canter over paths already blazed out, laid down, perfectly mapped, macadamised, made secure and public. Our Yoga is not a retreading of old walks, but a spiritual adventure.

Towards a Transformation of Earth Life

I believe Krishnaprem's comment was on a passage in which I wrote that this Yoga was not like the old ones in that it aimed not at an ascent or passing beyond life but at a descent of the divine consciousness into life. Its aim is double—two movements fusing themselves into one—an ascending into divine consciousness and a transformation of earth life by the divine consciousness coming down here. All the old Yogas put the emphasis on going to Nirvana or to heaven, Vaikuntha, Goloka, Brahmaloka etc. for good and so getting rid of rebirth. My emphasis is on life here and its transformation and I put that as the aim at once of my Yoga and of the terrestrial manifestation. I am quite unaware that any of the old Yogas hold this as the aim before them. Even Vaishnavism and Tantra are in the end other-worldly; mukti is the aim of their efforts and anything else could be only incidental and secondary or a result on the way. If my view is correct, then my statement was not an error.

I have not denied that the ideal of a change on earth is of old standing. It is there vaguely in the human mind perhaps since the beginning, though more often perfection is put in some golden

age of the past and deterioration and a cataclysm is the law of the future. Christianity foresees a descent of Christ and his rule on earth, but this is figured as an outward event, not as a change produced by an inward power and process or by Yoga. A reign of the saints is also foreshadowed in some Hindu scriptures, but that equally is something different from my conception. As for sainthood itself or the siddhis of Yoga including a siddha body, that too is not what I mean by transformation—it is a radical change of consciousness and nature itself that I envisage. I do not know also that these things were sought by the process of descent—the Tamil Shaiva saints for instance sought for the siddha body by tremendous austerities; the siddhis they sought were all there in the sukshma mental and vital worlds and by a stupendous effort and mastery of the body they brought them down into the physical instrument. I have always said that these things and these methods are out of my scope and eschewed by me in my Yoga. I tried some of these but after achieving some initial results I saw it was a bypath and I left it.

To get rid of or mastery over *kāma-krodha* is not the transformation, it is at best a preliminary step towards it provided it is done not in the moral way by mental self-control but in the spiritual way. Sainthood is not my object. I do not know how far Ramakrishna had gone towards the transformation as I conceive it; the metaphors you quote contain nothing precise with which I can compare my own experience or my own intuitions about the change. According to certain accounts there was a descent of Kali into his body which made it luminous, but he repressed it as something contrary to what he was seeking after. If there is something anywhere in the past which coincides with the aim and conceived process of my Yoga I shall be glad to know of it; for that would certainly be an aid to me. I put no value on the newness of what I am doing or trying to do. If the path was already there open and complete, it is a great pity that I should have wasted all my life clearing it out anew with much difficulty and peril when I could just have walked on a clear and safe avenue towards the goal of my endeavour. But the nearest I could get to it were some things in the Veda and Upanishads (secret

words, veiled hints) which seemed to coincide with or point towards certain things in my own knowledge and experience. But after incorporating certain parts of the Vedic method as far as I could interpret or recover it, I found it was insufficient and I had to seek farther.

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Transformation is a word that I have brought in myself (like supermind) to express certain spiritual concepts and spiritual facts of the integral Yoga. People are now taking them up and using them in senses which have nothing to do with the significance which I put into them. Purification of the nature by the "influence" of the Spirit is not what I mean by transformation; purification is only part of a psychic change or a psycho-spiritual change—the word besides has many senses and is very often given a moral or ethical meaning which is foreign to my purpose. What I mean by the spiritual transformation is something dynamic (not merely liberation of the self, or realisation of the One which can very well be attained without any descent). It is a putting on of the spiritual consciousness dynamic as well as static in every part of the being down to the subconscious. That cannot be done by the influence of the Self leaving the consciousness fundamentally as it is with only purification, enlightenment of the mind and heart and quiescence of the vital. It means a bringing down of Divine Consciousness static and dynamic into all these parts and the entire replacement of the present consciousness by that. This we find unveiled and unmixed above mind, life and body and not in mind, life and body. It is a matter of the undeniable experience of many that this can descend and it is my experience that nothing short of its *full* descent can thoroughly remove the veil and mixture and effect the full spiritual transformation. No metaphysical or logical reasoning in the void as to what the Atman "must" do or can do or needs or needs not to do is relevant here or of any value. I may add that transformation is not the central object of other paths as it is of this Yoga — only so much purification and change is demanded by them as will lead to liberation and the

beyond-life. The influence of the Atman can no doubt do that — a full descent of a new Consciousness into the whole nature from top to bottom to transform life here is not needed at all for the spiritual escape from life.

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It is not a hope but a certitude that the complete transformation of the nature will take place.

Spiritualisation and Transformation

Spiritualisation means the descent of the higher peace, force, light, knowledge, purity, Ananda etc. which belong to any of the higher planes from Higher Mind to Overmind, for in any of these the Self can be realised. It brings about a subjective transformation; the instrumental Nature is only so far transformed that it becomes an instrument for the Cosmic Divine to get some work done while the self within remains calm and free and united to the Divine. But this is an incomplete individual transformation — the full transformation of the instrumental Nature can only come when the Supramental change takes place. Till then the nature remains full of many imperfections, but the self in the higher planes does not mind them, as it is itself free and unaffected. The inner being down to the inner physical can also become free and unaffected. The Overmind is subject to limitations in the working of the effective Knowledge, limitations in the working of the Power, subjection to a partial and limited Truth, etc. It is only in the supermind that the full Truth consciousness comes into being.

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There are many planes above man's mind — the supramental is not the only one, and on all of them the self can be realised, — for they are all spiritual planes.

Mind, vital and physical are inextricably mixed together only in the surface consciousness — the inner mind, inner vital, inner physical are separate from each other. Those who seek

the self by the old Yogas separate themselves from mind, life and body and realise the self apart from these things. It is perfectly easy to separate mind, vital and physical from each other without the need of supermind. It is done by the ordinary Yogas.

The difference between this and the old Yogas is not that they are incompetent and cannot do these things — they can do them perfectly well — but that they proceed from realisation of self to Nirvana or some Heaven and abandon life, while this does not abandon life. The supramental is necessary for the transformation of terrestrial life and being, not for reaching the self. One must realise self first — only afterwards can one realise the supermind.

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In the former Yogas it was the experience of the spirit which is always free and one with the Divine that was sought. The nature had to change only enough to prevent its being an obstacle to that knowledge and experience. The complete change down to the physical was only sought for by a few and then more as a “siddhi” than anything else, not as the manifestation of a new Nature in the earth consciousness.

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I do not know that any except a very few great Yogis have really changed their outer nature. In all the Asrams I have seen people were just as others except for certain specific moral controls put on certain kinds of outer action (food, sex etc.), but the general nature was the human nature (as in the story of Narad and Janaka). It is even a theory of the old Yogas that the *prārabdha karma* and therefore necessarily the permanent elements of external character do not change — only one gets the inner realisation and separates oneself from it so that it drops off at death like a soiled robe and leaves the spirit free to enter into Nirvana. Our object is a spiritual change and not merely an ethical control, but this can only come first by a spiritual rejection from within and then by a supramental descent from above.

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Sri Aurobindo² has no remarks to make on Huxley's comments with which he is in entire agreement. But in the phrase "to its heights we can always reach" very obviously "we" does not refer to humanity in general but to those who have a sufficiently developed inner spiritual life.³ It is probable that Sri Aurobindo was thinking of his own experience. After three years of spiritual effort with only minor results he was shown by a Yogi the way to silence his mind. This he succeeded in doing entirely in two or three days by following the method shown. There was an entire silence of thought and feeling and all the ordinary movements of consciousness except the perception and recognition of things around without any accompanying concept or other reaction. The sense of ego disappeared and the movements of the ordinary life as well as speech and action were carried on by some habitual activity of Prakriti alone which was not felt as belonging to oneself. But the perception which remained saw all things as utterly unreal; this sense of unreality was overwhelming and universal. Only some undefinable Reality was perceived as true which was beyond space and time and unconnected with any cosmic activity but yet was met wherever one turned. This condition remained unimpaired for several months and even when the sense of unreality disappeared and there was a return to participation in the world-consciousness, the inner peace and freedom which resulted from this realisation remained permanently behind all surface movements and the essence of the realisation itself was not lost. At the same time an experience intervened; something else than himself took up his dynamic activity and spoke and acted through him but without any personal

² In this letter to a disciple living outside the Ashram, Sri Aurobindo refers to himself in the third person.—Ed.

³ In his book *The Perennial Philosophy* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1946, p. 74), Aldous Huxley quoted and commented on the following passage by Sri Aurobindo: "The touch of Earth is always reinvigorating to the son of Earth, even when he seeks a supraphysical Knowledge. It may even be said that the supraphysical can only be really mastered in its fullness—to its heights we can always reach—when we keep our feet firmly on the physical. 'Earth is His footing,' says the Upanishad whenever it images the Self that manifests in the universe." *The Life Divine*, volume 21 of THE COMPLETE WORKS OF SRI AUROBINDO, pp. 13–14.—Ed.

thought or initiative. What this was remained unknown until Sri Aurobindo came to realise the dynamic side of the Brahman, the Ishwara, and felt himself moved by that in all his sadhana and action. These realisations and others which followed upon them, such as that of the Self in all and all in the Self and all as the Self, the Divine in all and all in the Divine, are the heights to which Sri Aurobindo refers and to which he says we can always rise; for they presented to him no long or obstinate difficulty. The only real difficulty which took decades of spiritual effort to carry out towards completeness was to apply the spiritual knowledge utterly to the world and to the surface psychological and outer life and to effect its transformation both on the higher levels of Nature and on the ordinary mental, vital and physical levels down to the subconscious and the basic Inconscience and up to the supreme Truth-consciousness or Supermind in which alone the dynamic transformation could be entirely integral and absolute.

The Attempt at Physical Transformation

Sri Krishna never set out to arrive at any physical transformation, so anything of the kind could not be expected in his case.

Neither Buddha nor Shankara nor Ramakrishna had any idea of transforming the body. Their aim was spiritual mukti and nothing else. Krishna taught Arjuna to do liberated works, but he never spoke of any physical transformation.

I do not know that we can take this [*Yudhisthira's entry into the heavenly kingdom in his mortal body*] as a historical fact. Swarga is not somewhere in the Himalayas, it is another world in another plane of consciousness and substance. Whatever the story may mean, therefore, it has nothing to do with the question of physical transformation on earth.

*

Ramakrishna himself never thought of transformation or tried for it. All he wanted was bhakti for the Mother and along with that he received whatever knowledge she gave him and did whatever she made him do. He was intuitive and psychic from the

beginning and only became more and more so as he went on. There was no need in him for the transformation which we seek; for although he spoke of the divine man (Ishwarakoti) coming down the stairs as well as ascending, he had not the idea of a new consciousness and a new race and the divine manifestation in the earth-nature.

*

Whatever may have happened to Chaitanya or Ramalingam, whatever physical transformation they may have gone through is quite irrelevant to the aim of the supramentalisation of the body. Their new body was either a non-physical or subtle physical body not adapted for life on the earth. If it were not so, they would not have disappeared. The object of supramentalisation is a body fitted to embody and express the physical consciousness on earth so long as one remains in the physical life. It is a step in the spiritual evolution on the earth, not a step in the passage towards a supraphysical world. The supramentalisation is the most difficult part of the change arrived at by the supramental Yoga, and all depends on whether a sufficient change can be achieved in the consciousness at present to make such a step possible, but the nature of the step is different from that aimed at by other Yogas. There is not therefore much utility in these discussions — one has first of all to supramentalise sufficiently the mind and vital and physical consciousness generally — afterwards one can think of supramentalisation of the body. The psychic and spiritual transformation must come first, only afterwards would it be practical or useful to discuss the supramentalisation of the whole being down to the body.

Section Two

Other Spiritual Paths and the Integral Yoga

Chapter One

The Newness of the Integral Yoga

Old and New Truth

Well, I don't suppose the new race can be created by or according to logic or that any race has been. But why should the idea of the creation of a new race be illogical? It is not only my ideas that baffle reason, but Adhar Das's also! he must really be a superman,— self-made of course, outside the laboratory. As for the past seers, they don't trouble me. If going beyond the experiences of the past seers and sages is so shocking, each new seer and sage in turn has done that shocking thing— Buddha, Shankara, Chaitanya etc. all did that wicked act. If not, what was the necessity of their starting new philosophies, religions, schools of Yoga? If they were merely verifying and meekly repeating the lives and experiences of past seers and sages without bringing the world some new thing, why all that stir and bother? Of course, you may say they were simply explaining the old truth but in the right way — but this would mean that nobody had explained or understood it rightly before — which is again "giving the lie etc." Or you may say that all the new sages (they were not among X's cherished past ones in their day), e.g. Shankara, Ramanuja, Madhwa, were each merely repeating the same blessed thing as all the past seers and sages had repeated with an unwearyed monotony before them. Well, well, but why repeat it in such a way that each "gives the lie" to the others? Truly, this shocked reverence for the past is a wonderful and fearful thing! After all, the Divine is infinite and the unrolling of the Truth may be an infinite process or at least, if not quite so much, yet with some room for new discovery and new statement, even perhaps new achievement, not a thing in a nutshell cracked and its contents exhausted once for all by the first seer or sage, while the others must religiously crack the same nutshell all over again, each tremblingly careful not to give the lie to the "past" seers and sages.

Spiritual Realisation and the Supramental Transformation

This Yoga aims at the conscious union with the Divine in the supermind and the transformation of the nature. The ordinary Yogas go straight from Mind into some featureless condition of the cosmic Silence and through it try to disappear upward into the Highest. The object of this Yoga is to transcend mind and enter into the Divine Truth of Sachchidananda which is not only static but dynamic and raise the whole being into that Truth.

*

The Divine can be realised on any plane according to the capacity of that plane, as the Divine is everywhere. The Yogis and saints realise the Divine on the spiritualised mind plane, that does not mean they become supramental.

*

But why should they [*Yogis of the traditional schools*] feel any pressure [*of the supramental descent*] when they are satisfied with the realisation they have? They live in the spiritual mind and the nature of the mind is to separate — here to separate some high aspect or state of the Divine and seek that to the exclusion of all else. All the spiritual philosophies and schools of Yoga do that. If they go beyond, it is to the Absolute and mind cannot conceive of the Absolute except as something inconceivable, *neti neti*. Moreover for getting samadhi they concentrate on one single idea and what they reach is that which is represented by that idea — the samadhi is in its nature an exclusive concentration on that. So why should it open them to anything else? There are only a few who are sufficiently plastic to escape from this self-limitation of the sadhana — what they experience is that there is no end to the realisation, when you get to one peak, you find another beyond it. In order to see more than this one has to get into conscious waking touch with the supramental or at least get a glimpse of it — and that means passing beyond spiritual mind.

*

Certainly, the realisation of the Spirit comes long before the development of Overmind or Supermind; hundreds of sadhaks in all times have had the realisation of the Atman on the higher mental plane, *buddheḥ parataḥ*, but the supramental realisation was not theirs. One can get *partial* realisations of the Self or Spirit or the Divine on any plane, mental, vital, physical even, and when one rises above the ordinary mental plane of man into a higher and larger mind, the Self begins to appear in all its conscious wideness. It is by full entry into this wideness of the Self that cessation of mental activity becomes possible; one gets the inner Silence. After that this inner Silence can remain even when there is activity of any kind; the being remains silent within, the action goes on in the instruments and one receives all the necessary indications and execution of action whether mental, vital or physical from a higher source without the fundamental peace and calm of the Spirit being troubled.

The Overmind and Supermind states are something yet higher than this; but before one can understand them, one must first have the self-realisation, the full action of the spiritualised mind and heart, the psychic awakening, the liberation of the imprisoned consciousness, the purification and entire opening of the *ādhāra*. Do not think now of those ultimate things (Overmind, Supermind), but get first these foundations in the liberated nature.

*

By divine realisation is meant the spiritual realisation — the realisation of Self, Bhagavan or Brahman on the mental-spiritual plane or else the overmental plane. That is a thing (at any rate the mental-spiritual) which thousands have done. So it is obviously easier to do than the supramental. Also nobody can have the supramental realisation who has not had the spiritual.

It is true that neither can be got in any effective way unless the whole being is turned towards it — unless there is a real and very serious spirit and dynamic reality of sadhana.

It is true that I want the supramental not for myself but for the earth and souls born on the earth, and certainly therefore

I cannot object if anybody wants the supramental. But there are the conditions. He must want the Divine Will first and the soul's surrender and spiritual realisation (through works, bhakti, knowledge, self-perfection) on the way.

The central sincerity is the first thing and sufficient for an aspiration to be entertained—a total sincerity is needed for the aspiration to be fulfilled.

*

There are different statuses (*avasthā*) of the Divine Consciousness. There are also different statuses of transformation. First is the psychic transformation, in which all is in contact with the Divine through the psychic consciousness. Next is the spiritual transformation in which all is merged in the Divine in the cosmic consciousness. Third is the supramental transformation in which all becomes supramentalised in the divine gnostic consciousness. It is only with the last that there can begin the *complete* transformation of mind, life and body—in my sense of completeness.

*

You are mistaken in two respects. First, the endeavour towards this achievement [*the transformation of mind, life and body*] is not new and some Yogis have achieved it, I believe—but not in the way I want it. They achieved it as a personal siddhi maintained by Yoga-siddhi—not a dharma of the nature. Secondly, the supramental transformation is not the same as the spiritual-mental. It is a change of mind, life and body which the mental or overmental-spiritual cannot achieve. All whom you mention were spirituals, but in different ways. Krishna's mind, for instance, was overmentalised, Ramakrishna's intuitive, Chaitanya's spiritual-psychic, Buddha's illumined higher mental. I don't know about B.G. [Bijoy Goswami]—he seems to have been brilliant but rather chaotic. All that is different from the supramental. Then take the vital of the Paramhansas. It is said their vital behaves either like a child (Ramakrishna) or like a madman or like a demon or like something inert (cf.

Jadabharata). Well, there is nothing supramental in all that. So?

One can be a fit instrument for the Divine in any of the transformations. The question is, an instrument for what?

*

Your Guru's teaching and that of this Yoga are essentially the same; what he called *cittasuddhi* is what we mean by the psychic change. The teaching here is more developed because it includes the Supramental means of creating a divine life. Also the getting of the truth is different, since here it is put in such a way as to initiate men of all castes, races, creeds and cultures without distinction to share in the Truth and the Divine Life. But it is no use trying to draw those who received the earlier teaching, for their sight is still circumscribed by past forms and feelings and cannot extend itself beyond them. It is good that you have freed yourself from the desire to do so and taken an impersonal position—if any have to come they will come. Our concentration must be on all preparing themselves so that what was foreseen by your Guru may be fulfilled this time and here.

Depreciation of the Old Yogas

As for the depreciation of all the old Yogas as something quite easy, unimportant and worthless, and the consequent depreciation of Buddha and Yajnavalkya and other great spiritual figures of the past, is it not evidently absurd on the face of it?

*

It [*self-realisation*] is not a long process? The whole life and several lives more are often not enough to achieve it. Ramakrishna's guru took 30 years to arrive and even then he was not satisfied that he had realised it.

*

Wonderful! The realisation of the Self which includes the liberation from ego, the consciousness of the One in all, the established and consummated transcendence out of the universal

Ignorance, the fixity of the consciousness in the union with the Highest, the Infinite and Eternal is not anything worth doing or recommending to anybody — is “not a very difficult stage”!

Nothing new? Why should there be anything new? The object of spiritual seeking is to find out what is eternally true, not what is new in Time.

From where did you get this singular attitude towards the old Yogas and Yogis? Is the wisdom of the Vedanta and Tantra a small and trifling thing? Have then the sadhaks of this Asram attained to self-realisation and are they liberated Jivan-muktas, free from ego and ignorance? If not, why then do you say, “it is not a very difficult stage”, “their goal is not high”, “is it such a long process?”

I have said that this Yoga was “new” because it aims at the integrality of the Divine in this world and not only beyond it and at a supramental realisation. But how does that justify a superior contempt for the spiritual realisation which is as much the aim of this Yoga as of any other?

The Old Lines and This Line

Plenty of people, I suppose, would go on with the old lines¹ — for it is not likely that all would be able to take this line. As for the Darshanas most of them have fallen into disuse already except as a battlefield for Pandits. It is only the Vedanta and Patanjali and the later Bhakti Yoga that are still alive, not so much as darshanas but as traditional systems of Yoga.

¹ *The correspondent asked, “Is it not likely that the Darshanas and Upanishads will be forgotten in the next hundred years as the New Yoga establishes itself in the world? If it is possible to get the necessary things from your writings and the Mother’s, who would care to read the enigmatic sutras and concealed formulas of the Darshanas, Upanishads and Vedas?” — Ed.*

Chapter Two

The Veda and the Upanishads

The Vedic Rishis

It is not I only who have done what the Vedic Rishis did not do. Chaitanya and others developed an intensity of Bhakti which is absent in the Veda and many other instances can be given. Why should the past be the limit of spiritual experience?

*

I can't say whether any of them [*the Vedic Rishis*] attained the supramental plane, but the ascent to it was their object. Swar is evidently the illumined regions of Mind, between the supramental and the human intelligence formed by the rays of the Sun. According to the Upanishads those who ascend into the rays of the Sun return, but those who ascend into the Sun itself do not come back. That is because the ascent to supermind was envisaged, but the descent and organisation of the supermind here (as apart from the descent of the Rays) was not. We need not bother about the rebirth of the Rishis — they will come along if they are needed, I suppose.

*

I don't know of any [*Vedic Rishis*] that have taken birth this time. According to the Puranic stories there must have been many Rishis who were far from being *jitendriya, jitakrodha*. But also there are many Yogis who are satisfied with having the inner experience of the Self but allow movements of a rajasic or tamasic nature on the surface, holding that these will fall off with the body.

*

The Vedic Rishis were mystics of the ancient type who everywhere, in India, Greece, Egypt and elsewhere, held the secret

truths and methods of which they were in possession as very sacred and secret things not to be disclosed to the unfit who would misunderstand, misapply, misuse and degrade the knowledge. Their writings were therefore so couched as only to be intelligible in their secret meaning to the initiated, *nīnyā vacāṁsi nivacanāni kavaye*—secret words that carry their significance only to the seer. They were equipped with an apparent meaning exoteric and religious for the people, esoteric, occult and spiritual for the initiates. That the people should not find out the real Truth was their intention; they wanted them only to know the outward truths for which they were fit.

*

This picture of Vedic society [*a completely pastoral life, without priests or warriors*] could easily be challenged. The householder may have lit daily the fire on the household altar, but when he wanted to offer a sacrifice he did it with the aid of sacrificial priests who knew the ritual. Sometimes the Rishi himself performed the sacrifice for the householder. He was not a priest by profession, however, for he might have any occupation in the society. Besides, in a large sacrifice there were many versed in the Vedic rites who performed different functions. In the very first verse of the Rig Veda Agni is described as being himself the Purohit, the priest representative of the householder sacrificer, Yajamana, as the Ritwik, the one who saw to the arrangement of the rites, the Hota who invoked the Gods and gave the offering, and in other hymns he is spoken of as the priest of the purification, the priest of the lustration etc. All this has obviously an esoteric sense but it testifies to the habitual presence of a number of priests at any large sacrifice. So we cannot say that there were no priests in the Vedic age. There does not seem to have been any priestly caste until later times when the four castes came definitely into being. But the Brahmins were not predominantly priests but rather scholars and intellectuals with a religious authority derived from birth and from knowledge of the scriptures and the books of the social law, Shastra. The function of priesthood has never been highly honoured in India

and it would therefore be incorrect to speak of priestcraft or any rule by priests or ecclesiastics at any time in Indian history.

As for the warriors, there are in the Rig Veda two or three hymns describing a great battle which the scholars declare to have been the fight of one king against ten allied kings, and besides that, the hymns are full of images of war and battle. These too have an esoteric meaning, but they indicate a state of things in which war and battle must have been frequent; so we cannot say that there were no warriors.

Again, your description seems to indicate that all the householders were initiated in the knowledge held by the Rishis. But this was a secret knowledge imparted by the Rishi to his family and to disciples whom he found to be fit, it was not given to everyone. The language of the Veda was also veiled and mystic, "secret words of seer-wisdom which yielded their meaning to the seer" as one of the Rishis described them, but understood in an outward sense by the ordinary uninitiated man. This principle of secrecy was common to all the mysteries in every country and it was maintained also in ancient India. The religious worship practised by the common man and any communion it might bring with the gods was only a preliminary preparation and not the deeper knowledge.

It was always held in ancient India that religion, life and society should be so arranged that every man should have the opportunity to grow spiritually by whatever means is suitable to his capacity, *adhikāra*. Everywhere there was a system of gradations by which this purpose could be served. It provided for a continual contact of man at every step with what was behind and beyond the material life. In Vedic times meditation, worship and sacrifice were the means by which this connection with the Unseen was sought to be established and maintained. The sacrifice was symbolic in its ritual and the symbols were supposed to have an occult power to create a relation between the unseen powers worshipped and the worshipper; by it they were called in to preside over and help all the action and life of the human being. Worship was for establishing a more inner relation and meditation the means of spiritual experience,

development and knowledge. The institutions which grew up in later Vedic times, such as the four Asramas and the four Varṇas, the fourfold arrangement of society originally had the same intention and are so recognised in the Gita. So trained a man could develop until he was ready for a deeper knowledge and receive the initiation. In the Vedic times this deeper knowledge was the mystic doctrine and practice of the Vedic Rishis; it was that that afterwards developed on a hundred branching lines into the later systems of Yoga.

The Veda and the Greeks

As to the Eleusinian mysteries, about which he has asked an explanation, they were connected with the same mystic knowledge as was held in India by the Vedic Rishis. Demeter and Persephone were goddesses worshipped by the Greeks; Demeter is the Earth-Mother and Persephone was the goddess of the Harvest, but in the mystic symbols Persephone represented the earth consciousness buried in the Ignorance and emerging into the Divine Light. The Eleusinian mysteries were instituted as an outward symbol of this secret knowledge.

*

The Soma wine was the symbol of the divine or spiritual Ananda. This wine was however symbolic and cannot be exactly equated with the nectar or ambrosia of the Greeks which were the food and drink of the gods and sustained their immortality; but outwardly there is some resemblance.

No Incarnation of the Vedic Gods

In the Veda there is no idea or experience of a personal emanation or incarnation of any of the Vedic gods. When the Rishis speak of Indra or Agni or Soma in men, they are speaking of the god in his cosmic presence, power or function. This is evident from the very language when they speak of Agni as the immortal in mortals, the immortal Light in man, the inner Warrior, the

Guest in human beings. It is the same with Indra or Soma. The building of the gods in man means a creation of the divine Powers, Indra the Power of the Light, Soma the Power of the Ananda in the human nature.

No doubt, the Rishis felt the actual presence of the gods above, near, around or in them, but this was a common experience of all, not special and personal, not an emanation or incarnation. One may see or feel the presence of the Divine or a divine Power above the head or in the heart or in any or all of the centres, feel the presence, see the form living there; one may be governed in all one's actions, thoughts and feelings by it; one may lose one's separate personality in it, may identify and merge. But all that does not constitute an incarnation or emanation of the Divine or of the Power. These things are universal experiences to which any Yogin may arrive; to reach this condition with relation to the Divine is indeed a common object of Yoga.

An incarnation is something more, something special and individual to the individual being. It is the substitution of the Person of a divine being for the human person and an infiltration of it into all the movements so that there is a dynamic personal change in all of them and in the whole nature; not merely a change of the character of the consciousness or a general surrender into its hands, but a subtle intimate personal change. Even when there is an incarnation from the birth, the human elements have to be taken up, but when there is a descent, there is a total conscious substitution.

This is a long, subtle and persistent process. The incarnating Person first overshadows as an influence, then enters into the centres one after the other, sometimes in the same form, sometimes in different forms, then takes up all the nature and its actions. What you describe does not correspond to this process; it seems to be an endeavour to build the gods in yourself in the Vedic sense and the Vedic manner. That can bring, if it succeeds, their powers and a sense of their presence; it cannot bring about an incarnation. An incarnation is destined, is chosen for you; the human person cannot choose or create an incarnation for

himself by his own personal will. To attempt it is to invite a spiritual disaster.

One thing must be said—that an incarnation is not the object of this Yoga; it is only a condition or means towards the object. The one and only aim we have before us is to bring down the supramental consciousness and the supramental Truth into the world; the Truth and nothing but the Truth is our aim, and if we cannot embody this Truth, a hundred incarnations do not matter. But to bring down the true supramental and nothing but the true supramental, to escape from all mental mixture is not an easy matter. The mere descent of the suns into the centres, even of all the seven suns into all the seven centres is only the seed; it is not the thing itself done and finished. One may feel the descent of suns, one may have the attempt, the beginning of an incarnation, and yet in the end one may fail if there is a flaw in the nature or a failure to pass through all the ordeals and satisfy all the hard conditions of the perfect spiritual success. Not only the whole mental, vital and physical nature of the ignorant human being has to be overcome and transformed, but also the three states of mental consciousness which intervene between the human and the supramental and like all mind are capable of admitting great and capital errors. Till then there may be descents of supramental influence, light, power, Ananda, but the supramental Truth cannot be possessed, organised, put in possession of the whole nature. One must not think before that that one possesses the supermind; for that is a delusion which would prevent the fulfilment.

One thing more. The more intense the experiences that come, the higher the forces that descend, the greater become the possibilities of deviation and error. For the very intensity and the very height of the force excites and aggrandises the movements of the lower nature and raises up in it all the opposing elements in their full force, but often in the disguise of truth, wearing a mask of plausible justification. There is needed a great patience, calm, sobriety, balance, an impersonal detachment and sincerity free from all taint of ego or personal human desire. There must be no attachment to any idea of one's own, to any experience, to any

kind of imagination, mental building or vital demand; the light of discrimination must always play to detect these things, however fair or plausible they may seem. Otherwise the Truth will have no chance of establishing itself in its purity in the nature.

Terms and Verses of the Upanishads

It is quite impossible to say to what they [*the seers of the Upanishads*] were referring in those days.¹ We have no longer a clue to their symbolism. But it is meant that the lower worlds are in the higher worlds even as the higher worlds are in the lower worlds — they penetrate each other. E.g. in our system there is a vital mental, several layers of the vital itself, a physical vital and so on in each realm. Everything contains everything else, as it were.

*

It is quite probable that the sloka [*Katha Upanishad 2.3.4*] refers to a going up into higher worlds of felicity and light and this can be called a liberation or release. In later times the idea grew strong that from all these higher worlds return is inevitable and it is only release from all cosmic existence that gives mukti. The Vedic Rishis seem to have looked to an ascent into a divine luminous world or state above the falsehood and ignorance. In the Upanishad the sun is the symbol of the supramental Truth and it is said that those who pass into it may return but those who pass through the gates of the Sun itself do not; possibly this means that an ascent into the supermind itself above the golden lid of overmind was the definitive liberation. The Veda speaks of the Truth hidden by a Truth where the Sun looses his horses from his car and there all the myriad rays are drawn together into One and that was considered the goal. The Isha Upanishad also speaks of the golden lid hiding the face of the Truth by removing which the Law of the Truth is seen and the highest

¹ *The correspondent asked for an explanation of certain terms in a passage (3.6.1) from the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad. — Ed.*

knowledge in which the One Purusha is known (*so'ham asmi*) is described as the *kalyānatama* form of the Sun. All this seems to refer to the supramental states of which the Sun is the symbol.

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The mental realisation [*of the one self*] does not bring this result [*the ending of delusion (moha) and grief (śoka)*], the spiritual does.² In the Vedantic experience “seeing” means also becoming, one is that one self, identified,—all action of Nature seems to one a movement in that one self which is itself not touched by it. Therefore there is no *moha* or *śoka*. That is, when one can keep the experience and when it is complete. Even if one has the experience only as something within while the movements of the vital continue on the surface, yet these movements are felt as external and superficial, not really belonging to oneself—the self within remains untouched, calm, griefless, at peace. If the vital also is transformed into this consciousness, then even on the surface grief becomes impossible.

*

Perception is not enough to transform the nature. *Pasyataḥ*³ in the spiritual language does not mean only perception. Perception is of the mind and a mental perception is not enough—a substantial and dynamic realisation in all the being is necessary. Otherwise one of three things may happen. (1) The mind perceives oneness but the vital is not affected, it goes on with its impulses, for the vital is governed not by thought or reason but by tendency, impulse, desire-force—it uses reason only as a justification for its tendencies. Or even the vital may say, “All is one so it does not matter what I do. Why should not I seek oneness with others in my own way?” (2) If the mind has a realisation, but the vital does not share in it or distorts it, then also the vital can insist on its own way or even carry the mind

² The correspondent asked for a clarification of verse 7 of the Isha Upanishad, which ends, “... how shall he be deluded, whence shall he have grief who sees everywhere oneness?”—Ed.

³ This term appears in verse 7 of the Isha Upanishad.—Ed.

along with it. As the Gita says, the senses (vital) carry away the mind even of the sage who sees, as the wind carries away a ship on a stormy sea. (3) The inner being may have the realisation strongly and live in the oneness, calm, peace, but the interior parts of the outer may feel the reactions of desire etc. In this case the reactions are more superficial; but even so rejection is needed till they cease. When all the being lives in the solid realisation of calm, peace, liberation, oneness, then the desires fall away and the necessity of rejection ceases, because there is nothing to reject any longer.

*

It [*the identification of buddhi with the vijnānamaya kosa*] is the error that came with the excessive intellectualism of the philosophers and commentators. I don't think *buddhi* includes intuition as something separate in kind from intellect — the intellectualists considered intuition to be only a rapid process of intellectual thought — and they still think that. In the Taittiriya Upanishad the sense of *vijnāna* is very clear — its essence is *ṛtam*, the spiritual Truth; but afterwards the identification with *buddhi* became general.

*

I do not suppose they [*the commentators*] mean expressly intuition [by *buddhi*]; they regard *buddhi* as the means of knowledge, so they include all knowledge in it, and as the *vijnānamaya kosa* is the Knowledge sheath, they think it must mean *buddhi*. Obviously it doesn't. The description you have quoted⁴ evidently means something much higher than *buddhi*. It is the *satyam ṛtam bṛhat* of the Upanishad — the truth-consciousness of the Veda.

The Vedantin

No, certainly I did not mean that the Vedantin who sees a greater working behind the appearances of the world is living

⁴ From the Taittiriya Upanishad 2.4.1.—Ed.

in a different world from this material one—if I had meant that, all that I had written would be without point or sense. I meant a Vedantin who lives in this world with all its suffering and ignorance and ugliness and evil and has had a full measure of these things, betrayal and abandonment by friends, failure of outward objects and desires in life, attack and persecution, accumulated illnesses, constant difficulty, struggles, stumbling in his Yoga. It is not that he lives in a different world, but he has a different way of meeting its ordeals, blows and dangers. He takes them as the nature of this world and the result of the ego-consciousness in which it lives. He tries therefore to grow into another consciousness in which he feels what is behind the outward appearance, and as he grows into that larger consciousness he begins to feel more and more a working behind which is helping him to grow in the spirit and leading him toward mastery and freedom from ego and ignorance and he sees that all has been used for that purpose. Till he reaches this consciousness with its larger knowledge of things, he has to walk by faith and his faith may sometimes fail him, but it returns and carries him through all the difficulties. Everybody is not bound to accept this faith and this consciousness, but there is something great and true behind it for the spiritual life.

*

I doubt whether the condition of which you speak is that of the realised Vedantin⁵—except of course the loss of the sense of personality and the non-identification with desire and the movements of Prakriti. Still perhaps the condition of the *jadavat* Paramhansa (like Jada Bharata) may resemble it. The theory of *prārabdha karma* goes farther than that—it assumes that even if there are vital movements, that is also only the continuance of the machine of Prakriti and will drop off at death. They may, perhaps. I don't base the gospel of the transformation of Nature

⁵ The correspondent wrote that he felt dull, sleepy and mechanical, with no sense of desire or personality; therefore he could easily imagine why the realised Vedantin could say that with the static realisation of Brahman one's past karma would fall off at death.
—Ed.

on an impossibility of taking a static release as final — the static release is necessary, but I don't consider that to take it as final is the object of coming into world-existence. I hold that the static release is only a beginning, a first step in the Divine. If anyone is satisfied with the first step as all that is possible for him, I have no objection to his taking it like that.

Chapter Three

Jainism and Buddhism

Jainism

The Jain philosophy is concerned with individual perfection. Our effort is quite different. We want to bring down the Supermind as a new faculty. Just as the mind is now a permanent state of consciousness in humanity, so also we want to create a race in which the Supermind will be a permanent state of consciousness.

*

Why cannot one love or experience [*the Cosmic Divine or the Transcendent Divine*] concretely? many have done it. And why assume that He is immobile, silent and aloof? The Cosmic Divine can be as close to one as one's own self and the Transcendent as intimate as the closest friend or lover. It is only in the physical consciousness that there is some difficulty in realising it.

The Jain realisation of an individual godhead is all right so far as it goes — its defect is that it is too individual and isolated.

Buddhism

Buddhist teaching does not recognise any inner self or soul — there is only a stream of consciousness from moment to moment — the consciousness itself is only a bundle of associations — it is kept moving by the wheel of Karma. If the associations are untied and thrown away (they are called sanskaras), then it dissolves; the idea of self or a persistent person ceases; the stream flows no longer, the wheel stops. There is left, according to some, Sunya, a mysterious Nothing from which all comes; according to others a mysterious Permanent in which there is no individual existence. This is Nirvana. Buddha himself always refused to say what there was beyond cosmic existence; he spoke neither of God nor Self nor Brahman. He said there was no utility in

discussing that — all that was necessary was to know the causes of this unhappy temporal existence and the way to dissolve it.

*

Buddha, it must be remembered, refused always to discuss what was beyond the world. But from the little he said it would appear that he was aware of a Permanent beyond equivalent to the Vedantic Para-Brahman, but which he was quite unwilling to describe. The denial of anything beyond the world except a negative state of Nirvana was a later teaching, not Buddha's.

*

If Buddha really combated and denied all Vedantic conceptions of the Self then it can be no longer true that Buddha refrained from all metaphysical speculations or distinct pronouncements as to the nature of the ultimate Reality. The view you take of his conception of Nirvana seems to concur with the Mahayanist interpretation and its conception of the Permanent, *dhruvam*, which could be objected to as a later development like the opposite Nihilistic conception of the Shunyam. What Buddha very certainly taught was that the world is not-Self and that the individual has no true existence since what does exist in the world is a stream of impermanent consciousness from moment to moment and the individual person is fictitiously constituted by a bundle of sanskaras and can be dissolved by dissolving the bundle. This is in conformity with the Vedantic Monistic view that there is no true individual. As to the other Vedantic view of the one Self, impersonal and universal and transcendent, it does not seem that Buddha made any distinct and unmistakable pronouncements on abstract metaphysical questions; but if the world or all in the world is not-Self, *anātman*, there can be no more room for a universal Self, only at most for a transcendent Real Being. His conception of Nirvana was of something transcendent of the universe, but he did not define what it was because he was not concerned with any abstract metaphysical speculations about the Reality; he must have thought them unnecessary and irrelevant and any indulgence in them likely to divert from the

true object. His explanation of things was psychological and not metaphysical and his methods were all psychological, the breaking up of the false associations of consciousness which cause the continuance of desire and suffering, so getting rid of the stream of birth and death in a purely phenomenal (not an unreal) world; the method of life by which this liberation could be effected was also a psychological method, the eightfold path developing right understanding and right action. His object was pragmatic and severely practical and so were his methods; metaphysical speculations would only draw the mind away from the one thing needful.

As to Buddha's attitude towards life, I do not quite see how service to mankind or any ideal of improvement of the world-existence can have been part of his aim, since to pass out of life into a transcendence was his object. His eightfold path was the means towards that end and not an aim in itself or indeed in any way an aim. Obviously if right understanding and right action became the common rule of life, there would be a great improvement in the world, but for Buddha's purpose that could be an incidental result and not at all part of his central object. You say, "Buddha himself urged the necessity to serve mankind: his ideal was to achieve a consciousness of inner eternity and then be a source of radiant influence and action." But where and when did Buddha say these things, use these terms or express these ideas? "The service of mankind" sounds like a very modern and European conception; it reminds me of some European interpretations of the Gita as merely teaching the disinterested performance of duty or the pronouncement that the whole idea of the Gita is service. The exclusive stress or overstress on mankind or humanity is also European. Mahayanist Buddhism laid stress on compassion, fellow-feeling with all, *vasudhaiva kutumbakam*, just as the Gita speaks of the feeling of oneness with all beings and preoccupation with the good of all beings, *sarvabhūtahite ratāḥ*, but this does not mean humanity only but all beings and *vasudhā* means all earth-life. Are there any sayings of Buddha which would justify the statement that the object or one object of attaining to Nirvana was to become a

source of radiant influence and action? The consciousness of inner eternity may have that result, but can we really say that that was Buddha's ideal, the object which he held in view or for which he came?

*

Buddhism is the turning away from *duḥkha* and its causes to the peace of Nirvana. The *duḥkhavāda* did not exist in India, except in the theory of the Vaishnava *viraha*; otherwise it was not considered as a means or even a stage in the sadhana. But that does not mean that *duḥkha* does not come in the sadhana — it comes and has to be rejected and overcome, overpassed — excepting the psychic sorrow which does not disturb or depress but rather liberates the vital. To make a *vāda* or gospel of sorrow is dangerous because sorrow if indulged becomes a habit, sticks and few things, if once they stick, can be more sticky.

Buddhist Nirvana

The Buddhist Nirvana and the Adwaitin's Moksha are the same thing. It corresponds to a realisation in which one does not feel oneself any longer as an individual with such a name or such a form, but an infinite eternal Self spaceless (even when in space), timeless (even when in time). Note that one can perfectly well do actions in that condition and it is not to be gained only by Samadhi.

*

It [*the Nirvana of Buddha*] is the same [*as the Nirvana of the Gita*]. Only the Gita describes it as Nirvana in the Brahman while Buddha preferred not to give any name or say anything about that into which the nirvana took place. Some later schools of Buddhists described it as Sunya, the equivalent of the Chinese Tao, described as the Nothing which is everything.

*

The feeling of the Self as a vast peaceful Void, a liberation from

existence as we know it, is one that one can always have, Buddhist or no Buddhist. It is the negative aspect of Nirvana — it is quite natural for the mind, if it follows the negative movement of withdrawal, to get that first, and if you lay hold on that and refuse to go farther, being satisfied with this liberated Non-Existence, then you will naturally philosophise like the Buddhists that Sunya is the eternal truth. Lao Tse was more perspicacious when he spoke of it as the Nothing that is All. Many of course have the positive experience of the Atman first, not as a void but as pure unrelated Existence like the Adwaitins (Shankara) or as the one Existent.

*

They [*those who have had the experience of Nirvana*] do not feel as if they had any existence at all. In the Buddhistic Nirvana they feel as if there were no such thing at all, only an infinite zero without form. In the Adwaita Nirvana there is felt only one vast existence, no separate being is discernible anywhere. There are forms of course but they are only forms, not separate beings. Mind is silent, thought has ceased, — desires, passions, vital movements there are none. There is consciousness but only a formless elemental consciousness without limits. The body moves and acts, but the sense of body is not there. Sometimes there is only the consciousness of pure existence, sometimes only pure consciousness, sometimes all that exists is only a ceaseless limitless Ananda. Whether all else is really dissolved or only covered up is a debatable point, but at any rate it is an experience as if of their dissolution.

*

I don't think I have written, but I said once that souls which have passed into Nirvana may (not "must") return to complete the larger upward curve. I have written somewhere, I think, that for this Yoga (it might also be added, in the natural complete order of the manifestation) the experience of Nirvana can only be a stage or passage to the complete realisation. I have said also that there are many doors by which one can pass into the

realisation of the Absolute (Parabrahman) and Nirvana is one of them, but by no means the only one. You may remember Ramakrishna's saying that the Jivakoti can ascend the stairs, but not return, while the Ishwarakoti can ascend and descend at will. If that is so, the Jivakoti might be those who describe only the curve from Matter through Mind into the silent Brahman and the Ishwarakoti those who get to the integral Reality and can therefore combine the Ascent with the Descent and contain the "two ends" of existence in their single being.

*

The realisation of this Yoga is not lower but higher than Nirvana or Nirvikalpa Samadhi.

*

In our Yoga the Nirvana is the beginning of the higher Truth, as it is the passage from the Ignorance to the higher Truth. The Ignorance has to be extinguished in order that the Truth may manifest.

Different Kinds of Buddhism

Buddhism is of many kinds and the entirely nihilistic kind is only one variety. Most Buddhism admits a Permanent as beyond the creation of Karma and Sanskaras. Even the Sunya of the Sunyapanthis is described like the Tao of Lao Tse as a Nothing which is All. So as a higher "above mental" state is admitted which one tries to reach by a strong discipline of the consciousness, it may be called spirituality.

*

There are elements in most Yogas which enter into this one, so it is not surprising if there is something in Buddhism also. But such notions as a Higher Evolution beyond Nirvana seem to me not genuinely Buddhistic, unless of course there is some offshoot of Buddhism which developed something so interpreted by the author. I never heard of it as part of Buddha's teachings

— he always spoke of Nirvana as the goal and refused to discuss metaphysically what it might be.

*

About the One [*of the Buddhists*] there are different versions. I just read somewhere that the Buddhist One is a Superbuddha from whom all Buddhas come — but it seemed to me a rehash of Buddhism in Vedantic terms born of a modern mind. The Permanent of Buddhism has always been supposed to be Supracosmic and Ineffable — that is why Buddha never tried to explain what it was; for, logically, how can one talk about the Ineffable? It has really nothing to do with the Cosmos which is a thing of sanskaras and Karma.

*

There is no reason why the passage about Buddhism [*in an essay of the correspondent*] should be omitted. It gives one side of the Buddhistic teaching which is not much known or is usually ignored, for that teaching is by most rendered as Nirvana (Sunyavada) and a spiritualised humanitarianism. The difficulty is that it is these sides that have been stressed especially in the modern interpretations of Buddhism and any strictures I may have passed were in view of these interpretations and that one-sided stress. I am aware of course of the opposite tendencies in the Mahayana and the Japanese cult of Amitabha Buddha which is a cult of bhakti. It is now being said even of Shankara that there was another side of his doctrine — but his followers have made him stand solely for the Great Illusion, the inferiority of bhakti, the uselessness of Karma — *jagan mithyā*.

Buddhism and Vedanta

The impressions in the approach to Infinity or the entry into it are not always quite the same; much depends on the way in which the mind approaches it. It is felt first by some as an infinity above, by others as an infinity around into which the mind disappears (as an energy) by losing its limits. Some feel

not the absorption of the mind energy into the infinite, but a falling entirely inactive; others feel it as a lapse or disappearance of energy into pure Existence. Some first feel the infinity as a vast existence into which all sinks or disappears, others, as you describe it, as an infinite ocean of Light above, others as an infinite ocean of Power above. A certain school of Buddhists felt it in their experience as a limitless Sunya, the Vedantists on the contrary see it as a positive Self-Existence featureless and absolute. No doubt the various experiences were erected into various philosophies, each putting its conception as definitive; but behind each conception there was such an experience. What you describe as a completely emptied mind substance devoid of energy or light, completely inert, is the condition of neutral peace and empty stillness which is or can be a stage of the liberation. But it can afterwards feel itself filled with infinite existence, consciousness (carrying energy in it) and finally Ananda.

*

The universe is only a partial manifestation and Brahman as its foundation is the Sat. But there is also that which is not manifested and beyond manifestation and is not contained in the basis of manifestation. The Buddhists and others get from that the conception of Asat as the ultimate thing.

Another meaning given is: Sat = the Eternal, Asat = the Temporary and Unreal.

*

The ego and its continuity, they [*the Buddhists*] say, are an illusion, the result of the continuous flowing of energies and ideas in a determined current. There is no real formation of an ego. As to the liberation, it is in order to get free from *duhkha* etc., — it is a painful flow of energies and to get free from the pain they must break up their continuity. That is all right, but how it started, why it should end at all and how anybody is benefited by the liberation, since there is nobody there, only a mass of idea and action — these things are insoluble mysteries. But is there not the same difficulty with the Mayavadin also, since there is

no Jiva really, only Brahman and Brahman is by nature free and unbound for ever? So how did the whole absurd affair of Maya come into existence and who is liberated? That is what the old sages said at last: "There is none bound, none freed, none seeking to be free." It was all a mistake (a rather long-standing one though). The Buddhists, I suppose, could say that also.

Chapter Four

Sankhya and Yoga

Sankhya

In the spiritual thought of India during the time of the Rishis and even before, the Sankhya and Vedanta elements were always combined. The Sankhya account of the constitution of the being (Purusha, Prakriti, the elements, Indriyas, Buddhi etc.) was universally accepted and Kapila was mentioned with veneration everywhere. In the Gita he is mentioned among the great Vibhutis; Krishna says, “I am Kapila among the sages.”

Patanjali's Yoga

Divine union [*was the aim of Yoga in Patanjali's day*], yes — but for the ascetic schools it was union with the featureless Brahman, the Unknowable beyond existence or, if with the Ishwara, still it was the Ishwara in a supracosmic consciousness. From that point of view Patanjali's aphorism¹ is sound enough. When he says Yoga, he means the process of Yoga, the object which has to be kept in view in the process — for by the cessation of *cittavṛtti* one gets into *samādhi* and *samādhi* is the only way of uniting solely and completely with the Brahman beyond existence.

*

Stopping the movements of the chitta [*is what is meant by cittavṛttinirodha*]. In our Yoga it is more necessary to transform these movements than to stop them altogether, but the power to stop them is necessary — it is usually done by the mind falling into silence and then imposing the same silence on the vital nature.

*

¹ *Yogaścittavṛttinirodhaḥ* (*Yogasūtra 1.2*). — *Ed.*

Chit is the pure consciousness—as in Sat Chit Ananda.

Chitta is the stuff of mixed mental-vital-physical consciousness out of which arise the movements of thought, emotion, sensation, impulse etc. It is these that in Patanjali's system have to be stilled altogether so that the consciousness may be immobile and go into samadhi.

It [*stopping the movements of the chitta*] has a different function [*in this Yoga*]. The movements of the ordinary consciousness have to be quieted and into the quietude there has to be brought down a higher consciousness and its powers which will transform the nature.

*

If you suppress [*the cittavṛttis*], you will have no movements of the chitta at all; all will be immobile until you remove the suppression or will be so immobile that there cannot be anything else than immobility.

If you still, the chitta will be quiet; whatever movements there are will not disturb the quietude.

If you control or master, then the chitta will be immobile when you want, active when you want, and its action will be such that what you wish to get rid of will go, only what you accept as true and useful will come.

*

Some people do get disgusted with the body for its uncleanness, but I should say it is very few.

The suggestion of Patanjali² supposes that the mind is everything, so if I get the idea that the body is an unclean thing, all my feelings will harmonise with that idea. But it is not so—there are other parts which do not care for the idea or knowledge in the mind and are not affected by it but are led by their own instincts and desires. It is only those who have already the turn to vairagya who can make use of Patanjali's suggestion to help

² *The suggestion that disgust for one's body arises from the idea of cleanliness. In his letter the correspondent quoted Patanjali's aphorism, Śaucāt svāṅga-jugupsā (Yogasūtra 2.40).—Ed.*

their already existing vairagya. The medical man for instance holds his knowledge of the composition of the body as a matter of fact of science, he keeps it separate there in the scientific compartment of his mind and it does not in the least affect his other ideas, feelings or activities.

The Yoga-Vasishtha

I have not myself read the Yoga-Vasishtha, but from what I have read about it, it must be a book written by somebody with a remarkable occult knowledge.

Asanas and Pranayama

No use doing asanas and pranayam. It is not necessary to burn with passion. What is needed is a patient increasing of the power of concentration and steady aspiration so that the silence you speak of may fix in the heart and spread to the other members. Then the physical mind and subconscious can be cleared and quieted.

*

The asanas are one means for control of the body, as is Pranayam for the life-forces, but neither is indispensable.

*

Mother thinks that the shirhasan is not safe for your eyes. While some of these asanas are simple and safe, others are not so; they require a training of the body or practice under the eye of an expert. It might not be prudent for you to take them up in an amateur fashion.

*

Pranayam is safe only if one knows how to do it and is on guard against its possible dangers: (1) danger to health by mistakes in the method, (2) rising of the vital forces, especially lust, egoism and wrongly directed strength and force, (3) the awakening of

concealed sanskaras of the physical nature or latent karma from past lives.

*

Tell him it is not safe to do Pranayam without guidance by one who is expert in Rajayoga or Hathayoga. Pranayam is not a part of the sadhana here.

*

You can write to him that it is not safe to do Pranayam except under the directions of a guru who is siddha in either Rajayoga or Hathayoga. Gasping is obviously a sign of something wrong — for the breathing in Pranayam must be perfectly unimpeded and regular. It is better either to stop the Pranayam or to find out somebody who is practised in the method and take instructions from him what to do.

*

Your experience is correct. The true breathing is not merely the inspiration and expiration from the lungs which is merely the mechanism of it, but a drawing in of the universal energy of Prana into every cell of the body.

Chapter Five

The Yoga of the Bhagavad Gita

The Teaching of the Gita

This world *is* as the Gita describes it, *anityam asukham*, so long as we live in the present world-consciousness; it is only by turning from that to the Divine and entering into the Divine Consciousness that one can possess, through the world also, the Eternal.

*

The Gita cannot be described as exclusively a gospel of love. What it sets forth is a Yoga of knowledge, devotion and works based on a spiritual consciousness and realisation of oneness with the Divine and of the oneness of all beings in the Divine. Bhakti, devotion and love of God carrying with it unity with all beings and love for all beings is given a high place but always in connection with knowledge and works.

Apparent Contradictions in the Gita

The language of the Gita in many matters seems sometimes contradictory because it admits two apparently opposite truths and tries to reconcile them. It admits the ideal of departure from sansara into the Brahman as one possibility; also it affirms the possibility of living free in the Divine (in Me, it says) and acting in the world as the Jivanmukta. It is this latter kind of salvation on which it lays the greatest emphasis. So Ramakrishna put the “divine souls” (Ishwarakoti) who can descend the ladder as well as ascend it higher than the ordinary Jivas (Jivakoti) who, once having ascended, have not the strength to descend again for divine work. The full truth lies in the supramental consciousness and the power to work from there on life and matter.

*

There is no real contradiction; the two passages¹ indicate in the Gita's system two different movements of its Yoga, the complete surrender being the crowning movement. One has first to conquer the lower nature, deliver the self involved in the lower movement by means of the higher Self which rises into the divine nature; at the same time one offers all one's actions including the inner action of the Yoga as a sacrifice to the Purushottama, the transcendent and immanent Divine. When one has risen into the higher Self, has the knowledge and is free, one makes the complete surrender to the Divine, abandoning all other dharmas, living only by the divine Consciousness, the divine Will and Force, the divine Ananda.

Our Yoga is not identical with the Yoga of the Gita although it contains all that is essential in the Gita's Yoga. In our Yoga we begin with the idea, the will, the aspiration of the complete surrender; but at the same time we have to reject the lower nature, deliver our consciousness from it, deliver the self involved in the lower nature by the self rising to freedom in the higher nature. If we do not do this double movement, we are in danger of making a tamasic and therefore unreal surrender, making no effort, no tapas and therefore no progress; or else we may make a rajasic surrender not to the Divine but to some self-made false idea or image of the Divine which masks our rajasic ego or something still worse.

*

It was not your account of the inconsistencies of the Gita, but those that have been urged against the combining of sadhanas of which the Gita is the finest example that I was speaking of. Your objection to Krishna's pouring contradictory sadhanas on Arjuna was, I said, akin to these and not more sustainable.

All the other side questions I consider irrelevant and of no importance. The setting of the Gita is poetic and legendary and I consider it an admirable setting, but if you consider it a bad

¹ The correspondent asked how to reconcile two passages in the Gita: "Deliver the self by means of the Self" and "Abandon all dharmas, take refuge in Me alone" (Gita 6.5 and 18.66). — Ed.

one, that does not matter. It makes no difference, even if you are right, to the spiritual excellence of the Gita. I care nothing whether Sanjaya and Krishna and Arjuna of the Mahabharat were myths or real persons. The only thing that is important is that the sadhana of the Gita is a real thing and can be lived and that if spiritually lived, its so-called inconsistencies are no inconsistencies but many well-related aspects of a single Divine Truth — the vision seen by Arjuna included. The rest is a matter of opinion and, as I say, of no spiritual importance.

*

The Gita was *not* meant by the writer to be an allegory — you can say, if you like, that now we should dismiss the ancient war element by interpreting it as if it were an allegory. The Gita is Yoga, spiritual truth applied to external life and action — but it may be *any* action and not necessarily an action *resembling* that of the Gita. The *principle* of the spiritual consciousness applied to action has to be kept; the particular example used by the Gita may be treated as a thing belonging to a past world.

The Gita, the Divine Mother and the Purushottama

The Gita does not speak expressly of the Divine Mother; it speaks always of surrender to the Purushottama — it mentions her only as the Para Prakriti who becomes the Jiva, i.e., who manifests the Divine in the multiplicity and through whom all these worlds are created by the Supreme and he himself descends as the Avatar. The Gita follows the Vedantic tradition which leans entirely on the Ishwara aspect of the Divine and speaks little of the Divine Mother because its object is to draw back from world-nature and arrive at the supreme realisation beyond it; the Tantrik tradition leans on the Shakti or Ishwari aspect and makes all depend on the Divine Mother, because its object is to possess and dominate the world-nature and arrive at the supreme realisation through it. This Yoga insists on both the aspects; the surrender to the Divine Mother is essential, for without it there is no fulfilment of the object of the Yoga.

In regard to the Purushottama the Divine Mother is the supreme divine Consciousness and Power above the worlds, Adya Shakti; she carries the Supreme in herself and manifests the Divine in the worlds through the Akshara and the Kshara. In regard to the Akshara she is the same Para Shakti holding the Purusha immobile in herself and also herself immobile in him at the back of all creation. In regard to the Kshara she is the mobile cosmic Energy manifesting all beings and forces.

*

I do not know that there is anything like a Purushottama consciousness which the human being can attain or realise *for himself*,—for, in the Gita, the Purushottama is the Supreme Lord, the Supreme Being who is beyond the Immutable and the Mutable and contains both the One and the Many. Man, says the Gita, can attain the Brahmic consciousness, realise himself as an eternal portion of the Purushottama and live in the Purushottama. The Purushottama consciousness is the consciousness of the Supreme Being and man by loss of ego and realisation of his true essence can *live in it*.

The Gita and the Integral Yoga

It is not a fact that the Gita gives the whole base of Sri Aurobindo's message; for the Gita seems to admit the cessation of birth in the world as the ultimate aim or at least the ultimate culmination of Yoga; it does not bring forward the idea of spiritual evolution or the idea of the higher planes and the supramental Truth-Consciousness and the bringing down of that consciousness as the means of the complete transformation of earthly life.

The idea of the supermind, the Truth-Consciousness is there in the Rig Veda according to Sri Aurobindo's interpretation and in one or two passages of the Upanishads, but in the Upanishads it is there only in seed in the conception of the being of knowledge, *vijnānamaya puruṣa*, exceeding the mental, vital and physical being; in the Rig Veda the idea is there but in

principle only, it is not developed and even the principle of it has disappeared from the Hindu tradition.

It is these things among others that constitute the novelty of Sri Aurobindo's message as compared with the Hindu tradition,—the idea that the world is not either a creation of Maya or only a play, *lilā*, of the Divine, or a cycle of births in the ignorance from which we have to escape, but a field of manifestation in which there is a progressive evolution of the soul and the nature in Matter and from Matter through Life and Mind to what is beyond Mind till it reaches the complete revelation of Sachchidananda in life. It is this that is the basis of the Yoga and gives a new sense to life.

*

To the question in your last letter there can be no reply except that it is only either a single-minded faith or a fixed will that can give you the open road to the Yoga. It is because your ideas and your will are in a constant state of flux or of oscillation that you do not succeed. Even with a deficient faith, a fixed mind and will can carry one on and bring the experiences by which an uncertain faith is changed into certitude.

It is the reason why it is difficult for me to answer your questions about the different alternatives. I may say that the way of the Gita is itself a part of the Yoga here and those who have followed it, to begin with or as a first stage, have a stronger basis than others for this Yoga. To look down on it therefore as something separate and inferior is not a right standpoint. But whatever it is, you must yourself choose, nobody can do it for you. Those who go and come, can do so profitably only if or because they have made the decision and keep to it; when they are here, it is for the Yoga that they come, when they are elsewhere, the will for the Yoga remains with them there. You have to get rid of your constant reasonings and see whether you can do without the impulse towards Yoga or not—if you cannot, then it is useless thinking of the ordinary life without Yoga—your nature will compel you to seek after it even if you have to seek all your life with a small result. But the small result

is mainly due to the mind which always came in the way and the vital weakness which gives it its support for its reasonings. If you fixed your will irrevocably, that would give you a chance — and whether you followed it here or elsewhere would make only a minor difference.

I suggested the Gita method for you because the opening which is necessary for the Yoga here seems to be too difficult for you. If you made a less strenuous demand upon yourself, there might be a greater chance. In any case, if you cannot return to the ordinary life, it seems, in the absence of an opening to the Power that is here, the only course for you.

Chapter Six

The Adwaita of Shankaracharya

Shankara's Mayavada

If Shankara's conception of the undifferentiated pure Consciousness as the Brahman is your view of it, then it is not the path of this Yoga that you should choose; for here the realisation of pure Consciousness and Being is only a first step and not the goal. But an inner creative urge from within can have no place in an undifferentiated Consciousness — all action and creation must necessarily be foreign to it.

I do not base my Yoga on the insufficient ground that the Self (not soul) is eternally free. That affirmation leads to nothing beyond itself, or, if used as a starting-point, it could equally well lead to the conclusion that action and creation have no significance or value. The question is not that but of the meaning of creation, whether there is a Supreme who is not merely a pure undifferentiated Consciousness and Being, but the source and support also of the dynamic energy of creation and whether the cosmic existence has for It a significance and a value. That is a question which cannot be settled by metaphysical logic which deals in words and ideas, but by a spiritual experience which goes beyond Mind and enters into spiritual realities. Each mind is satisfied with its own reasoning, but for spiritual purposes that satisfaction has no validity, except as an indication of how far and on what line each one is prepared to go in the field of spiritual experience. If your reasoning leads you towards the Shankara idea of the Supreme, that might be an indication that the Vedanta Adwaita (Mayavada) is your way of advance.

This Yoga accepts the value of cosmic existence and holds it to be a reality; its object is to enter into a higher Truth-Consciousness or Divine Supramental Consciousness in which action and creation are the expression not of ignorance and imperfection, but of the Truth, the Light, the Divine Ananda.

But for that, surrender of the mortal mind, life and body to that Higher Consciousness is indispensable, since it is too difficult for the mortal human being to pass by its own effort beyond mind to a supramental consciousness in which the dynamism is no longer mental but of quite another power. Only those who can accept the call to such a change should enter into this Yoga.

*

The Shankara knowledge is, as your Guru pointed out, only one side of the Truth; it is the knowledge of the Supreme as realised by the spiritual Mind through the static silence of the pure Existence. It was because he went by this side only that Shankara was unable to accept or explain the origin of the universe except as illusion, a creation of Maya. Unless one realises the Supreme on the dynamic as well as the static side, one cannot experience the true origin of things and the equal reality of the active Brahman. The Shakti or Power of the Eternal becomes then a power of illusion only and the world becomes incomprehensible, a mystery of cosmic madness, an eternal delirium of the Eternal. Whatever verbal or ideative logic one may bring to support it, this way of seeing the universe explains nothing; it only erects a mental formula of the inexplicable. It is only if you approach the Supreme through his double aspect of Sat and Chit-Shakti, double but inseparable, that the total truth of things can become manifest to the inner experience. The other side was developed by the Shakta Tantrics. The two together, the Vedantic and the Tantric truth unified, can arrive at the integral knowledge.

But philosophically this is what your Guru's teaching comes to and it is obviously a completer truth and a wider knowledge than that given by the Shankara formula. It is already indicated in the Gita's teaching of the Purushottama and the Parashakti (Adya Shakti) who becomes the Jiva and upholds the universe. It is evident that Purushottama and Parashakti are both eternal and are inseparable and one in being; the Parashakti manifests the universe, manifests too the Divine in the universe as the Ishwara and herself appears at his side as the Ishwari Shakti. Or, one may say, it is the Supreme Consciousness-Power of the

Supreme that manifests or puts forth itself as Ishwara Ishwari, Atma Atmashakti, Purusha Prakriti, Jiva Jagat. That is the truth in its completeness as far as the mind can formulate it. In the Supermind these questions do not even arise — for it is the mind that creates the problem by erecting oppositions between aspects of the Divine which are not really opposed to each other but are one and inseparable.

This supramental knowledge has not yet been attained, because the supermind itself has not been attained, but the reflection of it in intuitive spiritual consciousness is there and that was what was evidently realised in experience by your Guru and what he was expressing in mental terms in the quoted passage. It is possible to go towards this knowledge by beginning with the experience of dissolution in the One, but on condition that you do not stop there, taking it as the highest Truth, but proceed to realise the same One as the supreme Mother, the Consciousness Force of the Eternal. If on the other hand you approach through the supreme Mother, she will give you the liberation in the silent One also as well as the realisation of the dynamic One and from that it is easier to arrive at the Truth in which both are one and inseparable. At the same time the gulf created by Mind between the Supreme and his Manifestation is bridged and there is no longer a fissure in the truth which makes all incomprehensible. If in the light of this you examine what your Guru taught, you will see that it is the same thing in less metaphysical language.

*

They [*two philosophers*] want to show that Shankara was not so savagely illusionist as he is represented — that he gave a certain temporary reality to the world, admitted Shakti etc. But these (supposing he made them) are concessions inconsistent with the logic of his own philosophy which is that only the Brahman exists and the rest is ignorance and illusion. The rest has only a temporary and therefore an illusory reality in Maya. He farther maintained that Brahman could not be reached by works. If that was not his philosophy, I should like to know what was his philosophy. At any rate that was how his philosophy has been

understood by people. Now that the general turn is away from the rigorous Illusionism, many of the Adwaitins seem to want to hedge and make Shankara hedge with them.

Vivekananda accepted Shankara's philosophy with modifications, the chief of them being Daridra-Narayan-seva which is a mixture of Buddhist compassion and modern philanthropy.

*

I believe according to the Adwaitins God is only the reflection of Brahman in Maya — just as Brahman is seen outwardly as the world which has only a practical not a real reality, so subjectively Brahman is seen as God, Bhagavan, Ishwara, and that also would be a practical not a real reality — which is and can be only the relationless Brahman all by itself in a worldless eternity. At least that is what I have read — I don't know whether Shankara himself says that. One is always being told by modern Adwaitins that Shankara did not mean what people say he meant — so one has to be careful in attributing any opinion to him.

*

Of course Shankara must have meant Mayavada. It is hardly possible that everybody should have misunderstood his ideas (which were not in the least veiled or enigmatic) till his modern apologists discovered what they really were.

*

Shankara surely stands or falls by the Mayavada. Even the *Bhaja Govindam* poem is Mayavadic in spirit. I am not well-acquainted with these other writings¹ — so it is difficult for me to say anything about that side of the question.

*

Chittashuddhi belongs to Rajayoga. In the pure Adwaita the method is rather to detach oneself by vichara and viveka and

¹ Writings attributed to Shankara such as Prabodhasudhākara. The correspondent asked whether Shankara changed his view from Mayavada to Lilavada later in his life. — Ed.

realise “I am not the mind, not the life, etc. etc.” In that case, no shuddhi would be necessary — the self would separate from the nature good or bad and regard it as a machinery which having no more the support of the egoless man would fall away of itself along with the body. Of course chittashuddhi can be resorted to also, but for cessation of the chittavrittis, not for their better dynamism as an instrument of the Divine. Shankara insists that all karma must fall off before one can be liberated — the soul must realise itself as *akartā*, there is no salvation in or by works in the pure Yoga of knowledge. So how could Shankara recognise dynamism? Even if he recognises chittashuddhi as necessary, it must be as a preparation for getting rid of karma, not for anything else.

Mayavada and Nirvana

About Nirvana:

When I wrote in the *Arya*, I was setting forth an overmind view of things to the mind and putting it in mental terms, that was why I had sometimes to use logic. For in such a work — mediating between the intellect and the supra-intellectual — logic has a place, though it cannot have the chief place it occupies in purely mental philosophies. The Mayavadin himself labours to establish his point of view or his experience by a rigorous logical reasoning. Only, when it comes to an explanation of Maya he, like the scientist dealing with Nature, can do no more than arrange and organise his ideas of the process of this universal mystification; he cannot explain how or why his illusionary mystifying Maya came into existence. He can only say, “Well, but it is there.”

Of course, it is there. But the question is, first, “What is it? is it really an illusionary Power and nothing else, or is the Mayavadin’s idea of it a mistaken first view, a mental imperfect reading, even perhaps itself an illusion?” And next, “Is illusion the sole or the highest Power which the Divine Consciousness or Superconsciousness possesses?” The Absolute is an absolute Truth free from Maya, otherwise liberation would not be

possible. Has then the supreme and absolute Truth no other active Power than a power of falsehood and with it, no doubt, for the two go together, a power of dissolving or disowning the falsehood,—which is yet there for ever? I suggested that this sounded a little queer. But queer or not, if it is so, it is so—for as you point out, the Ineffable cannot be subjected to the laws of logic.

But who is to decide whether it is so? You will say, those who get there. But get where? To the Perfect and the Highest, *pūrṇam param*. Is the Mayavadin's featureless Brahman that Perfect, that Complete—is it the very Highest? Is there not or can there not be a higher than that highest, *parātparam*? That is not a question of logic, it is a question of spiritual fact, of a supreme and complete experience. The solution of the matter must rest not upon logic, but upon a growing, ever heightening, widening spiritual experience—an experience which must of course include or have passed through that of Nirvana and Maya, otherwise it would not be complete and would have no decisive value.

Now to reach Nirvana was the first radical result of my own Yoga. It threw me suddenly into a condition above and without thought, unstained by any mental or vital movement; there was no ego, no real world—only when one looked through the immobile senses, something perceived or bore upon its sheer silence a world of empty forms, materialised shadows without true substance. There was no One or many even, only just absolutely That, featureless, relationless, sheer, indescribable, unthinkable, absolute, yet supremely real and solely real. This was no mental realisation nor something glimpsed somewhere above,—no abstraction—it was positive, the only positive reality—although not a spatial physical world, pervading, occupying or rather flooding and drowning this semblance of a physical world, leaving no room or space for any reality but itself, allowing nothing else to seem at all actual, positive or substantial. I cannot say there was anything exhilarating or rapturous in the experience, as it then came to me,—the ineffable Ananda I had years afterwards,—but what it brought was an inexpressible Peace, a

stupendous silence, an infinity of release and freedom. I lived in that Nirvana day and night before it began to admit other things into itself or modify itself at all, and the inner heart of experience, a constant memory of it and its power to return remained until in the end it began to disappear into a greater Superconsciousness from above. But meanwhile realisation added itself to realisation and fused itself with this original experience. At an early stage the aspect of an illusionary world gave place to one in which illusion² is only a small surface phenomenon with an immense Divine Reality behind it and a supreme Divine Reality above it and an intense Divine Reality in the heart of everything that had seemed at first only a cinematic shape or shadow. And this was no reimprisonment in the senses, no diminution or fall from supreme experience, it came rather as a constant heightening and widening of the Truth; it was the spirit that saw objects, not the senses, and the Peace, the Silence, the freedom in Infinity remained always with the world or all worlds only as a continuous incident in the timeless eternity of the Divine.

Now that is the whole trouble in my approach to Mayavada. Nirvana in my liberated consciousness turned out to be the beginning of my realisation, a first step towards the complete thing, not the sole true attainment possible or even a culminating finale. It came unasked, unsought for, though quite welcome. I had no least idea about it before, no aspiration towards it, in fact my aspiration was towards just the opposite, spiritual power to help the world and do my work in it, yet it came—without even a “May I come in” or a “By your leave”. It just happened and settled in as if for all eternity or as if it had been really there always. And then it slowly grew into something not less but greater than its first self! How then could I accept Mayavada or persuade myself to pit against the Truth imposed on me from above the logic of Shankara?

But I do not insist on everybody passing through my experience or following the Truth that is its consequence. I have

² In fact it is not an illusion in the sense of an imposition of something baseless and unreal on the consciousness, but a misinterpretation by the conscious mind and sense and a falsifying misuse of manifested existence.

no objection to anybody accepting Mayavada as his soul's truth or his mind's truth or their way out of the cosmic difficulty. I object to it only if somebody tries to push it down my throat or the world's throat as the sole possible, satisfying and all-comprehensive explanation of things. For it is not that at all. There are many other possible explanations; it is not at all satisfactory, for in the end it explains nothing; and it is—and must be unless it departs from its own logic—all-exclusive, not in the least all-comprehensive. But that does not matter. A theory may be wrong or at least one-sided and imperfect and yet extremely practical and useful. That has been amply shown by the history of science. In fact a theory whether philosophical or scientific is nothing else than a support for the mind, a practical device to help it to deal with its object, a staff to uphold it and make it walk more confidently and get along on its difficult journey. The very exclusiveness and one-sidedness of the Mayavada make it a strong staff or a forceful stimulus for a spiritual endeavour which means to be one-sided, radical and exclusive. It supports the effort of the Mind to get away from itself and from Life by a short cut into superconsciousness. Or rather it is the Purusha in Mind that wants to get away from the limitations of Mind and Life into the superconscious Infinite. Theoretically, the most radical way for that is for the mind to deny all its perceptions and all the preoccupations of the vital and see and treat them as illusions. Practically, when the mind draws back from itself, it enters easily into a relationless peace in which nothing matters—for in its absoluteness there are no mental or vital values—and from which the mind can rapidly move towards that great short cut to the Superconscious, mindless trance, *susupti*. In proportion to the thoroughness of that movement all the perceptions it had once accepted become unreal to it—illusion, Maya. It is on its road towards immergence.

Mayavada, therefore, with its sole stress on Nirvana, quite apart from its defects as a mental theory of things, serves a great spiritual end and, as a path, can lead very high and far. Even, if the Mind were the last word and there were nothing beyond it except the pure Spirit, I would not be averse to accepting it as

the only way out. For what the mind with its perceptions and the vital with its desires have made of life in this world, is a very bad mess, and if there were nothing better to be hoped for, the shortest cut to an exit would be the best. But my experience is that there is something beyond Mind; Mind is not the last word here of the Spirit. Mind is an ignorance-consciousness and its perceptions cannot be anything else than either false, mixed or imperfect—even when “true”, a partial reflection of the Truth and not the very body of Truth herself. But there is a Truth-Consciousness, not static only and self-introspective, but also dynamic and creative, and I prefer to get at that and see what it says about things and can do rather than take the short cut away from things offered as its own end by the Ignorance.

Still, I would have no objection, if your attraction towards Nirvana were not merely a mood of the mind and vital but an indication of the mind’s true road and the soul’s issue. But it seems to me that it is only the vital recoiling from its own disappointed desires in an extreme dissatisfaction, not the soul leaping gladly to its true path. This vairagya is itself a vital movement; vital vairagya is the reverse side of vital desire—though the mind of course is there to give reasons and say ditto. Even this vairagya, if it is one-pointed and exclusive, can lead or can point towards Nirvana. But you have many sides to your personality or rather many personalities in you; it is indeed their discordant movements each getting in the way of the other, as happens when they are expressed through the external mind, that have stood much in the way of your sadhana. There is the vital personality which was turned towards success and enjoyment and got it and wanted to go on with it but could not get the rest of the being to follow. There is the vital personality that wanted enjoyment of a deeper kind and suggested to the other that it could very well give up these unsatisfactory things if it got an equivalent in some faeryland of a higher joy. There is the psycho-vital personality that is the Vaishnava within you and wanted the Divine Krishna and bhakti and Ananda. There is the personality which is the poet and musician and a seeker of beauty through these things. There is the mental-vital personality which when it saw the vital

standing in the way insisted on a grim struggle of Tapasya, and it is no doubt that also which approves vairagya and Nirvana. There is the physical-mental personality which is the Russellite, extrovert, doubter. There is another mental-emotional personality all whose ideas are for belief in the Divine, Yoga, bhakti, Guruvada. There is the psychic being also which has pushed you into the sadhana and is waiting for its hour of emergence.

What are you going to do with all these people? If you want Nirvana, you have either to expel them or stifle them or beat them into coma. All authorities assure us that this exclusive Nirvana business is a most difficult job (*duḥkham dehavadbhīḥ* says the Gita), and your own fatal attempt at suppressing the others was not encouraging,—according to your own account it left you as dry and desperate as a sucked orange, no juice left anywhere. If the desert is your way to the promised land, that does not matter. But —

Well, if it is not, then there is another way—it is what we call the integration, the harmonisation of the being. That cannot be done from outside, it cannot be done by the mind and vital being—they are sure to bungle their affair. It can be done only from within by the soul, the Spirit which is the centraliser, itself the centre of these radii. In all of them there is a truth that can harmonise with the true truth of the others. For there is a truth in Nirvana—Nirvana is nothing but the peace and freedom of the Spirit which can exist in itself, be there world or no world, world-order or world-disorder. Bhakti and the heart's call for the Divine have a truth—it is the truth of the divine Love and Ananda. The will for Tapasya has in it a truth—it is the truth of the Spirit's mastery over its members. The musician and poet stand for a truth, it is the truth of the expression of the Spirit through beauty. There is a truth behind the mental Affirmer; even there is a truth behind the mental doubter, the Russellian, though far behind him—the truth of the denial of false forms. Even behind the two vital personalities there is a truth, the truth of the possession of the inner and outer worlds—not by the ego but by the Divine. That is the harmonisation for which our Yoga stands—but it cannot be achieved by any

outward arrangement, it can only be achieved by going inside and looking, willing and acting from the psychic and from the spiritual centre. For the truth of the being is there and the secret of Harmony also is there.

The Illusionist Metaphors

The illusionist metaphors all fail when you drive them home — they are themselves an illusion. Identification with the body is an error, not an illusion. We are not the body, but the body is still something of ourselves. With realisation the erroneous identification ceases — in certain experiences the existence of the body is not felt at all. In the full realisation the body is within us, not we in it, it is an instrumental formation in our wider being — our consciousness exceeds but also pervades it; it can be dissolved without our ceasing to be the self. That is about all.

*

Your objection is correct. The snake-rope image cannot be used to illustrate the non-existence of the world, it would only mean that our seeing of the world is not that of the world as it really is. The idea of complete illusion would better be illustrated by the juggler's rope-climbing trick, where there is no rope and no climber, and yet one is persuaded that they are there.

Laya

According to both Buddha and Shankara liberation means *laya* of the individual in some transcendent Permanence that is not individualised — so logically a belief in the individual soul must prevent liberation while the sense of misery in the world leads to the attempt to escape.

*

The impulse towards laya is a creation of the mind, it is not the sole possible destiny of the soul. When the mind tries to abolish its own Ignorance, it finds no escape from it except laya,

because it supposes that there is no higher principle of cosmic existence beyond itself—beyond itself is only the pure Spirit, the absolute impersonal Divine. Those who go through the heart (love, bhakti) do not accept laya, they believe in a state beyond of eternal companionship with the Divine or dwelling in the Divine without laya. All this quite apart from supramentalisation. What then becomes of your starting point that laya is the inevitable destiny of the soul and it is only the personal descent of the Avatar that saves it from inevitable laya?

*

There were two points of error [*in the correspondent's remarks about laya*]. (1) That the soul formerly had no other possibility once it reached the Divine than laya. There were other possibilities, e.g. passing into a higher plane, living in the Divine or in the presence of the Divine. Both imply the refusal of birth and leaving the Lila on earth. (2) That it was only for the sake of living with the incarnate Divine and by reason of this descent that the soul consented to give up laya. The capital point is the supramentalisation of the being which is the Divine intention in the evolution on earth and cannot fail to come; the descent or incarnation is only an instrumentation for bringing that about. Your statement therefore became wrong by incompleteness.

*

It is the Vedantic Adwaita experience of laya. It is only one phase of experience—not the whole or the highest Truth of the Divine.

Chapter Seven

Tantra

Tantra and the Integral Yoga

Veda and Vedanta are one side of the one Truth; Tantra with its emphasis on Shakti is another. In this Yoga all sides of the Truth are taken up, not in the systematic forms given them formerly, but in their essence and carried to the fullest and highest significance. But Vedanta deals more with the principles and essentials of the divine knowledge and therefore much of its spiritual knowledge and experience has been taken bodily into the *Arya*. Tantra deals more with forms and processes and organised powers—all these could not be taken as they were, for the integral Yoga needs to develop its own forms and processes, but the ascent of the consciousness through the centres and other Tantrik knowledge are there behind the process of transformation to which so much importance is given by me—also the truth that nothing can be done except through the force of the Mother.

*

The ascension and descent of the Force in this Yoga accomplishes itself in its own way without any necessary reproduction of the details laid down in the books [*on Tantra*]. Many become conscious of the centres, but others simply feel the ascent or descent in a general way or from level to level rather than from centre to centre, that is to say, the Force descending first to the head, then to the heart, then to the navel and still below. It is not at all necessary to become aware of the deities in the centres according to the Tantrik description, but some feel the Mother in the different centres. In these things our sadhana does not cleave to the knowledge given in the books, but only keeps to the central truth behind and realises it independently without any subjection to the old forms and symbols. The centres themselves

have a different interpretation here from that given in the books of the Tantriks.

Kundalini, the Chakras and the Integral Yoga

The process of the Kundalini awakened rising through the centres as also the purification of the centres is a Tantrik knowledge. In our Yoga there is no willed process of the purification and opening of the centres, no raising up of the Kundalini by a set process either. Another method is used, but still there is the ascent of the consciousness from and through the different levels to join the higher consciousness above; there is the opening of the centres and of the planes (mental, vital, physical) which these centres command; there is also the descent which is the main key of the spiritual transformation. Therefore there is, I have said, a Tantrik knowledge behind the process of transformation in this Yoga.

*

There is [*in the Integral Yoga*] no willed opening of the chakras, they open of themselves by the descent of the Force. In the Tantrik discipline they open from down upwards, the Mula-dhara first—in our Yoga, they open from up downward. But the ascent of the force from the Muladhara does take place.

*

The ascent of the Kundalini—not its descent, so far as I know—is a recognised phenomenon; there is one that corresponds in our Yoga, the feeling of the consciousness ascending from the vital or physical to meet the higher consciousness. This is not necessarily through the chakras but is often felt in the whole body. Similarly the descent of the higher consciousness is not felt necessarily or usually through the chakras but as occupying the whole head, neck, chest, abdomen, body.

*

In the Tantra the centres are opened and Kundalini is awakened

by a special process, its action of ascent is felt through the spine. Here it is the pressure of the Force from above that awakens it and opens the centres. There is an ascension of the consciousness going up till it joins the higher consciousness above. This repeats itself (sometimes a descent also is felt) until all the centres are open and the consciousness rises above the body. At a later stage it remains above and widens out into the cosmic consciousness and the universal Self. This is a usual course, but sometimes the process is more rapid and there is a sudden and definite opening above.

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It [*a force in the navel region rising upward in a coiling, pulsating movement*] is what is meant by the Kundalini rising towards the Brahmarandhra — not the whole of it, but something of it is released coiling or circling upward with vibrations (*spandana*) from the Muladhara. It is not always felt like that. Sometimes one simply feels currents or a Force of some kind rising up or just an ascending movement of consciousness. But in all cases it is the release of the Yogic consciousness which is shut up in the chakras and its ascent to meet the Divine Consciousness above. It is this and the corresponding descent from above that make Yogic experiences and realisations possible.

*

It [*the Kundalini*] is the Yogic force asleep in the Muladhara and covered up in the other centres by the ordinary consciousness. When it is liberated, it rises up to join the Brahmic (Divine) consciousness above passing through the centres on its way.

*

There is no Kundalini Shakti above the head. Above the head is the universal or Divine Consciousness and Force. The Kundalini is the latent power asleep in the chakras.

*

The Energy in the Kundalini is the Mother's.

*

I am afraid the attempt to apply scientific analogies to spiritual or Yogic things leads more often to confusion than to anything else,—just as it creates confusion if thrust upon philosophy also. Kundalini coiled in the Muladhara is asleep, plunged in the unconsciousness, supporting the play of the Ignorance. Naturally if she heaves up from there, there may be a disturbance or disruption of the states of the Ignorance, but that would be rather a salutary upheaval and helpful to the purpose of Yoga. Kundalini becoming conscious rises up to meet the Brahman in the thousand-petalled lotus. A mere ejection from her uniting with the higher consciousness would hardly lead to a radical change. Of course she need not abandon connection with the physical centre altogether; but she is no longer coiled there: if she were, the great occult force residing there would not be liberated. The usual image of her risen and awake is, I believe, that of a serpent standing erect, the tail touching the lowest centre, the head the highest at the Brahmarandhra. Thus with all the centres open and active she unites the two poles, superior and inferior, of the being, the spirit with Matter.

*

Sri Aurobindo¹ cannot undertake to guide you as your Guru, for the reason that he takes as disciples only those who follow his special path of Yoga; your experiences follow a different line. In his Yoga there may be an occasional current in the spine as in other nerve channels or different parts of the body, but no awakening of the Kundalini in this particular and powerful fashion. There is only a quiet uprising of the consciousness from the lower centres to join the spiritual consciousness above and a descent of the Divine Force from above which does its own work in the mind and body—the manner and stages varying in each sadhak. A perfect confidence in the Divine Mother and a vigilance to repel all wrong suggestions and influences is the main law of this Yoga. Your opening having once been so powerful on

¹ This letter was written by Sri Aurobindo in the third person and sent to the enquirer through his secretary.—Ed.

the more usual Tantric lines (even without your own will intervening), it is hardly probable that it could now change easily to other lines — any such effort might create a serious disturbance. In speaking of a competent Guru Sri Aurobindo meant one who had himself practised this opening of the centres and become siddha in that line of Yoga. It should not be impossible to find one — when one has the call for the Guru, the Guru sooner or later comes. Meanwhile to put away fear and have confidence in the Divine working is indispensable — but no effort should be made to force the pace by concentrated meditation unless you have a guide whom you can trust — a clear guidance from within or a guide from without. The inspiration about the Ida nadi and the subsequent waking of the Shakti show that there was an intervention at a critical moment and that the call to it whenever needed is likely to be effective.

In the experiences proper related in your first letter there is absolutely nothing that should have disturbed you — all was quite normal, the usual experiences of the Yogi at such a juncture and very good and powerful, such as do not come except by the grace of the Divine. Probably the opening came after slow invisible preparation as a result of the meditation on the lotus at the top of the head; for that is always an invitation to the Kundalini to awake or for the lower consciousness to rise and meet the higher. The disturbing factor came with the feeling of discomfort in the heart due to some resistance in the physical being which is very often felt and can be overcome by the working of the Force itself and the fear that came afterwards in the seats of the vital Nature, heart, navel etc. But that was no part of the experience, it was an interference by a wrong reaction from the lower or exterior consciousness. If you had not allowed yourself to be disturbed, probably nothing untoward would have disturbed the process. One must not get frightened by unusual states or movements or experiences, the Yogi must be fearless, *abhīḥ*; it is absurd to have a fear because one can control one's states; that is a power very much to be desired and welcomed in Yoga.

The crisis related in the second letter would hardly have

come, if there had not been this reaction; but in any case there was the intervention and setting right of the trouble. However these reactions and the fact that the disturbance came show that something in the exterior consciousness is not altogether prepared; it is better to wait and seek for a guide so that ignorant steps or reactions may not bring again a serious trouble or danger. This is all that Sri Aurobindo can say by way of enlightenment and advice. He does not usually intervene with anyone not his disciple, but as your case was an unusual one and your call urgent, he has given you what light he can on your experience.

Levels of Speech (Vak)

The Tantriks locate these forms of speech in different chakras. Speech may be internal or external, either may have the stamp of the same power. But if it is to be measured by withdrawal from externality, then Para ought to mean something of the causal realm beyond mind.

*

Pashyanti is evidently speech with the vision of Truth in it —Para is probably the revelatory and inspired speech. I am not certain about the exact nature of the others [*Vaikhari and Madhyama*].

Chapter Eight

Bhakti Yoga and Vaishnavism

The Vaishnava Theory and Sadhana

They [*the Vaishnavas*] accept the world as a Lila, but the true Lila is elsewhere in the eternal Brindavan. All the religions which believe in the personal Godhead accept the universe as a reality, a Lila or a creation made by the will of God, but temporal and not eternal. The aim is the eternal status above.

*

The idea of a temporary Kingdom of heaven on earth is contained in the Puranas and conceived by some Vaishnava saints or poets; but it is a devotional idea, no philosophical basis is given for the expectation. I think the Tantric overcoming of imperfection is more individual, not collective.

*

It is the Vaishnava theory — that if you only repeat the name of Hari it is enough — nothing else needed. Even if you do it by accident, you will go posthaste to Heaven. It has always seemed to be the apotheosis of laziness and incompetence. There are plenty of people who have a little Bhakti for Krishna but I don't find them revelling in all the fruits of tapasya.

*

If you can feel the Name bringing you peace, it should be able to bring everything else, bhakti, joy, the revelation of the Power and the Presence and the full feeling and consciousness of it to you. That is indeed the process of the Vaishnava sadhana and the power of the Name in it. Only, keep your poise and persevere.

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The Supramental is something in which the basis is absolute calm

and however intense a Divine Love there is in it it does not disturb the calm but increases its depth. Chaitanya's experience was not that of Supermind, but of a Love and Ananda brought from above into the vital—the response of the vital is an extreme passion and exultation of Godward love and Ananda, the result of which is these *vikāras*. Chaitanya claimed this supremacy for the Radha experience because Ananda is higher than the experiences of the spiritual mind, Ananda being according to the Upanishads the supreme plane of experience. But this is a logical conclusion which cannot be accepted wholly—one must pass through the supermind to arrive to the highest Ananda and in the supermind there is a unification and harmonisation of all the divine Powers (Knowledge, etc. as well as Love and Ananda). Different sadhanas emphasise one aspect or another as the highest, but it is this union of all that must be the true base of the highest realisation and experience.

Vaishnava Bhakti and the Integral Yoga

It is not necessary to repeat past forms [of *Bhakti Yoga*]—to bring out the bhakti of the psychic being and give it whatever forms come naturally in the development is the proper way for our sadhana.

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What three signs [of the *Paramhansa*]? If you refer to the four conditions (child, madman, demon, inert), it is not Ramakrishna who invented that. It is an old Sanskrit sloka, *bālonmādapiśācājadavat*, describing the Paramhansa or rather the various forms of Paramhansahood. The Paramhansa is a particular grade of realisation, there are others supposed to be lower or higher.

I have no objection to them [*vital manifestations of love and bhakti*] in their own place. But I must remind you that in my Yoga all vital movements must come under the control of the psychic and of the spiritual calm, knowledge and peace. If they conflict with the psychic or the spiritual control, they upset the balance and prevent the forming of the base of transformation.

If unbalance is good for other paths, that is the business of those who follow them. It does not suit mine.

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Everybody must be made to understand clearly that this is not a sadhana of emotional and egoistic *bhakti*, but of surrender. One who makes demands and threatens to commit suicide if his demands are not complied with, is not meant for this Yoga. . . .

This Yoga is not a Yoga of emotional egoistic vital *bhakti* full of demands and desires. There is no room in it for *ābdār* of any kind. It is only for those who surrender to the Divine and obey implicitly the directions given to them by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.

The True Vaishnava Attitude

Your whole-hearted acceptance of the Vaishnava idea and *bhakti* becomes rather bewildering when it is coupled with an insistence that love cannot be given to the Divine until one has experience of the Divine. For what is more common in the Vaishnava attitude than the joy of *bhakti* for its own sake? "Give me *bhakti*," it cries, "whatever else you may keep from me. Even if it is long before I can meet you, even if you delay to manifest yourself, let my *bhakti*, my seeking for you, my cry, my love, my adoration be always there." How constantly the Bhakta has sung, "All my life I have been seeking you and still you are not there, but still I seek and cannot cease to seek and love and adore." If it were really impossible to love God unless you first experience him, how could this be? In fact your mind seems to be putting the cart before the horse. One seeks after God first, with persistence or with passion, one finds him afterwards, some sooner than others, but most after a long seeking. One does not find him first, then seek after him. Even a glimpse only comes after long or fervent seeking. One has the love of God or at any rate some heart's desire for him and afterwards one becomes aware of God's love, its reply to the heart's desire, its response of the supreme joy and Ananda. One does not say to God, "Show your love for

me first, shower on me the experience of yourself, satisfy my demand, then I will see whether I can love you so long as you deserve it.” It is surely the seeker who must seek and love first, follow the quest, become impassioned for the Sought—then only does the veil move aside and the Light be seen and the Face manifest that alone can satisfy the soul after its long sojourn in the desert.

Then again you may say, “Yes, but whether I love or not, I want, I have always wanted and now I want more and more, but I get nothing.” Yes, but wanting is not all. As you now begin to see, there are conditions that have to be met—like the purification of the heart. Your thesis was, “Once I want God, God must manifest to me, come to me, at least give glimpses of himself to me, the real solid concrete experiences, not mere vague things which I can’t understand or value. God’s Grace must answer my call for it, whether I yet deserve it or not—or else there is no Grace.” God’s Grace may indeed do that in certain cases, but where does the “must” come in? If God must do it, it is no longer God’s Grace, but God’s duty or an obligation or a contract or a treaty. The Divine looks into the heart and removes the veil at the moment which he knows to be the right moment to do it. You have laid stress on the bhakti theory that one has only to call his name and he must reply, he must at once be there. Perhaps, but for whom is this true? For a certain kind of Bhakta surely who feels the power of the Name, who has the passion of the Name and puts it into his cry. If one is like that, then there may be the immediate reply—if not, one has to become like that, then there will be the reply. But some go on using the Name for years, before there is an answer. Ramakrishna himself got it after a few months, but what months! and what a condition he had to pass through before he got it! Still he succeeded quickly because he had a pure heart already—and that divine passion in it.

It is not surely the Bhakta but the man of knowledge who demands experience first. He can say, “How can I know without experience?”, but even he goes on seeking like Tota Puri even though for thirty years, striving for the decisive realisation. It is

really the man of intellect, the rationalist who says, "Let God, if he exists, prove himself to me first, then I will believe, then I will make some serious and prolonged effort to explore him and see what he is like."

All this does not mean that experience is irrelevant to sadhana—I certainly cannot have said such a stupid thing. What I have said is that the love and seeking of the Divine can be and ordinarily is there before the experience comes—it is an instinct, an inherent longing in the soul and it comes up as soon as certain coverings of the soul disappear or begin to disappear. The next thing I have said is that it is better to get the nature ready first (the purified heart and all that) before the "experiences" begin rather than the other way round and I base that on the many cases there have been of the danger of experiences before the heart and vital are ready for the true experience. Of course in many cases there is a true experience first, a touch of the Grace, but it is not something that lasts and is always there, but rather something that touches and withdraws and waits for the nature to get ready. But this is not so in every case, not even in many cases, I believe. One has to begin with the soul's inherent longing, then the struggle with the nature to get the temple ready, then the unveiling of the Image, the permanent Presence in the sanctuary.

P.S. All this is of course only an answer couched in mental terms to your one objection or inability to conceive how one can love God without having first known Him or had experience of Him. But mental reasoning by itself leads to nothing—it is something in yourself that has to see and then there is no difficulty. Fortunately, you are moving near to that. Nor would I trouble at all about this point, if you did not make of it a support for depression and despair. Otherwise it would have no importance, since with one idea or with the other one can arrive at the goal because the soul drives towards it.

The Sunlit Way of Yoga

Peace was the very first thing that the Yogins and seekers of old

asked for and it was a quiet and silent mind — and that always brings peace — that they declared to be the best condition for realising the Divine. A cheerful and sunlit heart is the fit vessel for the Ananda and who shall say that Ananda or what prepares it is an obstacle to the Divine union? As for despondency, it is surely a terrible burden to carry on the way. One has to pass through it sometimes, like Christian of *The Pilgrim's Progress* through the Slough of Despond, but its constant reiteration cannot be anything but an obstacle. The Gita specially says, "Practise the Yoga with an undespondent heart", *anirvijn̄acetasā*.

I know perfectly well that pain and suffering and struggle and excesses of despair are natural — though not inevitable — on the way, — not because they are helps, but because they are imposed on us by the darkness of this human nature out of which we have to struggle into the Light. I do not suppose Ramakrishna or Vivekananda would have recommended the incidents you allude to as an example for others to follow — they would surely have said that faith, fortitude, perseverance were the better way. That after all was what they stuck to in the end in spite of these bad moments and they would never have dreamed of giving up the Yoga or the aspiration for the Divine on the ground that they were unfit and not meant for the realisation.

At any rate Ramakrishna told the story of Narada and the ascetic Yogi and the Vaishnava Bhakta with approval of its moral. I put it in my own language but keep the substance. Narada on his way to Vaikuntha met a Yogi practising hard tapasya on the hills. "O Narada," cried the Yogi, "you are going to Vaikuntha and will see Vishnu. I have been practising terrific austerities all my life and yet I have not even now attained to Him. Ask Him at least for me when I shall reach Him." Then Narada met a Vaishnava, a Bhakta who was singing songs to Hari and dancing to his own singing, and he cried also, "O Narada, you will see my Lord, Hari. Ask my Lord when I shall reach Him and see His face." On his way back Narada came first to the Yogi. "I have asked Vishnu; you will realise Him after six more lives." The Yogi raised a cry of loud lamentation,

“What, so many austerities! such gigantic endeavours! and my reward is realisation after six long lives! O how hard to me is the Lord Vishnu.” Next Narada met again the Bhakta and said to him, “I have no good news for you. You will see the Lord, but only after a lakh of lives.” But the Bhakta leapt up with a great cry of rapture, “Oh, I shall see my Lord Hari! after a lakh of lives I shall see my Lord Hari! How great is the grace of the Lord.” And he began dancing and singing in a renewed ecstasy. Then Narada said, “Thou hast attained. Today thou shalt see the Lord!” Well, you may say, “What an extravagant story and how contrary to human nature!” Not so contrary as all that and in any case hardly more extravagant than the stories of Harishchandra and Shivi. Still I do not hold up the Bhakta as an example, for I myself insist on the realisation in this life and not after six or a lakh of births more. But the point of these stories is in the moral and surely when Ramakrishna told it, he was not ignorant that there was a sunlit path of Yoga! He even seems to say that it is the quicker way as well as the better! You are quite mistaken in thinking that the possibility of the sunlit path is a discovery or original invention of mine. The very first books on Yoga I read more than thirty years ago spoke of the dark and sunlit way and emphasised the superiority of the second over the other.

It is not either because I have myself trod the sunlit way or flinched from difficulty and suffering and danger. I have had my full share of these things and the Mother has had ten times her full share. But that was because the finders of the Way had to face these things in order to conquer. No difficulty that can come on the sadhak but has faced us on the path; against many we have had to struggle hundreds of times (in fact that is an understatement) before we could overcome; many still remain protesting that they have a right until the perfect perfection is there. But we have never consented to admit their inevitable necessity for others. It is in fact to ensure an easier path to others hereafter that we have borne that burden. It was with that object that the Mother once prayed to the Divine that whatever difficulties, dangers, sufferings were necessary for the path might be laid on

her rather than on others. It has been so far heard that as a result of daily and terrible struggles for years those who put an entire and sincere confidence in her *are* able to follow the sunlit path and even those who cannot, yet when they do put the trust find their path suddenly easy and, if it becomes difficult again, it is only when distrust, revolt, abhiman, or other darknesses come upon them. The sunlit path is not altogether a fable.

But you will ask what of those who cannot? Well, it is for them I am putting forth all my efforts to bring down the supramental Force within a measurable time. I know that it will descend but I am seeking its near descent and, with whatever dark obstruction of the earth-nature or furious inroads of the Asuric forces seeking to prevent it, it is approaching the terrestrial soil. The supramental is not, as you imagine, something cold, hard and rocklike. It bears within it the presence of the Divine Love as well as the Divine Truth and its reign here means for those who accept it the straight and thornless path on which there is no wall or obstacle of which the ancient Rishis saw the far-off promise.

The dark path is there and there are many who make like the Christians a gospel of spiritual suffering; many hold it to be the unavoidable price of victory. It may be so under certain circumstances, as it has been in so many lives at least at the beginning, or one may choose to make it so. But then the price has to be paid with resignation, fortitude or a tenacious resilience. I admit that if borne in that way the attacks of the Dark Forces or the ordeals they impose have a meaning. After each victory gained over them, there is then a sensible advance; often they seem to show us the difficulties in ourselves which we have to overcome and to say, "Here you must conquer us and here." But all the same it is a too dark and difficult way which nobody should follow on whom the necessity does not lie.

In any case one thing can never help and that is to despond always and say, "I am unfit; I am not meant for the Yoga." And worse still are these perilous mental formations such as you are always accepting that you must fare like X (one whose difficulty of exaggerated ambition was quite different from yours) and

that you have only six years etc. These are clear formations of the Dark Forces seeking not only to sterilise your aspiration but to lead you away and so prevent your sharing in the fruit of the victory hereafter. I do not know what Krishnaprem has said but his injunction, if you have rightly understood it, is one that cannot stand as valid, since so many have done Yoga relying on tapasya or anything else but not confident of any divine Grace. It is not that, but the soul's demand for a higher Truth or a higher life that is indispensable. Where that is, the Divine Grace whether believed in or not, will intervene. If you believe, that hastens and facilitates things; if you cannot yet believe, still the soul's aspiration will justify itself with whatever difficulty and struggle.

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Prāyopaveśana would be quite the wrong movement, it would be a sort of Satyagraha against the Divine. In essence it is an attempt to force the Divine to do what one wants instead of trusting to him to do what is best according to his own divine will and wisdom; it is a culminating act of vital impatience and disappointed desire, while the true movement is a pure aspiration and an ardent surrender.

After all, one has not a *right* to call on the Divine to manifest himself; it can come only as a response to a spiritual or psychic state of consciousness or to a long course of sadhana rightly done; or, if it comes before that or without any apparent reason, it is a grace; but one cannot demand or compel grace; grace is something spontaneous which wells out from the Divine Consciousness as a free flower of its being. The bhakta looks for it, but he is ready to wait in perfect reliance, even if need be all his life, knowing that it will come, never varying in his love and surrender because it does not come now or soon. That is the spirit of so many songs of the devotees, which you have sung yourself; I heard one such song from you in a record some time ago and a very beautiful song it was and beautifully sung—“Even if I have not won thee, O Lord, still I adore.”

What prevents you from having that, is the restless element

of vital impatience and ever recurring or persisting disappointment at not having what you want from the Divine. It is the idea, "I wish so much for it, surely I ought to have it; why is it withheld from me?" But wanting, however strongly, is not a passport to getting; there is something more to it than that. Our experience is that too much vital eagerness and insistence often blocks the way, it makes a sort of obstructing mass or a whirl of restlessness and disturbance which leaves no quiet space for the Divine to get in or for the thing wished for to come. Often it does come, but when the impatience has been definitely renounced and one waits, quietly open, for whatever may be (or for the time not be) given. But so often when you are preparing for a greater progress in the true devotion the habit of this vital element stands up and takes hold and interrupts the progress made.

The joylessness also comes from the vital. It is partly due to the disappointment but not solely, for it is a very common phenomenon when there is a pressure from the mind and soul on the vital to give up its attachments and its full unpurified acceptance of the outward life; it often gets a rajasic or tamasic vairagya instead of the sattwic kind, refuses to take a joy in anything, becomes dry, listless or unhappy, or it says, "Well, I have given up, I am giving up, but in exchange I must have the realisation you promise me; why don't I get it, I can't wait." To get rid of that, it is best, even while observing it, not to identify oneself with it; if the mind or some part of the mind sanctions or justifies, it will persist or recur. If sorrow there must be, the other kind you described in the previous letter is preferable, the sadness that has a sweetness in it, no revolt, no despair, only the psychic longing for the true thing to come.

It is not by *prāyopavesāna* or anything of the kind that it must come, but by the increase of the pure and true bhakti. You have been constantly told so by us and lately by Krishnaprem and his guru; remember that she told you that the presence of Krishna during your singing was a sure sign that it would come, —not necessarily today or tomorrow or the day after, but that it would surely come. We can't be all of us wrong and your vital

impatience only in the right. For heaven's sake, get rid of it and settle down to quiet aspiration and an ever growing devotion and surrender leaving it to Krishna to do what he is sure to do in his own way and time.

Ordinary Life, Vaishnava Traditions and the Supramental Yoga

Even if things were as bad as you say, I don't see how going away would help you in the least—(it would certainly not make you non-human); some have tried before this device of progress by departure and it has never succeeded, they have had to come back and face their difficulty. Why do you always come back to this notion of going away or entertain it at all? It is quite meaningless from any rational point of view; it only encourages the adverse Force which wants to take you away from the path to return to the attack, and it prevents the speedy conversion of that dissatisfied part of your vital which is always kicking against the pricks—the pricks of your soul and of your spiritual destiny. However sad the prospect may seem to this dissatisfied vital fragment, your destiny is to be a Yogi and the sooner it reconciles itself to the prospect the better for it and for all the other personalities in you. Your alleged or inferred unfitness is a delusion, an imagination of this vital part; it doesn't exist. If persistence of difficulties is a proof of unfitness, then there is nobody in this Asram who is fit for the Yoga. We would all have to pack up our belongings or give them away and start either to get back to the ordinary world or en route for the Himalayas.

You describe the rich human egoistic life you might have lived and you say "not altogether a wretched life, you will admit". On paper, it sounds even very glowing and satisfactory, as you describe it. But there is no real or final satisfaction in it, except for those who are too common or trivial to seek anything else, and even they are not really satisfied or happy,— and in the end, it tires and palls. Sorrow and illness, clash and strife, disappointment, disillusionment and all kinds of human suffering come and beat its glow to pieces—and then decay and death.

That is the vital egoistic life as man has found it throughout the ages, and yet it is that which this part of your vital regrets? How do you fail to see, when you lay so much stress on the desirability of a merely human consciousness, that suffering is its badge? When the vital resists the change from the human into the divine consciousness, what it is defending is its right to sorrow and suffering and all the rest of it, varied and relieved no doubt by some vital or mental pleasures and satisfactions, but very partially relieved by them and only for a time. In your own case, it was already beginning to pall on you and that was why you turned from it. No doubt, there were the joys of the intellect and of artistic creation, but a man cannot be an artist alone; there is the outer quite human lower vital part and, in all but a few, it is the most clamorous and insistent part. But what was dissatisfied in you? It was the soul within, first of all, and through it the higher mind and the higher vital. Why then find fault with the Divine for misleading you when it turned you to the Yoga or brought you here? It was simply answering to the demand of your own inner being and the higher parts of your nature. If you have so much difficulty and become restless, it is because you are still divided and something in your lower vital still regrets what it has lost or, as a price for its adhesion or a compensation — a price to be *immediately* paid down to it, — asks for something similar and equivalent in the spiritual life. It refuses to believe that there is a greater compensation, a larger vital life waiting for it in which there shall not be the old inadequacy and unrest and final dissatisfaction. The foolishness is not in the Divine guidance, but in the irrational and obstinate resistance of this confused and obscure part of you to the demand, made not only by this Yoga, but by all Yoga — to the necessary conditions for the satisfaction of the aspiration of your own soul and higher nature.

The “human” vital consciousness has moved always between these two poles, the ordinary vital life which cannot satisfy and the recoil from it to the ascetic solution. India has gone fully through that see-saw; now Europe is beginning once more after a full trial to feel the failure of the mere vital egoistic life.

The traditional Yogas — to which you appeal — are founded upon the movement between these two poles. On one side are Shankara and Buddha and most go, if not by the same road, yet in that direction; on the other are Vaishnava or Tantric lines which try to combine asceticism with some sublimation of the vital impulse. And where did these lines end? They fell back to the other pole, to a vital invasion, even corruption and a loss of their spirit. At the present day the general movement is towards an attempt at reconciliation, and you have alluded sometimes to some of the protagonists of this attempt and asked me my opinion about them, yours being unfavourable. But these men are not mere charlatans, and if there is anything wrong with them (on which I do not pronounce), it can only be because they are unable to resist the magnetic pull of this lower pole of the egoistic vital desire-nature. And if they are unable to resist, it is because they have not found the true force which will not only neutralise that pull and prevent deterioration and downward lapse, but transform and utilise and satisfy in their own deeper truth, instead of destroying or throwing away, the life-force and the embodiment in matter; for that can only be done by the supermind power and by no other.

You appeal to the Vaishnava-Tantric traditions, to Chaitanya, Ramprasad, Ramakrishna. I know something about them and, if I did not try to repeat them, it is because I do not find in them the solution, the reconciliation I am seeking. Your quotation from Ramprasad does not assist me in the least — and it does not support your thesis either. Ramprasad is not speaking of an embodied, but of a bodiless and invisible Divine — or visible only in a subtle form to the inner experience. When he speaks of maintaining his claim or case against the Mother until she lifts him into her lap, he is not speaking of any outer vital or physical contact, but of an inner psychic experience; precisely, he is protesting against her keeping him in the external vital and physical nature and insists on her taking him on the psycho-spiritual plane into *spiritual* union with her. All that is very good and very beautiful, but it is not enough; the union has indeed to be realised in the inner psycho-spiritual experience first, because

without that nothing sound or lasting can be done; but also there must be a realisation of the Divine in the outer consciousness and life, in the vital and physical planes on their own essential lines. It is that which, without your mind understanding it or how it is to be done, you are asking for, and I too; only I see the necessity of a vital transformation, while you seem to think and to demand that it should be done without any radical transformation, leaving the vital as it is. In the beginning, before I discovered the secret of the supermind, I myself tried to seek the reconciliation through an association of the spiritual consciousness with the vital, but my experience and all experience shows that this leads to nothing definite and final,—it ends where it began, midway between the two poles of human nature. An association is not enough, a transformation is indispensable.

The tradition of later Vaishnava bhakti is an attempt to sublimate the vital impulses through love by turning human love towards the Divine. It made a strong and intense effort and had many rich and beautiful experiences; but its weakness was just there, that it remained valid only as an inner experience turned towards the inner Divine, but it stopped at that point. Chaitanya's *prema* was nothing but a psychic divine love with a strong sublimated vital manifestation. But the moment Vaishnavism before or after him made an attempt at greater externalisation, we know what happened—a vitalistic deterioration, much corruption and decline. You cannot appeal to Chaitanya's example as against psychic or divine love; it was not something merely vital-human; in its essence, though not in its form, it was very much the first step in the transformation, which we ask of the sadhaks, to make their love psychic and use the vital not for its own sake, but as an expression of the soul's realisation. It is the first step and perhaps for some it may be sufficient, for we are not asking everybody to become supramental; but for any *full* manifestation on the physical plane the supramental is indispensable.

In this later Vaishnava tradition the sadhana takes the form of an application of human vital love in all its principal turns to the Divine; *viraha, abhimāna*, even complete separation (like the

departure of Krishna to Mathura) are made prominent elements of this Yoga. But all that was only meant — in the sadhana itself, not in the Vaishnava poems — as a passage of which the end is *milana* or complete union; but the stress laid on the untoward elements by some would almost seem to make strife, separation, *abhimāna*, the whole means if not the very object of this kind of *prema-yoga*. Again, this method was only applied to the inner, not to a physically embodied Divine and had a reference to certain states and reactions of the inner consciousness in its seeking after the Divine. In the relations with the embodied Divine manifestation, or, I may add, of the disciple with the Guru, such things might rise as a result of human imperfection, but they were not made part of the theory of the relations. I do not think they formed a regular and authorised part of the relations of the bhaktas to Chaitanya or of the disciples at Dakshineshwar towards Ramakrishna! On the contrary, the relation of the disciple to the Guru in the Guruvada is supposed always to be that of worship, respect, complete happy confidence, unquestioning acceptance of the guidance. The application of the unchanged vital relations to the embodied Divine or the Guru may lead and has led to movements which are not conducive to the progress of the Yoga.

Ramakrishna's Yoga was also turned only to an inner realisation of the inner Divine, — nothing less but also nothing more. I believe his sentence about the claim of the sadhak on the Divine for whom one has sacrificed everything was the assertion of an inner and not an outer claim, on the inner rather than on any physically embodied Divine: it was a claim for the full spiritual union, the God-lover seeking the Divine, but the Divine also giving himself and meeting the God-lover. There can be no objection to that; such a claim all seekers of the Divine have; but as to the modalities of this Divine meeting, it does not carry us much farther. In any case, my object is a realisation on the physical plane and I cannot consent merely to repeat Ramakrishna. I seem to remember too that for a long time he was withdrawn into himself, all his life was not spent with his disciples! He got his siddhi first in retirement and when

he came out and received everyone—well, a few years of it wore out his body. To that, I suppose, he had no objection; he even pronounced a theory, when Keshav Chandra was dying, that spiritual experience *ought* to wear out the body! But at the same time, when asked why he got his illness in the throat, he answered that it was the sins of his disciples which they threw upon him and he had to swallow! Not being satisfied, as he was, with an inner liberation alone, I cannot accept these ideas or these results, for it does not sound to me like a successful meeting of the Divine and the sadhak *on the physical plane*, however successful it might have been for the inner life. Krishna did great things and was very clearly a manifestation of the Divine. But I remember a passage of the Mahabharata in which he complains of the unquiet life his followers and adorers gave him, their constant demands, reproaches, their throwing of their unregenerate vital nature upon him. And in the Gita he speaks of this human world as a transient and sorrowful affair and, in spite of his gospel of divine action, seems almost to admit that to leave it is after all the last solution! The traditions of the past are very great in their own place,—in the past; but I do not see why we should merely repeat them and not go farther. In the spiritual development of the consciousness upon earth the great past ought to be followed by a greater future.

There is the rub that you seem all to ignore entirely, the difficulties of the physical embodiment and the divine realisation on the physical plane. For most, it seems to be a simple alternative; either the Divine comes down in full power and the thing is done — no difficulty, no necessary conditions, no law or process, only miracle and magic, or else, well, this can't be the Divine! Again you all (or almost all) insist on the Divine becoming human, remaining in the human consciousness and you protest against any attempt to make the human divine; on the other hand there is an outcry of disappointment, bewilderment, distrust, perhaps indignation, if there are human difficulties, if there is strain in the body, a swaying struggle with adverse forces, obstacles, checks, illness, and some begin to say, "Oh, there is nothing divine here!" — as if one could remain, vitally and physically, in the

untransformed undivinised human consciousness, in unchanged contact with it, satisfying its demands, and yet be immune under all circumstances and in all conditions against strain and struggle and illness. If I want to divinise the human consciousness, to bring down the supramental, the Truth-Consciousness, the Light, the Force into the physical to transform it, to create there a great fullness of Truth and Light and Power and Bliss and Love, and make these other things impossible, the response is repulsion, or fear, or unwillingness—or a doubt whether it is possible. On one side there is the claim that illness and the rest should be impossible, on the other a violent rejection of the only condition under which these things can become impossible. I know that this is the natural inconsistency of the human vital mind wanting two inconsistent and incompatible things together; but that is one reason why it is necessary to transform the human and put something a little more luminous in its place.

But is the Divine then something so terrible, horrible or repellent that the idea of its entry into the physical, its divinising of the human should create this shrinking, refusal, revolt or fear? I can understand that the unregenerate vital attached to its own petty sufferings and pleasures, to the brief ignorant drama of life, should shrink from what will change it. But why should a God-lover, a God-seeker, a sadhak fear the divinisation of the consciousness! Why should he object to becoming one in nature with what he seeks, why should he recoil from *sādṛśya-mukti*? Behind this fear there are usually two causes: first, there is the feeling of the vital that it will have to cease to be obscure, crude, muddy, egoistic, unrefined (spiritually), full of stimulating desires and small pleasures and interesting sufferings (for it shrinks even from the Ananda which will replace them); next, there is some vague ignorant idea of the mind, due, I suppose, to the ascetic tradition, that the divine nature is something cold, bare, empty, austere, aloof, without the glorious riches of the egoistic human vital life. As if there were not a divine vital and as if that divine vital is not itself and, when it gets the means to manifest, will not make the life on earth also infinitely more full of beauty, love, radiance, warmth, fire, intensity and divine passion and

capacity for bliss than the present impotent, suffering, pettily and transiently excited and soon tired vitality of the still so imperfect human creation!

But you will say that it is not the Divine from which you recoil, rather you accept and ask for it (provided that it is not too divine), but what you object to is the supramental—grand, aloof, incomprehensible, unapproachable, a sort of austere Nirakara Brahman. The supramental so described is a bogey created by this part of your vital mind in order to frighten itself and justify its attitude. Behind this strange description there seems to be an idea that the supramental is a new version of the Vedantic featureless and incommunicable Parabrahman, vast, grand, cold, empty, remote, devastating, overwhelming; it is not quite that, of course, since it can come down, but for all practical purposes it is just as bad! It is curious that you admit your ignorance of what the supramental can be, and yet you in these moods not only pronounce categorically what it is like, but reject emphatically my experience about it as of no practical validity or not valid for anybody but myself! I have not insisted, I have answered only casually because I am not asking you now to be non-human or divine, much less to be supramental; but as you are always returning to this point when you have these attacks and making it the pivot—or at least a main support—of your depression, I am obliged to answer. The supramental is *not* grand, aloof, cold and austere; it is not something opposed to or inconsistent with a full vital and physical manifestation; on the contrary, it carries in it the only possibility of the full fullness of the vital force and the physical life on earth. It is because it is so, because it was so revealed to me and for no other reason that I have followed after it and persevered till I came into contact with it and was able to draw down some power of it and its influence. I am concerned with the earth and not with worlds beyond for their own sake; it is a terrestrial realisation that I seek and not a flight to distant summits. All other Yogas regard this life as an illusion or a passing phase; the supramental Yoga alone regards it as a thing created by the Divine for a progressive manifestation and takes the fulfilment

of the life and the body for its object. The supramental is simply the Truth-Consciousness and what it brings in its descent is the full truth of life, the full truth of consciousness in Matter. One has indeed to rise to high summits to reach it, but the more one rises, the more one can bring down below. No doubt, life and body have not to remain the ignorant, imperfect, impotent things they are now; but why should a change to fuller life-power, fuller body-power be considered something aloof, cold and undesirable? The utmost Ananda the body and life are now capable of is a brief excitement of the vital mind or the nerves or the cells which is limited, imperfect and soon passes; with the supramental change all the cells, nerves, vital forces, embodied mental forces can become filled with a thousandfold Ananda, capable of an intensity of bliss which passes description and which need not fade away. How aloof, repellent and undesirable! The supramental love means an intense unity of soul with soul, mind with mind, life with life, and an entire flooding of the body consciousness with the physical experience of oneness, the presence of the Beloved in every part, in every cell of the body. Is that too something aloof and grand but undesirable? With the supramental change, the very thing on which you insist, the possibility of the free physical meeting of the embodied Divine with the sadhak without conflict of forces and without undesirable reactions becomes possible, assured and free. That too is, I suppose, something aloof and undesirable? I could go on—for pages, but this is enough for the moment.

Different Approaches through Love and Bhakti

It seems to me that these differences of valuation come from the mind laying stress on one side or another of the approach to the Divine or exalting one aspect of realisation over another. When there is the approach through the heart, through Love and Bhakti, its highest culmination is in a transcendent Ananda, an unspeakable Bliss or Beatitude of union with the Divine through Love. The school of Chaitanya laid especial and indeed sole emphasis on this way and made this the whole reality of

Krishna consciousness. But the transcendent Ananda is there at the origin and end of all existence and this is not and cannot be the sole way to it. One can arrive at it also through the Vasudeva consciousness, which is a wider, more mentalised approach — as in the method of the Gita where knowledge, works, bhakti are all centred in Krishna, the One, the Supreme, the All and arrive through the cosmic consciousness to the luminous transcendence. There is the way too described in the Taittiriya Upanishad, the Vedanta's Gospel of Bliss. These are certainly wider methods, for they take up the whole existence through all its parts and ways of being to the Divine. If less intense at their starting point, a vaster and slower movement, there is no reason to suppose that they are less intense on their summits of arrival. It is the same transcendence to which all arrive, either with a large movement gathering up everything spiritual in us to take it there in a vast sublimation, or in a single intense uplifting from one point, a single exaltation leaving all the rest aside. But who shall say which is profounder of the two? Concentrated love has a profundity of its own which cannot be measured; concentrated wisdom has a wider profundity but one cannot say that it is deeper.

Cosmic values are only reflections of the truth of the Transcendence in a lesser truth of time experience which is separative and sees diversely a thousand aspects of the One. As one rises through the mind or any part of the manifested being, any one or more of these aspects can become more and more sublimated and tend towards its supreme transcendental intensity, and whatever aspect is so experienced is declared by the spiritualised mental consciousness to be the supreme thing. But when one goes beyond mind all tends not only to sublimate but to fuse together until the separated aspects recover their original unity, indivisible in the absoluteness of all made one. Mind can conceive and have experience of existence without consciousness or Ananda and this receives its utmost expression in the inconscience attributed to Matter. So also it can conceive of Ananda or Love as a separate principle; it even feels consciousness and existence losing themselves in a trance or swoon of

Love or Ananda. So too the limited personal loses itself in the illimitable Person, the lover in the supreme Beloved, or else the personal in the Impersonal,—the lover feels himself immersed, losing himself in the transcendental reality of Love or Ananda. The personal and the impersonal are themselves posited and experienced by mind as separate realities—and one or other is declared and seen as supreme, so that the personal can have *laya* in the Impersonal or on the contrary the impersonal disappear into the absolute reality of the supreme and divine Person; the impersonal in that view is only an attribute or power of the personal Divine. But at the summit of spiritual experience passing beyond mind one begins to feel the fusion of all these things into one. Consciousness, Existence, Ananda return to their indivisible unity, Sachchidananda. The personal and the impersonal become irrevocably one, so that to posit one as against the other appears as an act of ignorance. This tendency of unification is the basis of the supramental consciousness and experience; for cosmic or creative purposes the supermind can put forward one aspect prominently where that is needed, but it is aware of all the rest behind it or contained in it and does not admit into its view any separation or opposition anywhere. For that reason a supramental creation would be a multifold harmony and not a separative process fragmenting or analysing the One into parts and setting these parts over against each other or else putting them contradictorily against each other and having afterwards to synthetise and piece them together in order to arrive at harmony or else to exclude some or all of the parts in order to realise the indivisible One.

You speak of the Vaishnava school emphasising the personal felicities, as in the classification of the *bhāvas*, and you say that these are short and quick feelings and lack in vastness or amplitude. No doubt, when they are first felt and as they are felt by the limited consciousness in its ordinary functioning and movement; but that is only because the emotional in man with this imperfect bodily instrument acts largely by spasms of intensity when it wants to sublimate and cannot maintain either the continuity or the extension or the sublimated paroxysm of

these things. But as the individual becomes cosmic (the universalising of the individual without his losing his higher individuality as a divine centre is one of the processes which lead towards the supramental Truth), this disability begins to disappear. The truth behind the *dāsyā* or *madhura* or any other *bhāva* or fusion of *bhāvas* becomes a vast and ample continuous state,—if by chance they lose something of their briefer intensities by this extension of themselves, they recover them a thousandfold in the movement of the universalised individual towards the Transcendence. There is an ever enlarging experience which takes up the elements of spiritual realisation and in this uplifting and transforming process they become other and greater things than they were and more and more they take their place by sublimation, first in the spiritual-cosmic, then in the all-embracing transcendent whole.

The difference of view between Shankara and Ramanuja and on the other side Chaitanya about Krishna arises from the turn of their experience. Krishna was only an aspect of Vishnu to the others because that ecstatic form of love and bhakti which had become associated with Krishna was not for them the whole. The Gita, like Chaitanya, but from a different viewpoint, regarded Krishna as the Divine himself. To Chaitanya he was Love and Ananda, and Love and Ananda being for him the highest transcendental experience, so Krishna too must be the Supreme. For the writer of the Gita, Krishna was the source of Knowledge and Power as well as Love, the Destroyer, Preserver, Creator in one, so necessarily Vishnu was only an aspect of this universal Divine. In the Mahabharat indeed Krishna comes as an incarnation of Vishnu, but that can be turned by taking it that it was through the Vishnu aspect as his frontal appearance that he manifested, for that the greater Godhead can manifest later than others is logical if we consider the manifestation as progressive,—just as Vishnu is in the Veda a younger Indra, Upendra, but gains upon his elder and subsequently takes place above him in the Trimurti.

I cannot say much about the Vaishnava idea of the form of Krishna. Form is the basic means of manifestation and without

it it may be said that the manifestation of anything is not complete. Even if the Formless logically precedes Form, yet it is not illogical to assume that in the Formless, Form is inherent and already existent in a mystic latency, otherwise how could it be manifested? For any other process would be the creation of the non-existent, not manifestation. If so, it would be equally logical to assume that there is an eternal form of Krishna, a spirit body. As for the highest Reality, it is no doubt absolute Existence, but is it only that? Absolute Existence as an abstraction may exclude everything else from itself and amount to a sort of very positive zero; but Absolute Existence as a reality — who shall define and say what is or is not in its inconceivable depths, its illimitable Mystery? Mind can ordinarily conceive of the Absolute Existence only as a negation of its own concepts spatial, temporal or other. But it cannot tell what is at the basis of manifestation or what manifestation is or why there is any manifestation at all out of its positive zero — and the Vaishnavas, we must remember, do not admit this conception as the absolute and original truth of the Divine. It is therefore not rigidly impossible that what we conceive and perceive as spatial form may correspond to some mysterious power of the spaceless Absolute. I do not say all that as a definite statement of Truth, I am only pointing out that the Vaishnava position on its own ground is far from being logically or metaphysically untenable.

Love and Bhakti for Krishna

As for Krishna, why not approach simply and straight? The simple approach means trust. If you pray, trust that he hears. If the reply takes long in coming, trust that he knows and loves and that he is wisest in the choice of the time. Meanwhile quietly clear the ground, so that he may not have to trip over stone and jungle when he comes. That is my suggestion and I know what I am saying — for whatever you may say, I know very well all human difficulties and struggles and I know of the cure. That is why I press always on the things that would minimise and shorten the struggles and difficulties, — the psychic turn, faith, perfect

and simple confidence and reliance. These, let me remind you, are tenets of the Vaishnava Yoga. Of course, there is the other Vaishnava way which swings between yearning and despair—ardent seeking and the pangs of viraha. It is that you seem to be following and I do not deny that one can arrive by that as one can by almost any way, if followed sincerely. But then those who follow it find a rasa even in viraha, in the absence and the caprice of the Divine Lover. Some of them have sung that they have followed after him all their lives but always he has slipped away from their vision and even in that they find a rasa and never cease following. But you find no rasa in it. So you cannot expect me to approve of that for you. Follow after Krishna by all means, but follow with the determination to arrive: don't do it with the expectation of failure or admit any possibility of breaking off half-way.

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As for the “hostile forces”, it is quite true that to persuade the sadhak to cut off outer contact with us on the plea of solitude and intense sadhana, is a favourite device of theirs and has often led to disaster. It gives them a freer field to bring in their own influence and represent it as the divine influence or as our own influence, and it ends often by a revolt and finally the sadhak cuts off the inner relation also or even turns hostile. This has happened fairly often and that is one reason why I have usually discouraged that or any kind of complete solitude. Absence from darshan for a short time if there is good reason for it, but more than that is inadvisable.

The direct approach to Krishna is not safe or easy; it can sometimes be terribly risky, if there is anything in the sadhak that interferes with the clarity and singleness of his attitude. In that case any wrong desire, vanity, pride, sexual impurity, ambition, or any other pronounced weakness may open the way to serious distortion of the sadhana, turning into wrong ways, breakdown or collapse, even to spiritual perdition. Krishna's own influence cannot be a wrong influence, if it is really his, but it is easy to mistake and accept some other influence as his. Especially, he is

the Lord of Love and Beauty and Delight, and nothing is easier for men who are always going in the wrong way in search of these things, to bring their wrong ways into their search for him also. That experience must be one of the reasons why the seers insist on the approach through the guru and say that Krishna cannot be attained otherwise. It is the reason why they insist on vairagya, detachment from the ordinary aims and ends of human nature as so necessary. That is also why Krishna does not like to show himself until the field is clear for him! The intervention of some power or influence that represents itself as he, even puts on an imitation of his form or voice would be fatal if accepted; but even his real manifestation might bring about an upset in someone not really ready for it. One must be on guard against these dangers and it is the guru who can interpose himself as a shield against them.

The identification of the guru with the Divine is a common rule, not peculiar to the Vaishnava bhakti. Ordinarily, so far as the outer mind is concerned, it is a firm belief; the outer mind can believe, can by its faith have some feeling of it, can with the help of the heart worship, adore, serve with humility and fidelity; ordinarily, this is enough and it prepares besides for something deeper. But to realise the identity is another matter, [*incomplete*]

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I do not know that I can answer your question about what Krishnaprem means by Krishna's light. It is certainly not what people ordinarily mean by knowledge. He may mean the light of the Divine Consciousness, or if you like, the light that is the Divine Consciousness or the light that comes from it or he may mean the luminous being of Krishna in which all things are in their supreme truth,—the truth of Knowledge, the truth of Bhakti, the truth of ecstasy and Ananda, everything is there.

There is also a manifestation of Light—the Upanishads speak of *jyotir brahma*, the Light that is Brahman. Very often the sadhak feels a flow of Light upon him or around him or a flow of Light invading his centres or even his whole being and body, penetrating and illuminating every cell and in that Light

there grows the spiritual consciousness and one becomes open to all or many of its workings and realisations. Appositely I have a review of a book of Ramdas (of the *Vision*) before me in which is described such an experience got by the repetition of the Rama mantra, but, if I understand rightly, after a long and rigorous self-discipline. "The mantra having stopped automatically, he beheld a small circular light before his mental vision. This yielded him thrills of delight. This experience having continued for some days, he felt a dazzling light like lightning, flashing before his eyes, which ultimately permeated and absorbed him. Now an inexpressible transport of bliss filled every pore of his physical frame." It does not always come like that — very often it comes by stages or at long intervals, at first, working on the consciousness till it is ready.

We speak here also of Krishna's light — Krishna's light in the mind, Krishna's light in the vital; but it is a special light — in the mind it brings clarity, freedom from obscurity, mental error and perversion; in the vital it clears out all perilous stuff and where it is there is a pure and divine happiness and gladness.

There are some however who seem to regard this invasion of Light not merely as a thing without value but a thing of evil or, possibly, one that can be such and so to be distrusted: for I have before me a letter describing an experience very similar to Ramdas's, but it was condemned by the writer's Guru as an attempt at possession by a devil to be dispelled by uttering the name of Ramakrishna!

But why limit oneself, insist on one thing alone and shut out every other? Whether it be by Bhakti or by Light or by Ananda or by Peace or by any other means whatsoever that one gets the initial realisation of the Divine, to get it is the thing and all means are good that bring it.

If it is Bhakti that one insists on, it is by Bhakti that Bhakti comes and Bhakti in its fullness is nothing but an entire self-giving, as Krishnaprem very rightly indicates. Then all meditation, all tapasya, all means of prayer or mantra must have that as its end and it is when one has progressed sufficiently in that that the Divine Grace descends and the realisation comes

and develops till it is complete. But the moment of its advent is chosen by the wisdom of the Divine alone and one must have the strength to go on till it arrives; for when all is truly ready it cannot fail to come.

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As to the point that puzzles you, it only arises from a confusion between the feeling of the devotee and the observation of the observer. Of course the devotee loves Krishna because Krishna is lovable and not for any other reason—that is his feeling and his true feeling. He has no time to bother his head about what in himself made him able to love, the fact that he does love is sufficient for him and he does not need to analyse his emotions. The Grace of Krishna consists for him in Krishna's very loveliness, in his showing of himself to the devotee, in his call, the cry of his flute. That is enough for the heart or, if there is anything more, it is the yearning that others or all may hear the flute, see the face, feel all the beauty and rapture of this love.

It is not the heart of the devotee but the mind of the observer that questions how it is that the Gopis were called or responded at once and others—the Brahmin women, for instance—were not called or did not respond at once. Once the mind puts the question, there are two possible answers, the mere will of Krishna without any reason, what the mind would call his absolute divine choice or his arbitrary divine caprice or else the readiness of the heart that is called, and that amounts to *adhikāri-bheda*. A third reply would be—circumstances, as for instance, the parking off of the spiritual ground into closed preserves. But how can circumstances prevent the Grace from acting? In spite of the parking off, it works—Christians, Mahomedans do answer to the Grace of Krishna. Tigers, ghouls must love if they see him, hear his flute? Yes, but why do some hear it and see him, others not? We are thrown back on the two alternatives, Krishna's Grace calls whom it wills to call without any determining reason for the choice or rejection, his mercy or his withholding or at least delaying of his mercy, or else he calls the hearts that are ready to vibrate and leap up at his call—and even there he waits till the moment has come. To say that it does not depend

on outward merit or appearance of fitness is no doubt true; the something that was ready to wake in spite, it may be, of many hard layers in which it was enclosed, may be something visible to Krishna and not to us. It was there perhaps long before the flute began to play, but he was busy melting the hard layers so that the heart in its leap might not be pressed back by them when the awakening notes came. The Gopis heard and rushed out into the forest—the others did not—or did they think it was only some rustic music or some rude cowherd lover fluting to his sweetheart, not a call that learned and cultured or virtuous ears could recognise as the call of the Divine? There is something to be said for the *adhikāri-bheda*. But of course it must be understood in a large sense,—some may have the *adhikāra* for recognising Krishna's flute, some for the call of Christ, some for the dance of Shiva—to each his own way and his nature's answer to the Divine Call. *Adhikāra* cannot be stated in rigid mental terms, it is something spiritual and subtle, something mystic and secret between the called and the Caller.

As for the swelled head, the theory of Grace may no doubt contribute to it, though I should imagine that the said head never felt the Grace but only the magnanimity of its own ego. The swelling may come equally in the way of personal effort as by the craving for Grace. It is fundamentally not due to either, but to a natural predisposition to this kind of oedema.

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If Krishna was always and by nature cold and distant (Lord, what a discovery—Krishna of all people!), how could human devotion and aspiration come near him—he and it would soon be like the North and South Pole, growing icier and icier, always facing each other but never seeing because of the earth's bulge. Also, if Krishna did not want the human bhakta as well as the bhakta wanting him, who could get at him?—he would be always sitting on the snows of the Himalayas like Shiva. History describes him otherwise and he is usually charged with being too warm and sportive.

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If one wants Krishna, one gets Krishna — but he is a sufficiently trying Deity and does not come at once, though he may come suddenly at any time. But usually one has to want him so badly and obstinately that one is prepared to pay any price. One has to know how to wait as well as to want — to go on insisting and insisting without taking heed of even the longest denial. The psychic can do that — but the mind and the vital have to learn how to do it also.

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Certainly Krishna is credited with much caprice, difficult dealings and a playfulness (*lila!*) which the played-with do not always immediately appreciate. But there is a reasoning as well as a hidden method in his caprices, and when he does come out of it and takes a fancy to be nice to you, he has a supreme attractiveness, charm and allurement which compensates and more than compensates for all you have suffered.

*

Well, why should not Krishna ride a horse if he so wants?¹ His actions or habits cannot be fixed by the human mind or by an immutable tradition. Especially Krishna is a law to himself. Perhaps he was in a hurry to get to the place where he wanted to flute.

*

The Gopis are not ordinary people in the proper sense of the word — they are extraordinary by their extremeness of love, passionate devotion, unreserved self-giving. Whoever has that, however humble his position in other respects, learning, external sanctity etc. etc., can easily follow after Krishna and reach him; that seems to me the sense of the symbol of the Gopis. There are many other significances, of course — that is only one among the many.

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¹ The correspondent wrote about a disciple who had a vision of Krishna galloping on a horse. — Ed.

Radha is the personification of the absolute love for the Divine, total and integral in all parts of the being from the highest spiritual to the physical, bringing the absolute self-giving and total consecration of all the being and calling down into the body and the most material Nature the supreme Ananda.

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The coming of sex on seeing the image of Krishna and Radha is due to the past association of sex with the cult of Radha-Krishna. But in fact the image has nothing to do with sex. The true symbol for it would not be the human sex-attraction, but the soul, the psychic, hearing the call of the Divine and flowering into the complete love and surrender that brings the supreme Ananda. That is what Radha and Krishna by their divine union bring about in the human consciousness and it is so that you must regard it, throwing aside the old sex-associations.

Love of Krishna and This Yoga

What you were told of the incompatibility of love and adoration of Krishna with this Yoga, is not true. There is not and cannot be any such incompatibility. Otherwise we would not have encouraged you in your aspiration. You can seek for him quite as well here as in Brindaban.

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As regards Krishna and devotion, I think I have already answered more than once. I have no objection at all to the worship of Krishna or the Vaishnava form of devotion, nor is there any incompatibility between Vaishnava bhakti and my supramental Yoga. There is in fact no special and exclusive form of supramental Yoga: all ways can lead to the Supermind, just as all ways can lead to the Divine.

Certainly, I will help you and am helping and will always help you; the idea that I can stop doing it or will send you away has no sense in it. If you persevere, you cannot fail to get the permanent bhakti you want and the realisation you want, but

you should learn to put an entire reliance on Krishna to give it when he finds all ready and the time come. If he wants you to clear out imperfections and impurities first, that is after all understandable. I don't see why you should not succeed in doing it, now that your attention is being so constantly turned on it. To see them clearly and acknowledge them is the first step, to have the firm will to reject them is the next, to separate yourself from them entirely so that if they enter at all it will be as foreign elements, no longer parts of your normal nature but suggestions from outside, brings their last state; even, once seen and rejected, they may automatically fall away and disappear; but for most the process takes time. These things are not peculiar to you; they are parts of universal human nature; but they can, do and will disappear.

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But I have already told you more than once that I have no objection to your seeking Krishna or to your asking for Ananda or milan or anything else. I have never pressed you or others either to seek after Supermind or to accept me as an Avatar. These things have risen as an answer to questions put by yourself or others and I have treated them as matters of knowledge. But each must go by his own way and his own nature to his own goal. Ahaituki bhakti according to the Vaishnava ideal is the highest way and also the quickest, but if one does not feel equal to it, sahaituki bhakti will do well enough. Or if one has no turn for bhakti at all, there are plenty of other ways. Or if one does not care to follow any way, there is, as I said, in answer to X's question, the pressure of something in the nature to find the Self, if that is what it is after, or God or Krishna or the Mother or whatever it may be.

If you know the urge in you, well, follow it straight — there is no need of questioning or going this side or that. Follow the heart's urge till it reaches what it is seeking.

Chapter Nine

The Teachings of Some Modern Indian Yogis

Ramana Maharshi

According to Brunton's description of the sadhana he (Brunton) practised under the Maharshi's instructions,¹ it is the Overself one has to seek within, but he describes the Overself in a way that is at once the Psychic Being, the Atman and the Ishwara. So it is a little difficult to know what is the exact reading.

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The methods described in the account [of *Ramana Maharshi's technique of self-realisation*] are the well-established methods of Jnanayoga—(1) one-pointed concentration followed by thought-suspension, (2) the method of distinguishing or finding out the true self by separating it from mind, life, body (this I have seen described by him [Brunton] more at length in another book) and coming to the pure I behind; this also can disappear into the Impersonal Self. The usual result is a merging in the Atman or Brahman—which is what one would suppose is meant by the Overself, for it is that which is the real Overself. This Brahman or Atman is everywhere, all is in it, it is in all, but it is in all not as an individual being in each but is the same in all—as the Ether is in all. When the merging into the Overself is complete, there is no ego, no distinguishable I, or any formed separative person or personality. All is *ekākāra*—an indivisible and undistinguishable Oneness either free from all formations or carrying all formations in it without being affected—for one can realise it in either way. There is a realisation in which all

¹ *The correspondent sent to Sri Aurobindo two paragraphs from Paul Brunton's book A Message from Arunachala (London: Rider & Co., n.d. [1936], pp. 205–7). —Ed.*

beings are moving in the one Self and this Self is there stable in all beings; there is another more complete and thoroughgoing in which not only is it so but all are vividly realised as the Self, the Brahman, the Divine. In the former, it is possible to dismiss all beings as creations of Maya, leaving the one Self alone as true — in the other it is easier to regard them as real manifestations of the Self, not as illusions. But one can also regard all beings as souls, independent realities in an eternal Nature dependent upon the One Divine. These are the characteristic realisations of the Overself familiar to the Vedanta. But on the other hand you say that this Overself is realised by the Maharshi as lodged in the heart-centre, and it is described by Brunton as something concealed which when it manifests appears as the real Thinker, source of all action, but now guiding thought and action in the Truth. Now the first description applies to the Purusha in the heart, described by the Gita as the Ishwara situated in the heart and by the Upanishads as the Purusha Antaratma; the second could apply also to the mental Purusha, *manomayah prāṇaśarīra netā* of the Upanishads, the mental Being or Purusha who leads the life and the body. So your question is one which on the data I cannot easily answer. His Overself may be a combination of all these experiences, without any distinction being made or thought necessary between the various aspects. There are a thousand ways of approaching and realising the Divine and each way has its own experiences which have their own truth and stand really on a basis, one in essence but complex in aspects, common to all, but not expressed in the same way by all. There is not much use in discussing these variations; the important thing is to follow one's own way well and thoroughly. In this Yoga, one can realise the psychic being as a portion of the Divine seated in the heart with the Divine supporting it there — this psychic being takes charge of the sadhana and turns the whole being to the Truth and the Divine, with results in the mind, the vital, the physical consciousness which I need not go into here, — that is a first transformation. We realise it next as the one Self, Brahman, Divine, first *above* the body, life, mind and not only within the heart supporting them — above

and free and unattached as the static Self but also extended in wideness through the world as the silent Self in all and dynamic too as the active Divine Being and Power, Ishwara-Shakti, containing the world and pervading it as well as transcending it, manifesting all cosmic aspects. But, what is most important for us, is that it manifests as a transcending Light, Knowledge, Power, Purity, Peace, Ananda of which we become aware above and which descends into the being and progressively replaces the ordinary consciousness by its own movements—that is the second transformation. We realise also the consciousness itself as moving upward, ascending through many planes physical, vital, mental, overmental to the supramental and Ananda planes. This is nothing new; it is stated in the Taittiriya Upanishad that there are five Purushas, the physical, the vital, the mental, the Truth Purusha (supramental) and the Bliss Purusha; it says that one has to draw the physical self up into the vital, the vital into the mental, the mental into the Truth Self, the Truth Self into the Bliss Self and so attain perfection. But in this Yoga we become aware not only of this taking up but of a pouring down of the powers of the higher Self, so that there comes in the possibility of a descent of the Supramental Self and nature to dominate and change our present nature and turn it from nature of Ignorance into nature of Truth-Knowledge (and through the supramental into nature of Ananda)—this is the third or supramental transformation. It does not always go in this order, for with many the spiritual descent begins first in an imperfect way before the psychic is in front and in charge, but the psychic development has to be attained before a perfect and unhampered spiritual descent can take place, and the last or supramental change is impossible so long as the two first have not become full and complete. That's the whole matter, put as briefly as possible.

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The Upanishads do not say that about the Atman²—what they

² *That is, the Upanishads do not say that the Atman is situated in the core of the heart.*
—Ed.

say about the Atman is that it is in all and all is in it, it is everywhere and all this universe is the Atman. What they speak of as situated in the deeper inner heart is the Purusha in the heart or Antaratman.³ This is in fact what we call the psychic being, *caitya puruṣa*.

The heart spoken of by the Upanishads corresponds with the physical cardiac centre; it is the *hṛtpadma* of the Tantriks. As a subtle centre, *cakra*, it is supposed to have its apex on the spine and to broaden out in front. Exactly where in this area one or another feels it does not matter much; to feel it there and be guided by it is the main thing. I cannot say what the Maharshi has realised—but what Brunton describes in his book as the Self is certainly this Purusha Antaratma but concerned more with *mukti* and a liberated action than with transformation of the nature. What the psychic realisation does bring is a psychic change of the nature purifying it and turning it altogether towards the Divine. After that or along with it comes the realisation of the cosmic Self. It is these two things that the old Yogas encompassed and through them they passed to Moksha, Nirvana or the departure into some kind of celestial transcendence. The Yoga practised here includes both liberation and transcendence, but it takes liberation or even a certain Nirvana, if that comes, as a first step and not as the last step of its siddhi. Whatever exit to or towards the Transcendent it achieves is an ascent accompanied by a descent of the power, light, consciousness that has been achieved and it is by such descents that is to be achieved the spiritual and supramental transformation here. This possibility does not seem to be admitted in the Maharshi's thought,—he considers the Descent as superfluous and logically impossible. "The Divine is here, from where will He descend?" is his argument. But the Divine is everywhere, he is above as well as within, he has many habitats, many strings to his bow of Power, there are many levels of his dynamic Consciousness and each has its own light and force. He is not confined to his position in the heart or to the single cord of the psycho-spiritual

³ *āṅguṣṭhamātrah puruṣo antarātmā.*

realisation. He has also his supramental station above the heart-centre and mind-centres and can descend from there if He wants to do so.

Swami Ramatirtha

I think Ramatirtha's realisations were more mental than anything else. He had opening of the higher mind and a realisation there of the cosmic Self, but I find no evidence of a transformed mind and vital; that transformation is not a result or object of the Yoga of Knowledge. The realisation of the Yoga of Knowledge is when one feels that one lives in the wideness of something silent, featureless and universal (called the Self) and all else is seen as only forms and names; the Self is real, nothing else. The realisation of "*my* self in other forms" is a part of this or a step towards it, but in the full realisation the "*my*" should drop so that there is only *the* one Self or rather only the Brahman. For the Self is merely a subjective aspect of the Brahman, just as the Ishwara is its objective aspect. That is the Vedantic "Knowledge". Its result is peace, silence, liberation. As for the active Prakriti, (mind, vital, body), the Yoga of Knowledge does not make it its aim to transform them—that would be no use as the idea is that if the liberation has come, it will all drop off at death. The only change wanted is to get rid of the idea of ego and realise as true only the supreme Self, the Brahman.

Swami Ramdas

I have not read Ramdas's writings nor am I at all acquainted with his personality or what may be the level of his experience. The words you quote from him could be expressions either of a simple faith or of a pantheistic experience; evidently, if they are used or intended to establish the thesis that the Divine is everywhere and is all and therefore all is good, being Divine, they are very insufficient for that purpose. But as an experience, it is a very common thing to have this feeling or realisation in the Vedantic sadhana—in fact without it there would be

no Vedantic sadhana. I have had it myself on various levels of consciousness and in numerous forms and I have met scores of people who have had it very genuinely — not as an intellectual theory or perception, but as a spiritual reality which was too concrete for them to deny whatever paradoxes it may entail for the ordinary intelligence.

Of course it does not mean that all here is good or that in the estimation of values a brothel is as good as an Asram, but it does mean that all are part of one manifestation and that in the inner heart of the harlot as in the inner heart of the sage or saint there is the Divine. Again his experience is that there is one Force working in the world both in its good and in its evil — one Cosmic Force; it works both in the success (or failure) of the Asram and in the success (or failure) of the brothel. Things are done in this world by the use of the force, although the use made is according to the nature of the user, one uses it for the works of light, another for the works of Darkness, yet another for a mixture. I don't think any Vedantin (except perhaps some modernised ones) would maintain that all is good here — the orthodox Vedantic idea is that all is here an inextricable mixture of good and evil, a play of the Ignorance and therefore a play of the dualities. The Christian missionaries, I suppose, hold that all that God does is morally good, so they are shocked by the Taoist priests aiding the work of the brothel by their rites. But do not the Christian priests invoke the aid of God for the destruction of men in battle and did not some of them sing Te Deums over a victory won by the massacre of men and the starvation of women and children? The Taoist who believes only in the Impersonal Tao is more consistent and the Vedantin who believes that the Supreme is beyond good and evil, but that the Cosmic Force the Supreme has put out here works through the dualities, therefore through both good and evil, joy and suffering, has a thesis which at least accounts for the double fact of the experience of the Supreme which is All Light, All Bliss and All Beauty and a world of mixed light and darkness, joy and suffering, what is fair and what is ugly. He says that the dualities come by a separative Ignorance and so long as you

accept this separative Ignorance, you cannot get rid of that, but it is possible to draw back from it in experience and to have the realisation of the Divine in all and the Divine everywhere and then you begin to realise the Light, Bliss and Beauty behind all and this is the one thing to do. Also you begin to realise the one Force and you can use it or let it use you for the growth of the Light in you and others—no longer for the satisfaction of the ego and for the works of the ignorance and darkness.

As to the dilemma about the cruelty of things, I do not know what answer Ramdas would give. One answer might be that the Divine within is felt through the psychic being and the nature of the psychic being is that of the divine light, harmony, love, but it is covered by the mental and separative vital ego from which strife, hate, cruelty naturally come. It is therefore natural to feel in the kindness the touch of the Divine, while the cruelty is felt as a disguise or perversion in Nature, although that would not prevent the man who has the realisation from feeling and meeting the Divine behind the disguise. I have known even instances in which the perception of the Divine in all accompanied by an intense experience of universal love or a wide experience of an inner harmony had an extraordinary effect in making all around kind and helpful, even the most coarse and hard and cruel. Perhaps it is some such experience which is at the base of Ramdas's statement about the kindness. As for the Divine working, the experience of the Vedantic realisation is that behind the confused mixture of good and evil something is working that he realises as the Divine and in his own life he can look back and see what each step, happy or unhappy, meant for his progress and how it led towards the growth of his spirit. Naturally this comes fully as the realisation progresses; before that he had to walk by faith and may have often felt his faith fail and yielded to grief, doubt and despair for a time.

As for my writings, I don't know if there is any that would clear up the difficulty. You would find mostly the statement of the Vedantic experience, for it is that through which I passed and, though now I have passed to something beyond, it seems to me the most thorough-going and radical preparation for whatever

is Beyond, though I do not say that it is indispensable to pass through it. But whatever the solution, it seems to me that the Vedantin is right in insisting that one must, to arrive at it, admit the two facts, the prevalence of evil and suffering here and the experience of that which is free from these things — and it is only by the progressive experience that one can get a solution — whether through reconciliation, a conquering descent or an escape. If we start from the basis taken as an axiom that the prevalence of suffering and evil in the present and in the hard, outward fact of things, disproves of itself all that has been experienced by sages and mystics of the other side, the realisable Divine, then no solution seems possible.

Chapter Ten

Christianity and Theosophy

Christianity

The gospel of suffering, the obsessing sense of sin and the dramatic vital turn which goes with these things are certainly the most prominent defects of the Christian attitude, and they keep the religion even in its esoteric movements too much tied to a half-spiritualised vital movement. Christianity seems to me to have never clarified its intelligence by the spiritual light in the higher reaches of the mind; it is lacking in a spiritual philosophy and never really went beyond theology — in spite of one or two large thinkers who were the exception rather than the rule. One has to pass beyond even the higher mind, but not to have developed the spiritual light in it leaves the instrument defective and, instead of going above the mind, one is then apt to be content to remain below receiving whatever flashes and upliftings one can from a high and far-off and very much veiled Divine. And in such a state it is easier to mistake partial deities or even, if one is not careful, undivine Powers for the Supreme.

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There is no connection between the Christian conception (of the Kingdom of Heaven) and the idea of the supramental descent. The Christian conception supposes a state of things brought about by religious emotion and moral purification; but these things are no more capable of changing the world, whatever value they may have for the individual, than mental idealism or any other power yet called upon for the purpose. The Christian proposes to substitute the sattwic religious ego for the rajasic and tamasic ego, but although this can be done as an individual achievement, it has never succeeded and will never succeed in accomplishing itself in the mass. It has no higher spiritual or psychological knowledge behind it and ignores the foundations

of human character and the source of the difficulty — the duality of mind, life and body. Unless there is a descent of a new Power of Consciousness, not subject to the dualities but still dynamic which will provide a new foundation and a lifting of the centre of consciousness above the mind, the Kingdom of God on earth can only be an ideal, not a fact realised in the general earth-consciousness or earth-life.

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I feel it difficult to say anything about X's Christ and Krishna. The attraction which she says people feel for Christ has never touched me, partly because I got disgusted with the dryness and deadness of Christianity in England and partly because the Christ of the gospels (apart from a few pregnant episodes) is luminous no doubt, but somewhat shadowy and imperfectly constructed in his luminosity; there is more of the ethical put forward than of the spiritual or divine man. The Christ that has strongly lived in the Western saints and mystics is the Christ of St. Francis of Assisi, St. Teresa and others. But apart from that, is it a fact that Christ has been strongly or vividly loved by Christians? Only by a very few, it seems to me. As for Krishna, to judge him and his revealing tradition by the Christ figure and Christ tradition is not possible. The two stand in two different worlds. There is nothing in the latter of the great and boundless and sovereign spiritual knowledge and power of realisation we find in the Gita, nothing of the emotional force, passion, beauty of the Gopi symbol and all that lies behind it, nothing of the many-sided manifestation of the Krishna figure. The other has other qualities: there is no gain in putting them side by side and trying to weigh them against each other. That is the besetting sin of the Christian mind even in those who are most liberal like Dr. Stanley Jones; they cannot get altogether free from the sectarian narrowness and leave each manifestation to its own inner world for those to follow who have the inner drawing to the one or the other. I have always refrained from these comparisons in my published writings in order to avoid this error. What I feel

personally is for myself—I can't ask others to conform to my measure.

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I do not gather from these extracts¹ the true nature of the transformation spoken of here. It seems to be something mental and moral with the love of God and a certain kind of union in separateness brought about by this divine love as the spiritualising element.

Love of God and union in separateness through that love and a transformation of the nature by realising certain mental, ethical, emotional, perhaps even physical possibilities (for the Vaishnavas speak of a new *cinmaya* body) is the principle of Vaishnava Yoga. So there is nothing here that was not already present in that line of Asiatic mysticism which looks to a Personal Deity and insists on the eternal pre-existence and survival of the individual being. A spiritual raising of the nature to its highest possibilities is a part of the Tantric discipline—so that too is not absent from Indian Yoga. The writer seems like most European writers to know only Illusionism and Buddhism and to accept them as the whole wisdom of Asia (*sagesse asiatique*); but even there he misinterprets their idea and their experience. Adwaita even in its extreme form does not aim at the extinction of existence, the adoption of nothingness, the end of the being and destruction of the essence. Only a certain kind of Nihilistic Buddhism aims at that and even so that Nothingness, Sunya, is described on another side of it as the Permanent. What these disciplines aim at is a passing from Time to Eternity, a putting off of the finite and putting on of the Infinite, a casting off of the bonds of ego and its results, desire, suffering, a falsified existence, in order to live in the true Self. These descriptions of the Christian writer betray an entire ignorance of the realisation which he decries, its infinity, freedom, surpassing peace, the ecstasy of the Brahmananda. It is an extinction of the limited individual personality but a liberation into cosmic and then into

¹ Brief extracts from a book by Henri Massis, *Défense de l'Occident* (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1927), pp. 214–24.—Ed.

transcendental consciousness — an extinction of thought and life but a liberation into an unlimited consciousness and knowledge and being. The personality is extinguished but in something greater than itself, not in something less nor in mere “*Néant*”. If it be said that that negates earthly life, so does the Christian ideal, for the Christian ideal aims at the attainment of a celestial existence beyond the earth existence (beyond this single earth life, for reincarnation is not admitted), which is only a vale of sorrows and a passing ordeal. It insists on the preservation of the spiritual personality, but so do Vaishnavism and Shaivism and other “Asiatic” ideals. The writer’s ignorance of the many-sidedness of Asiatic wisdom deprives his depreciation of it of all value.

The phrases which struck you as resembling superficially at least our ideal of transformation are of a general character and could be adopted without hesitation by almost any spiritual discipline, even Illusionism would be willing to include it as a stage or experience on the way. All depends on the content you put into the words, what actual change in the consciousness and life they are intended to cover. If the transformation be “from sin to sainthood” by the union of the soul with God “in an intellectual light full of love” — which is the most definite description of it in these extracts, — then it is not at all identical, but rather very far from what I mean by transformation. For the transformation I aim at is not from sin to sainthood but from the lower nature of the Ignorance to the Divine Nature of Light, Peace, Truth, Divine Power and Bliss beyond the Ignorance. It journeys towards a supreme self-existent good and leaves behind it the limited struggling human conception of sin and virtue; it is not an intellectual light that is the sun of its aspiration but a spiritual supra-intellectual supramental light; it is not sainthood that is its culmination but divine consciousness — or if you like, soul-hood, spirit-hood, conscious self-hood, divine-hood. There is therefore between these two kinds or two degrees of transformation an immense difference.

I. *“It is a heroic surrender in which the soul reaches the summit of free activity, the being is transformed and its faculties are*

purified, deified by Grace, without its essence being destroyed.”²

What is meant by free activity? With us the freedom consists in freedom from the darkness, limitation, error, suffering, transience of the ignorant lower Nature, but also in a total surrender to the Divine. Free action is the action of the Divine in us and through us; no other action can be free. That seems to be accepted in II and III; but this perception, this conception is as old as spiritual knowledge itself—it is not peculiar to Catholicism. What again is meant by the purification and deification of the faculties by Grace? If it is an ethical purification, that goes a very small way and does not bring deification. Again, if the deification is limited by the intellectual light, it must be a rather petty affair at the best. There was a similar aim in ancient Indian spirituality, but it had a larger sweep and a higher height than that. No spiritual discipline aims at purification or deification by the destruction of the essence—there can be no such thing, the very phrase is meaningless and self-contradictory. The essence of the being is indestructible. Even the most rigid Adwaita discipline does not aim at any such destruction; its object is the purest purity of the essential self. Transformation aims at this essential purity of the pure Spirit, but it asks also for the purity and divinity of the supreme Nature; it is not the essence of being but the accidents of our undeveloped imperfect nature that are destroyed and replaced by the manifestation of the divine Nature. The monistic Adwaita aims at the disappearance of the ego, not of the essence of the person; it arrives at its disappearance by identity with the One, by dissolution of the Nature-constructed ego into the reality of the eternal Self, for that, it says, not ego, is the essence of the person—*so’ham, tat tvam asi*. In our idea of transformation also there is the destruction of the ego, its dissolution into the cosmic and the divine consciousness, but by that destruction we recover the true or spiritual person which is an eternal portion of the Divine.

II. “The contemplation of the Christian . . . is inseparable

² This extract and those that follow appear here in translation. The original French extracts are given in the Note on the Texts.—Ed.

from the state of Grace³ and the divine life. Even when he annuls himself, his personality still triumphs by allowing itself to be torn away from all that is not itself, by breaking all the bonds that tie it to the flesh so that the living God may seize him, possess him and dwell in him.

III. “Freedom means first to subordinate what is inferior in one’s nature to what is superior.”

These passages can be taken in the above sense and as approximating to our ideal; but the confusion here is in the use of the word “personality”. Personality is a temporary formation and to eternise it would be to eternise ignorance and limitation. The true “I” is not the mental ego or the present personality which is only a mask, but the eternal I which assumes various personalities in various lives. The Christian and European conception of a single life on earth tends to bring about this error by making our present personality appear as if it were our whole self . . . Again, it is not merely the bodily individuality to which ignorance ties us, but the mental individuality and vital individuality also. All these ties have to be broken, the imperfect forms of mind and life transcended, mind transformed into something beyond mind, life into divine life, if the transformation is to be real and not merely a new shaping or heightening of the lights of the Ignorance.

IV. “This solitude of the soul [of the Asiatic ascetic] is not the true spiritual leisure, the active solitude in which the transformation from sin to sainthood takes place through the soul’s union with God in an intellectual light full of love.”

I have commented already on this description of the transformation to be effected and have to add only one more reserve. The solitude of the self in the Divine has no doubt to be active as well as static and passive; but none who has not arrived at the silence and motionless solitude of the eternal Self can have the free and integral activity of the higher divine Nature. For the

³ Grace is not a conception peculiar to the Christian spiritual idea—it is there in Vaishnavism, Shaivism, the Shakta religion,—it is as old as the Upanishads.

action is based on the silence and by the silence it is free.

V. “ . . . *the Christian life, a mystic, progressive life which is an enrichment, an infinite enlargement of the human being.*”

This is not our idea of transformation — for the human person is the mental being limited by life and body. An enrichment and enlargement of it cannot go beyond the extreme limit of that formula, it can only widen and adorn its present poverty and narrowness. It cannot ascend out of the mental ignorance into a greater Truth and Light or bring that down in any fullness into earthly nature, which is the aim of transformation as we conceive it.

VI. “*For the Asiatic, the personality is the fall of man; for the Christian it is the very plan of God, the principle of union, the summit of the natural creation, and it calls wholly to the Grace.*”

The personality of this single life in man is a formation in the Ignorance, therefore a fall; it cannot be the summit of the being. We do not admit that it is the summit of the natural creation either, but say there are higher summits to which we have to climb and reveal their powers in earthly nature. The natural creation is an evolution of the hidden Divine Consciousness in Nature which is limited and disguised at first by the Ignorance. It has still to climb out of the Ignorance — therefore to get beyond the human person into the divine person. It is in this spiritual evolution that the Plan Divine (*dessein de Dieu*) manifests its central and significant line and calls all creation to the crowning Grace.

You will see therefore that the resemblance of the transformation here to our ideal is only on the surface, in the words, but not in the content of the words which is much narrower and of another order. So far as there is agreement and coincidence, it is because there is contained in them what is common (a certain conversion of the consciousness) to all spiritual disciplines; for all, in East or in West, have a common core of experience — it is in their developments, range, turn to this or that aspect or else their will towards the totality of the Truth that they differ.

Theosophy

It [*Theosophy*] is a movement that has taken from each previous movement European or Asiatic some of its knowledge and mixed it with much error and imagination of a rather vital character. It is that mixture and the mental character of its knowledge that prevent it from being a sound thing. Many start with it, but have to leave it if they want to get to real spiritual life and knowledge.

Note on the Texts

Note on the Texts

LETTERS ON YOGA—II, the second of four volumes, contains letters in which Sri Aurobindo speaks about the practice of his system of Yoga. The letters have been arranged in three parts dealing with these broad subject areas:

1. The Path of the Integral Yoga
2. The Synthetic Method of the Integral Yoga
3. The Integral Yoga and Other Spiritual Paths

The letters in this volume have been selected from the extensive correspondence Sri Aurobindo carried on with his disciples and others between 1927 and 1950. Letters from this corpus appear in seven volumes of THE COMPLETE WORKS OF SRI AUROBINDO: *Letters on Poetry and Art* (Volume 27), *Letters on Yoga* (Volumes 28–31), *The Mother with Letters on the Mother* (Volume 32), and *Letters on Himself and the Ashram* (Volume 35). The titles of these works specify the nature of the letters included in the volumes, but there is some overlap. For example, a number of letters in the present volume are also published in *Letters on Himself and the Ashram*.

The Writing of the Letters

Between 1927 and 1950, Sri Aurobindo replied to hundreds of correspondents in tens of thousands of letters, some of them many pages in length, others only a few words long. Most of his replies, however, were sent to just a few dozen disciples, almost all of them resident members of his Ashram; of these disciples, about a dozen received more than half the replies. Sri Aurobindo wrote most of these letters between 1931 and 1937, the prime period of his correspondence. Letters before and after this period were written on a more restricted scale and confined to a few persons for special reasons.

Disciples in the Ashram wrote to Sri Aurobindo on loose sheets or

sent him the notebooks in which they kept diaries as a record of their spiritual endeavour and a means of communicating with him. These notebooks and loose sheets reached Sri Aurobindo via an internal “post” once or twice a day. Letters from outside which his secretary thought he might like to see were sent at the same time. Correspondents wrote in English if they knew the language well enough, but a good number wrote in Bengali, Gujarati, Hindi or French, all of which Sri Aurobindo read fluently, or in other languages that were translated into English for him. The disciples usually addressed their letters to the Mother, since Sri Aurobindo had asked them to do so, but most assumed that he would answer them. He generally replied in the notebook or on the sheets sent by the correspondent, writing beneath the correspondent’s remarks or in the margin or between the lines; sometimes, however, he wrote his reply on a separate sheet of paper. In some cases he had his secretary prepare a typed copy of his letter, which he revised before it was sent. For correspondents living outside the Ashram, Sri Aurobindo sometimes addressed his reply not to the correspondent but to his secretary, who quoted, paraphrased or translated the reply and signed the letter himself. In these indirect replies, Sri Aurobindo often referred to himself in the third person.

While going through Sri Aurobindo’s letters, the reader should keep in mind that each letter was written to a specific person at a specific time, in specific circumstances and for a specific purpose. The subjects taken up arose in regard to the needs of the person. Sri Aurobindo varied the style and tone of his replies according to his relationship with the correspondent; to those with whom he was close, he sometimes employed humour, irony and even sarcasm.

Although written to specific recipients, these letters contain much of general interest, which justifies their inclusion in a volume destined for the general public. For the reasons mentioned above, however, the advice in them does not always apply equally to everyone. Aware of this, Sri Aurobindo himself made some cautionary remarks about the proper use of his letters:

I should like to say, in passing, that it is not always safe to apply practically to oneself what has been written for another.

Each sadhak is a case by himself and one cannot always or often take a mental rule and apply it rigidly to all who are practising the Yoga.

The tendency to take what I lay down for one and apply it without discrimination to another is responsible for much misunderstanding. A general statement, too, true in itself, cannot be applied to everyone alike or applied now and immediately without consideration of condition or circumstance or person or time.

It is not a fact that all I write is meant equally for everybody. That assumes that everybody is alike and there is no difference between sadhak and sadhak. If it were so everybody would advance alike and have the same experiences and take the same time to progress by the same steps and stages. It is not so at all.¹

The Typing and Revision of the Letters

Most of the shorter items in this volume, and many of the longer ones, were not typed or revised during Sri Aurobindo's lifetime and are reproduced here directly from his handwritten manuscripts. A good number of the letters, however, as mentioned above, were typed for Sri Aurobindo and revised by him before sending. Other letters were typed by the recipients for their own use or for circulation within the Ashram. At first, circulation of the letters was restricted to members of the Ashram and others whom Sri Aurobindo had accepted as disciples. When these letters were circulated, personal references were removed. Persons mentioned by Sri Aurobindo were indicated by their initials or by the letters X, Y, Z, etc. Copies of these typed letters were kept by Sri Aurobindo's secretary and sometimes presented to Sri Aurobindo for revision before publication. These typed copies sometimes contained errors, most of which were corrected by him while revising.

¹ First and third passages: *Letters on Himself and the Ashram*, volume 35 of THE COMPLETE WORKS OF SRI AUROBINDO, pp. 473 and 475. Second passage: *The Mother with Letters on the Mother*, volume 32, p. 349.

Sri Aurobindo's revision sometimes amounted merely to making minor changes here and there, sometimes to a complete rewriting of the letter. He generally removed personal references if this had not already been done by the typist. When necessary, he also rewrote the openings or other parts of the replies in order to free them from dependence on the correspondent's question. As a result, some of these letters have an impersonal tone and read more like brief essays than personal communications.

The Publication of the Letters

Around 1933, Sri Aurobindo's secretary Nolini Kanta Gupta began to compile selections from the growing body of letters in order to publish them. During Sri Aurobindo's lifetime, four small books of letters were published: *The Riddle of This World* (1933), *Lights on Yoga* (1935), *Bases of Yoga* (1936) and *More Lights on Yoga* (1948). Sri Aurobindo revised the typescripts of most of the letters in these books. During this revision, he continued the process of removing personal references. A letter he wrote in August 1937 alludes to his approach to the revision:

I had no idea of the book being published as a collection of personal letters—if that were done, they would have to be published whole as such without a word of alteration. I understood the book was meant like the others [*i.e., like Bases of Yoga, etc.*] where only what was helpful for an understanding of things Yogic was kept with necessary alterations and modifications. . . . With that idea I have been not only omitting but recasting and adding freely. Otherwise as a book it would be too scrappy and random for public interest. In the other books things too personal were omitted—it seems to me the same rule must hold here—except very sparingly where unavoidable.

A number of letters not included in the four books mentioned above were published in the mid and late 1940s in several journals associated with the Ashram: *Sri Aurobindo Circle*, *Sri Aurobindo Mandir Annual*, *The Advent* and *Mother India*. Many letters in these journals

were revised by Sri Aurobindo before publication.

By the mid-1940s a significant body of letters had been collected, typed and revised. In 1945 plans were made, with Sri Aurobindo's approval, to publish a collection of his letters. The work of compiling and editing these letters was done under his guidance. At that time, many typed or printed copies of letters, some revised, some not, were presented to Sri Aurobindo for approval or revision. The resulting material was arranged and published in a four-volume series entitled *Letters of Sri Aurobindo*. Series One appeared in 1947, Series Two and Three in 1949 and Series Four in 1951. The first, second and fourth series contained letters on Yoga, the third letters on poetry and literature. In 1958, most of these letters on Yoga, along with many additional ones, were published under the titles *On Yoga II: Tome One* and *On Yoga II: Tome Two*, as Volumes VI and VII of the Sri Aurobindo International University Centre collection. The first tome, with further additions, was reissued in 1969. In 1970 a new edition of the letters was published under the title *Letters on Yoga*; this edition contained many new letters not included in *On Yoga II*. The three volumes of the enlarged edition constituted volumes 22, 23 and 24 of the Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary Library.

The present edition, also titled *Letters on Yoga*, incorporates the Centenary Library letters, but also contains a large number of letters that have come to light in the four decades between the two editions. One source of new letters is the correspondences of several disciples which were published in books after the Centenary Library edition had been issued. Govindbhai Patel's correspondence was published in 1974 in a book entitled *My Pilgrimage to the Spirit*; an enlarged edition appeared in 1977. Nagin Doshi's correspondence, *Guidance from Sri Aurobindo: Letters to a Young Disciple*, was brought out in three volumes in 1974, 1976 and 1987. *Nirodbaran's Correspondence with Sri Aurobindo* came out in two volumes in 1983 and 1984. Sahana Devi's correspondence came out in 1985 in a book entitled *At the Feet of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother*. Prithwi Singh's correspondence came out in 1988 as *Sri Aurobindo and the Mother to Prithwi Singh*. Dilip Kumar Roy's correspondence was issued in four volumes in 2003, 2005, 2007 and 2011 under the title *Sri Aurobindo to Dilip*. A second source of new material is individual letters and small collections of

letters published in Ashram journals and elsewhere after the Centenary Library had been issued. A third source is letters transcribed from manuscripts or from early typed copies. Many unpublished letters were discovered while reviewing correspondences long held by the Ashram; some of these had never been assessed to find letters for publication; others had been assessed, but relatively few letters were selected at the time. Additional letters were received by the Ashram upon the passing away of disciples. From the three sources mentioned above, many letters have been found that are worthy of publication. The present edition contains about one-third more letters than appear in the Centenary Library.

The Selection, Arrangement and Editing of the Letters

In compiling the present edition, all known manuscripts, typed copies or photographic copies of manuscripts and printed texts of letters were checked. From these sources, letters that seemed to be of general interest were selected. Electronic texts of the letters were then made and carefully checked at least twice against the handwritten, typed, photocopied, and printed versions of the texts.

The selected letters have been arranged according to subject and placed in the four volumes of the present edition. Each volume is divided and subdivided into parts, sections, chapters and groups with descriptive headings; each group, the lowest unit of division, contains one or more letters devoted to the specific subject of the group.

The present volume consists of 1163 separate items, an “item” being defined as what is published between one heading or asterisk and another heading or asterisk. Many items correspond exactly to individual letters; a good number, however, contain only part of the individual letters; a small number consist of two or more letters (or parts of them) that were joined together by early typists or editors and then revised in that form by Sri Aurobindo.

Whenever possible, the letters are reproduced to their full extent. In some cases, however, portions of the letters have been omitted because they are not of general interest. A number of letters, for example, begin with personal remarks by Sri Aurobindo unrelated to the more substantial remarks which follow; these personal openings have often

been removed. In some letters, Sri Aurobindo marked the transition from one part of a letter to another with a phrase such as "As to"; these transitional phrases have often been retained and stand at the beginning of abbreviated letters—that is, letters in which the first part of the letter has been omitted or placed elsewhere.

A number of letters, or portions of them, have been published in more than one volume of THE COMPLETE WORKS OF SRI AUROBINDO. Most of this doubling of letters occurs between *Letters on Yoga* and *Letters on Himself and the Ashram*. The form of these letters is not always the same in both places. In *Letters on Himself and the Ashram*, the manuscript version of a given letter has often been used because it contains Sri Aurobindo's remarks on himself or the Mother or members of the Ashram. These personal remarks, as noted above, were usually removed by Sri Aurobindo when he revised the letter for publication as a letter on Yoga. This revised form of the letter has generally been reproduced in *Letters on Yoga*. Thus, a number of letters are available both in their original form and their revised form.

As in previous collections of Sri Aurobindo's letters, the names of Ashram members and others have often been replaced by the letters X, Y, Z, etc. In any given letter, X stands for the first name replaced, Y for the second, Z for the third, A for the fourth, and so on. An X in a given letter has no necessary relation to an X in another letter. Names of Ashram members to whom Sri Aurobindo referred not as sadhaks but as holders of a certain position—notably Nolini Kanta Gupta in his position as Sri Aurobindo's secretary—are given in full. Sometimes the names of people who played a role in the history of the period are also given.

In his letters Sri Aurobindo sometimes wrote Sanskrit words in the devanagari script; these words have been transliterated into roman script in this edition. Words in Bengali script have likewise been transliterated. This policy is in accord with the practice followed in Sri Aurobindo's lifetime.

The reader may note that Sri Aurobindo almost always spelled the word "Asram" without an "h" in his manuscripts. Around 1945, due to failing eyesight, he began dictating most of his writings to his amanuensis Nirodbaran; Nirodbaran sometimes spelled the word without an "h", sometimes with one. In the present edition, the word

is always spelled as it occurs in the manuscripts, both those of Sri Aurobindo and of Nirodbaran. In headings and other editorial matter, the spelling “Ashram” has been used, since this is now the official spelling of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram.

**Original French Texts of Six Extracts
Cited in the Letter on Pages 506–10**

I. “*C'est un abandon héroïque, où l'âme parvient au sommet de l'activité libre, où la personne se transforme, où ses facultés sont épurées, déifiées par la grâce, sans que son essence soit détruite.*”

II. “*La contemplation du chrétien . . . est inseparable de l'état de grâce et de vie divine. S'il doit s'anéantir, c'est encore sa personnalité qui triomphe en se laissant arracher à tout ce qui n'est pas elle, en brisant tous les liens qui l'unissent à son individu de chair, afin que le Dieu vivant puisse s'en saisir, l'assumer, l'habiter.*”

III. “*Liberté qui consiste d'abord à subordonner ce qui est inférieur dans sa nature à ce qui lui est supérieur.*”

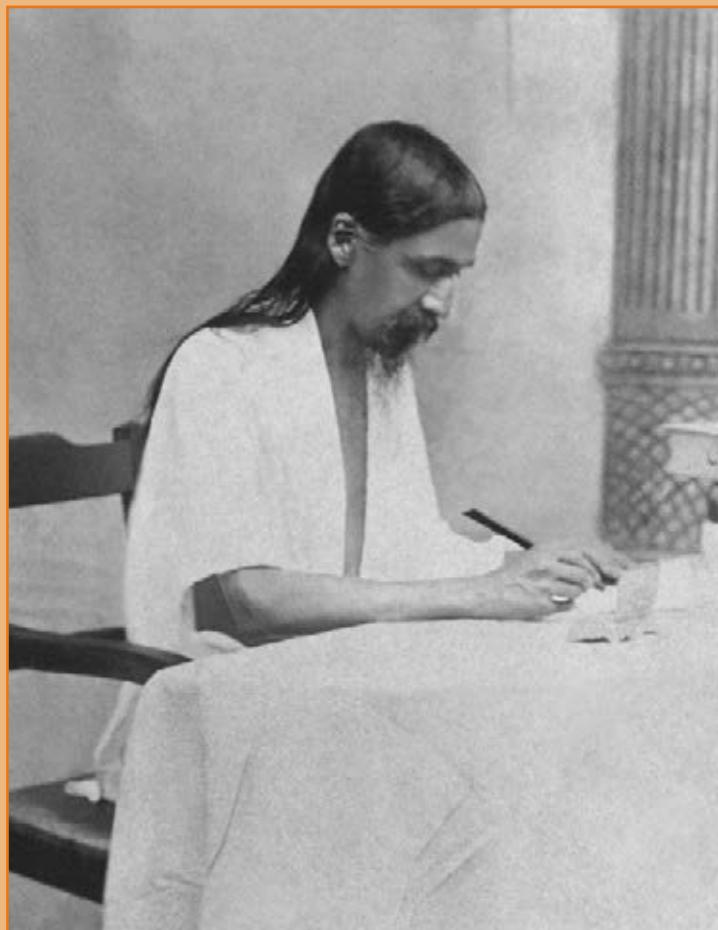
IV. “*Cette solitude de l'âme [de l'ascète asiatique] . . . n'est pas le vrai loisir spirituel, la solitude active où s'opère la transformation du péché en sainteté par l'union de l'âme avec Dieu dans ‘une lumière intellectuelle toute pleine d'amour’.*”

V. “*. . . la vie chrétienne. Mystique progressive qui est un enrichissement, un élargissement infini de la personne humaine.*”

VI. “*Pour l'Asiatique la personnalité est la chute de l'homme; pour le chrétien, c'est le dessein même de Dieu, le principe de l'union, le sommet naturel de la création qu'il appelle tout entière à la grâce.*”

Letters on Yoga

III



Sri Aurobindo

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Letters on Yoga — III

Experiences and Realisations
in the Integral Yoga

Publisher's Note

Letters on Yoga — III comprises letters written by Sri Aurobindo on the experiences and realisations that may occur in the practice of the Integral Yoga. It is the third of four volumes of *Letters on Yoga*, arranged by the editors as follows:

- I. Foundations of the Integral Yoga
- II. Practice of the Integral Yoga
- III. Experiences and Realisations in the Integral Yoga
- IV. Transformation of Human Nature in the Integral Yoga

The letters in these volumes have been selected from the large body of letters that Sri Aurobindo wrote to disciples and others between 1927 and 1950. Other letters from this period are published in *Letters on Poetry and Art*, *The Mother with Letters on the Mother* and *Letters on Himself and the Ashram*, volumes 27, 32 and 35 of THE COMPLETE WORKS OF SRI AUROBINDO. Letters written before 1927 are reproduced in *Autobiographical Notes and Other Writings of Historical Interest*, volume 36 of THE COMPLETE WORKS.

During Sri Aurobindo's lifetime, relatively few of his letters were published. Three small books of letters on Yoga were brought out in the 1930s. A more substantial collection came out between 1947 and 1951 in a four-volume series entitled *Letters of Sri Aurobindo* (including one volume of letters on poetry and literature). In 1958, many more letters were included in the two large tomes of *On Yoga — II*. A further expanded collection in three volumes entitled *Letters on Yoga* was published in 1970 as part of the Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary Library. The present collection, also entitled *Letters on Yoga*, constitutes volumes 28–31 of THE COMPLETE WORKS. These volumes incorporate previously published letters and contain many new ones as well.

About one-third of the letters in the present volume were not published in the Centenary Library.

The present volume is arranged by subject in four parts:

1. The Place of Experiences in the Practice of Yoga
2. The Opening of the Inner Senses
3. Experiences of the Inner Consciousness and the Cosmic Consciousness
4. The Fundamental Realisations of the Integral Yoga

The texts of all the letters have been checked against the available manuscripts, typescripts and printed versions.

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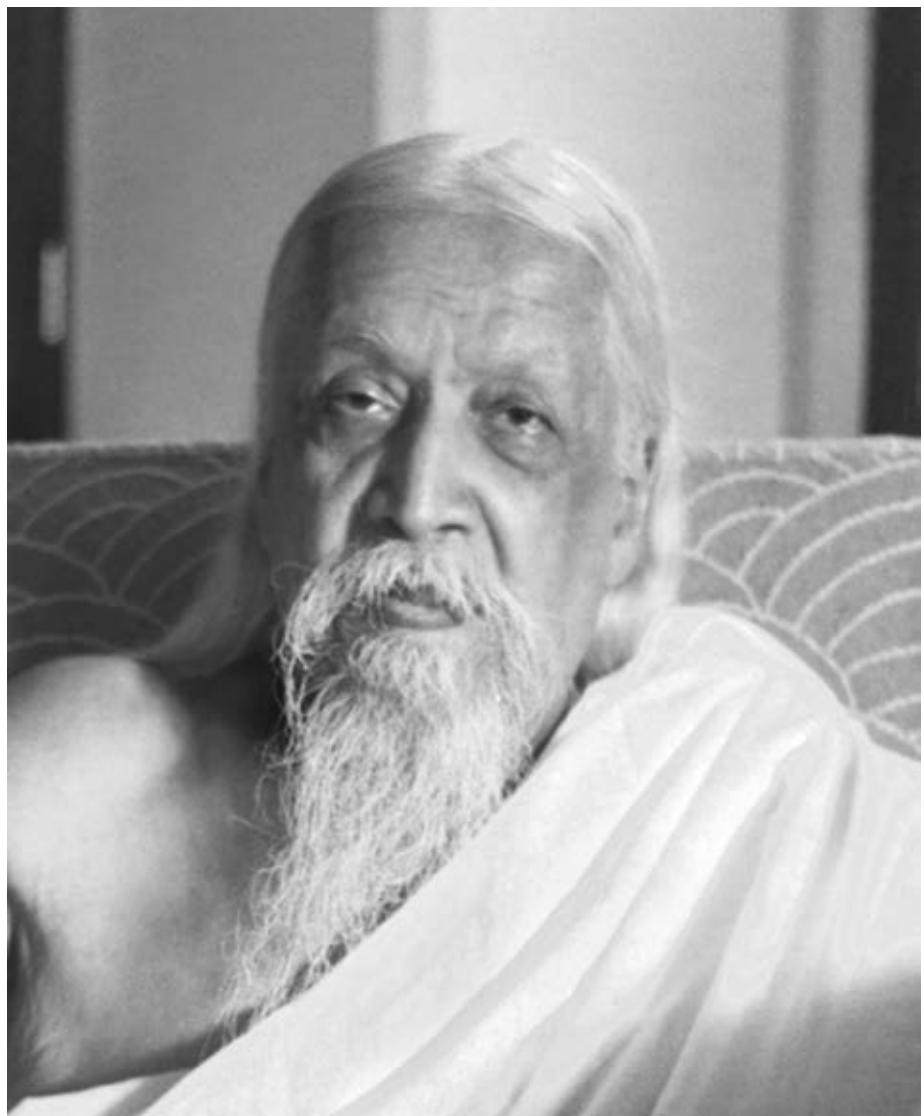
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Sri Aurobindo, 1950

Part One

The Place of Experiences in the Practice of Yoga

Section One

The Nature and Value of Experiences

Chapter One

Experiences and Realisations

The Difference between Experience and Realisation

Experience is a word that covers almost all the happenings in Yoga; only when something gets settled, then it is no longer an experience but part of the siddhi. E.g. peace when it comes and goes is an experience — when it is settled and goes no more it is a siddhi. Realisation is different — it is when something for which you are aspiring becomes real to you. E.g. you have the idea of the Divine in all, but it is only an idea, a belief; when you feel or see the Divine in all, it becomes a realisation.

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Experience of Truth is an isolated or repeated descent of the Truth into the consciousness or ascent of the consciousness into it. Realisation is when the Truth becomes a settled part of the consciousness.

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An experience of a truth in the substance of mind, in the vital or the physical, wherever it may be, is the beginning of realisation. When I experience peace, I begin to realise what it is. Repetition of the experience leads to a fuller and more permanent realisation. When it is settled anywhere, that is the full realisation of it in that plane or in that part of the being.

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Your going up to a higher plane is an experience — the descent of the higher plane into you, if temporary, is an experience.

If you become fully aware of the nature of the higher plane and if that becomes part of your consciousness, it is a realisation.

These are the two words usually used, realisation and experience.

*

There is a fundamental realisation in which one can say, "I have now realised the Divine" and there is no longer any anxiety or straining after something unachieved. But after that even there is a development of this consciousness of realisation into which more and more of the Divine Truth comes into the fundamental experience.

The Yogi and the Sadhak

The Yogi is one who is already established in realisation — the sadhak is one who is getting or still trying to get realisation.

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A sadhaka is one who is doing sadhana to attain union with the divine consciousness. A Yogi is one who is already living in some kind of oneness with the Divine, not in the ordinary consciousness.

Subordinate and Great Experiences

One who lives in the spiritual consciousness is a spiritual man, just as one who lives in thinking mind is an intellectual man. The spiritual consciousness is that in which you realise the Divine, the Self, the cosmic oneness as the constant living contact with these things. I do not know what you mean by abnormal experiences. There are many abnormal experiences that are not spiritual. There are two kinds of experiences: (1) subordinate things (like visions etc.) that help to open or build up or furnish a new (Yogic) consciousness; (2) the great experiences of Self, Peace, Light, Ananda, etc., also the perception of a deeper knowledge which shows us the truths of Soul and Nature and of the aspects of the Divine. This class of experiences are the beginning of realisation and it is when they settle and become part of the consciousness that realisation is complete.

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One develops by spiritual knowledge and experience which

comes from above the mind or one develops by psychic perception and experience which comes from within—these are the two main things. But it is also necessary to grow by inner mental and vital experiences and visions and dream experiences play a large part here. One thing may predominate in one sadhak, others in another; each develops according to his nature.

Feelings as Experiences

There is no law that a feeling cannot be an experience; experiences are of all kinds and take all forms in the consciousness. When the consciousness undergoes, sees or feels anything spiritual or psychic or even occult, that is an experience—in the technical Yogic sense, for there are of course all sorts of experiences that are not of that character. Feelings themselves are of many kinds. The word feeling is often used for an emotion, and there can be psychic or spiritual emotions which are numbered among Yogic experiences, such as a wave of shuddha bhakti or the rising of love towards the Divine. A feeling also means a perception of something felt—a perception in the vital or psychic or in the essential substance of the consciousness. I find even often a mental perception when it is very vivid described as a feeling. If you exclude all these feelings and kindred ones and say that they are feelings, not experiences, then there is very little room left for experiences at all. Feeling and vision are the main forms of spiritual experience. One sees and feels the Brahman everywhere; one feels a force enter or go out from one; one feels or sees the presence of the Divine within or around one; one feels or sees the descent of light; one feels the descent of peace or Ananda. Kick all that out on the ground that it is only a feeling and you make a clean sweep of most of the things that we call experience. Again we feel a change in the substance of the consciousness or the state of consciousness. We feel ourselves spreading in wideness and the body only as a small thing in the wideness (this can be seen also); we feel the heart-consciousness becoming wide instead of narrow, soft instead of hard, illumined instead of obscure, the head-consciousness also, the vital, even

the physical; we feel thousands of things of all kinds and why are we not to call them experiences? Of course it is an inner sight, an inner feeling, subtle feeling, not material like the feeling of a cold wind or a stone or any other object, but as the inner consciousness deepens it is not less vivid or concrete, it is even more so.

In this case what you felt was not an emotion, though something emotional came with it. You felt a condition in the very substance or consciousness—a softness, a plasticity, even a velvety softness, an ineffable plasticity. Any fellow who knows anything about Yoga would immediately say, “What a fine experience”, — a very clear psychic and spiritual experience.

Love, Joy and Experience

Your supposition [*that one cannot love the Divine until one experiences him*] conflicts with the experience of many sadhaks. I think Ramakrishna indicated somewhere that the love and joy and ardour of seeking was much more intense than that of fulfilment. I don't agree, but that shows at least that intense love is possible before realisation.

*

My point is that there have been hundreds of Bhaktas who have the love and seeking without any concrete experience, with only a mental conception or emotional belief in the Divine to support them. The whole point is that it is untrue to say that one must have a decisive or concrete experience before one can have love for the Divine. It is contrary to the facts and the quite ordinary facts of the spiritual experience.

*

The ordinary Bhakta is not a lion heart. The lion hearts get experiences comparatively soon but the ordinary Bhakta has often to feed on his own love or yearning for years and years—and he does it.

*

I really do not know what kind of joy you want. All experiences are not accompanied by joy. Interest is another matter.

Imagined Experiences

When one is living in the physical mind, the only way to escape from it is by imagination. Incidentally, that is why poetry and art etc. have so strong a hold. But these imaginations are often really shadows of supraphysical experience and once the barrier of the physical mind is broken or even swung a little open, there come the experiences themselves if the temperament is favourable. Hence are born visions and other such phenomena — all those that are miscalled psychic phenomena.

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Even imagined experiences (honestly imagined) can help to mental realisation and mental realisation can be a step to total realisation.

Mental Knowledge and Spiritual Experience

These disadvantages of mental knowledge no doubt exist.¹ But I doubt whether anybody could mentally simulate to himself the experience of the One everywhere or the downflow of peace. He might mistake a first mental realisation for the deeper spiritual one or think the descent was in his physical when it was in his mental influencing the body through the mental sheath of the subtle body — but those who have no mental knowledge can also make these mistakes. The disadvantage of the one who does not know mentally is that he gets the experience without understanding it and this may be a hindrance or at least retardatory to development while he would not get so easily out of a

¹ *The correspondent suggested that a mere mental knowledge of spiritual experience might lead one to concoct an experience through imagination or to exaggerate an experience by adding something to it mentally or to doubt an experience, thinking it might be a mental formation. — Ed.*

mistake as one more mentally enlightened.

*

Usually they [*persons without mental knowledge of the Self*] feel first through the psychic centre by union with the Mother and do not call it the Self—or else they simply feel a wideness and peace in the head or in the heart. Previous mental knowledge is not indispensable. I have seen in more cases than one sadhaks getting the Brahman realisation and asking “what is this?”—describing it with great vividness and exactness but without any of the known terms.

Just after writing this I read a letter from a sadhika in which she writes, “I see that my head is becoming very quiet, pure, luminous, universal, *viśvamaya*.” Well, that is the beginning of the realisation of the universal Brahman-Self in the mind, but if I put it to her in that language she would understand nothing.

*

Mental realisation is useful at the beginning and prepares spiritual experience.

It [*book-knowledge*] can help too at the beginning—but also it can hinder. It depends on the sadhak.

*

You have to learn by experience. Mental information (badly understood, as it always is without experience) might rather hamper than help. In fact there is no fixed mental knowledge for these things, which vary infinitely. You must learn to go beyond the hankering for mental information and open to the true way of knowledge.

*

All the experiences [*of the Theosophists*] are mental except with a very few. Wordsworth's experience also was mental. Mental experiences are of course a good preparation, but to stop there leaves one far away from the real thing.

*

Yes, if one has thought much of one kind of realisation and absorbed the idea deeply — then it is quite natural that the spiritual experience of it should be one of the first to come.

Mental Realisation and Spiritual Realisation

It [*mental realisation of the Divine*] is a certain kind of living cognition — of which there are two parts — the living perception in thought rising as far as intuition or revelation, the vivid mental feeling and reproduction of what is thus known in the substance of mind. Thus the One in all is felt, seen, realised by the mind by a sort of inner mental sense. The spiritual realisation is more concrete than that — one has the Knowledge by a kind of identity in one's very substance.

*

A mental or vital sense of oneness has not the same essentiality or the same effect as a spiritual realisation of oneness — just as the mental perception of the Divine is not the same thing as the spiritual realisation. The consciousness of one plane is different from the consciousness of another. Spiritual and psychic love are different from mental, vital or physical love — so with everything else. So too with the perception of oneness and its effects. That is why the different planes have their importance; otherwise their existence would have no meaning.

*

You have to know by experience. The mental perception and mental realisation are different from each other — the first is only an idea, in the second the mind in its very substance reflects or reproduces the truth. The spiritual experience is more than the mental — it is in the very substance of the being that the experience takes place.

*

But if you have that [*peace, calm, silence, wideness*] when you concentrate, it is a true spiritual realisation — that which

accompanies or prepares the experience of the Atman. It is not merely a mental realisation.

Spiritual Experience as Substantial Experience

Your feeling [*of spiritual experience as a “substance”*] is quite correct. All spiritual experience is a substantial experience—consciousness, Ananda even are felt as something substantial. It is also true that it is felt so by something deeper than mind; it is the mind that turns concrete realities into abstractions.

*

Yes, so long as the attitude is mental it is insecure because it is something imposed on the nature—a mental direction and control. But with the spiritual experience what begins is a change in the stuff of the consciousness itself and by that, as it proceeds to settle and confirm itself, begins naturally what we call the transformation of the nature.

*

The phrase [*“stuff of consciousness”*] simply means “substance of consciousness”, the consciousness in itself.

As the Yogic experience develops, consciousness is felt as something quite concrete in which there are movements and formations which are what we call thoughts, feelings etc.

Chapter Two

The Value of Experiences

Experience and Development of Consciousness

It is only by persistent experience and development of consciousness that the veil of Ignorance can be entirely dispelled.

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An experience is an unmistakable thing and must be given its proper value. The mind may exaggerate in thinking about it, but that does not deprive it of its value.

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Trances and experiences have their value. There is no question of less or more important — each thing has its place.

*

It is not a question of giving an equal value to everything you do, but of recognising the value of all the different elements of the sadhana. No such rule can be made as that trances are of little value or that experiences are of inferior importance any more than it can be said that work is of no or inferior importance.

*

Your experience is the beginning of the fundamental and decisive realisation which carries the consciousness out of the limited mental into the true spiritual vision and experience in which all is one and all is the Divine. It is this constant and living experience that is the true foundation of spiritual life. There can be no doubt about its truth and value, for it is evidently something living and dynamic and goes beyond a mental realisation. It may add to itself in future different aspects, but the essential fundamental realisation you now have. When this is permanent, one can be said to have passed out of the twilight of the mind

into the light of the Spirit.

What you have now to do is to allow the realisation to grow and develop. The necessary movements will probably come of themselves as these have come — provided you keep your will single and faithful towards this Light and Truth. Already it has brought you the guidance towards the next step, cessation of the flow of thought, the inner mind's silence. Once that is won, there is likely to come a settled peace, liberation, wideness. The sense of the need of simplicity and transparency is also a true movement and comes from the same inner guidance. That is necessary for the deepest inmost divine element within behind the mind, life and body to come forward fully in you — when it does you will be able to become aware of the inner guide within you and of a Force working for the full spiritual change. This simplicity comes by a separation from the manifold devious mental and vital movements which lead one in all directions — a quiet, a detachment in the heart which turns one singly towards the one Truth and the one Light till it takes up the whole being and the whole life.

Put your trust in the grace of the One and Divine which has already touched you and opened its door and rely on it for all that is to come.

The Importance of Small Beginnings

What I meant about the experiences was simply this that you have erected your own ideas about what you want from the Yoga and have always been measuring what began to come by that standard and because it was not according to expectation or up to that standard telling yourself after a moment, "It is nothing, it is nothing." That dissatisfaction laid you open at every step to a reaction or recoil which prevented any continuous development. The Yогin who has experience knows that the small beginnings are of the greatest importance and have to be cherished and allowed with great patience to develop. He knows for instance that the neutral quiet so dissatisfying to the vital eagerness of the sadhak is the first step towards the peace that passeth all

understanding, the small current or thrill of inner delight the first trickling in of the ocean of Ananda, the play of lights or colours the key of the doors of the inner vision and experience, the descents that stiffen the body into a concentrated stillness the first touch of something at the end of which is the presence of the Divine. He is not impatient; he is rather careful not to disturb the evolution that is beginning. Certainly, some sadhaks have strong and decisive experiences at the beginning, but these are followed by a long labour in which there are many empty periods and many periods of struggle.

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If you truly decide in all your consciousness to offer your being to the Divine to mould it as He wills, then most of your personal difficulty will disappear — I mean that which still remains, and there will be only the lesser difficulties of the transformation of the ordinary into the Yogic consciousness, normal to all sadhana. Your mental difficulty has been all along that you wanted to mould the sadhana and the reception of experience and the response of the Divine according to your own preconceived mental ideas and left no freedom to the Divine to act or manifest according to His own truth and reality and the need not of your mind and vital but of your soul and spirit. It is as if your vital were to present a coloured glass to the Divine and tell Him, "Now pour yourself into that and I will shut you up there and look at you through the colours", or, from the mental point of view, as if you were to offer a test-tube in a similar way and say, "Get in there and I will test you and see what you are." But the Divine is shy about such processes and His objections are not altogether unintelligible.

At any rate I am glad the experience has come back again — it has come as the result of your effort and mine for the last days and is practically a reminder that the door of entry into Yogic experience is still there and can open at the right touch. You taxed me the other day with making a mistake about your experience of breathing with the name in it and reproached me for drawing a big inference from a very small phenomenon — a

thing, by the way, which the scientists are doing daily without the least objection from your reason. You had the same idea, I believe, about my acceptance of your former experiences, this current and the descent of stillness in the body, as signs of the Yogi in you. But these ideas spring from an ignorance of the spiritual realm and its phenomena and only show the incapacity of the outer intellectual reason to play the role you want it to play, that of a supreme judge of spiritual truth and inner experience—a quite natural incapacity because it does not know even the A.B.C. of these things and it passes my comprehension how one can be a judge about a thing of which one knows nothing. I know that the “scientists” are continually doing it with supra-physical phenomena outside their province—those who never had a spiritual or occult experience laying down the law about occult phenomena and Yoga; but that does not make it any more reasonable or excusable. Any Yogi who knows something about pranayama or japa can tell you that the running of the name in the breath is not a small phenomenon but of great importance in these practices and, if it comes naturally, a sign that something in the inner being has done that kind of sadhana in the past. As for the current it is the familiar sign of a first touch of the higher consciousness flowing down in the form of a stream—like the “wave” of light of the scientist—to prepare its possession of mind, vital and physical in the body. So is the stillness and rigidity of the body in your former experience a sign of the same descent of the higher consciousness in its form or tendency of stillness and silence. It is a perfectly sound conclusion that one who gets these experiences at the beginning has the capacity of Yoga in him and can open, even if the opening is delayed by other movements belonging to his ordinary nature. These things are part of the science of Yoga, as familiar as the crucial experiences of physical Science are to the scientific seeker.

As for the impression of swooning, it is simply because you were not in sleep, as you imagined, but in a first condition of what is usually called *svapna samādhi*, dream trance. What you felt like swooning was only the tendency to go deeper in, into a more profound *svapna samādhi* or else into a *susupta* trance—

the latter being what the word trance usually means in English, but it can be extended to the *svapna* kind also. To the outer mind this deep loss of the surface consciousness seems like a swoon, though it is really nothing of the kind — hence the impression. Many sadhaks here get at times or sometimes for a long period this deeper *svapna samādhi* in what began as sleep — with the result that a conscious sadhana goes on in their sleeping as in their waking hours. This is different from the dream experiences that one has on the vital or mental plane which are themselves not ordinary dreams but actual experiences on the mental, vital, psychic or subtle physical planes. You have had several dreams which were vital dream experiences, those in which you met the Mother, and recently you had one such contact on the mental plane which, for those who understand these things, means that the inner consciousness is preparing in the mind as well as in the vital, which is a great advance.

You will ask why these things take place either in sleep or in an indrawn meditation and not in the waking state. There is a twofold reason. First, that usually in Yoga these things begin in an indrawn state and not in the waking condition, — it is only if or when the waking mind is ready that they come as readily in the waking state. Again in you the waking mind has been too active in its insistence on the ideas and operations of the outer consciousness to give the inner mind a chance to project itself into the waking state. But it is through the inner consciousness and primarily through the inner mind that these things come; so, if there is not a clear passage from the inner to the outer, it must be in the inner states that they first appear. If the waking mind is subject or surrendered to the inner consciousness and willing to become its instrument, then even from the beginning these openings can come through the waking consciousness. That again is a familiar law of the Yoga.

I may add that when you complain of the want of response, you are probably expecting immediately some kind of direct manifestation of the Divine which, as a rule though there are exceptions, comes only when previous experiences have prepared the consciousness so that it may feel, understand, recognise the

response. Ordinarily the spiritual or divine consciousness comes first — what I have called the higher consciousness — the presence or manifestation comes afterwards. But this descent of the higher consciousness is really the touch or influx of the Divine itself, though not at first recognised by the lower nature.

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“I will try again” is not sufficient; what is needed is to try always — steadily, with a heart free from despondency, as the Gita says, *anirvijnācetasā*. You speak of five and a half years as if it were a tremendous time for such an object, but a Yogi who is able in that time to change radically his nature and get the concrete decisive experience of the Divine would have to be considered as one of the rare gallopers of the spiritual Way. Nobody has ever said that the spiritual change was an easy thing; all spiritual seekers will say that it is difficult but supremely worth doing. If one’s desire for the Divine has become the master desire, then surely one can give one’s whole life to it without repining and not grudge the time, difficulty or labour.

Again you speak of your experiences as vague and dreamlike. In the first place the scorn of small experiences in the inner life is no part of wisdom, reason or common sense. It is in the beginning of the sadhana and for a long time the small experiences that come on each other and, if given their full value, prepare the field, build up a preparatory consciousness and one day break open the walls to big experiences. But if you despise them with the ambitious idea that you must have either the big experiences or nothing, it is not surprising that they come once in a blue moon and cannot do their work. Moreover, all your experiences were not small. There were some like the stilling descent of a Power in the body — what you used to call numbness — which anyone with spiritual knowledge would have recognised as a first strong step towards the opening of the consciousness to the higher Peace and Light. But it was not in the line of your expectations and you gave it no special value. As for vague and dreamlike, you feel it so because you are looking at them and at everything that happens in you from the standpoint of

the outward physical mind and intellect which can take only physical things as real and important and vivid and to it inward phenomena are something unreal, vague and truthless. The spiritual experience does not even despise dreams and visions; it is known to it that many of these things are not dreams at all but experiences on an inner plane and if the experiences of the inner planes which lead to the opening of the inner self into the outer so as to influence and change it are not accepted, the experiences of the subtle consciousness and the trance consciousness, how is the waking consciousness to expand out of the narrow prison of the body and the body-mind and the senses? For, to the physical mind untouched by the inner awakened consciousness, even the experience of the cosmic consciousness or the Eternal Self might very well seem merely subjective and unconvincing. It would think, "Curious, no doubt, rather interesting, but very subjective, don't you think? Hallucinations, yes?" The first business of the spiritual seeker is to get away from the outward mind's outlook and to look at inward phenomena with an inward mind to which they soon become powerful and stimulating realities. If one does that, then one begins to see that there is here a wide field of truth and knowledge, in which one can move from discovery to discovery to reach the supreme discovery of all. But the outer physical mind, if it has any ideas about the Divine and spirituality at all, has only hasty *a priori* ideas miles away from the solid ground of inner truth and experience.

I have not left myself time to deal with other matters at any length. You speak of the Divine's stern demands and hard conditions — but what severe demands and iron conditions you are laying on the Divine! You practically say to Him, "I will doubt and deny you at every step, but you must fill me with your unmistakable Presence; I will be full of gloom and despair whenever I think of you or the Yoga, but you must flood my gloom with your rapturous irresistible Ananda; I will meet you only with my outer physical mind and consciousness, but you must give me in that the Power that will transform rapidly my whole nature." Well, I don't say that the Divine won't or can't do it, but if such a miracle is to be worked, you must give Him

some time and just a millionth part of a chance.

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There is no reason certainly for despair. The bliss always comes in drops at first, or a broken trickle. You have to go on cheerfully and in full confidence, till there is the cascade.

Chapter Three

Inner Experience and Outer Life

Subjective Experience and the Objective Existence

Experiences on the mental and vital and subtle physical planes or thought formations and vital formations are often represented as if they were concrete external happenings; true experiences are in the same way distorted by mental and vital accretions and additions. One of the first needs in our Yoga is a discrimination and a psychic tact distinguishing the false from the true, putting each thing in its place and giving it its true value or absence of value, not carried away by the excitement of the mind or the vital being.

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What do you mean by true? You have a subjective experience belonging to a higher plane of consciousness; when you descend you come down with it into the material and the whole of existence is seen by you in the terms of that consciousness — just as when a man sees the vision of the Divine everywhere, he sees all down to the material world as the Divine.

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It happens so in the sadhak's own subjective consciousness [*that the Divine is seen everywhere and there is no sorrow or suffering in the world*]. Of course it does not mean that the whole world becomes like that in everybody's consciousness.

If your experience were objective, then that would mean that the whole world had changed, everybody became conscious, no sorrow or suffering anywhere. Needless to say, the material world has not changed objectively in that way. Only in your own consciousness, subjectively, you see the Divine

everywhere, all disharmony disappears, sorrow and suffering become impossible for the time at least—that is a subjective experience.

*

It depends on what you mean by subjective and objective. Knowledge and Ignorance are in their nature subjective. But from the personal point of view, the Force of Ignorance may manifest as something objective, outside oneself so that even when one has knowledge for oneself one cannot remove the environing Ignorance. If that is so, Ignorance is not merely a subjective force in oneself, it is there in the world.

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It seems to have been a series of experiences of the different bhavas of bhakti and it came for experience only—or for a manifold development of the bhakti. These of course are purely subjective experiences meant to educate the consciousness and have no definitive value for the actual manifestation. It is merely for subjective experience and knowledge.

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Subjective does not mean false. It only means that the Truth is experienced within but it has not yet taken hold of the dynamic relations with the outside existence. It is an inner experience of the cosmic consciousness and the overmind knowledge that you have.

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The cosmic consciousness, the overmind knowledge and experience is an inner knowledge—but its effect is subjective. As long as one lives in it, one can be free in soul, but to transform the external nature more is needed.

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I have told you once before that your experiences are subjective—and in the subjective sphere they are correct in substance so

far as they go. But to enter the Supermind subjective experience is not sufficient. Some sufficient application of intuition and overmind to life must first be done.

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The difficulty of the Yoga is not in getting experiences or a subjective realisation of the Truth; it is in objectivising the Truth, that is, in making the outer consciousness down to the material an expression of the inner Truth. So long as that is not done, the attacks of the lower Nature can always continue.

Experience and the Change of One's Nature

Merely to have experiences of the higher consciousness will not change the nature. Either the higher consciousness has to make a dynamic descent into the whole being and change it—or it must establish itself in the inner being down to the inner physical so that the latter feels itself separate from the outer and is able to act freely upon it—or the psychic must come forward and change the nature—or the inner will must awake and force the nature to change. These are the four ways in which change can be brought about.

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When you are in connection with the higher worlds above the mental, with the mental and the psychic or even with some of the higher vital planes, then there is the peace and Ananda—but connection with the lower vital worlds can easily bring disturbance and unrest, so long as your vital itself is not changed and made full of peace and strength and quiet.

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You forget that for a long time she was often keeping much more to herself, to X's great anger. During that time she built up an inner life and made some attempt to change certain things in her outer—not in the outward appearance but in the movements governing it. There is still an enormous amount to be done before

the inward change can be outwardly visible, but still she is not insincere in her resolution. As for her not having any depression it is because she has established a fundamental calm which is only upset by clashes with X; all the rest passes on the surface ruffling it perhaps, but not breaking the calm. She has also a day or two ago had the experience of the ascent above and of the wideness of peace and joy of the Infinite (free from the bodily sense and limitation) as also the descent down to the Muladhara. She does not know the names or technicalities of these things but her description which was minute and full of details was unmistakable. There are three or four others who have had this experience recently so that we may suppose the working of the Force is not altogether in vain, as this experience is a very big affair and is supposed to be, if stabilised, the summit of the old Yogas. For us it is only a beginning of spiritual transformation. I have said this though it is personal so that you may understand that outside defects and obstacles in the nature or the appearance of unyogicness does not necessarily mean that a person can do or is doing no sadhana.

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To change the nature is not easy and always takes time, but if there is no inner experience, no gradual emergence of the other purer consciousness that is concealed by all these things you now see, it would be almost impossible even for the strongest will. You say that first you must get rid of all these things, then have the inner experiences. But how is that to be done? These things, anger, jealousy, desire, are the very stuff of the ordinary human vital consciousness. They could not be changed if there were not a deeper consciousness within which is of quite another character. There is within you a psychic being which is divine, directly a part of the Mother, pure of all these defects. It is covered and concealed by the ordinary consciousness and nature, but when it is unveiled and able to come forward and govern the being, then it changes the ordinary consciousness, throws all these undivine things out and changes the outer nature altogether. That is why we want the sadhaks to concentrate, to open this concealed

consciousness — it is by concentration of whatever kind and the experiences it brings that one opens and becomes aware within and the new consciousness and nature begin to grow and come out. Of course we want them also to use their will and reject the desires and wrong movements of the vital, for by doing that the emergence of the true consciousness becomes possible. But rejection alone cannot succeed; it is by rejection and by inner experience and growth that it is done.

You say that all these things were hidden within you. No; they were not deep within, they were in the outer or surface nature, only you were not sufficiently conscious of them because the other true consciousness had not opened and grown within you. Now by the experiences you have had the psychic has been growing and it is because of this new psychic consciousness that you are able to see clearly all that has to go. It does not go at once because the vital had so much the habit of them in the past, but they will now have to go because your soul wants to get rid of them and your soul is growing stronger in you. So you must both use your will aided by the Mother's force to get rid of these things, and go on with your inner psychic experiences — it is by the two together that all will be done.

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The persistence or the obstinate return of the old Adam is a common experience: it is only when there is a sufficient mass of experience and a certain progression of consciousness in the higher parts of the being that the lower can be really transmuted. It is that that one must allow to develop. It is the pressure of the Yoga shakti and the increase of the experiences that is wanted in your case, not this preoccupation with an external “grim” tapasya.

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Once these experiences [*of peace and the descent of force*] begin, they repeat themselves usually, whether the general condition is good or not. But naturally they cannot make a radical change until they settle themselves and become normal in the whole

being or at least in the inner part of it. In the latter case the old movements can still come, but they are felt as something quite superficial and the sadhana increases in spite of them. There is no question of good or wicked. If some part of the being even has been opened the experiences come.

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The action of the higher consciousness does not usually begin by changing the outer nature—it works on the inner being, prepares that and then goes outward. Before that, whatever change is done in the outer nature has to be done by the psychic.

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All experiences can be brought into the smallest constituents of the being.

Inner Attitude and Outward Things

You have had some experiences which are signs of a future possibility. To have more within the first one and a half years it would be necessary to have the complete attitude of the sadhak and give up that of the man of the world. It is only then that progress can be rapid from the beginning.

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All these [*outward restraints such as moderation in eating food and drinking tea*] are external things that have their use, but what I mean [*by “the complete attitude of the sadhak”*] is something more inward. I mean not to be interested in outward things for their own sake, following after them with desire, but at all times to be intent on one's soul, living centrally in the inner being and its progress, taking outward things and action only as a means for the inner progress.

The Power of Creative Formation

It [*feeling that the Mother and Sri Aurobindo are looking at one*]

simply means you have a subjective sense of our Presence. But must a subjective sense of things be necessarily a vain imagination? If so, no Yoga is possible. One has to take it as an axiom that subjective things can be as real as objective things. No doubt there may be and are such things as mental formations—but, to begin with, mental formations are or can be very powerful things, producing concrete results; secondly whether what one sees or hears is a mental formation or a real subjective object can only be determined when one has sufficient experience in these inward things.

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You have a strong power of (subjective) creative formation, mostly, I think, on the mental but partly too on the vital plane. This kind of formative faculty can be used for objective results if accompanied by a sound knowledge of the occult forces and their workings; but by itself it results more often in one's building up an inner world of one's own in which you can live very well satisfied, so long as you live in yourself, apart from any close contact with external physical life; but it does not stand the test of objective experience.

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In each plane there is an objective as well as a subjective side. It is not the physical plane and life alone that are objective.

When you have the power of formation of which I spoke, whatever is suggested to the mind, the mind constructs and establishes a form of it in itself. But this power can cut two ways; it may tempt the mind to construct mere images of the reality and mistake them for the reality itself. It is one of the many dangers of a too active mind.

You make a formation in your mind or on the vital plane in yourself—it is a kind of creation, but subjective only; it affects only your own mental or vital being. You can create by ideas, thought-forms, images a whole world in yourself or for yourself; but it stops there.

Some have the power of making consciously formations that

go out and affect the minds, actions, vital movements, external lives of others. These formations may be destructive as well as creative.

Finally, there is the power to make formations that become effective realities in the earth-consciousness here, in its mind, life, physical existence. That is what we usually mean by creation.

Chapter Four

The Danger of the Ego and the Need of Purification

Spiritual Experiences and the Ego

A certain exaltation of the being comes naturally with the stronger experiences and the sense of marvel or miracle may go with it, but there should be no egoistic feeling in the exaltation.

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What you have to be careful about is, when the feeling of power and strength comes into you or when you have experiences, not to allow it to be seized on by any kind of egoistic or vital desire, pride, ambition, wish to dominate others — even if it takes the garb of doing the Mother's work, — for this is your great weakness which always gets in and spoils your progress. Also when you have experiences, do not allow yourself to get exalted and excited by them so as to lose discrimination; for, if you do, then even though the experiences when they begin may be of the right kind, the vital forces take advantage of the excitation and rush in with their own deformations. Remain always calm, collected, quiet within, vigilant — discriminate always. The progress so made may be more slow or seem so; but it is more sure.

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A true spiritual experience must be free from the claim of the ego. What the ego can do however is to get proud of having the experience and think, "What a great one am I." Or it may think, "I am the Self, the Divine, so let me go and do what I will, for it is the Divine who wills in me." It is only if the experience of Self imposes silence on the other parts and frees the psychic that the ego disappears. Even if not ego itself, numerous fragments and

survivals of ego-habit can remain and have to be eliminated.

*

Yes, if there is the solid experience, the ego habit is much diminished, but it does not go altogether. It takes refuge in the sense of being an instrument and—if there is not the psychic turn—it may easily prefer to be the instrument of some Force that feeds the satisfaction of the ego. In such cases the ego may still remain strong although it feels itself instrumental and not the primary actor.

*

Although there is no ego in the spiritual planes, yet by the spiritual experience the ego on the lower planes may get aggrandised through pride and wrong reception of the experience. Also by entering into the larger mental and vital planes one may aggrandise the ego. These things are always possible so long as the higher consciousness and the lower are not harmonised in the being and the lower transformed into the nature of the higher.

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The first result of the downflow of the overmind forces is very often to exaggerate the ego, which feels itself strong, almost irresistible (though it is not really so), divinised, luminous. The first thing to do, after some experience of the thing, is to get rid of this magnified ego. For that you have to stand back, not allow yourself to be swept in by the movement, but to watch, understand, reject all mixture, aspire for a purer and yet purer light and action. This can only be done perfectly if the psychic comes forward. The mind and vital, especially the vital, receiving these forces, can with difficulty resist the tendency to seize on and use them for the ego's objects or, which comes practically to the same thing, they mix the demands of the ego with the service of a higher object.

*

There is [*when one receives forces without a basis of peace, light and love*] more a sense of having power than real power. There are some mixed and quite relative powers — sometimes a little effective, sometimes ineffective — which could be developed into something real if put under the control of the Divine, surrendered. But the ego comes in, exaggerates these small things and represents them as something huge and unique and refuses to surrender. Then the sadhak makes no progress — he wanders about in the jungle of his own imaginations without any discrimination or critical sense or among a play of confused forces he is unable to understand or master.

Forces can come anywhere. The Asuras have their forces, but without peace, light or love — only they are forces of darkness.

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The man there [*in the correspondent's dream*] symbolises that ego-tendency in the human nature which makes a man, when some realisation comes, to think how great a realisation is this and how great a sadhak am I and to call others to see and admire — perhaps he thinks like the man in the dream, "I have seen the Divine, indeed I feel I am one with the Divine, — I will call everybody to see that." This is a tendency which has injured the sadhana of many and sometimes ruined the sadhana altogether. In the thoughts you describe you came to see something in yourself which is there more or less in all human beings, the desire to be thought well of by others, to occupy a high place in their esteem or their affection, to have honour, position, admiration. When anybody joins this feeling to the idea of sadhana, then the disposition to do the sadhana for that and not purely and simply for the sake of the Divine comes in and there must be disturbance or else an obstruction in the sadhana itself or if in spite of it spiritual experience comes, then there is the danger of his misusing the experience to magnify his ego like the man in the dream. All these dreams are coming to you to give you a vivid and concrete knowledge and experience of what these human defects are so that you may find it easier to throw them

out, to recognise them when they come in the waking state and refuse them entrance. These things are not in yourself only but in all human nature; they are the things one has to get rid of or else to guard against so that one's consecration to the Divine may be complete, selfless, true and pure.

Purification and Preparation of the Nature

I don't think there is any cause for dissatisfaction with the progress made by you. Experiences come to many before the nature is ready to make full profit from them; to others a more or less prolonged period of purification and preparation of the stuff of the nature or the instruments comes first while experiences are held up till this process is largely or wholly over. The latter method which seems to be adopted in your case is the safer and sounder of the two. In this respect we think it is evident that you have made considerable progress, for instance in control over the violence and impatience and heat natural to the volcanic energy of your temperament, in sincerity also curbing the devious and errant impulses of an enormously active mind and temperament, in a greater quiet and harmony in the being as a whole. No doubt the process has to be completed, but something very fundamental seems to have been done. It is more important to look at the thing from the positive rather than the negative side. The things that have to be established are—*brahmaccaryam śamah satyam prasāntir ātmasamīyamah*: *brahmaccaryam*, a complete sex-purity; *śamah*, quiet and harmony in the being, its forces maintained but controlled, harmonised, disciplined; *satyam*, truth and sincerity in the whole nature; *prasāntih*, a general state of peace and calm; *ātmasamīyamah*, the power and habit to control whatever needs control in the movements of the nature. When these are fairly established one has laid a foundation on which one can develop the Yogic consciousness and with the Yogic consciousness there comes an easy opening to realisation and experience.

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The progress does not always come in the way that people expect. There is first a preparation within even for many years before such experiences come as people usually associate with the word progress. There has been this preparation and progress in you, but because struggle is still there you cannot recognise it.

You must put your trust in the Mother and let her Force work in you — keep the attitude of confidence and self-offering and the result will appear as soon as the consciousness is ready.

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According to the affirmation of people acquainted with the subject, the preliminary purification before getting any Yogic experiences worth the name may extend to 12 years. After that one may legitimately expect something. You are far from the limit yet — so no reason to despair.

*

Do not be over-eager for experience, — for experiences you can always get, having once broken the barrier between the physical mind and the subtle planes. What you have to aspire for most is the improved quality of the recipient consciousness in you — discrimination in the mind, the unattached impersonal Witness look on all that goes on in you and around you, purity in the vital, calm equanimity, enduring patience, absence of pride and the sense of greatness — and more especially, the development of the psychic being in you — surrender, self-giving, psychic humility, devotion. It is a consciousness made up of these things, cast in this mould that can bear without breaking, stumbling or deviation into error the rush of lights, powers and experiences from the supraphysical planes. An entire perfection in these respects is hardly possible until the whole nature from the highest mind to the subconscious physical is made one in the light that is greater than Mind; but a sufficient foundation and a consciousness always self-observant, vigilant and growing in these things is indispensable — for perfect purification is the basis of the perfect siddhi.

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You must not try to get experiences; you are not yet ready for them; instead of the right experience something abnormal comes. You must get your vital purified and calm so that these movements may not come. Nothing abnormal like not sleeping, not eating — all that is the vital trying to do extraordinary things so as to imagine it is going fast and doing high sadhana. A pure, simple, quiet, well-balanced vital is necessary for this Yoga.

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The automatic tendency is a good sign as it shows that it is the inner being opening to the Truth which is pressing forward the necessary changes.

As you say, it is the failure of the right attitude that comes in the way of passing through ordeals to a change of nature. The pressure is becoming greater now for this change of character even more than for decisive Yoga experience — for if the experience comes it fails to be decisive because of the want of the requisite change of nature. The mind for instance gets the experience of the One in all, but the vital cannot follow because it is dominated by ego-reaction and ego-motive or the habits of the outer nature keep up a way of thinking, feeling, acting, living which is quite out of harmony with the experience. Or the psychic and part of the mind and emotional being feel frequently the closeness of the Mother, but the rest of the nature is unoffered and goes its own way prolonging division from her nearness, creating distance. It is because the sadhaks have never even tried to have the Yogic attitude in all things — they have been contented with the common ideas, common view of things, common motives of life, — only varied by inner experiences and transferred to the framework of the Asram instead of that of the world outside. It is not enough — and there is great need that this should change.

*

Quite correct. Unless the adhar is made pure, neither the higher truth (intuitive, illumined spiritual) nor the overmental nor the supramental can manifest; whatever forces come down from

them get mixed with the inferior consciousness and a half-truth takes the place of the Truth or even sometimes a dangerous error.

*

As for experiences, anybody with an occult bent can have experiences. The thing is to know what to do with them.

Mixed and Confused Experiences

I do not question at all the personal intensity or concreteness of your internal experiences, but experiences can be intense and yet be very mixed in their truth and their character. In your experience your own subjectivity, sometimes your ego-pushes interfere very much and give them their form and the impression they create on you. It is only if there is a pure psychic response that the form given to the experience is likely to be the right one and the mental and vital movements will then present themselves in their true nature. Otherwise the mind, the vital, the ego give their own colour to what happens, their own turn, very usually their own deformation. *Intensity* is not a guarantee of entire truth and correctness in an experience; it is only *purity* of the consciousness that can give an entire truth and correctness.

The Mother's presence is always there; but if you decide to act on your own — your own idea, your own notion of things, your own will and demand upon things, then it is quite likely that her presence will get veiled; it is not she who withdraws from you, but you who draw back from her. But your mind and vital don't want to admit that, because it is always their preoccupation to justify their own movements. If the psychic were allowed its full predominance, this would not happen; it would have felt the veiling, but it would at once have said, "There must have been some mistake in me, a mist has arisen in me," and it would have looked and found the cause.

It is perfectly true that so long as there is not an unreserved self-giving in both the internal and external, there will always be veilings, dark periods and difficulties. But if there is unreserved

self-giving in the internal, the unreserved self-giving in the external would naturally follow; if it does not, it means that the internal is not unreservedly surrendered; there are reservations in some part of the mind insisting on its own ideas and notions; reservations in some part of the vital insisting on its own demands, impulses, movements, ego-ideas, formations; reservations in the internal physical insisting on its own old habits of many kinds, and all claiming consciously, half-consciously or subconsciously that these should be upheld, respected, satisfied, taken as an important element in the work, the “creation” or the Yoga.

*

All this is absolutely idiotic confusion. It has come because you have persisted in disobeying and disregarding everything I wrote for you.

I told you you were not to try to decide by your mind. You persistently go on repeating, “*I must decide. I must decide. I must take a decision. I must take a resolution.*” You are always repeating this “*I, I, I must decide*” as if you knew better than myself and the Mother! “*I must understand, I must decide.*” And always you find that your mind can decide nothing and understand nothing. And yet you go on repeating the same falsehood.

I tell you plainly once again that all your so-called experiences are worth nothing, mere vital ignorance and confusion. The only experience you need is the experience of the presence of the Mother, the Mother’s light, the Mother’s force, and the change they bring in you.

You have to throw away all other influences and open yourself only to the Mother’s influence.

You have to think and talk no longer about energies flowing out and your energies and others’ energies. The only energy you have to feel is the descent and inflow and action of the Mother’s force.

These were my instructions and so long as you carried them out, you were progressing rapidly.

Throw all these incoherent false experiences away. Go back to the single rule I gave you. Open to the Mother's presence, influence, light, force — reject everything else. Only so will you get back clearness (instead of this confusion), peace, psychic perception and progress in the sadhana.

*

But why be overwhelmed by any wealth of any kind of experiences? What does it amount to after all? The quality of a sadhak does not depend on that; one great spiritual realisation direct and at the centre will often make a great sadhak or Yogi, an army of intermediate Yogic experiences will not, that has been amply proved by a host of instances. You need not therefore compare that wealth to your poverty. To open yourself to the descent of the higher consciousness (the true being) is the one thing needed and that, even if that comes after long effort and many failures, is better than a hectic gallop leading nowhere.

*

You have missed my rather veiled hint about wealth of "any kind of experiences" and the reference to the intermediate zone which, I think at least, I made. I was referring to the wealth of *that* kind of experience. I do not say that these experiences are always of no value, but they are so mixed and confused that if one runs after them without any discrimination at all they end either by leading astray, sometimes tragically astray, or by bringing one into a confused nowhere. That does not mean that all such experiences are useless or without value. There are those that are sound as well as those that are unsound; those that are helpful, in the true line, sometimes signposts, sometimes stages on the way to realisation, sometimes stuff and material of the realisation. These naturally and rightly one seeks for, calls, strives after, or at least one opens oneself in the confident expectation that they will sooner or later arrive. Your own main experiences may have been few or not continuous, but I cannot recollect any that were not sound or were unhelpful. I would say that it is better to have a few of these than a multitude of

the others. My only meaning in what I wrote was not to be impressed by mere wealth of experiences or to think that that is sufficient to constitute a great sadhak or that not to have this wealth is necessarily an inferiority, a lamentable deprivation or a poverty of the one thing desirable.

There are two classes of things that happen in Yoga — realisations and experiences. Realisations are the reception in the consciousness and the establishment there of the fundamental truths of the Divine, of the Higher or Divine Nature, of the world-consciousness and the play of its forces, of one's own self and real nature and the inner nature of things, the power of these things growing in one till they are a part of one's inner life and existence, — as for instance, the realisation of the Divine Presence, the descent and settling of the higher Peace, Light, Force, Ananda in the consciousness, their workings there, the realisation of the divine or spiritual love, the perception of one's own psychic being, the discovery of one's own true mental being, true vital being, true physical being, the realisation of the overmind or the supramental consciousness, the clear perception of the relation of all these things to our present inferior nature and their action on it to change that lower nature. The list of course might be infinitely longer. These things also are often called experiences when they only come in flashes, snatches or rare visitations; they are spoken of as full realisations only when they become very positive or frequent or continuous or normal.

Then there are the experiences that help or lead towards the realisation of things spiritual or divine or bring openings or progressions in the sadhana or are supports on the way — experiences of a symbolic character, visions, contacts of one kind or another with the Divine or with the workings of the higher Truth, things like the waking of the Kundalini, the opening of the chakras, messages, intuitions, openings of the inner powers, etc. The one thing that one has to be careful about is to see that they are genuine and sincere and that depends on one's own sincerity, for if one is not sincere, if one is more concerned with the ego or being a big Yogi or becoming a superman than with meeting the Divine or getting the Divine Consciousness which enables one

to live in or with the Divine, then a flood of pseudos or mixtures comes in, one is led into the mazes of the intermediate zone or spins in the grooves of one's own formations. There is the truth of the whole matter.

Then why does Krishnaprem say that one should not hunt after experiences but only love and seek the Divine? It simply means that you have not to make experiences your main aim, but the Divine only your aim; and if you do that, you are more likely to get the true helpful experiences and avoid the wrong ones. If one seeks mainly after experiences, his Yoga may become a mere self-indulgence in the lesser things of the mental, vital and subtle physical worlds or in spiritual secondaries, or it may bring down a turmoil or maelstrom of the mixed and the whole or half-pseudo and stand between the soul and the Divine. That is a very sound rule of sadhana. But all these rules and statements must be taken with a sense of measure and in their proper limits,—it does not mean that one should not welcome helpful experiences or that they have no value. Also when a sound line of experience opens, it is perfectly permissible to follow it out, keeping always the central aim in view. All helpful or supporting contacts in dream or vision, such as those you speak of, are to be welcomed and accepted. I had no intention of discouraging such things at all. Experiences of the right kind are a support and help towards the realisation; they are in every way acceptable.

Purification and Positive Experience

It is a mistake to dwell too much on the lower nature and its obstacles, which is the negative side of the sadhana. They have to be seen and purified, but preoccupation with them as the one important thing is not helpful. The positive side of experience of the descent is the more important thing. If one waits for the lower nature to be purified entirely and for all time before calling down the positive experience, one might have to wait for ever. It is true that the more the lower nature is purified, the easier is the descent of the higher Nature, but it is also and more true that the more the higher Nature descends, the more the lower is purified.

Neither the complete purification nor the permanent and perfect manifestation can come all at once, it is a matter of time and patient progress. The two (purification and manifestation) go on progressing side by side and become more and more strong to play into each other's hands — that is the usual course of the sadhana.

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I do not know what Krishnaprem said or in which article, I do not have it with me. But if the statement is that nobody can have a successful meditation or realise anything till he is pure and perfect, I fail to follow it; it contradicts my own experience. I have always had realisation by meditation first and the purification started afterwards as a result. I have seen many get important, even fundamental realisations by meditation who could not be said to have a great inner development. Are all Yogis who have meditated with effect and had great realisations in their inner consciousness perfect in their nature? It does not look like it to me. I am unable to believe in absolute generalisations in this field, because the development of spiritual consciousness is an exceedingly vast and complex affair in which all sorts of things can happen and one might almost say that for each man it is different according to his nature and that the one thing that is essential is the inner call and aspiration and the perseverance to follow always after it no matter how long it takes or what are the difficulties or impediments — because nothing else will satisfy the soul within us.

It is quite true that a certain amount of purification is indispensable for going on, that the more complete the purification the better because then when the realisations begin they can continue without big difficulties or relapses and without any possibility of fall or failure. It is also true that with many purification is the first need, — certain things have to be got out of the way before one can begin any consecutive inner experience. But the main need is a certain preparation of the consciousness so that it may be able to respond more and more freely to the higher Force. In this preparation many things are useful — the poetry

and music you are doing can help, for it acts as a sort of *śravāṇa* and *manana*, even, if the feeling roused is intense, a sort of natural *nididhyāṣana*. Psychic preparation, clearing out of the grosser forms of mental and vital ego, opening mind and heart to the Guru and many other things help greatly—it is not perfection or a complete freedom from the dualities or ego that is the indispensable preliminary, but preparedness, a fineness of the inner being which makes spiritual responses and receiving possible.

There is no reason therefore to take as gospel truth these demands which may have been right for Krishnaprem on the way he has trod, but cannot be imposed on all. There is no ground for despondency on that ground—the law of the spirit is not so exacting and inexorable.

Purification and Consecration

What Krishnaprem writes (I have not read it yet) is perfectly true that purification of the heart is necessary before there can be the spiritual attainment. All ways of spiritual seeking are agreed on that. Purification and consecration are two great necessities of *sadhanā*. It is not a fact that one must be pure in heart before one can have *any* Yogic experience at all, but those who have experiences before purification is done run a great risk. It is much better to have the heart pure first, for then the way becomes safe. Nor can the Divine dwell in one's consciousness, if that consciousness is obscure with impurity. It is for the same reason that I advocate the psychic change of the nature first—for that means the purification of the heart, the turning of it wholly to the Divine, the subjection of the mind, of the vital passions, desires, demands, of the physical instincts to the control of the inner being, the soul. What Krishnaprem calls intuitions I would describe as psychic intimations or, as some experience it, the voice of the soul showing the outer members what is the true thing to be done. Always when the soul is in front, one gets the right guidance from within what is to be done, what avoided, what is the wrong thing or the true thing in thought, feeling, action. But this inner intimation emerges in proportion as the

consciousness grows more and more pure.

I never intended that X should stay here; he came for darshan and sat down here without a “by your leave”. I allowed him to remain for a while to see if he got any profit out of it; afterwards came his repeated illness and he somehow stuck on till now. What I meant by some concrete method was things like repetition of a mantra, pranayama, asana etc. He has been doing these things even here or some of them at least; it is the only thing he really understands (or misunderstands?); but purification of the heart he has not been capable of doing. What I mean by subtle methods is psychological, non-mechanical processes — e.g. concentration in the heart, surrender, self-purification, working out by inner means the change of the consciousness. This does not mean that there is no outer change, — the outer change is necessary but as a part of the inner change. If there is impurity and insincerity within, the outer change will not be effective; but if there is a sincere inner working, the outer change will help it and accelerate the process. What use is X’s eating less except for his body’s health? But if a man seeks to restrain and get rid of his greed for food or attachment, (not by starvation, though), then he is doing something useful to his sadhana.

Y’s case is different. His main stumbling block was ambition, pride, vanity, the desire to be a big Yogi with occult powers. To try to bring down occult powers into an unpurified mind, heart and body — well, you can do it if you want to dance on the edge of a precipice. Or you can do it if your aim is not to be spiritual but to be an occultist, for then you can follow the necessary methods and get the help of the occult powers. But the occult spiritual forces and masteries can be called down or come down without calling only if that is quite secondary to the true thing, the seeking for the Divine, and if it is part of the Divine plan in you. Occult powers can only be for the spiritual man an instrumentation of the Divine Power that uses him, they cannot be the aim or an aim of his sadhana. I don’t know who started Y on this false path or whether he hit on it himself; many people here have a habit of doing Yoga according to their own ideas without caring for the guidance of the Guru — from whom

however they expect an entire protection and success in sadhana even if they prance or gambol into the wrongest paths possible.

Of course, renunciation of sex is indispensable for the purification you seek,—the heart must be pure and consecrated to the Divine. There must be no turn left that side. As for food, well, that is not so much a purification of the heart as of the vital in the physical, but it is of course very helpful to get control there. The purification of the heart is the central necessity, but a purification of the mind, vital and physical is also called for. But the most important thing for purification of the heart is an absolute sincerity. No pretence with oneself, no concealment from the Divine or oneself or the Guru, a straight look at one's nature and one's movements, a straight will to make them straight. It does not so much matter if it takes time; one must be prepared to make it one's whole life-task to seek the Divine. Purifying the heart means after all a pretty considerable achievement and it is no use getting despondent, despairful etc. because one finds things in oneself that still need to be changed. If one keeps the true will and true attitude, then the intuitions or intimations from within will begin to grow, become clear, precise, unmistakable and the strength to follow them will grow also. And then before even you are satisfied with yourself, the Divine will be satisfied with you and begin to withdraw the veil by which he protects himself and his seeker against a premature and perilous grasping of the greatest thing to which humanity can aspire.

Purification and Transformation

Transformation is made possible by purification.

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If you remain in a fully conscious state, the clearing of the outer nature ought not to be difficult—afterwards the positive work of its transformation into a perfect instrument can be undertaken.

Conditions for the Coming of Experience

If you make your mind quiet, the experience will come. If you cannot make your mind quiet, work and pray and wait. Those who are able to open to the Divine receive him—but also to those who can wait for the Divine, the Divine comes.

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If one feels [*the Mother's Force working while in a state of quietness*] it is all right—but it does not always happen. The quietness, silence or peace is a basis for the extension of consciousness, the coming of higher experiences or realisations etc. In what way or order they come differs according to the individual nature.

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Visions and experiences will come; but the most important thing is to get in the peace, Ananda, confidence and establish it. When that is fixed, afterwards the consciousness can open to the working of the Mother's Force—it's coming down into the body and its working will bring all the experience and change that is needed.

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To fix the calm and strength is the main thing now—more important than fresh experiences; these will come fast enough if the calm and strength become durable, are made the habit and stuff of the consciousness.

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As for sadhana what is necessary is to arrive at a certain quiet of the inner mind which makes meditation fruitful or a quietude of the heart which creates the psychic opening. It is only by regular concentration, constant aspiration and a will to purify the mind and heart of the things that disquiet and agitate them that this can be done. When a certain basis has been established in these two centres the experiences come of themselves. Many,

no doubt, get some kind of experiences such as visions etc. before the basis is well laid by a sort of mental or vital aptitude for these things, but such experiences do not of themselves lead to transformation or realisation — it is by the quietude of the mind and the psychic opening that these greater things can come.

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Experience in the sadhana is bound to begin with the mental plane,—all that is necessary is that the experience should be sound and genuine. The pressure of understanding and will in the mind and the Godward emotional urge in the heart are the two first agents of Yoga, and peace, purity and calm (with a lulling of the lower unrest) are precisely the first basis that has to be laid; to get that is much more important in the beginning than to get a glimpse of the supraphysical worlds or to have visions, voices and powers. Purification and calm are the first needs in the Yoga. One may have a great wealth of experiences of that kind (worlds, visions, voices etc.) without them, but these experiences occurring in an unpurified and troubled consciousness are usually full of disorder and mixture.

At first the peace and calm are not continuous, they come and go, and it usually takes a long time to get them settled in the nature. It is better therefore to avoid impatience and to go on steadily with what is being done. If you wish to have something beyond the peace and calm, let it be the full opening of the inner being and the consciousness of the Divine Power working in you. Aspire for that sincerely and with a great intensity but without impatience and it will come.

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It is necessary to lay stress on three things — (1) an entire quietness and calm of the mind and the whole being, (2) a continuance of the movement of purification so that the psychic being (the soul) may govern the whole nature, (3) the maintenance in all conditions and through all experiences of the attitude of adoration and bhakti for the Mother. These are the conditions in which one can grow through all experiences with security and

have the right development of the complete realisation without disturbance to the system or being carried away by the intensity of the experiences. Calm, psychic purity, bhakti and spiritual humility before the Divine are the three conditions.

*

The special experiences you are having are glimpses of what is to be and what is growing and preparing and are helping to make the consciousness ready for it. It is not therefore surprising that they change and are replaced by others — that is what usually happens; for it is not these forms that are to be perpetuated, but the essence of the thing which they are bringing. Thus the one thing that has to grow most now is the silence, the quietude, the peace, the free emptiness into which experiences can come, the sense of coolness and release. When that is in possession of the consciousness fully, then something else will come into it which is also essential to the true consciousness and fix itself — it proceeds usually like that. There is nothing strange therefore in the special forms of experience ceasing and being followed by others after you have written about or brought them to the Mother. When the more permanent forms of realisation begin to come, it will no longer be like that.

Chapter Five

Suggestions for Dealing with Experiences

Letting the Experiences Develop Naturally

It is better to let the experiences develop naturally. It is not necessary, when they come freely, to determine with the mind which is to be remembered or sought after.

*

An experience should be allowed its full time to develop or have its full effect. It should not be interrupted except in case of necessity or, of course, if it is not a good experience.

*

You have to watch and see how they [*experiences*] develop. For the most part they carry their own meaning and if you go on observing them with a silent and vigilant mind you will understand more than if you were in a constant turmoil of thought about them.

*

When an experience begins, you should not interfere with it by either questioning or by disturbing movements.

Thinking about Experiences

To think and question about an experience when it is happening is the wrong thing to do; it stops it or diminishes it. Let the experience have its full play—if it is something like this “new life force” or peace or Force or anything else helpful. When it is over, you can think about it—not while it is proceeding. For these experiences are spiritual and not mental and the mind has

to be quiet and not interfere.

*

During the experience the mind should be quiet. After the experience is over it can be active. If it is active while it is there, the experience may stop altogether.

*

It was not an imagination, but an experience. When such an experience occurs, the attempt to take hold of it mentally and continue it may on the contrary interrupt it. It is best to let it continue of itself; if it ceases, it is likely to recur.

*

There are two centres or parts of the consciousness — one is a witness, *sākṣī*, and observes, the other consciousness is active and it is this active consciousness that you felt going down deep into the vital being. If your mind had not become active, you would have known where it went and what it went there to experience or do. When there is an experience, you should not begin to think about it, for that is of no use at all and it only stops the experience — you should remain silent, observe and let it go on to its end.

*

There is something in you that does want to stick to the habit of mentalising about everything. So long as you were not having real experiences, it did not matter. But once real experiences begin you have to learn to approach them in the right way.

Observing Experiences without Attachment

At a certain stage of the sadhana, in the beginning (or near it) of the more intense experiences, it sometimes happens that there is the intense realisation of some aspect of the Divine, a sort of communion with it, and that is seen everywhere and all as that. It is a transitory phase and afterwards one gets the

larger experience of the Divine in all its aspects and beyond all aspects. Throughout the experience there should be one part of the being that observes and understands—for sometimes ignorant sadhaks are carried away by their experience and stop short there or fall into extravagance. It must be taken as an experience through which you are passing.

Observing Experiences without Fear or Alarm

It is always dangerous to allow fear to come in like that and associate itself with experiences in the sadhana. There is nothing in the experiences themselves as you describe them that are at all alarming. A burning in the head or a creeping or ticklish sensation or a sense of something moving and working in the head has often been felt by many when there was an opening and the Force was working there. The other things also are in themselves usual enough, the sense of something separate from oneself and the opening and connection made between the head and the centre above. But where the anomaly comes in is that with the connection comes the fear and nervous physical upsetting. So long as there is fear it is no use going on with these experiences—you have to stop and get back to the normal consciousness. Besides that, as I have already said, you must realise what it is in you that has come across and created this upsetting. It is not the descent and the experiences, for many have had them or similar things without being any the worse. It is something in you, probably in your lower vital and physical, that does not want the Higher Consciousness because it will have to change and it has no intention of changing. When this pressure acts, it gets at once a fear and shakes the physical mind and system by its fear. You will have then to get rid of this—till then it will not be safe for you to go farther.

*

These experiences are symbolic in their character, so there is no reason to be horrified by the green waters even if you did drown in a well in the last life. All such experiences should be observed

quietly without alarm or depression or other such feelings. One can look at them and try to see or feel their meaning, but too active a speculation in the mind rather hinders than helps the seeing.

If you sink down into an unopened part and open it to the light or empty and clear it, that is a quite salutary and necessary operation and there is no reason for alarm. As for self-preservation, one does not drown in these inner wells—it is only a bath or a plunge. And if it happens to be the well of the psychic, nothing more salutary than to plunge into it.

Speaking about Experiences

The usual rule given by Yogis is that one should not speak of one's experience to others except of course the Guru while the sadhana is going on because it wastes the experience, there is what they call *kṣaya* of the tapasya. It is only long past experiences that they speak of and even that not too freely.

*

The Light left you because you spoke of it to someone who was not an *adhikārī*. It is safest not to speak of these experiences except to a guru or to one who can help you. The passing away of an experience as soon as it is spoken of is a frequent happening and for that reason many Yogis make it a rule never to speak of what happens within them unless it is a thing of the past or a settled realisation that nothing can take away. A settled permanent realisation abides, but these were rather things that come to make possible an opening in the consciousness to something more complete—to prepare it for realisation.

*

I thought it was understood that what I wrote to you about persons was private. Experiences one's own or others' if one comes to know of them, should not be talked about or made a matter of gossip. It is only if there can be some spiritual profit to others and even then if they are experiences of the past that one

can speak of them. Otherwise it becomes like news of Abyssinia or Spain, something common and trivial for the vital mass-mind to chew or gobble.

*

To show what is written about experiences or to speak about one's experiences to others is always risky. They are much better kept to oneself.

*

I rather doubt whether it should be done.¹ There is a privacy about experiences which stands in the way of their being dealt with like that, at least until the sadhak has got into siddhi. They can be spoken of to a few, if one wishes, but to make public like that in a general way, even without names, is a little difficult. People besides might begin to speculate on these experiences, gossip and ask questions. What might be useful is some experiences with explanation, if the answer gives one, which would make clear certain sides of the sadhana. But they would have to be carefully chosen.

*

General knowledge is another matter, it is intellectual and the intellect gains by the intellectual activity of teaching. Also if in Yoga it were only a matter of imparting intellectually one's mental knowledge of the subject, that rule² would perhaps hold; but this mental aspect is only a small part of Yoga. There is something more complex which forms the bigger part of it. In teaching Yoga to another one becomes to some extent a master with disciples. The Yogis have always said that one who takes disciples, takes upon himself the difficulties of his disciples as well as one's own—that is why it is recommended not to take

¹ *The correspondent wished to compile a "Journal of Experiences" containing the letters of sadhaks who had written about their experiences to Sri Aurobindo and he had commented on them. This collection of letters would be kept in the Ashram library for sadhaks to read.—Ed.*

² *The rule that one understands something better by teaching it.—Ed.*

disciples unless and until one is siddha and even then only if one receives the Divine authority to do it—what Ramakrishna called getting the *cāprās*. Secondly, there is the danger of egoism —when one is free from that, then the objection no longer holds. There is a separate question and that is the telling of one's own experiences to others. That too is very much discouraged by most Yogis—they say it is harmful to the sadhana. I have certainly seen and heard of any number of instances in which people were having a flow of experiences and, when they told it, the flow was lost—so there must be something in this objection. I suppose however it ceases to apply after one has reached a certain long-established stability in the experience, that is to say, when the experience amounts to a definite and permanent realisation, something finally and irrevocably added to the consciousness. I notice that those who keep their experiences to themselves and do not put themselves out on others seem to have a more steady sadhana than others, but I don't know whether it is an invariable rule. It would probably not apply any longer after a certain stage of realisation.

*

It is true that experiences often disappear when spoken or written about to others. But that does not always happen, nor does it happen to everybody.

*

It is not good to talk too much to others about the sadhana and its experiences. There can be exceptions to the rule, but that depends on the person and circumstances.

*

If you want to keep the joy, it will be wise not to speak of it to others. Things spoken about get wings and try to escape.

The Difficulty of Keeping Experiences

The rush of the experience at the beginning is often very powerful, so powerful that the resisting elements remain quiescent—

afterwards they rise up. The experience has then to be brought down and settled in these parts also.

*

Yes, that is the truth of the working. At first what has to be established comes with difficulty and is felt as if abnormal, an experience that one loses easily—afterwards it comes of itself, but does not yet stay; finally it becomes a frequent and intimate state of the being and makes itself constant and normal. On the other hand all the confusions and errors once habitual to the nature are pushed out; at first they return frequently, but afterwards they in their turn become abnormal and foreign to the nature and lose frequency and finally disappear.

*

One can speak of a condition as coming freely and spontaneously when it comes of itself or as soon as it is remembered after an interruption. One can speak of it as coming at will, when it comes back at a slight pressure of the will and nothing more is necessary. Yours comes by an effort of the will which has to be sustained and is kept at the price of a constant vigilance. But this effort and vigilance are quite the right thing and must be done until the condition either becomes stable or comes automatically or at will, as described above. This is not pulling, so you need not hesitate to go on with it fully. It is the necessary tapasya.

What prevents it from remaining is the natural lapse to a lower consciousness which comes either from the mind's or vital's inclination to indulge in accustomed occupations or by sleep or by losing oneself in some outer action such as talking —because these things are associated with the ordinary mental consciousness and still need it to be done. At a later stage it will be possible to do these things with the surface mind only while the new consciousness remains intact and is either found there immediately as soon as the surface occupation ceases or else remains even during the occupation upholding the surface action or enveloping it as a small movement in itself.

*

All that you have written is quite correct; but the smallness is a general characteristic of the human instrument before it has the spiritual change. When the quietude comes, then the wideness also begins to come. The state you feel in which things go right, is the psychic and spiritual condition of the being; it is true that at first it is there only at times, but that is usual in the sadhana. All new states and realisations come like that at first; they are there for a short time, then seem to cease and other things come up from below and cover and hide the new condition. This is because of the habit of the past nature. But the true condition goes on returning till it and not the old things establishes itself as the habit and rule of a new nature.

The inward condition and its new outlook on things without the eagerness of the old consciousness in work is simply a passage through which you are going towards the new nature in which you will remain unmoved and undisturbed by things, but with a new and freer power of action which comes from within and from above.

*

It is more difficult at this stage for the experiences of Ananda (this felicity seems from your description to be an intense psychic Ananda) to be kept permanently than for peace to remain abidingly. The difficulty of keeping up these states in work or reading is more a matter of habit than anything else, because the mind is accustomed to absorb in the reading or work and forget all else for the time being. But once one gets the right poise and can keep in the inner being during work, that difficulty disappears.

Section Two
Vicissitudes on the Way
to Realisation

Chapter One

Variations in the Intensity of Experience

The Up and Down Movement in Yoga

The up and down movement which you speak of is common to all ways of Yoga. It is there in the path of bhakti, but there are equally alternations of states of light and states of darkness, sometimes sheer and prolonged darkness, when one follows the path of knowledge. Those who have occult experiences come to periods when all experiences cease and even seem finished for ever. Even when there have been many and permanent realisations, these seem to go behind the veil and leave nothing in front except a dull blank, filled, if at all, only with recurrent attacks and difficulties. These alternations are the result of the nature of human consciousness and are not a proof of unfitness or of predestined failure. One has to be prepared for them and pass through. They are the “day and night” of the Vedic mystics.

As for surrender, everyone has his own first way of approach towards it; but if it is due to fear, “form” or sense of duty, then certainly that is not surrender at all; these things have nothing to do with surrender. Also, complete and total surrender is not so easy as some seem to imagine. There are always many and large reservations; even if one is not conscious of them, they are there. Complete surrender can best come by a complete love and bhakti. Bhakti on the other hand can begin without surrender, but it naturally leads, as it forms itself, to surrender.

You are surely mistaken in thinking that the difficulty of giving up intellectual convictions is a special stumbling-block in you more than in others. The attachment to one's own ideas and convictions, the insistence on them is a common characteristic and here it seems to manifest itself with an especial vehemence. It can be removed by a light of knowledge from above which

gives one the direct touch of Truth or the luminous experience of it and takes away all value from mere intellectual opinion, ideas or conviction and removes the necessity for it, or by a right consciousness which brings with it right ideas, right feeling, right action and right everything else. Or else it must come by a spiritual and mental humility which is rare in human nature — especially the mental, for the mind is always apt to think its own ideas, true or false, are the right ideas. Eventually it is the psychic growth that makes this surrender too possible and that again comes most easily by bhakti. In any case, the existence of this difficulty is not in itself a good cause for forecasting failure in Yoga.

*

The rhythm of up and down is fairly general — it is only a few who keep an even course and even these have slight though comparatively rare drops of the consciousness. But the times vary — although it is true that it comes upon a few at the same time, and occasionally there is a massed general attack and shaking. It seems difficult as yet to eliminate these vicissitudes of the sadhana.

*

Everything once gained is there and can be regained. Yoga is not a thing that goes by one decisive rush one way or the other — it is a building up of a new consciousness and is full of ups and downs. But if one keeps to it the ups have a habit of resulting by accumulation in a decisive change — therefore the one thing to do is to keep at it. After a fall don't wail and say, "I'm done for," but get up, dust yourself and proceed farther on the right path.

*

After one has got to a certain stage the things gained are never lost — they may be covered over but they return — they have only gone inside and come back to the surface.

Alternations, Oscillations, Fluctuations of Consciousness

It is always like that — some days of experience, some days of no experience (or only experience of peace and quietude) alternating. It is only later on that the consciousness becomes capable of continuous experience and even then there are alternations of the level.

*

The reason why there are these alternations of which you complain is that the nature of the consciousness is like that; after a little spell of wakefulness it feels the need of a little sleep. Very often in the beginning the wakings are brief, the sleeps long; afterwards it becomes more equal and later on the sleep periods are shorter and shorter. Another cause of these alternations, when one is receiving, is the nature's need of closing up to assimilate. It can take perhaps a great deal, but while the experience is going on it cannot absorb properly what it brings, so it closes down for assimilation. A third cause comes in in the period of transformation, — one part of the nature changes and one feels for a time as if there had been a complete and permanent change. But one is disappointed to find it cease and a period of barrenness or lowered consciousness follows. This is because another part of the consciousness comes up for change and a period of preparation and veiled working follows which seems to be one of unenlightenment or worse. These things alarm, disappoint or perplex the eagerness and impatience of the sadhak; but if one takes them quietly and knows how to use them or adopt the right attitude, one can make these unenlightened periods also a part of the conscious sadhana. So the Vedic Rishis speak of the alternation of "Day and Night both suckling the divine Child".

*

Everyone has these alternations because the total consciousness is not able to remain always in the above experience [*of the higher force working powerfully*]. The point is that in the intervals there should be quietude, at least in the inner being, no

restlessness, dissatisfaction or struggle. If that point is attained, then the sadhana can go on smoothly—not that there will be no difficulties, but there will be no disquietude or dissatisfaction etc. etc.

*

The impermanence of the better condition is a fairly general phenomenon. There is an oscillation always, a coming and going till the change that is trying to take place is strong enough to fix itself. This is due to two reasons, first the inability of the vital and physical to give up their old movements at once and accommodate themselves to the new and secondly to the habit of things hiding in the nature somewhere under the pressure from above and turning up as soon as they get an opportunity.

*

These slight oscillations always happen until everything is open. They are due to one of two causes,—either

- (1) Some small part or movement of the being comes up which is not quite open and needs to have the Influence brought into it, or
- (2) A shadow is thrown by the outside force, bringing back, not the old disturbance, but some temporary obscuration or appearance of obscuration.

Do not be disturbed, but immediately become quite quiet and open yourself.

The important thing is not to allow the old strong disturbance and confusion to come back and, secondly, not to allow a long obscuration, even if the obscuration be without a serious disturbance. To keep hold on quiet persistently will prevent the serious disturbance; to keep quiet and steadily open yourself will prevent any long obscuration.

*

These oscillations [*of consciousness*] always come. The universal lower Nature tries to come back and resume its hold—the lower vital or the physical consciousness responds, not always because

it wants or likes to do so but because the old habit of response is still so strong that it cannot help it.

The first necessity is to detach yourself, not to regard it as your own, to learn to feel it as something foreign and refuse to be touched or upset. Then it will become easier for the lower vital or physical itself to reject and refuse to admit it.

*

These fluctuations in the force of the aspiration and the power of the sadhana are unavoidable and common to all sadhaks until the whole being has been made ready for the transformation. When the psychic is in front or active and the mind and vital consent, then there is the intensity. When the psychic is less prominent and the lower vital has its ordinary movements or the mind its ignorant action, then the opposing forces can come in unless the sadhak is very vigilant. Inertia comes usually from the ordinary physical consciousness, especially when the vital is not actively supporting the sadhana. These things can only be cured by a persistent bringing down of the higher spiritual consciousness into all the parts of the being.

*

These fluctuations always take place. By insistence and practice it becomes finally possible to keep the aspiration and the open consciousness above continuously, but even then periods of active progress and periods of assimilation alternate.

*

Fluctuations of this kind cannot but come and when they come, one has to remain very quiet and detach oneself from the surface condition and wait for it to pass while calling the Mother's Force. A neutral condition of this kind serves a certain purpose in the economy of the purification and change—it brings up things that have to be transformed or rejected, lifts up some part of the being in order to expose it to the transforming force. If one can understand, remain quiet and detached from the surface movements, not identified, then it goes sooner, the Force can

quickly clear out what rises and afterwards it is found that something has been gained and a progress made.

*

Yes, indeed, to keep the fixed consciousness of the soul, even when there are fluctuations in the outer nature, is a great victory. If one can do that, it means that the capacity to arrive is there fixed in the being and only the firm will is needed for the entire certitude.

Fluctuations in the Working of the Force

There are no fixed rules [*about fluctuations in the working of the Force*]. There are simply a mass of tendencies and forces with which one has to become familiar. It is not a fixed machinery which one can manage by devices or by pulling this or that button. It is only by the inner Will, the constant aspiration, by detachment and rejection, by bringing down the true consciousness, force etc. that it can be done.

*

I can only say as before, that there is no specific reason [*for fluctuations in the working of the Force*] which the mind can determine. It depends on the total condition and interaction of the forces. One has to hold on to the aspiration and look steadily towards the goal without being disturbed by these inequalities and fluctuations.

*

I don't know.¹ Times and seasons vary according to the poise and flux and reflux of the forces in the consciousness. It is not a thing to which you can affix a rationalised and systematised explanation. One can feel it and understand in the essence of the consciousness, but not formulate precise cause and effect.

¹ *The correspondent asked why he felt an emptiness in the morning, a suspension of sadhana.—Ed.*

Lulls, Pauses, Interim Periods

There are always lulls of this kind. One must not get upset—otherwise they are prolonged and disturbances come in. One must remain quiet, aspire steadily but without vehemence or, if one presses for a change, then too with a quiet steady pressure.

*

There are always periods when all one can do is to remain quiet and aspire. A continuous activity of the light and power is only possible when the whole being has been prepared and the psychic is constantly in front.

*

Everyone has periods when the consciousness is covered up. One has to go on in spite of that, and if you persist in aspiration and keep turned to the Mother, then these periods will diminish and the consciousness more and more open to her.

At such periods instead of allowing these things to hold you, you should separate yourself from them and regard them as something foreign which you have to reject.

*

There are always long periods of this kind at the beginning when the first openings of experience are covered up by the restless mind and vital; but with perseverance they diminish—the experience always returns and takes up more and more of the consciousness till it becomes its normal state.

*

There are always pauses of preparation and assimilation between two movements. You must not regard these with fretfulness or impatience as if they were untoward gaps in the sadhana. Besides, the Force rises up lifting part of the nature on a higher level and then comes down to a lower layer to raise it; this motion of ascent and descent is often extremely trying because the mind partial to an ascent in a straight line and the vital eager

for rapid fulfilment cannot understand or follow this intricate movement and are apt to be distressed by it or resent it. But the transformation of the whole nature is not an easy thing to accomplish and the Force that does it knows better than our mental ignorance or our vital impatience.

*

There is nothing wrong in having intervals of passive peace without anything happening—they come naturally in the sadhana as a basis for fresh action when the nature is ready for it. It is only the vital attitude that turns it into a disharmony, because somewhere in its being there is not the assent to or participation in the peace and passivity. To be able often to rest, repose in all the being outspread in the silent Brahman is an indispensable thing for the Yogi. But the vital wants always fuss, action, to feel that it is somebody doing something, getting on, having progress, on the move. The counterpart to this rajasic fuss is inertia. If the whole being can widen itself out, rest satisfied in the silence, then progressively inertia fades out and gives place to *sama*.

*

In the interim periods, if any come, to maintain the calm observing consciousness is the one great necessity.

The dynamic activity of the higher consciousness may be suspended but once manifested its presence is always there.

*

They [*certain experiences*] are first indications of an opening—but the opening has to be stabilised and enlarged. Also so long as the external mind is very much on the top they come at intervals only. Continuous experience is only possible when one gets inside and stays there.

*

There are always variations in the intensity of experience, due to the necessity of assimilation in the consciousness. It is only at

a much later stage that the consciousness remains always at its highest level.

*

These variations are inevitable. They go on until three things are sufficiently and unfluctuatingly established: (1) A fixed peace and gladness. (2) A clear light and understanding. (3) A complete selfless love and surrender.

Drops or Falls of Consciousness

These drops [of consciousness] happen to all sadhaks; their causes are various; sometimes it is a pull from below, sometimes an invasion from outside, sometimes a less ascertainable cause. When it happens, one must always remain as quiet as possible behind and call back the better condition.

*

A drop of consciousness need not be so serious or take as long a time to repair. A few hours or, if there is much disturbance or mental obstruction, a few days should be sufficient to recover. Sometimes it takes longer if the sadhak continues to be too troubled or agitated or otherwise stands in his own way by dwelling too much on the obstacle. But years are taken only when there is, not a mere dropping of the consciousness, but a strong fall of the whole nature from the path or other very serious accident etc. There is nothing of this kind here or anything that could cause it.

*

You must have allowed the consciousness to fall — there may have been some tamasic movement or it may merely be the habit of oscillation between the two conditions [*obscure and luminous*] that still persists.

The speedy removal of the difficulties depends on the continuance of the experiences. Otherwise the consciousness oscillates between the higher and the lower condition — which does not

prevent the ultimate liberation, but does cause delay.

*

Yes—if the peace is established, then the falls [*of consciousness*] are only on the surface and do not affect the inner consciousness.

*

Fall of the concentration happens to everybody—it has not to be taken as if it were something tragic or allowed to be the cause of depression.

Fatigue, Inertia and Lowering of the Consciousness

The falling down [*of the consciousness*] comes usually by some inertia coming in the consciousness through fatigue or through mere habit of relaxation or it comes through some vital reaction which one may or may not notice or it comes through a wrong movement of the mind. These are the positive lowering causes, but at the back of them is the fact that these alternations are almost inevitable so long as the consciousness is in any way subject to the old nature. The intervals of non-sadhana may however be long or short according to inner circumstances (mainly the power of the will or the psychic or the higher being to restore quickly the true poise).

*

An occasional sinking of the consciousness happens to everybody. The causes are various, some touch from outside, something not yet changed or not sufficiently changed in the vital, especially the lower vital, some inertia or obscurity rising up from the physical parts of nature. When it comes, remain quiet, open yourself to the Mother and call back the true condition, and aspire for a clear and undisturbed discrimination showing you from within yourself the cause or the thing that needs to be set right.

*

Yes, the ordinary physical consciousness is not able to hold the

contact and it does get tired—also it cannot assimilate much at a time. But it is not always the Divine who takes away the pressure; the lower consciousness itself loses it or gives it up.

*

An always intense aspiration, an unswerving and unwavering will turned to the one thing only, help to get through the difficulties without discouragement or falling into depression—they give an impetus for a rapid development. But the difficulties come all the same because they are inherent in human nature. Even the best sadhaks have these periods of suspension of the sadhana, of nothing happening, of the absence of the urge of the inner being. It is when some difficulty arises in the physical nature that has to be dealt with or when a pause has to be made for a veiled preparation, or for some similar reason. Even when the working of the sadhana is in the mind or vital which are more plastic such periods are frequent—when the physical is concerned they must necessarily come and are usually marked not so much by any apparent struggle but by an immobility and an inertia of the energies that were at work before. This is very troublesome to the mind because it suggests entire cessation, incapacity to progress or unfitness. But it is not really so. One must be quiet and go on opening oneself to the working or keeping the will to do so—afterwards there will be a greater progress. Many sadhaks indulge in such a period a spirit of despondency and loss of faith in the future which delays the renewal, but this should be avoided.

*

It is difficult to say [*why the veiling of consciousness persists*]—usually it is when something in the mind and vital accepts and indulges the lower forces that this inability to re-enter the true consciousness remains so obstinate. Physical tamas can produce long interregnums of obscure consciousness, but not usually with such a violent obstruction—usually only dull and obstinate.

*

The depression is not the only cause of suspension of experiences. There are others such as inertia etc. If one can have experiences continuously in spite of these things, that means that a part of the consciousness has definitely separated from the rest and is able to go on in spite of the outer resistance.

*

Even if there is physical fatigue sometimes it is not inevitable that it should interfere with the sadhana. The inner movement can always go on.

*

When the physical consciousness prevails, often one does not feel any sign or effect [of *inner or higher experiences*] even if they are there.

*

How do you expect anything so obtuse and forgetful as the physical consciousness to have the effect if the experiences are not repeated? It is as when you learn a lesson, you have to repeat it till the physical mind gets hold of it — otherwise it does not become a part of consciousness.

Variations during the Day

It happens to most sadhaks that in particular parts of the day they feel concentrated and get results, and in others that condition is not there. This is especially in the earlier stages of the progress. It is only after the higher consciousness, peace etc. have settled in the being that one can usually be at all times in the active condition of sadhana.

*

It is often like that — the period of intense activity is limited to a particular part of the day and then the rest of the time there is a lull.

*

It is quite usual to have such periods in the day. The consciousness needs time for rest and assimilation, it cannot be at the same pitch of intensity at all times. During the assimilation a calm quietude is the proper condition.

*

These variations in the consciousness during the day are a thing that is common to almost everybody in the sadhana. The principle of constant oscillation, relaxation, relapse to a normal or a past lower condition from a higher state that is experienced but not yet fixed in realisation or else realised but not yet perfectly stable, becomes very strong and marked when the working of the sadhana is in the physical consciousness. For there is an inertia in the physical nature that does not easily allow the intensity natural to the higher consciousness to remain constant,— the physical is always sinking back to something more ordinary; the higher consciousness and its force have to work long and come again and again before they can become constant and normal in the physical nature. Do not be disturbed or discouraged by these variations or this delay, however long and tedious; remain careful only to be quiet always with an inner quietude and as open as possible to the higher Power, not allowing any really adverse condition to get hold of you. If there is no adverse wave, then the rest is only a persistence of imperfections which all have in abundance; that imperfection and persistence the Force must work out and eliminate, but for the elimination time is needed.

*

There is no mentally definite and rigidly effective reason for the thing [*a fall into inertia*] coming in the evening rather than at 2 p.m. or in the midnight or in the morning. For some people the fall comes in the evening, for some in the morning, for some at other times, and so too with the rise. But the alternations happen to most people in one kind of rhythm or another. The times vary with people and even can vary with the same men. There is no definable reason for it being at a particular time except that it has made itself habitual at that time. The rest is a question of

the play of forces which is observable but the reasons of which escape mental definition.

*

That is a frequent experience (though I suppose it is not general)—not only with peace, but other things; there is a tendency towards a lowering of the consciousness in the evening. On the other hand with some it is the opposite. I don't know that it actually depends on work and mixing, though these may have a wearing effect—I find more often that it is a sort of rhythm of rise and fall in the consciousness during the day. Even when peace is perfectly established, there may be this rhythm for other things that are being developed.

The Need for Periods of Assimilation

Intensities like that do not remain so long as the consciousness is not transformed—there has to be a period of assimilation. When the being is unconscious, the assimilation goes on behind the veil or below the surface and meanwhile the surface consciousness sees only dullness and loss of what it had got; but when one is conscious, then one can see the assimilation going on and one sees that nothing is lost, it is only a quiet settling in of what has come down.

*

Yes—the system has to take rest so as to assimilate and renew its receptive power.

*

When one is assimilating, one is not receiving.

*

The periods of assimilation continue really till all that has to be done is fundamentally done. Only they have a different character in the later stages of sadhana. If they cease altogether at an early stage (you are still in a very early stage), it is because all the

nature was capable of has been done and that would mean it was not capable of much.

*

What I have written is perfectly clear. The periods of assimilation continue till all that has to be done is fundamentally done. If they stop early, it means that all has been done that could be done and nothing more is possible, the later and more advanced developments of the sadhana are not possible,—if they were, the assimilation periods would continue until all was developed and not cease. The only reason for such a premature end of the sadhana would be that the sadhaka is not capable of going farther.

*

The only change in the assimilation periods afterwards is that certain things remain settled while the assimilation applies to others that are not yet settled in the system. E.g. one feels always a constant peace in the inner being, but disturbances go on on the surface, till the surface also has assimilated peace. Or perhaps peace is settled everywhere and always there but knowledge comes and goes or strength comes and goes. Or all these are there but Ananda comes and goes etc. etc.

*

There is always a gain or progress at some point after these periods of assimilation if one takes them rightly—however dull or troublesome they may be.

*

If your faith is getting firmer day by day, you are certainly progressing in your sadhana and there can have been no fall. An interruption of definite experiences may be only a period of assimilation in which one prepares for a new range of experience. Keep yourself open and aspire.

Chapter Two

Emptiness, Voidness, Blankness and Silence

Periods of Emptiness

If it is only emptiness, there is nothing wrong. Alternations of emptiness and fullness are a quite normal feature of experience in sadhana.

*

Emptiness usually comes as a clearance of the consciousness or some part of it. The consciousness or part becomes like an empty cup into which something new can be poured. The highest emptiness is the pure existence of the Self in which all manifestation can take place.

*

To be an empty vessel is a very good thing if one knows how to make use of the emptiness.

*

Keep the quiet and do not mind if it is for a time empty; the consciousness at times is like a vessel which has to be emptied of its mixed and undesirable contents; it has to be kept vacant for a while till it can be filled with the right contents. The one thing to be avoided is the refilling of the cup with the old contents. Meanwhile wait, open yourself upwards, call very quietly and steadily, not with a too restless eagerness for the peace to come into the silence and, once the peace is there, for the joy and the presence.

*

You have written of the Force coming down [*during a period of*

emptiness] — even sometimes of its filling all parts — so what is this “never”? I did not at all mean that there is a mechanical process by which every time there is emptiness afterwards there comes an entire filling up. It depends on the stage of the sadhana. The emptiness may come often or stay long before there is any descent — what fills may be silence and peace or Force or Knowledge and they may fill only the mind or mind and heart or mind and heart and vital or all. But there is nothing fixed and mechanically regular about these two processes.

*

Usually such feelings of emptiness [*in the body*] come when the identification with the body is lessening and the consciousness is preparing to take its seat either above or in a cosmic wideness or in some beginning of that wideness.

*

An emptiness in the mind or vital may be spiritual without emptiness being an essential characteristic of the higher consciousness. If it were, there could be no Force, Light or Ananda in the higher consciousness. Emptiness is only a result produced by a certain action of the higher Force on the system in order that the higher consciousness may be able to come into it. It is a spiritual emptiness as opposed to the dull and inert emptiness of complete tamas which is not spiritual.

*

If it is the spiritual emptiness then it will not be felt as interfering with the sadhana.

*

If it is real emptiness, one can last in it for years together, — it is because the vital is restless and full of desires (not empty) that it is like that [*difficult to remain empty*]. Also the physical mind is by no means at rest. If the desires were thrown out and the ego less active and the physical mind at rest knowledge would come from above; in place of the physical mind’s stupidities,

the vital mind could be calm and quiet and the Mother's Force take up the action and the higher consciousness begin to come down. That is the proper sequel of emptiness. But nothing of this has happened because the "emptiness" could not complete itself, that is to say, the true silence and peace.

Emptiness — A Transitional State

The emptiness that you described in your letter yesterday was not a bad thing—it is this emptiness inward and outward that often in Yoga becomes the first step towards a new consciousness. Man's nature is like a cup of dirty water—the water has to be thrown out, the cup left clean and empty for the divine liquor to be poured into it. The difficulty is that the human physical consciousness feels it difficult to bear this emptiness—it is accustomed to be occupied by all sorts of little mental and vital movements which keep it interested and amused or even if in trouble and sorrow still active. The cessation of these things is hard to bear for it. It begins to feel dull and restless and eager for the old interests and movements. But by this restlessness it disturbs the quietude and brings back the things that had been thrown out. It is this that is creating the difficulty and the obstruction for the moment. If you can accept emptiness as a passage to the true consciousness and true movements, then it will be easier to get rid of the obstacle.

All in the Asram are not suffering from the sense of dullness and want of interest, but many are because the Force that is descending is discouraging the old movements of the physical and vital mind which they call life and they are not accustomed to accept the renunciation of these things, or to admit the peace or joy of silence.

*

There is a certain truth in what you say about the empty cup—a certain emptying of the consciousness of old things is necessary before anything positive can settle itself. It is what is happening in your physical consciousness, the old movements are being

emptied out and you fall quiet, but they press in again and the cup has to be repeatedly emptied. If there is a firm and persistent rejection, then this repeated return of these old movements will cease to be so persistent; the periods of quiet and its intensity will increase until the peace and quietude can be established and permanent.

It is not however a fact that the whole nature has to be emptied of the old things before there can be the Light and Grace. It is done usually in different parts of the nature at different times. You had your former experiences because the mind and higher vital were sufficiently emptied and quiet to receive some experiences of a new consciousness. Now it is the physical mind, physical vital and body that have to be emptied — these always take longer than the others because the physical is more full of old habits, more obstinate in keeping and always repeating them, more slow to receive anything new or to change. But by the detachment and steady rejection and reliance on the Mother's force, this obstinacy can be overcome and the cup emptied for filling with the Divine Light.

*

There is nothing out of the normal in what you describe — it happens in the course of the change of consciousness. What has to be remedied is that you feel the stillness, emptiness, but seem to have no joy of it or the satisfied peace of the self or sense of wideness or quiet release and freedom. Usually the cessation of the lower activities brings a sense of freedom, release, repose. The inner consciousness does not miss the mental jumpings or the vital swirl — it feels as if the silence were its native element.

*

Emptiness is not in itself a bad condition, only if it is a sad and restless emptiness of the dissatisfied vital. In sadhana emptiness is very usually a necessary transition from one state to another. When mind and vital fall quiet and their restless movements, thoughts and desires cease, then one feels empty. This is at first often a neutral emptiness with nothing in it, nothing in it either

good or bad, happy or unhappy, no impulse or movement. This neutral state is often or even usually followed by the opening to inner experience. There is also an emptiness made of peace and silence, when the peace and silence come out from the psychic within or descend from the higher consciousness above. This is not neutral, for in it there is the sense of peace, often also of wideness and freedom. There is also a happy emptiness with the sense of something close or drawing near which is not yet there, e.g. the closeness of the Mother or some other preparing experience. What you describe is the neutral quiet. There is no need for anxiety. When it comes, one has only to remain quiet and open and turned to the Mother till something develops from within.

*

What you describe is the same neutral condition that you had before. It is a transitional state in which the old consciousness has ceased to be active, the new is preparing behind a neutral quietude. One must take it quietly and wait for it to turn into the spiritual peace and the psychic happiness which is quite different from vital joy and grief. To have neither vital joy nor vital grief is considered by the Yogins to be a very desirable release,—it makes it possible to pass from the ordinary human vital feelings to the true and constant inner peace, joy or happiness. I suppose you have no time just now for sitting in meditation. The pressure of sleep is a pressure to go inside and the habit of meditation makes it possible to turn the sleep that comes into a kind of sleep-samadhi in which one is conscious of various experiences and progresses in the inner being.

*

If you mean that after this kind of samadhi [*during the afternoon rest*], you feel a greater emptiness or voidness, it is quite natural. To void the being of the old consciousness and its movements and to fill the mind from above are the two main processes now by the Force from above.

*

When you feel empty like that, you have only to remain very still and open yourself to receive the Light and Force. Emptiness is a bad condition only when it is dull or when you receive into it wrong movements. But often one has to be empty in order to receive what is to be given.

*

In itself this emptiness and quietude free from all anxiety or trouble or thought about people or things is not a bad sign or an undesirable state. It is a state of what the Yogis call *udāśinatā*, a separateness from all things and indifference, an untroubled neutral quietude. In many Yogas it is considered a very advanced and desirable condition — a state of liberation from the world, though not yet of realisation of the Divine, — but they consider it a necessary passage to the realisation. In our Yoga it is only a passage through which one arrives at a more positive spiritual calm consciousness in which all experiences and all realisations become possible. The feeling of dullness is due probably not to this state which is in itself a condition of ease and release, but to the depressed condition of the bodily health and strength. That also is probably the cause why the more positive state does not come quickly. The forgetfulness you speak of comes sometimes in the period of change, but passes away afterwards; a new force of memory comes.

Voidness

The voidness is the best condition for a full receptivity.

*

The voidness (if by that you mean silence and emptiness of thoughts, movements etc.) is the basic condition into which the higher consciousness can flow.

*

The usual result of voidness is to quiet down any vital tumult although it does not, unless it is complete, stop the mechanical

recurrent action of the mind.

*

Yes, it becomes like that.¹ In the end you feel as if you had no body, but were spread out in the vastness of space as an infinite consciousness and existence — or as if the body were only a dot in that consciousness.

*

There is no reason why the void should be a dull or unhappy condition. It is usually the habit of the mind and vital to associate happiness or interest only with activity, but the spiritual consciousness has no such limitations.

*

Voidness can come from anywhere, mind, vital or from above.

*

Voidness may be of different kinds — a certain kind of spiritual voidness or the emptiness that is a preparation for new experience. But an exhaustion of life energy is a very different thing. It may arise from fatigue, from somebody or something drawing away the vital force or from an invasion of tamas.

Blankness

In the course of the sadhana a state of blankness, of “neutral quiet” like this often comes — especially when the sadhana is in the physical consciousness. It is not that the aspiration is gone, but that it does not manifest for the time being, because all has become neutrally quiet. This condition is trying for the human mind and vital which are accustomed to be in some kind of activity always and regard this as a lifeless state. But one must not feel disturbed or disappointed when this comes, but remain calm in the full confidence that it is a stage only, a ground that

¹ *The correspondent wrote that in the state of voidness his body felt as light as cotton.*
— Ed.

has to be crossed in the sadhana. In whatever condition, the faith and the fixed idea of surrender must be kept before the mind. As for the brief movements of restlessness, they will still down if this is kept and the quiet mind and vital reassert themselves quickly.

*

The physical does not get tired of the blankness. It may feel tamasic because of its own tendency to inertia, but it does not usually object to voidness. Of course it may be the vital physical — you have only to reject it as a remnant of the old movements.

*

Blankness is only a condition in which realisation has to come. If aspiration is needed for that, it has to be used; if the realisation comes of itself, then of course aspiration is not necessary.

Emptiness, Blankness and Silence

Silence of the being is the first natural aim of the Yoga. You and some others do not find satisfaction in it because you have not overcome the vital mind which wants always some kind of activity, change, doing something, making something happen. The eternal immobility of the silent Brahman is a thing it does not relish. So when emptiness comes, it finds it dull, inert, monotonous.

*

I do not quite gather what is the nature of this silence and this heat which makes you feel like that. An inner silence is a condition favourable to the sadhana even if for a time it means the cessation of all activity within, all thoughts, emotions or mental perceptions. But it is possible and it does happen that the unaccustomed physical consciousness feels the silence to be dull and a deprivation of intelligence rather than a release and repose, and the strangeness of this inactive condition causes it apprehension and an alarmed perplexity. As for the heat that also may be troublesome and difficult to bear to the physical

consciousness because it is unaccustomed and gets alarmed and troubled. If it is that we must try to slow down and diminish the intensity of the force that is acting.

But in any case try to dismiss any alarm that may be suggested to you and keep the faith which you express in the last part of the letter.

*

I cannot have written that it is only you who feel the silence as empty, as there are plenty who do so feel it at first. One feels it empty because one is accustomed to associate existence with thought, feeling and movement or with forms and objects, and there are none of these there. But it is not really empty.

*

Certainly, the vital cannot take an interest in a blank condition. If you depend on your vital you cannot prolong it. It is the spirit that feels a release in the silence empty of all mental or other activities, for in that silence it becomes self-aware. For the blankness to be real one must have got into the Purusha or Witness consciousness. If you are looking at it with your mind or vital, then there is not blankness,—for even if there are no distinct thoughts then there must be a mental attitude or mental vibrations—e.g. the not feeling interest.

*

The silence can remain when the blankness has gone. All sorts of things can pour in and yet the silence still remains, but if you become full of force, light, Ananda, knowledge etc. you can't call yourself blank any longer.

*

Every kind of realisation— infinite self, cosmic consciousness, the Mother's Presence, Light, Force, Ananda, Knowledge, Sach-chidananda realisation, the different layers of consciousness up to the Supermind—all these can come in the silence which remains but ceases to be blank.

*

The emptiness, silence and peace are the basic condition for the spiritual siddhi—it is the first step towards it. It enables the Purusha to be free from the movements of Prakriti, to see and know where they come from since they no longer rise from within the mind, heart etc., these being in a state of quietude, and to reject the lower movements and to call in the knowledge, will etc. of the higher Consciousness which is above.

Emptiness, Voidness and the Self

Emptiness is a state of quietude of the mental or vital or all the consciousness not visited by any mind or vital movements, but open to the Pure Existence and ready or tending to be that or already that but not yet realised in its full power of being. Which of these conditions it happens to be depends on the particular case. The Self state or the state of pure Existence is sometimes also called emptiness, but only in the sense that it is a state of sheer static rest of being without any contacts of mobile Nature.

*

Emptiness as such is not a character of the higher consciousness, though it often looks like that to the human vital when one has the pure realisation of the Self, because all is immobile, and for the vital all that is not full of action appears empty. But the emptiness that comes to the mind, vital or physical is a special thing intended to clear the room for the things from above.

*

The void is the condition of the Self—free, wide and silent. It seems void to the mind, but in reality is simply a state of pure existence and consciousness, Sat and Chit with Shanti.

*

There is no such thing as *néant*. By “void” is meant emptiness clear of all contents except existence pure and simple. Without that one cannot realise the silent Brahman.

Part Two

The Opening of the Inner Senses

Section One

Visions, Sounds, Smells and Tastes

Chapter One

The Value of Visions

Vision, Experience and Realisation

When you see Light, that is vision; when you feel Light entering into you, that is experience; when Light settles in you and brings illumination and knowledge, that is a realisation. But ordinarily visions are also called experiences.

*

Sometimes a vision accompanies an experience and is as it were a visual rendering of it or accompaniment to it, but the experience itself is a separate thing.

*

Vision is something *seen* in the conscious state (whether with closed or open eyes) which is not of the physical plane. In “conscious state” I include the consciousness of Samadhi when one is unaware of outward things but conscious of things going on within.

Experience is a wide term which covers almost everything that happens in the inner consciousness — usually it indicates either a spiritual happening, e.g. the descent of peace, the feeling of the presence of the Mother, or an occult experience, e.g. a going into the other worlds in dream and seeing and doing things there. There are thousands of different kinds of experience. Visions are a special kind of experience in which the inner eye is active.

*

Visions do not come from the spiritual plane — they come from the subtle physical, the vital, the mental, the psychic or from planes above the Mind. What comes from the spiritual planes are experiences of the Divine, e.g. the experience of self

everywhere, of the Divine in all etc.

*

The Infinite is in all things and can be seen through them when the vision opens.

*

By going deep [*in meditation*] one person may see visions; another may fall in deeper consciousness but see no vision—and so on. The result varies with the nature.

*

Yes, it [*the higher consciousness*] can come down into the mind planes bringing peace, wideness, the cosmic consciousness, the realisation of the Divine, the sense of the cosmic forces and other things—without any breaking of the veil through vision. Ordinarily, however, with most people the inner vision comes first.

*

I said [*in the preceding letter*] the realisation of the Divine in the mind. If there is to be the total realisation, the breaking of the veil is indispensable.

*

Usually the visions precede realisation, in a way they prepare it.

*

Visions and voices have their place when they are the genuine visions and the true voices. Naturally, they are not the realisation but only a step on the way and one has not to get shut up in them or take all as of value.

*

The vision of the higher planes or the idea of what they are can be had long before the transformation. If that were not possible, how could the transformation take place—the lower

nature cannot change of itself, it changes by the growing vision, perception, descent of the higher consciousness belonging to the higher planes? It is through aspiration, through an increasing opening that these visions and perceptions begin to come — the realisation comes afterwards.

Sensing Supraphysical Things

No, it was neither optical illusion nor hallucination nor coincidence nor auto-suggestion nor any of the other ponderous and vacant polysyllables by which physical science tries to explain away or rather avoid explaining the scientifically inexplicable. In these matters the scientist is always doing what he is always blaming the layman for doing when the latter lays down the law on things about which he is profoundly ignorant, without investigation or experiment, without ascertained knowledge — simply by evolving a theory or *a priori* idea out of his own mind and plastering it as a label on the unexplained phenomena.

There is, as I have told you, a whole range or many inexhaustible ranges of sensory phenomena other than the outward physical which one can become conscious of, see, hear, feel, smell, touch, mentally contact — to use the new established Americanism — either in trance or sleep or an inward state mis-called sleep or simply and easily in the waking state. This faculty of sensing supraphysical things internally or externalising them, so to speak, so that they become visible, audible, sensible to the outward eye, ear, even touch, just as are gross physical objects, this power or gift is not a freak or an abnormality; it is a universal faculty present in all human beings, but latent in most, in some rarely or intermittently active, occurring as if by accident in others, frequent or normally active in a few. But just as anyone can with some training learn science and do things which would have seemed miracles to his forefathers, so almost anyone, if he wants, can with a little concentration and training develop the faculty of supraphysical vision. When one starts Yoga, this power is often though not invariably — for some find it difficult — one of the first to come out from its latent condition and

manifest itself, most often without any effort, intention or previous knowledge on the part of the sadhak. It comes more easily with the eyes shut than with the eyes open, but it does come in both ways. The first sign of its opening in the externalised way is very often that seeing of "sparkles" or small luminous dots, shapes etc. which was your first introduction to the matter; a second is, often enough, the seeing of circles of light or colour round objects, most easily round luminous objects like a star; seeing of colours is a third initial experience—but they do not always come in that order. The Yogis in India very often in order to develop the power use the method of *trāṭak*, concentrating the vision on a single point or object—preferably a luminous object. Your looking at the star was precisely an exercise in *trāṭak* and had the effect which any Yogi in India would have told you is normal. For all this is not fancy or delusion; it is part of an occult science which has been practised throughout the historic and prehistoric ages in all countries and it has always been known to be not merely auto-suggestive or hallucinatory in its results, but, if one can get the key, veridical and verifiable. Your first scepticism may be natural in a "modern" man plunging into these lasting things of the past, present and future,—natural but not justifiable because very obviously inadequate to the facts observed; but once you have seen, the first thing you should do is to throw all this vapid pseudo-science behind you, this vain attempt to stick physical explanations on supraphysical things, and take the only rational course. Develop the power, get more and more experience—develop the consciousness by which these things come: as the consciousness develops, you will begin to understand and get the intuition of the significances. Or if you want their science too, then learn and apply the occult science which can alone deal with supraphysical phenomena. As for what showed itself to you, it was not mere curious phenomena, not even merely symbolic colours, but things that have a considerable importance.

Develop this power of inner sense and all that it brings you. These first seeings are only an outer fringe—behind lie whole worlds of experience which fill what seems to the material

man the gap (your Russell's inner void) between the earth-consciousness and the Eternal and Infinite.

The Importance of Visions

All visions have a significance of one kind or another. This power of vision is very important for the Yoga and should not be rejected although it is not the most important thing — for the most important thing is the change of the consciousness. All other powers like this of vision should be developed without attachment as parts and aids of the Yoga.

*

The particular things seen may be of no importance, but the power of seeing is of importance and can be of great help in the Yoga. It enables you to see things belonging to other planes (other than the physical) and get knowledge that is useful for sadhana — also to have concrete contact with the Mother in those planes (mental, vital, psychic worlds) etc.

*

Visions come from all planes and are of all kinds and different values. Some are of very great value and importance, others are a play of the mind or vital and are good only for their own special purpose, others are formations of the mind and vital plane, some of which may have truth, while others are false and misleading, or they may be a sort of artistry of that plane. They can have considerable importance in the development of the first Yogic consciousness, that of the inner mind, inner vital, inner physical or for an occult understanding of the universe. Visions which are real can help the spiritual progress, I mean, those which show us inner realities: one can for instance meet Krishna, speak with him and hear his voice in an inner "real" vision, quite as real as anything on the outer plane. Merely seeing his image is not the same thing, any more than seeing his picture on the wall is the same thing as meeting him in person. But the picture on the wall need not be useless for the spiritual life. All one can say is that

one must not attach oneself too much to this gift and what it shows us, but neither is it necessary to belittle it. It has its value and sometimes a considerable spiritual utility. But, naturally, it is not supreme,—the supreme thing is the realisation, the contact, the union with the Divine, bhakti, change of the nature etc.

*

Visions and experiences (especially experiences) are all right; but you cannot expect every vision to translate itself in a corresponding physical fact. Some do, the majority don't, others belong to the supraphysical entirely and indicate realities, possibilities or tendencies that have their seat there. How far these will influence the life or realise themselves in it or whether they will do so at all depends upon the nature of the vision, the power in it, sometimes on the will or formative power of the seer.

People value visions for one thing because they are one key (there are others) to contact with the other worlds or with the inner worlds and all that is there and these are regions of immense riches which far surpass the physical plane as it is at present. One enters into a larger freer self and a larger more plastic world; of course individual visions only give a contact, not an actual entrance, but the power of vision accompanied with the power of the other subtle senses (hearing, touch, etc.) as it expands does give this entrance. These things have not the effect of a mere imagination (as a poet's or artist's, though that can be strong enough) but if fully followed out bring a constant growth of the being and the consciousness and its richness of experience and its scope.

People also value the power of vision for a greater reason than that: it can give a first contact with the Divine in his forms and powers; it can be the opening of a communion with the Divine, of the hearing of the Voice that guides, of the Presence as well as the Image in the heart, of many other things that bring what man seeks through religion or Yoga.

Farther, vision is of value because it is often a first key to inner planes of one's own being and one's own consciousness as distinguished from worlds or planes of the cosmic consciousness.

Yoga experience often begins with some opening of the third eye in the forehead (the centre of vision in the brows) or with some kind of beginning and extension of subtle seeing which may seem unimportant at first, but is the vestibule to deeper experience. Even when it is not that,—for one can go to experience direct,—it can come in afterwards as a powerful aid to experience; it can be full of indications which help to self-knowledge or knowledge of things or knowledge of people; it can be veridical and lead to prevision, premonition and other openings of less importance but very useful to a Yogi.

In short, vision is a great instrument though not absolutely indispensable.

But, as I have suggested, there are visions and visions just as there are dreams and dreams, and one has to develop discrimination and a sense of values and kinds and know how to understand and make use of these powers. But that is too big and intricate a matter to be pursued now.

*

The visions he has between the eyebrows are not imaginations — they could be so only if he thought them first and his thoughts took shape, but as they came independent of his thoughts, they are not visual imagination but vision. This faculty is a useful one in Yoga and it can be allowed to develop; it should not be discouraged. I do not know what he means by not having *śraddhā* in them. What he sees now are probably only images of subtle (*sūkṣma*) scenes and objects; but, when developed, this can become a power of symbolic, representative or real vision, showing the truths of things or realities of this or other worlds or representations of the past, present or future.

If the concentration goes naturally to the centre between the eyebrows which is the centre of inner mind and its thought, will and vision, there is no harm in that.

*

These lights and visions are not hallucinations. They indicate an opening of the inner vision whose centre is in the forehead

between the eyebrows. Lights are very often the first thing seen. Lights indicate the action or movement of subtle forces belonging to the different planes of being,—the nature of the force depending on the colour and shade of the light. The sun is the symbol and power of the inner or higher Truth—to see it in meditation is a good sign. The sea is also often symbolic, indicating usually the vital nature, sometimes the expanse of consciousness in movement. The opening of vision must be allowed to develop, but too much importance need not be given to the individual visions unless or until they become evidently symbolic or significant or shed light on things in the sadhana etc.

*

What was developed in you is a power of true inner vision—this will help you to enter through it into touch with the Divine; you have only to let it develop. Two other things have to develop—the feeling of the Divine Presence and power and inspiration behind your actions, and the inner contact with myself and the Mother. Aspire with faith and sincerity and these will come. I do not wish to give any more precise instructions until I see what happens in you during your stay here; for although the path is common to all, each man has his own way of following it.

*

The frequent seeing of lights such as those he writes of in his letter is usually a sign that the seer is not limited by his outward surface or waking consciousness but has a latent capacity (which can be perfected by training and practice) for entering into the experiences of the inner consciousness of which most people are unaware but which opens by the practice of Yoga. By this opening one becomes aware of subtle planes of experience and worlds of existence other than the material. For the spiritual life a still farther opening is required into an inmost consciousness by which one becomes aware of the Self and Spirit, the Eternal and the Divine.

*

From what he writes it is apparent that he has a capacity [*for Yoga*], and it is probable that he would have made more progress if he had not shut the door that was opening. Evidently, he made a mistake when he stopped the visions that were coming. Vision and hallucination are not the same thing. The inner vision is an open door on higher planes of consciousness beyond the physical mind which gives room for a wider truth and experience to enter and act upon the mind. It is not the only or the most important door, but it is one which comes readiest to very many if not most and can be a very powerful help. It does not come easily to intellectuals as it does to men with a strong life-power or the emotional and the imaginative. It is true that the field of vision, like every other field of activity of the human mind, is a mixed world and there is in it not only truth but much half-truth and error. It is also true that for the rash and unwary to enter into it may bring confusion and misleading inspirations and false voices, and it is safer to have some sure guidance from those who know and have spiritual and psychic experience. One must look at this field calmly and with discrimination, but to shut the gates and reject this or other supraphysical experiences is to limit oneself and arrest the inner development.

*

Visions and voices are not meant for creating faith; they are effective only if one has faith already.

Visions Not the Most Important Thing

Visions are not indispensable — they are a help, that is all, when they are of the right kind.

*

Anybody with a predisposition can develop the power of seeing visions like that. People are mistaken in thinking it is a sign of great Yogashakti. Apposite and effective visions, those that reveal movements in the occult workings of the nature or help the spiritual growth, are another matter.

*

Well, it is difficult to explain [*what kind of visions help one's spiritual growth*]. I might give the example of St. Paul's vision on the way to Damascus as an example of a vision which really meant business. You have yourself given the Kurukshetra example. But all visions need not be so stupendous as that—small ones can also be useful.

But the predisposition I spoke of was for visionary display, not for spiritual growth. There are people who can see visions by the hundred and there are those who cannot. But it does not follow that the non-visionary cannot have decisive spiritual experiences or the realisation.

*

The kind of vision you want comes only if the general visual power opens and develops. It is not the greatest form of experience; many advance very far and have high experiences and change of consciousness without it. The important thing is to feel the Presence of the Mother with one and in one, her Light, her Power working, her Ananda. The form can be there, if the vision develops, but only as one element of the experience.

*

I did not quite understand from your letter what is the nature of these sights and objects that pass like a cinema film before you. If they are things seen by the inner vision, then there is no need to drive them away—one has only to let them pass. When one does sadhana an inner mind which is within us awakes and sees by an inner vision images of all things in this world and other worlds—this power of vision has its use, though one has not to be attached to it; one can let them pass with a quiet mind, neither fixing on them nor driving them away.

*

This kind of vision [*seeing water, a rose, a tiger*] almost anybody can have except those who live too much in the mind. For others it is very near to the surface, this faculty of vision. Many have it in this elementary way without doing any Yoga at all.

*

The power of occult seeing is there in everyone, mostly latent, often near the surface, sometimes but much more rarely already on the surface. If one practises *trāṭak*, it is pretty certain to come out sooner or later,—though some have a difficulty and with them it takes time; those in whom it comes out at once have had all the time this power of occult vision near the surface and it emerges at the first direct pressure.

No Reason to Fear Visions

Such visions [of *human figures*] often happen when the inner sight is open. These were evidently two powers of the supra-physical world. One has to see quietly whatever comes of this kind—there is no reason to fear them, any more than if you saw a picture or moving figures in the cinema.

Wrong Visions and Voices

When the sadhana progresses, one almost always gets the power of vision; what one sees is true if one remains in the right consciousness. There are also wrong voices and experiences. The people who have gone mad, went mad because they were egoistic, began to think themselves great sadhaks and attach an exaggerated importance to themselves and their experiences; this made them get a wrong consciousness and wrong voices and visions and inspirations. They attached so much importance to them that they refused to listen to the Mother and finally became hostile to her because she told them they were in error and checked their delusions. Your visions and experiences are very true and good and I have explained to you what they signify—the wrong ones tried to come but you threw them away, because you are not attached to them and are fixed on the true aim of sadhana. One must not get attached to these things, but observe them simply and go on; then they become a help and cannot be a danger.

Chapter Two

Kinds of Vision

The Inner Vision

There is an inner vision that opens when one does sadhana and all sorts of images rise before it or pass. Their coming does not depend upon your thought or will; it is real and automatic. Just as your physical eyes see things in the physical world, so the inner eye sees things and images that belong to the other worlds and subtle images of things of this physical world also.

*

Everything not physical is seen by an inner vision.

*

When the inner vision opens, there can come before it all that ever was or is now in the world, even it can open to things that will be hereafter — so there is nothing impossible in seeing thus the figures and the things of the past.

*

The inner vision can see objects — but it can also see instead the vibration of the forces which act through the object.

*

This realm (whose centre is between the eyebrows) is the realm of inner thought, will, vision — the motor-car indicates a rapid progress in this part of the consciousness. The motor-car is a symbolic image, these images do not refer to anything physical.

These things take place in the inner mind or inner vital and usually there is a truth behind them, but the form in which they come into the mind may be imperfect — i.e. the meaning may be something not perfectly revealed in the words.

*

Things inside can be seen as distinctly as outward things whether in an image by the subtle vision or in their essence by a still more subtle and powerful way of seeing; but all these things have to develop in order to get their full power and intensity.

Stages in the Development of the Inner Vision

It is the inner vision that is opened or opening in you. When that opens, the first thing that you see is colours or lights moving or small or vague shapes or objects — afterwards flowers etc., then figures of people, scenes, landscapes, things happening etc. Often by the power of this subtle vision the sadhak can see the image of the Divine he worships in his heart and so feel more concretely the presence.

*

The seeing of colours is the beginning of inner vision, what is called *sūkṣmadṛṣṭi*. Afterwards this vision opens and one begins to see figures and scenes and people. It is good that the seeing began with an image of the Mother.

*

When one tries to meditate, the first obstacle in the beginning is sleep. When you get over this obstacle, there comes a condition in which, with the eyes closed, you begin to see things, people, scenes of all kinds. This is not a bad thing, it is a good sign and means that you are making progress in the Yoga. There is, besides the outer physical sight which sees external objects, an inner sight in us which can see things yet unseen and unknown, things at a distance, things belonging to another place or time or to other worlds; it is the inner sight which is opening in you. It is the working of the Mother's force which is opening it in you, and you should not try to stop it. Remember the Mother always, call on her and aspire to feel her presence and her power working in you; but you do not need, for that, to reject this or other developments that may come in you by her working hereafter. It is only desire, egoism, restlessness and other wrong movements

that have to be rejected.

*

The visions you describe are those which come in the earliest stages of sadhana. At this stage most of the things seen are formations of the mental plane and it is not always possible to put on them a precise significance, for they depend on the individual mind of the sadhak. At a later stage the power of vision becomes important for the sadhana, but at first one has to go on without attaching excessive importance to the details — until the consciousness develops more. The opening of the consciousness to the Divine Light and Truth and Presence is always the one important thing in the Yoga.

The Diverse Nature and Significance of Visions

Your visions are not mental images but significant symbols. The white dove is the higher divine or spiritual Consciousness above the mental surrounded by the golden lightnings of the Truth. The lamb is the psychic aspiring to the Truth. When one has a thought or feeling and creates a mental form of it, that is a mental image — or when not so positively or consciously self-created forms arise either in meditation or sleep, which correspond to mental thoughts or vital feelings, one's own or those of others, those also are simply mental images or vital formations. The true significant ones are those that come of themselves and correspond to things, states of consciousness or a play of forces that are actual and not determined mainly by one's ideas, will or feelings.

*

Visions are of all kinds — some are merely suggestions of what wants to be or is trying to be, some indicate some approach of the thing or movement towards it, some indicate that the thing is being done.

*

Nothing has to be done to develop them [*images seen in vision*]. They develop of themselves by the growing practice of seeing, — what was faint becomes clear, what was incomplete becomes complete. One cannot say in a general way that they are real or unreal. Some are formations of the mind, some are images that come to the sight of themselves, some are images of real things that show themselves directly to the sight — others are true pictures, not merely images.

*

No rule of a general character can be given. Each vision or dream has to be taken by itself; some are mental constructions, symbols or indications, some are vital possibilities truly or falsely represented, some are representations of physical facts — but this last is more rare.

*

The seeing of the body (at least one's own) in its internal parts is a Yogic power developed by the Raja and Hathayogins — I suppose it could be extended to the body of others. There is also the sense of subtle smells and I have noticed that sometimes one smell persists.

*

Subtle images can be images of all things in all worlds.

*

There is no criterion [*for distinguishing visions from dreams of a deeper origin*], but one can easily distinguish if one is in the inward condition, not sleep, in which most visions take place by the nature of the impression made. A vision in dream is more difficult to distinguish from a vivid dream-experience, but one gets to feel the difference.

*

Vision in trance is vision no less than vision in the waking state. It is only the condition of the recipient consciousness that varies

—in one the waking consciousness shares in the vision, in the other it is excluded for the sake of greater facility and range in the inner experience. But in both it is the inner vision that sees.

*

The physical things¹ are simply an occasion or starting-point for the inner vision to work through the open eyes and bring in the significant inner things.

Representative and Dynamic Visions

It depends on the nature of the symbolic vision whether it is merely representative, offering to the inner vision and nature (even though the outer mind has not the understanding, the inner can receive its effect) the thing symbolised in its figure or whether it is dynamic. The Sun symbol, for instance, is usually dynamic. Again among the dynamic symbols some may bring simply an influence of the thing symbolised, some indicate what is being done but not yet finished, some a formative experience that visits the consciousness, some a prophecy of something that may or will or is soon about to happen. There are others that are not merely symbols but present actualities seen by the vision in a symbolic figure.

*

When the colours begin to take definite shapes [*in one's visions*], it is a sign of some dynamic work of formation in the consciousness—a square for instance means that some kind of creation is in process in some field of the being; the square indicates that the creation is to be complete in itself while the rectangle indicates something partial and preliminary. The waves of colour mean a dynamic rush of forces and the star may in such a context indicate the promise of the new being that is to be formed. The blue colour must here be the Krishna light—so it is a creation under the stress of the Krishna light. All these are symbols of what is

¹ *The correspondent saw the lights on a pier at night as sparkling diamonds. —Ed.*

going on in the inner being, in the consciousness behind, and the results well up from time to time in the external or surface consciousness in such feelings as the awareness of a softening and opening which you had, devotion, joy, peace, Ananda etc. When the opening is complete, there is likely to be a more direct consciousness of the working that is going on behind till it is no longer behind but in the front of the nature.

*

When you see a square, that is a symbol of complete creation; when you see a buffalo rushing upon you and missing and feel you have escaped a great danger, that is a transcription. Something actually happened of which the buffalo's ineffectual rush was your mind's transcription — the rush of some hostile force represented by the buffalo.

Seeing Forms of the Divine and Other Beings

Subjective visions can be as real as objective sight — the only difference is that one is of real things in material space, while the others are of real things belonging to other planes down to the subtle physical; even symbolic visions are real insofar as they are symbols of realities. Even dreams can have a reality in the subtle domain. Visions are unreal only when these are merely imaginative mental formations not representing anything that is true or was true or is going to be true.

In this case the thing seen [*a vision of Krishna, silvery blue in colour, standing in a dance pose playing the flute*] can be taken as true since it has been seen by many and always in the same relation and still more because it has been confirmed by what was seen by Yashodabai and Krishnaprem. It means obviously that your singing by the power of the bhakti it expresses can and does bring the presence of Krishna there. It is not that Krishna "shows himself", but simply that he is there and some who have the power of vision catch sight of him and others who have not the power fail to do so. This power of vision is sometimes inborn and habitual even without any effort of development,

sometimes it wakes up of itself and becomes abundant or needs only a little practice to develop; it is not necessarily a sign of spiritual attainment, but usually when by practice of Yoga one begins to go inside or live within, the power of subtle vision awakes to a greater or less extent; but this does not always happen easily, especially if one has been habituated to live much in the intellect or in an outward vital consciousness.

I suppose what you are thinking of is “darshan”, the self-revelation of the Deity to the devotee; but that is different, it is an unveiling of his presence, temporary or permanent, and may come as a vision or may come as a close feeling of his presence which is more intimate than sight and a frequent or constant communication with him; that happens by deepening of the being into its inner self and growth of consciousness or by growth of the intensity of bhakti. When the crust of the external consciousness is sufficiently broken by the pressure of increasing and engrossing bhakti, the contact comes.

*

It is quite usual at a certain stage of the sadhana for people who have the faculty to see or hear the Devata of their worship and to receive constant directions from him or her with regard either to action or to sadhana. Defects and difficulties may remain, but that does not prevent the direct guidance from being a fact. The necessity of the Guru in such cases is to see that it is the right experience, the right voice or vision—for it is possible for a false guidance to come as it did with X and Y.

*

These things [*the seeing of Buddha, Ramakrishna, Vivekananda, Shankaracharya in vision*] are the result of past thoughts and influences. They are of various kinds—sometimes merely thought-forms created by one's own thought-force to act as a vehicle for some mental realisation—sometimes Powers of different planes that take these forms as a support for their work through the individual,—but sometimes one is actually in communion with that which had the name and form and personality

of Buddha or Ramakrishna or Vivekananda or Shankara.

It is not necessary to have an element akin to these personalities—a thought, an aspiration, a formation of the mind or vital are enough to create the connection—it is sufficient for a vibration of response anywhere to what these Powers represent.

Cosmic, Inner and Psychic Vision

Cosmic vision is the seeing of the universal movements—it has nothing to do with the psychic necessarily. It can be in the universal mind, the universal vital, the universal physical or anywhere.

What do you mean here by psychic vision? Inner vision means the vision with the inner seeing as opposed to outer vision, the external sight with the surface mind or the surface eyes. Psychic in the language of this Yoga is confined to the soul, the psychic being—it is not as in the ordinary language in which if you see a ghost it is called a psychic “vision”: we speak of the inner vision or the subtle sight or the occult sight—not the psychic vision.

*

The “sight” spoken of [*in passages of the Upanishads*] is not a sense vision but an experience in the inner consciousness which is more true and living and dynamic than the experiences given to the external consciousness by the material senses.

There is also a psychic vision by which one can see the forms of the Gods or one of the many forms in which the Ishwara reveals himself to the Bhakta.

There is too an inner or subtle sense and sight by which one can see and experience forms and happenings which are not present to the physical eye and also those which belong to other planes than that of the physical world. There are many supraphysical worlds and one can get into contact with these worlds and their beings only by an awakening or developing of this inner sense.

Mental Visions

The mental visions are meant to bring in the mind the influence of the things they represent.

*

Inner vision is vivid like actual sight, always precise and contains a truth in it. In mental vision the images are invented by the mind and are partly true, partly a play of possibilities. Or a mental vision like the vital may be only a suggestion,—that is a formation of some possibility on the mental or vital plane which presents itself to the sadhak in the hope of being accepted and helped to realise itself.

*

The visions and experiences you have described are all of the mental plane and show a great openness and purity of the inner mental being free from unfavourable influences. But it is difficult to tell the precise significance of those that are in the nature of colours, lights, a star etc., because they depend on contacts which are personal to the sadhaka. The first five are of this kind and appear to indicate contact with powers, influences, personalities (godheads), etc. of the higher mental plane. E.g. the light of pink colour might be that of some influence or godhead of love or bhakti in contact with the mental being. In some cases it may be the figure of a formation of the mental being itself. The flowers, diamonds and gems etc. would seem to indicate contact with Radha, Mahalakshmi and Mahakali influences. The vision of writing is also frequent on the mental plane—it is known by us as the *lipi*, and if it organises itself so as to be legible and intelligible, it can embody many things such as intuitions, messages from one or other of the mental planes—the voice you heard was probably one of these messages. There is no necessity to explain the vision of the form of the Mother and mine—for that is clear.

Vital Visions

The dream was on the vital plane. Dreams or visions on the vital plane are usually either

- (1) symbolic vital visions
- (2) actual occurrences on the vital plane
- (3) formations of the vital mind, either of the dreamer or of someone else with whom he contacts in sleep or of powers or beings of that plane. No great reliance can be put on this kind of experience.

*

These are visions of the vital world and the vital planes and one sees hundreds of them there.² Those of the type of the first have no significance; they are only things seen just as on earth you may see a man bathing in water. The other seems to indicate a being or else simply a Force given form entering into the consciousness. All the parts of the consciousness are like fields into which forces from the same planes of consciousness in the universal Nature are constantly entering or passing. The best thing is to observe without getting affected in either way or without attaching too much importance—for these are minor experiences and one's concentration must call the major ones.

*

Most of these visions are the result of your getting into contact with a certain field of forces in the vital world which are at present creating the pressure for war and revolution and all catastrophic things in Europe. It was from here that these menacing visions were coming. There is no coherence or reality in them. Chhinnamasta is a symbol of this kind of force, feeding as it were the world with her own blood.

They have to be at once rejected. It was not meant that you should be inactive, but that there was sufficient Force gathering

² *The correspondent had two visions in dream—one of a young lad standing waist deep in water, another of a woman's face which looked at the correspondent and then entered his chest. —Ed.*

to carry on the sadhana as if by an automatic action. But the consent of the sadhak, his rejection of all that comes against is always necessary.

*

It is the vital plane—probably the vital physical. It is mostly there that the beings of the vital world appear with animal heads or features. A human figure with a dog's face means a very coarse and material sexual energy. Of course, all such energies can be transformed and cease to be sexual—turned into material strength of some kind, just as the seminal force can be turned by brahmacharya into ojas.

*

This gazing on a flame or a bright spot is the traditional means used by Yogis for concentration or for awakening of the inner consciousness and vision. You seem to have gone by the gazing into a kind of surface (not deep) trance, which is indeed one of its first results, and begun to see things probably on the vital plane. I do not know what were the “dreadful objects” you saw but that dreadfulness is the character of many things first seen on that plane, especially when crossing its threshold by such means. You should not employ these means, I think, for they are quite unnecessary and besides, they may lead to a passive concentration in which one is open to all sorts of things and cannot choose the right ones.

Subtle Physical Visions

All that can be seen with closed eyes can be seen with open eyes also; it is sufficient that the inner sight should extend to the subtle physical consciousness for that to happen.

*

One can see [*visions*] either with open or closed eyes or both. It is a matter of temperament or idiosyncrasy which one starts with.

*

The world you see is in some subtle physical plane where men see the gods according to their own ideas and images of them.

*

As you were concentrating your attention on the electric light, it may have been the god of electricity you saw, Vaidyuta Agni. There is no reason why he should have many faces — the many-headed or many-armed figures belong usually to the vital plane — and it may not have been in his vital form that he was manifesting. As for the colours, colours are symbols of forces and Agni need not be pure red — the principle of Fire can manifest all the colours and the pure white fire is that which contains in itself all the colours.

*

The gods in the overmental plane have not many heads and arms — this is a vital symbolism, it is not necessary in other planes. This figure [of *Vaidyuta Agni*, mentioned in the preceding letter] may have belonged to the subtle physical plane.

*

(1) It [*the vision of a flower*] was seen through the physical eyes but by the subtle physical consciousness; in other words there was an imposition of one consciousness upon another. After a certain stage of development, this capacity of living in the ordinary physical consciousness and yet having superadded to it another and more subtle sense, vision, experience becomes quite normal. A little concentration is enough to bring it; or, even, it happens automatically without any concentration.

As the flower was a subtle physical object, not entirely material in the ordinary sense of the word (though quite substantial and material in its own plane, not an illusion), a camera would not be able to detect it — except in the case of one of those abnormal interventions by which a subtle form has been thrown upon the material plate.

It could be sensed in a dark room, though not so easily, and it would not then have so vivid an appearance — unless you are

able to bring out something of the light of the subtle physical plane to surround it and give it its natural medium.

If seen with the eyes shut, it would be no longer a subtle physical form, but an object or formation of the vital, mental or other plane. Unless, indeed, the inner consciousness had progressed so far as to be able to project itself into the physical planes; but this is a rare and, in most cases, a late development.

(2) It is not, usually, the object that vanishes; it is the consciousness that changes. Owing to lack of sustained capacity or lack of training, one is not able to keep the subtle physical vision which is what was really seeing the object. This subtle physical vision comes easiest in the moment between light sleep and waking—either when one just comes out of the sleep or when one is just going into it. But one can train oneself to have it when one is quite wide awake.

At first when one begins to see, it is quite usual for the more ill-defined and imprecise figures to last longer while those which are successful, complete, precise in detail and outline are apt to be quite momentary and disappear in an instant. It is only when the subtle vision is well developed that the precise and full seeing lasts for a long time. This results from the difficulty of keeping what is still an abnormal consciousness and also, in this case, from the difficulty of keeping the two momentarily superimposed consciousnesses together.

(3) There are all kinds in the experiences of each plane—symbolic forms, figures of suggestion, thought-figures, desire-formations or will-formations, constructions of all kinds, things real and lasting in the plane to which they belong and things fictitious and misleading. The haphazardness belongs to the consciousness that sees with its limited and imperfect way of cognizing the other worlds, not to the phenomena themselves. Each plane is a world or a conglomeration or series of worlds, each organised in its own way, but organised, not haphazard; only, of course, the subtler planes are more plastic and less rigid in their organisation than the material plane.

Chapter Three

Subtle Sights, Sounds, Smells and Tastes

Sights and Sounds of Other Planes

The sounds of bells and the seeing of lights and colours are signs of the opening of the inner consciousness which brings with it an opening also to sights and sounds of other planes than the physical. Some of these things, like the sound of bells, crickets etc., seem even to help the opening. The Upanishad speaks of them as *brahmavyaktikarāni yoge*. The lights represent forces — or sometimes a formed light like that you saw may be the Light of a being of the supraphysical planes.

*

When the inner senses open, or any of them, one sees or hears things belonging to the other planes automatically. What one sees or hears depends on the development of the inner sense. It depends on what you hear whether these are the symbol sounds only which have a connection with the sadhana or simply other-plane sounds of an ordinary character.

*

It depends on the nature of the sounds. Some have a connection [*with sadhana*], others are merely sounds of the other planes.

Subtle Sounds

When the mind becomes quiet, there are certain sounds that are heard, which are supposed to be signs of the awakening of the subtle senses and the inner consciousness.

*

Sounds in the ear indicate a pressure to open the inner consciousness.

*

The sound is a very good sign. It comes when the inner consciousness is opening or preparing to open to the Yoga-force and the deeper experiences it brings.

*

They [*subtle sounds*] are the signs of a working going on to prepare something — but as that is a general thing, it cannot be said from the sounds themselves what the preparation is.

*

The sounds or voices you hear are like the sights (persons, objects) you see. As there is an inner sight other than the physical, so there is an inner hearing other than that of the external ear, and it can listen to voices and sounds and words of other worlds, other times and places, or those which come from supraphysical beings. But here you must be careful. If conflicting voices try to tell you what to do or not to do, you should not listen to them or reply. It is only myself and the Mother who can tell you what you should or should not do or guide or advise you.

*

Such sounds (bells, bees, crickets etc.) are stated in the Upanishad to be signs of realisation approaching. They come very commonly when the inner or subtle consciousness is awake.

*

The hearing of the bells has always been considered a sign or a premonition of the opening of the inner being to spiritual experience.

*

It [*the sound of the conch*] is one of the many symbol sounds one hears in Yoga. The conch shell is the sound of victory.

*

Both of these [*the sound of OM and of church bells*] are usually sounds that indicate the opening or attempt to open to the cosmic consciousness.

*

The music you heard was the music of the divine call to the soul — like the flute of Krishna.

Subtle Smells and Tastes

It [*experiencing subtle smells and tastes*] was not an opening of occult knowledge and powers, but simply an opening of the inner consciousness.

*

Subtle smells of that kind [*sweet smells*] are a common feature of occult experience. Their exact nature and *provenance* varies, but they have no gross physical cause.

*

The smell [*coming from a person*] is due to something in the person's vital-physical. That something may not be prominent at all times. When it is, the smell is there.

*

I wrote [*in the preceding letter*] that the something may be of different kinds in different cases and one cannot give a rule that it is this or it is that. What has the dirtiest smell is sex.

*

Every man has a different smell; also there is a particular smell that goes with different states of the vital-physical. Animals (like the dogs) recognise a man and his character by the smell. The human sense has lost this acuteness, but it can be recovered by a development in the sense consciousness. That is what probably has happened in your case. There are others in the Asram who have the same experience.

Section Two

Lights and Colours

Chapter One

Light

Seeing Light

Light is always seen in Yoga with the inner eye and even with the outer eye, but there are many lights; all are not and all do not come from the *param jyotih*.

*

Lights of various colours are one of the first things people see when they meditate.

*

There is no imagination in the seeing of these lights — it is when the inner vision is open or active that one sees them — for they themselves are subtle and not physical lights.

*

A concentrated mind is not always necessary for seeing the light — if there is an opening anywhere in the consciousness, that is sufficient.

*

It is not necessary to have the mind quiet in order to see the lights — that depends only on the opening of the subtle vision in the centre which is in the forehead between the eyebrows. Many people get that as soon as they start sadhana. It can even be developed by effort and concentration without sadhana by some who have it to a small extent as an inborn faculty. The quietude of the mind is needed for other things, such as the feeling of the presence of the Mother etc.

*

Light between the eyebrows indicates some opening of the Ajna-

chakra, which is there — it is the centre of the inner mind, inner will and occult vision.

*

The light outside means a touch or influence of the Force indicated by the light (golden is truth-light, blue is some spiritual force from the upper planes), while within means that it has penetrated and is established or is frequently active in the nature itself. Light above means a Force descending upon the mind, light around a general enveloping influence.

*

The golden and blue lights are both of them lights of Krishna. It was intimated to you by your seeing them once that they are there within you waiting to manifest. But it is by a psychic and spiritual, not a physical pressure that it must be done. If the mind can become silent and not interfere and if the nature can become more pure and both open to what is above the mind, these lights descend into the body and with them the divine influence.

Light and the Illumination of the Consciousness

Light or rays of light are always light of the higher consciousness working in the being to illumine or to purify or to awaken the consciousness or attune it to the Truth.

*

It [*Light*] is the power that enlightens whatever it falls upon — the result may be vision, memory, knowledge, right will, right impulse etc.

*

There are many lights of various planes — there is also the Divine Light that comes down from the higher planes and illuminates the Adhar.

*

It is not necessary or possible to define [*the Divine Light*].

Light is light just like the light you see, only subtle — it clarifies the consciousness and works as a force and makes knowledge possible.

*

It [*the Divine Light*] has no function — it is just Light of Divine Consciousness. If you mean the result, it is supposed to illumine, to remove darkness and obscurity, to make the nature fit for true consciousness, Knowledge etc.

*

Light is a general term. Light is not knowledge but the illumination that comes from above and liberates the being from obscurity and darkness. But this Light also assumes different forms such as the white light of the Mother, the pale blue light of Sri Aurobindo, the golden light of Truth, the psychic light (pink and rose) etc.

*

The light, colours, flowers are always seen when there is a working of the forces within at a certain stage of the sadhana. The light of course indicates an illumination of the consciousness, the colour the play of forces mental (yellow), physical and vital, but forces making for enlightenment of these parts of the being. The flowers usually indicate a psychic activity.

Different Forms of Light

One sometimes sees the Light in masses, sometimes in forms — and the most common forms are sun, moon, star or fire.

*

The Light is often seen in front before the centre of inner vision, mind and will which is between the eyebrows in the forehead. The Sun means the formed Light of the Divine Truth, the starry light is the same Light acting as a diffused Power on the ordinary consciousness which is seen as the night of Ignorance. The call

brought the Light etc. streaming down into the inner being.

*

It is not balls or flashes of light [*seen around the Mother*], but a flow or sea of Light entering into the body and surrounding it and illumining the whole field of consciousness. There can also be a vivid sense of Light and illumination without the vision. It can be seen or felt usually as an intense white or diamond or golden Light or something like sunlight or, for many, a blue or bluish white light.

*

What you saw was the procession of the chariots of the gods (Divine Powers) bringing light flashes into the air and the other was the corresponding movement of lightning flashes of the Truth in the heart lighting up the consciousness. These lightning flashes do not as yet bring knowledge — as the sunlight from above the mind does, — but they prepare the consciousness for realisation and knowledge.

*

Sparks or movements of light indicate the play of forces in the consciousness or around it.

*

Any well-formed illumined thought can be seen as a spark of light.

*

A glow means a subdued but rich light or else a sort of warm exhilaration of a luminous kind.

Two Visions Explained

(1) The lid of the skull opening means that the mental being has opened to the Divine Light and the flames indicate aspiration filled with the Light arising to join the mental part to what is above Mind.

(2) The Divine Light from above is of various colours. White is the Divine Power of purity, blue the light of the spiritual consciousness, gold the hue of the supramental knowledge or of knowledge from the intermediate planes.

(3) OM golden rising to the sky = the cosmic consciousness supramentalised and rising towards the Transcendent consciousness.

(1) and (2) indicate either something that is happening at present or a potentiality that is trying to materialise. (3) symbolises the process of the Yoga which will be followed if this potentiality is realised and pursued to its natural goal.

*

About your vision. It came as an answer to your call for the removal of ugly things in your own nature and you were shown how it would be effectively done.

First a vivid realisation was given of what the lower nature is, its terrible darkness and ugliness in which men contentedly live. But having realised its true nature a cry came from your lower nature itself for the change.

You were then shown the light of the higher nature by whose descent the change could come — the white light of the Mother's consciousness and a flame of it descended into you by the usual path and filled you with the light. From there it descended into the subconscious and brought the light there. As a result the consciousness (it was the inner consciousness) became like a crystal pillar connecting the heights with the depths, the superconscious with the subconscious. In it the image of the Mother filled with the light in her.

You were then shown a symbol of the *rūpāntar*, the change in the universal Nature. This change was only in seed and in symbol. Afterwards this part of the vision disappeared and you saw again the darkness of the lower Nature. But in you the light was there still and the assurance that it brings. For it is in the individual that the change must first come and it is with the light and the faith in the individual as a support that the wider change can be made.

Chapter Two Colours

The Symbolism of Colours

Colour and light are always close to each other—colour being more indicative, light more dynamic. Colour incandescent becomes light.

*

As for the exact symbolism of colours, it is not always easy to define exactly, because it is not rigid and precise, but complex, the meaning varying with the field, the combinations, the character and shades of the colour, the play of forces. A certain kind of yellow, for instance, is supposed by many occultists to indicate the *buddhi*, the intellect, and it often has that sense, but occurring among a play of vital forces it could not always be so interpreted—that would be too rigid. Here all one can say is that the blue (the particular blue seen, not every blue) indicated the response to the Truth; the green—or *this* green—is very usually associated with Life and a generous emanation or action of forces—often of emotional life-force, and it is probably this that it would indicate here.

*

The rays which you saw the trees giving out are there always, only they are veiled to the ordinary material vision. I said the blue and gold together indicated the combined presence of Krishna and Durga-Mahakali; but gold and yellow have different significances. Yellow in the indication of forces signifies the thinking mind, *buddhi*, and the pink (modified here into a light vermillion) is a psychic colour; the combination probably meant the psychic in the mental.

In interpreting these phenomena you must remember that all depends on the order of things which the colours indicate in

any particular case. There is an order of significances in which they indicate various psychological dynamisms, e.g., faith, love, protection, etc. There is another order of significances in which they indicate the aura or the activity of divine beings, Krishna, Mahakali, Radha or else of other superhuman beings; there is another in which they indicate the aura around objects or living persons—and that does not exhaust the list of possibilities. A certain knowledge, experiences, growing intuition are necessary to perceive in each case the true significance. Observation and exact description are also very necessary; for sometimes people say, for instance, yellow when they mean gold or *vice versa*; there are besides different possible meanings for different shades of the same colour. Again, if you see colour near or round a person or by looking at him or her, it does not necessarily indicate that person's aura; it may be something else near him or around him. In some cases it may have nothing to do with the person or object you look at, which may serve merely the purpose of a background or a point of concentration—as when you see colours on a wall or by looking at a bright object.

*

There are no separate colours of the beings. There is a characteristic colour of mind, yellow, of the psychic, pink or pale rose, of the vital, purple; but these are colours corresponding to the forces of mind, psychic, vital—they are not the colours of the beings. Also other colours can play, e.g. in the vital, green and deep red as well as purple and there are other colours for the hostile vital forces.

*

The lights one sees in concentration are the lights of various powers or beings or forces and often lights that come down from the higher consciousness.

The violet light is that of the Divine Compassion (*karunā*—Grace)—the white light is the light of the Mother (the Divine Consciousness) in which all others are contained and from which they can be manifested.

Purple is the colour of vital power. "Red" depends on the character of the colour, for there are many reds—this may be the colour of the physical consciousness.

*

As for the tricoloured ball of energy, I am not quite sure, but it may mean the triple force, Love, Light, Life which are contained and constrained in the inconscient sleep of the Shakti in the Muladhara. Possibly an observation of the colours might determine the significance; but this is not sure, as the colours on these lower planes have various meanings.

*

The four lights were the lights of the Truth,—white the purity and power of the divine Truth, green its active energy for work, blue the spiritual consciousness of the divine Truth, the gold its knowledge.

*

The silver temple is that of the spiritualised mind—the golden is that of the divine Truth. Yellow is the colour of the light of the thinking mind—white is that of the divine consciousness.

White Light

White light indicates the divine consciousness.

*

White indicates a force of purity.

*

The forces that come with white light are usually those of purity and peace.

*

The important experience is that of the white ray in the heart—for that is a ray of the Mother's light, the white light, and the

illumining of the heart by this light is a thing of great power for this sadhana.

*

The white light is, as you know, the Mother's light — it is the light of the Force of the Divine Consciousness; the sun of white light is symbolic of that Force in its origin and fullness of manifestation. It is a very good sign and if one feels its power in the being or mind or body it can have a strong influence.

*

What you saw was the Light (the white Light is the Mother's) which is always there in a mass; but it is seen only when the inner (Yogic) eye is open and the consciousness in some part of it at least can enter into touch with the Light.

*

The diamond light is the Mother's own light (that of divine Consciousness) at its most intense.

White Light with Light of Other Colours

The white light is that of the Pure Conscious Force from which all the rest come. The golden light is that of the Divine Truth on the higher planes.

*

The pale blue light is mine — the white light is the Mother's. The world you saw above the head was the plane of the illumined Mind which is a level of consciousness much higher than the human intelligence. It is there that the Divine Light and Power come down to be transmitted to the human consciousness and from there they work and prepare the transformation of the human consciousness and even the physical nature.

*

The two first [*bright white and whitish blue*] are the Mother's

light and mine — the golden red is the touch of the Truth in the physical.

Whitish Blue Light

The pale whitish blue light is “Sri Aurobindo’s light” — it is the blue light modified by the white light of the Mother.

*

The snake form is a symbol of Energy and the white blue light may be that of the Mother’s consciousness in the higher mind, or if it is not two separate colours but whitish blue then it is Sri Aurobindo’s light. The light is a manifestation of Force, the nature of the force being indicated by the colour of the Light.

*

The lights indicate the action of certain forces, usually indicated by the colour of the light. Whitish blue is known as Sri Aurobindo’s light or sometimes Sri Krishna’s light.

*

Whitish blue is Krishna’s light or mine; deeper blues often indicate light from the higher consciousness.

*

There are two pale blues, one which is whitish blue and is known as Sri Aurobindo’s light, the other quite blue which is that of the higher consciousness just above mind.

*

The meaning of blue light depends on the exact character of the colour, its shade and nature. A whitish blue like moonlight is known as Krishna’s light or Sri Aurobindo’s light — light blue is often that of the Illumined Mind — there is another deeper blue that is of the Higher Mind; another, near to purple, which is the light of a power in the vital.

Blue Light

Blue light, according to the shades, means several different things.

*

If the blue lights [*seen in vision*] were of different shades it might mean the overhead planes, Overmind, Intuition, Illumined Mind, Higher Mind.

*

The light from the higher planes of consciousness just above the mind is blue.

*

The light indicates an action of force (bluish probably indicates the spiritual-mind-force), the rest was a working to open the higher spiritual centre (*sahasradala*).

*

Blue is the normal colour of the spiritual planes; moonlight indicates the spiritual mind and its light.

*

Moonlight indicates spirituality—the blue light may be that of the higher or illumined mind.

*

The plane with the blue light is the Higher Mind which is just above the ordinary human intelligence, the first of several planes of higher consciousness through which one has to pass in order to reach the Divine Truth. Something from your mind (thinking willing mind) is trying to rise up into the blue light of the Higher Mind so as to join and become one with it.

*

There is one blue that is the higher mind, a deeper blue that

belongs to the mind — Krishna's light in the mind.

*

There are different Krishna lights — pale diamond blue, lavender blue, deep blue etc. It depends on the plane in which it manifests.

*

Diamond blue is Krishna's light in the overmind — lavender blue in intuitive mind.

*

There is the whitish moonlight blue of Krishna's light — lavender blue of devotion, deep blue of the physical mind, sapphire blue of the higher mind and many others.

*

All blue is not Krishna's light.

*

Blue is also the Radha colour.

Violet Light

The violet is the light of the Divine grace and compassion.

*

“Violet” is the colour of benevolence or compassion, but also more vividly of the Divine Grace — represented in the vision as flowing from the heights of the spiritual consciousness down on the earth. The golden cup is I suppose the Truth consciousness.

*

Violet is indeed the colour or light of Divine Compassion, so also of Krishna's grace.

Golden Light

Golden Light is the light of the divine Truth descending from above.

*

The golden light is the light of the Divine Truth which comes out from the supralental sunlight and, modified according to the level it crosses, creates the ranges from Overmind to higher Mind.

*

The golden light is usually a light from the supermind — a light of Truth-Knowledge (it may sometimes be the supralental Truth-Knowledge turned into overmind or intuitive Truth).

*

It [*golden light*] always means the light of Truth — but the nature of the Truth varies according to the plane to which it belongs. Light is the light of consciousness, truth, knowledge — the Sun is the concentration or source of the Light.

*

The sunlight is the light of the Truth itself — whatever power of Truth it may be — while the other lights derive from the Truth.

*

The Light of the Sun descending into the heart (the Sun of the Knowledge) turns upon the physical and purifies it.

*

The golden light is the promise of the higher knowledge. For the coming of that knowledge the silence of the frontal exterior mind is necessary.

*

Gold is always the symbol of the higher Truth.

*

The hand with the gold pen writing golden letters was perhaps an indication of the Mother writing the things of the Divine Truth in you,—for gold in these visions is the symbol of the Divine Truth.

*

The spiritual Power is naturally more free on its own level than in the body. The golden colour indicates here Mahakali force which is the strongest for the working in the body.

*

The different parts [*mind, life and body*] are naturally coloured by the lights of the powers that come down (golden of Overmind and Intuition, blue of higher, illumined and intuitive mind) while keeping their own characteristic shade as an element.

Gold-Green Light

Gold-green: gold indicates at its most intense something from the supramental, otherwise overmind truth or intuitive truth deriving ultimately from the supramental Truth consciousness. Green has much to do with the vital and indicates here, I think, the emotional forces in their outpouring. The play of the emotional forces in the divine Truth is, obviously, very pertinent to the working of the Krishna lights.

*

Sunlight is the direct light of the Truth; when it gets fused into the vital, it takes the mixed colour — here gold and green — just as in the physical it becomes golden red or in the mental golden yellow.

Golden Red or Red Gold Light

Golden red is the colour of the supramental physical light — so this yellow red may indicate some plane of the Overmind in which there is a nearer special connection with that. The golden

red light has a strong transforming power.

*

The golden Light is that of the modified (overmentalised) Supramental, i.e., the Supramental Light passing through the Overmind, intuition etc. and becoming the Light of Truth in each of these planes. When it is golden red it means the same modified supramental-physical Light — the Light of divine Truth in the physical.

*

“Red gold” is rather the light of the Truth in the physical.

*

Orange or red gold is supposed by the way to be the light of the supramental in the physical.

Orange Light

Orange is the true light manifested in the physical consciousness and being.

*

Orange is the colour of occult knowledge or occult experience.

Yellow Light

Yellow is the thinking mind. The shades indicate different intensities of mental light.

*

Yellow is light of the mind — golden is light from above the mind.

*

It is again the ascent into one of the higher planes of mind illumined with the light of the Divine Truth. Yellow is the light

of mind growing brighter as one goes higher till it meets the golden light of the Divine Truth.

Pink or Rose Light

The rosy light is that of love—so probably you entered the psychic worlds—or at least one of them.

*

The colour of the psychic light is according to what it manifests — e.g., psychic love is pink or rose, the psychic purity is white etc.

Green Light

Green is the higher light in the vital, especially the emotional vital.

*

The green light is a vital force, a dynamic force of the emotional vital which has the power to purify, harmonise or cure.

*

Green is a vital energy of work and action.

*

Green light can signify various things according to the context — in the emotional vital it is the colour of a certain form of emotional generosity, in the vital proper an activity with vital abundance or vital generosity behind it — in the vital physical it signifies a force of health.

Purple and Crimson Light

It [*purple light*] is a light of vital power.

*

Purple is the colour of the vital force — crimson is usually physical.

*

Both [*purple and crimson*] are vital lights, but when seen above they represent the original forces of which the vital are the derivations.

*

The crimson colour is the light of Love in the vital and physical.

Red Light

Red is the colour of the physical, — touched by the higher Light it becomes golden red.

*

It seems to be an opening of various powers and the peace, light and wideness of the spiritual consciousness. The red Purusha may be the power of the true physical — red being the colour of the physical.

*

It depends on the nature of the red. Red (when it does not mean the light of the physical consciousness) indicates always some kind of Force or Power, but what power it is depends on the shade.

*

Deep red is the Divine Love — rosy is the psychic love.

*

The deep red is the light of the Power that descended before the 24th [November 1933] for the transformation of the physical.

*

The deep red light is a Light that came down into the physical for

its change just before the 24th [November 1933]. It is associated with the sunlight and the golden Light.

Red and Black

Red is the colour of rajas, black is the colour of tamas.

Section Three

Symbols

Chapter One

Symbols and Symbolic Visions

Different Kinds of Symbols

A symbol, as I understand it, is the form on one plane that represents a truth of another. For instance, a flag is the symbol of a nation. But generally all forms are symbols. This body of ours is a symbol of our real being and everything is a symbol of some higher reality. There are, however, different kinds of symbols:

(1) Conventional symbols, such as the Vedic Rishis formed with objects taken from their surroundings. The cow stood for light because the same word go meant both ray and cow, and because the cow was their most precious possession which maintained their life and was constantly in danger of being robbed and concealed. But once created, such a symbol becomes alive. The Rishis vitalised it and it became a part of their realisation. It appeared in their visions as an image of spiritual light. The horse also was one of their favourite symbols, and a more easily adaptable one, since its force and energy were quite evident.

(2) What we might call Life-symbols, such as are not artificially chosen or mentally interpreted in a conscious deliberate way, but derive naturally from our day-to-day life and grow out of the surroundings which condition our normal path of living. To the ancients the mountain was a symbol of the path of Yoga, level above level, peak upon peak. A journey involving the crossing of rivers and the facing of lurking enemies, both animal and human, conveyed a similar idea. Nowadays I dare say we would liken Yoga to a motor ride or a railway trip.

(3) Symbols that have an inherent appositeness and power of their own. Akasha or etheric space is a symbol of the infinite all-pervading eternal Brahman. In any nationality it would convey the same meaning. Also, the Sun stands universally for the

supramental Light, the divine Gnosis.

(4) Mental symbols, instances of which are numbers or alphabets. Once they are accepted, they too become active and may be useful. Thus geometrical figures have been variously interpreted. In my experience the square symbolises the Supermind. I cannot say how it came to do so. Somebody or some force may have built it before it came to my mind. Of the triangle, too, there are different explanations. In one position it can symbolise the three lower planes, in another the symbol is of the three higher ones: so both can be combined together in a single sign. The ancients liked to indulge in similar speculations concerning numbers, but their systems were mostly mental. It is no doubt true that supramental realities exist which we translate into mental formulas such as Karma, psychic evolution etc. But they are, so to speak, infinite realities which cannot be limited by these symbolic forms, though they may be somewhat expressed by them; they might be expressed as well by other symbols, and the same symbol may also express many different ideas.

The Effect of Symbolic Visions

It is the same with the symbols in Yoga [*as with images in mystic poetry*]. One puts an intellectual label on the “White Light” and the mind is satisfied and says, “Now I know all about it; it is the pure divine Consciousness light,” and really it knows nothing. But if one allows the Divine White Light to manifest and pour through the being, then one comes to know it and get all its results. Even if there is no labelled knowledge there is the luminous experience of all its significance.

*

The vision of the moon and the rain of flowers means always the falling of the light of spirituality on the consciousness (the moon) and the descent of a psychic influence (flowers). These things are symbols to the mind, but in the inner experience they have a reality and can produce a tangible effect.

Some Symbolic Visions and Dreams Interpreted

The depth of the sleep in your experience was intended to make you go deep inside and, as soon as you did so, you entered into the psychic and spiritual state which takes the figure of the beautiful *maidān* and the flow of white light and the coolness and peace. The staircase was a symbol of the ascent from this psychic and spiritual state into higher and higher levels of the spiritual consciousness where is the source of the light. The Mother's hand was the symbol of her presence and help which will draw you up and lead you to the top of the ladder.

*

The separate images [*in a mystic poem submitted by the correspondent*] are very usual symbols of the inner experience, but they have been combined together here in a rather difficult way. The fire of course is the psychic fire which wells up from the veiled psychic source. The bird is the soul and the flower is the rose of love and surrender. The moon is the symbol of spirituality. As the star is within it is described as piercing through the knots of the inner darkness and worsting the vital growths that are like clouds enwrapping it. The boat also is a usual symbol in the inner visions. The elephant is the spiritual strength that removes obstacles and the horse the force of tapasya that gallops to the summits of the spiritual realisation. The sun is the symbol of the higher Truth. The lotus is the symbol of the inner consciousness.

*

The vision you saw was a symbol of the outward physical consciousness obscured by the ordinary movements (clouds), but with the spirituality (the moon) still spreading its light everywhere from behind the ordinary human ignorance. The dog indicates something in the physical (the part that is faithful, obedient etc.) waiting confidently for the Light to come.

The fire you felt was the fire of purification and the heat came because it was burning up some resistance,—after that was burnt out there was coolness and peace and quietude. The

voices and sounds and impression of X being there indicate a confused activity of the occult sense in the vital which hears things other than the physical. When this kind of thing comes, there has to be a quiet rejection in the being and the thing will pass away. Some people get interested and have a lot of trouble because they get into the habit of hearing voices and seeing and feeling things which are only partly or sometimes true but mixed with much that is false and misleading. It is good that there was something in your vital being which rejected it.

*

The dream is evidently an indication of the difficulty you are experiencing. The sea is the sea of the vital nature whose flood is pursuing you (desires are the sea water) on your road of sadhana. The Mother is there in your heart but sleeping — i.e. her power has not become conscious in your inner consciousness because she is surrounded by the thin curtain of skin (the obscurity of the physical nature). It is this (it is not thick any longer but still effective to veil her from you) which has to go so that she may awake. It is a matter of persistence in the will and the endeavour — the response from within, the awaking of the Mother in the heart will come.

*

It is probably a symbol of three stages or developments or planes of spiritualised life. A star means creation, the triangle a triple principle. The tree is life in a new creation. Green is the colour of the emotional vital, the moon governs a spiritualised emotional life; blue is the colour of the higher mind, the moon there governs a spiritualised higher mind life; the gold colour is that of the Divine Truth, whether intuitive or overmind — the moon here is the spiritualised Truth-life. As the star is *sphatika*-coloured, the triangle may indicate Sachchidananda principle. The butterflies and birds are of course life forces and soul forces, powers or beings. Probably it indicates three stages of transformation before the supramental can reign altogether or else three that will exist as the steps towards the supramental.

*

Your dreams were very beautiful and, symbolically, very true. By the way, let me repeat, they were not really dreams; the state between sleep and waking or which is neither sleep nor waking is not a dozing but an inward gathered consciousness, quite as much awake as the waking mind, but awake in a different plane of experience.

As for the dream of the cobras it could be taken as an answer to your complaints against the Divine being grim and solemn and refusing to play and your remark that if you could have the faith that the troubles were a part of the Divine plan leading you through them to the Divine, you would be more at ease. The answer of the symbolic experience was that the Divine can play if you know how to play with him—and bear his play on your shoulders; the cobras and the bite indicate that what seems to you in the vital painful and dangerous may be the very means of bringing you the ecstasy of the Divine Presence.

Less generally the cobras are the forces of the evolution, the evolution towards the Divine. Their taking the place of the legs means that their action here takes place in the physical or external consciousness, in the evolution of the external mind, vital, physical towards the experience of the Divine and of the Divine Nature. The bite of the cobras (Shiva's cobras!) does not kill, or it only kills the "old Adam" in the being; their bite brings the ecstasy of the presence of the Divine—that which you felt coming upon your head as trance waves. It is this trance ecstasy that has descended upon you each time you went inside or were even on the point of going inside in meditation. It is the universal experience of sadhaks that a force or consciousness or Ananda like this first comes from above—or around—and presses on or surrounds the head, then it pierces the skull as it were and fills first the brain and forehead, then the whole head and descends occupying each centre till the whole system is full and replete. (Of course there are or can be preliminary rushes occupying the whole body for a time or some other part of the system most open and least resistant to the influence.)

Chapter Two

Sun, Moon, Star, Fire

Sun

Fire, lights, sun, moon are usual symbols and seen by most in sadhana. They indicate movement or action of inner forces. The Sun means the inner truth.

*

The sun is the symbol of the concentrated light of Truth.

*

The Sun is the Truth-Light of the One Existence and the flame the dynamic power of action (Yogic) of that Truth-Light.

*

The Sun is the divine Truth-Light on whatever plane of consciousness. It is, I suppose, the original cosmic Truth that is here indicated.

*

The Sun is the Truth from above, in the last resort the Supramental Truth.

*

The sun is the symbol of the Supermind.

*

The sun in the Yoga is the symbol of the supermind and the supermind is the first power of the Supreme which one meets across the border where the experience of spiritualised mind ceases and the unmodified divine Consciousness begins the domain of the supreme Nature, *parā prakṛti*. It is that Light of which the Vedic mystics got a glimpse and it is the opposite of the intervening

darkness of the Christian mystics, for the supermind is all light and no darkness. To the mind the Supreme is *avyaktāt param avyaktam* but if we follow the line leading to the supermind, it is an increasing affirmation rather than an increasing negation through which we move.

*

Supermind is not mind at all, it is something different. The Sun indicates Truth directly perceived in whatever plane it may be. It is the symbol of Supermind but the Truth may come down into the other planes and then that is no longer supramental but modified to the substance of the other planes — still it is the direct Light of Truth.

*

The sun rising on the horizon is the direct light of the Divine Truth rising in the being — the ray upwards opens the being to the Truth as it is above mind, the ray in front opens it to what we call the cosmic consciousness, it becomes released from the personal limitation and opens and becomes aware of the universal mind, universal physical, universal vital. The action on the heart was the pressure of this Sun on it to have this direct opening, so that the consciousness may become free, wide and wholly at peace.

*

There are different suns in the different planes, each with its own colour. But there are also suns of a similar colour above, only more bright, from which these minor suns derive their light and power.

*

The golden [Sun] is the Light of the Truth on the higher planes. The white [Sun] is the Sun of the Mother's consciousness (the Divine Consciousness) which manifests on all the planes.

*

The white sun indicates the purity and peace of the Divine Consciousness.

*

The red sun is a symbol of the true, illumined physical consciousness which is to replace the obscure and ignorant physical consciousness in which men now live. Red is the colour of the physical; the red diamond is the Mother's consciousness in the physical.

*

In the experience the disc of the sun indicates the supramental consciousness with the Divine Being in it (the supramental Divine who can bridge by his light the gulf between the higher and the lower consciousness and unify them). But the smoky appearance, the veil etc. indicated that there was something in the (human) nature that made rapid realisation difficult. This was what was also said by the voice that the time was not yet. Obviously the supramental cannot be achieved except by a long sadhana — the experience should not be taken as meaning anything more than that.

Moon

The moon signifies the light of spirituality or of the spiritual consciousness.

*

The moonlight indicates the light of the spiritual consciousness.

*

The moonlit *maidān* is the spiritual consciousness at the doors of which you are standing as it were and feeling its peace and ease.

*

The moon generally indicates spiritual realisation in the mind.

*

The moon indicates different things according to circumstances — most often spiritual consciousness in the mind.

*

The light above the head is never an imagination in Yoga; if it is felt, it is because it is there. If it is the moon, it means the light of the spiritual consciousness in the mind.

*

The moon as a symbol in vision signifies usually spirituality in the mind or, simply, the spiritual consciousness. It can also indicate the flow of spiritual Ananda (nectar is in the moon according to the old tradition).

*

The moon indicates spirituality, sometimes also spiritual Ananda. ■

*

It [*spiritual mind, symbolised by the moon*] is Mind in contact with truths of the spirit and reflecting them. The Sun is the light of the Truth, the Moon only reflects the light of the Truth — that is the difference.

*

Golden light means the light of the higher Truth — the moon is the symbol of spirituality. A golden moon means a power of spirituality full of the light of the higher Truth.

*

The moon, as I have already written, indicates spirituality — the crescent form means a commencement of the spiritual light. The position near the knee would indicate an action on the physical consciousness — for all below the Muladhara down to the feet is the physical province.

*

The moon is sometimes a symbol of the Light in the mind, — if

it is a full moon. The crescent moon may be a symbol of growing spirituality of the mind centre.

Star

The star signifies a creation or formation or the promise or power of a creation or formation.

*

The star is always a promise of the Light to come; the star changes into a sun when there is the descent of the Light. It is not possible to fix the actual value of these signs for the future; they indicate a turn or a possibility, but everything depends on herself and the future orientation she gives to her being.

*

Stars in such visions¹ indicate points of light or of higher experience in the consciousness. The earth means the physical consciousness.

*

Stars indicate points of light in the ignorant mental consciousness.

Moon = spiritual light

Sun = the higher Truth light

*

They [*gold stars in the sky*] are simply indications of divine Truth in the mind — the sky is a symbol of mind very often.

*

The sky is always some mental plane. The stars indicate beginnings or promises of Light — the various lights indicating various powers of the consciousness: gold = Truth, blue = higher

¹ In one vision the correspondent saw stars in the sky, in another stars upon earth. — Ed.

spiritualised mind, violet = sympathy, unity or universal compassion.

Fire and Burning

The fire indicates a dynamic action.

*

The white fire is the fire of aspiration, the red fire is the fire of renunciation and tapasya, the blue fire is the fire of spirituality and spiritual knowledge which purifies and dispels the Ignorance.

*

The fire is always the fire of purification — it is very red when it is acting on the vital; when the vital no longer covers the psychic, then the rose colour of the psychic comes out more and more.

*

It is the purification of the physical that is usually indicated in the symbol of burning.

Chapter Three

Sky, Weather, Night and Dawn

Sky

The sky usually symbolises a plane of consciousness mental or higher than the ordinary mental — stars are formations of light on that plane.

*

The sky is a symbol of the mental consciousness (or the psychic) or other consciousnesses above the mind — e.g. the higher mind, intuition, overmind etc. Akasha as the ether indicates also the infinite.

*

The sky in the heart is the chidakash. It is seen usually above the head, but when it is seen in the heart, that means the opening of the heart to the higher consciousness.

*

The blue sky is that of the Higher Mind — the nearest of the planes between human mentality and the Supermind. The moon here [*in a vision*] is the symbol of spirituality in the mental planes. The world of the Higher Mind is above those directly connected with the body consciousness.

*

The higher consciousness on any of its levels is seen usually as a sky or ether, but when felt through the vital it is often perceived as a sea.

*

Sat, Chit, Ananda, Supermind, Mind, Life, Matter are the seven [*seas of consciousness mentioned in the Veda*]. But in this Yoga

one sees many levels of consciousness which appear as skies or else as seas.

Rain, Snow, Clouds, Lightning, Rainbow

The rain is the symbol of the descent of Grace or of the higher consciousness which is the cause of the riches—the spiritual plenty.

*

The vision you saw of the snow is probably a symbol of the consciousness in a condition of purity, silence and peace like a snowy ground; in that a new life (psychic, spiritual as indicated by the flowers) appears in place of the old mental and vital life which has been covered by that mantle of snowy whiteness.

*

Clouds are a symbol of obscurity.

*

The lightning is a symbol of the dynamic force of the higher consciousness acting at intervals to enlighten the rest of the being.

*

The rainbow is the sign of peace and deliverance.

Night and Dawn

The Night is the symbol of the Ignorance or Avidya in which men live just as Light is the symbol of Truth and Knowledge.

*

Dawn always means an opening of some kind—the coming of something that is not yet fully there.

Chapter Four

Water and Bodies of Water

Water

Water is the symbol of a state of consciousness or a plane.

Sea or Ocean

The sea with the sun over it is a plane of consciousness lit by the Truth. To enter into the rays is to be no longer merely lit by it, but in one's own conscious being to begin to become part of the Truth.

*

A sea in tumult usually indicates a vital upheaval or a period of strain and stress and struggle.

*

The blue ocean is often a symbol of the spiritual consciousness in higher Mind one and indivisible.

*

Normally, the ocean of higher consciousness is above the head (mind) and all below is that of the lower consciousness. Your seeing of the two oceans rather means that in the descent the influence of the higher consciousness reaches down to the heart (emotional being with the psychic behind it), but does not yet reach below in the lower vital and physical — but it is dissolving the knot in the heart centre which prevents the descent into the lower vital and physical centres. The joy in the *sānta svarūpa* is indeed a sign of the release of the heart centre. But the phrase in the Upanishads refers more particularly to the breaking of the knots of desire, attachment, sanskara, ego in the heart, which stand in the way of spiritual liberation and ascension — not to

the knot which prevents the descent.

Pond, Lake, River

When the water is symbolic [*it is a plane of consciousness*] and here it is a big expanse of water—but a river or a pond are not large enough to symbolise a plane. It may be an actual experience in another world—or it may be the symbol of a particular movement in the sadhana.

It is not from dreams that you can know what plane of consciousness you are living in; it is by an observation of your condition.

*

Sometimes a part of the consciousness is seen in the image of a pond, lake or sea. The fish must be the vital mind.

*

The lake is the being in its individual consciousness, the sea is the same being with a universalised consciousness which can hold the universe and its cosmic forces in itself—the one (individual) merges into the other (the universal). The boat is the formation of the Mother's consciousness in you in which you are preparing to sail on this sea.

*

The river represents some movement of the consciousness. All these are images of the vital plane.

Chapter Five

Earth

Mountain

The mountain is the symbol of the embodied consciousness based upon earth but rising up towards the Divine.

*

The mountain always represents the ascending hill of existence with the Divine to be reached on the summits.

*

The mountain always means the same thing — it is the ascending consciousness.

*

The mountain is an image of the ascending consciousness.

*

The mountain is a very usual symbol of the consciousness with its ascending levels. The flowing of water from the peak indicates some flow from the higher consciousness above.

*

The mountain represents the ascending planes of the higher consciousness. The journey in the train is the passage from one consciousness to another.

*

The bucket is the physical consciousness; milk is always a symbol of the flow of consciousness from Above; the mountain is the Adhar with its ascending levels from the physical to the Above.¹

¹ In a vision during meditation, the correspondent saw a stream of milk flowing down a mountain and filling a bucket at its base. —Ed.

The golden mountain is a symbol of the ascent to the Truth.

*

The Golden Mountain is always the mountain of the Divine Truth which one has to ascend — at its summit is the dwelling place of the Divine.

*

The experience of the great expanse of golden light on a mountain-top came because I had asked X to aspire for the higher experiences of the consciousness from above. The symbolic image of the mountain with the light on its top comes to most sadhaks who have the power of vision at all. The mountain is the consciousness rising from earth (the physical) through the successive heights (vital, mental, above-mental) towards the spiritual heaven. The golden light is always the light of the higher Truth (Supermind, Overmind or a little lower down the pure Intuition) and it is represented as a great luminous expanse on the summits of the being. X by concentrating on the light entered into contact with the higher reaches and that always gives these results, peace, joy, strength, a consciousness secure in the power of the Divine. It is of course through the psychic that she got into this contact, but in itself it is more an experience of the higher spiritual consciousness above mind than a psychic experience.

*

The silvery narrow way upward is the path of the spiritual consciousness.

Earth and Patala

Patala simply means the subconscious below the Earth — the Earth being the conscious physical plane.

*

You had asked the other day about the subconscious, what it was. In the vision you describe you were shown the universal

subconscious in the figure of Patala, a place without light of consciousness and, because universal, therefore without bounds or end — the dark unconscious infinite out of which this material universe has arisen — it is walled with darkness on all sides, it seems also to have no bottom. The Light comes from above from the higher consciousness and coming down through the mind and heart and vital and physical has to pour down into this subconscious and make it luminous.

*

“Patala” is a name for the subconscious — the beings there [*in a dream*] had no heads, that is to say, there is there no mental consciousness; men have all of them such a subconscious plane in their own being and from there rise all sorts of irrational and ignorant (headless) instincts, impulsions, memories etc. which have an effect upon their acts and feelings without their detecting the real source. At night many incoherent dreams come from this world or plane. The world above is the superconscious plane of being — above the human consciousness — there are many worlds of that kind; they are divine worlds.

Chapter Six

Gods, Goddesses and Semi-Divine Beings

Agni

There are many forms of Agni,—the solar fire, the vaidyuta fire and the nether fire are one Trinity—the fivefold fire is part of the Vedic symbolism of sacrifice.

*

The vision you saw of the man and the fire at his feet was probably a vision of the God Agni from whom flows the fire of tapasya and purification in the sadhana.

Shiva

The vision you had was of the way to the goal. Shiva on the way is the Power that pours the light but also scrutinises the sadhak to see whether he is ready for the farther advance. When he lets him pass, then is the rush of new and higher experiences, the march and progress of the divine forces, the Gods and their powers, the transformation of the nature into a higher consciousness. It was these powers that you saw passing in your vision.

Parvati-Shankara

It is probably the realm of the dynamic creative Spirit on the highest mental plane which you saw as the world of Parvati-Shankara.

Narayana, Vishnu, Brahma, Lakshmi, Saraswati, Ananta

Narayana is usually taken as a name of Vishnu—to the Vaishnavas he is the Supreme as Shiva is to the Shaivas. Both are

cosmic Personalities of the Divine and both like Brahma have their original plane in the Overmind, although they take different forms to the human consciousness in the mental, vital and subtle physical planes.

Lakshmi is usually golden, not white. Saraswati is white.

The snake is simply a symbol of Energy or Power. Narayana in your dream is clearly Vishnu as is shown by the presence of Lakshmi and the single many-hooded snake.

Vishnu or Narayana in this image which is a normal Puranic image is the Lord of the waters of Space and Time—the Preserver of the principle of the Universe which he maintains as a seed in himself even in the intervals between one creation and another. Out of that seed in his navel (the navel is the central seat of the Vital, the Life-Principle) Brahma the Creator arises in the Lotus (cosmic consciousness) which grows from it when Vishnu awakens from the inter-cyclic sleep. The Snake Ananta is the Energy of the cosmic manifestation of the Infinite in Space-Time.

Krishna

This is the Krishna of the Gita¹ (the boy Krishna is the Krishna of Brindavan),—Krishna bringing the spiritual knowledge, will, bhakti—and not love and bhakti alone.

The eye indicates the vision of the higher spiritual consciousness and the blue expanse indicates that consciousness.

*

The boy with the flute is Sri Krishna, the Lord descended into the world-play from the divine Ananda; his flute is the music of the call which seeks to transform the lower ignorant play of mortal life and bring into it and establish in its place the lila of his divine Ananda. It was the psychic being in you that heard the call and followed after it.

*

¹ In a dream the correspondent saw Sri Krishna in the prime of manhood. This image disappeared and gave way to a large eye seen in a vast expanse of blue.—Ed.

It is, I suppose, the image of Sri Krishna as Lord of the divine Love and Ananda—and his flute calls the physical being to awake out of the attachments of the physical world and turn to that Love and Ananda.

*

Krishna with Radha is the symbol of the Divine Love. The flute is the call of the Divine Love; the peacock is victory.

*

The green circular disc you saw round Venus must indeed have been the aura of Venus which is of that colour; but this was only an introduction, a first application of the suddenly developed power of vision. Afterwards what came, the blue and the violet, were another kind of seeing more important for your Yoga; both are closely associated with Krishna. Blue is his especial and significant colour, the colour of his aura when he manifests,—that is why he is called *Nil Krishna*; the adjective does not mean that he was blue or dark in his physical body whether in Brindavan or Mathura or Dwarka! Violet is the radiance of Krishna's protection,—that was why, very naturally, it brought to you a sense of peace. The Mother says that she always saw it when she was in communion with Krishna and now too constantly sees it enveloping the Asram. That this should be the first thing shown when the power of vision broke through its state of latency is very significant; it proves that you are in contact, the touch already there in your inner being and this force of presence and protection is already around you or over you as an environing influence.

Hanuman

Hanuman stands for Bhakti.

*

Hanuman = complete bhakti.

*

Hanuman is a symbol of Shakti and devotion.

Narada

Narada stands for the expression of the Divine Love and Knowledge.

Mahakali and Kali

Mahakali and Kali are not the same, Kali is a lesser form. Mahakali in the higher planes appears usually with the golden colour.

*

These — Kali, Shyama, etc. — are ordinary forms seen through the vital; the real Mahakali form whose origin is in the Overmind is not black or dark or terrible, but golden of colour and full of beauty, even when formidable to the Asuras.

Durga on a Lion

The lion with Durga on it is the symbol of the Divine Consciousness acting through a divinised physical-vital and vital-material force.

*

The lion is the attribute of the Goddess Durga, the conquering and protecting aspect of the Universal Mother.

The Death's Head is the symbol of the Asura (the adversary of the gods) vanquished and killed by the Divine Power.

Ganesh

It is according to the need or else the condition of the consciousness that these figures [*of the Gods*] appear in sadhana. Ganesh is at once the god of wisdom and the remover of obstacles.

*

Ganesh (among other things) is the devata of spiritual Knowledge—so as you are getting this knowledge, you saw yourself in this form, identified with Ganesh.

Kartikeya

The peacock is the bird of victory and Kartikeya the leader of the divine forces.

Sanatkumar

Sanatkumar is, I believe, one of the four mind-born sons of Brahma; he cannot therefore be identical with Skanda who is a son of Shiva.

Buddha

Buddha stands for the conquest over the Ignorance of the lower Nature.

Apsaras

Apsaras generally indicate sexual desire.

Chapter Seven

The Human World

Child

The child is usually the symbol of the psychic being.

*

A dream like this of a child—especially a newborn child—usually signifies the birth (i.e. the awakening) of the soul or psychic being in the outward nature.

*

The child usually signifies the psychic being—newborn in the sense that it at last comes to the surface. The colour of the cloth [*bright yellow*] would mean that it comes with health (internal or external or both) and the spiritual riches.

*

The infant in the Mother's arms is the symbol of the psychic being.

*

It is not a fact that the psychic being always appears as a baby—it is sometimes seen symbolically as a newborn baby; many see it as a child of varying ages—it is a very common and usual experience; it is not peculiar to emotional natures. It has several significances such as the new birth of the consciousness into the true psychic nature, the still young growth of this new being, the trust, reliance of the child on the Mother.

*

The child (when it does not mean the psychic being) is usually the symbol of something newborn in some part of the consciousness.

*

I suppose the golden child is the Truth-Soul which follows after the silver light of the spiritual. When it plunges into the black waters of the subconscious, it releases from it the spiritual light and the sevenfold streams of the Divine Energy and, clearing itself of the stains of the subconscious, it prepares its flight towards the supreme Divine (the Mother).

Parents and Relatives

In these dreams the parents or relatives mean the ordinary forces of the physical consciousness (the old nature).

*

A relative is generally a symbol of some element of the hereditary nature (the external being so far as it is created by heredity).

*

Mother, sister or other relatives are usually in such dreams symbols of forces of ordinary nature. The exact meaning depends on the context. But all such dreams are not symbolical — a sex dream for instance may bring up the form of any woman known or unknown.

*

These vital dreams are not interpretable unless there is an evident clue. Aunt or mother usually indicates the ordinary physical nature, a closed room would be some part of the physical nature that was not open to the light, bats would mean forces of the night, i.e. ignorant movements finding a lodging in the obscurity of the unenlightened nature.

*

It [*seeing relatives in dreams*] is the impression left by the past life and its sanskaras that come up in these dreams from the subconscious. They have to be rejected till the impressions are rooted out.

Robbers

The robbers are, as in the Veda, vital beings who come to steal away the good condition or else to steal the gains of the sadhana.

Journeying

The image of journeying always signifies a movement in life or a progress in sadhana.

*

Journeying on a horse or in a conveyance, if symbolic, means a progress or a movement in life, work or sadhana.

*

A journey in a boat or other conveyance means always a movement in the Yoga — often an advance or progress.

*

A journey in a carriage, train, motor car, steamer, boat, aeroplane etc. indicates a movement in the sadhana. The white horse may be the sattvic mind and the red horse the vital rajas giving energy and both combining to make a progress.

*

Aeroplane, steamer and train are always symbols of a rapid progress or forward movement.

*

The railway train at full speed means rapid progress.

*

The railway line is a symbol of rapid progress and the three stars are a symbol of Divine Grace in the mind, life and body.

*

The moving on the sands — it frequently happens in these

dreams — is usually a sign of an easier movement in the sadhana.

Running Away

The running away [*in dream*] is a symbol of the inertia in part of the being which allows the forces to invade, drawing back from them and losing ground instead of facing and destroying them.

Flying

When you find yourself flying it is always the vital being in the subtle body in the vital world that is doing it.

*

Flying during sleep over houses, streets, etc. simply means that the consciousness in the vital sheaths has gone out and is moving over places in the vital or subtle physical world (even sometimes the material); it is always in the vital sheath that one flies like that.

The ascending movement is different — in that it is the consciousness that goes high up to other planes or levels and comes down again to the body.

Ears

The ears signify usually the place of inspired knowledge or else of inspired expression — red and gold mean truth and power joined together.

Teeth

Symbolically, if the dream is symbolic, the falling of teeth means the disappearance of old fixed mental habits belonging to the physical mind.

*

The breaking or falling of teeth [*in dream*] is symbolic usually of the breaking or falling off of habitual formations or sanskaras in the physical mind.

Flesh

The piece of flesh indicates something restless in the physical being which stands by its restlessness and excessive materiality in the way of the full flow of the Ananda. In the dream this became active and was eliminated by the pressure of the psychic.

Being Dead

The feeling of being dead in a vision or dream experience comes when something in the being is to be silenced into entire inactivity and ceases to exist as a part of the nature. It may be a very small part, but as during the process the consciousness is concentrated in it and identified with it for the purpose of the working, the feeling is that “I am dead”. When you said, “I am dead, now let me get up and go”, it simply meant, “The thing is done and the process is over. There is no need to identify myself with this part any longer.” There is no indication in the experience as to what the thing was that passed through this experience.

Chapter Eight

The Animal World

Cow

The cow in the occult symbolism indicates Light or the consciousness — white indicates the purified or spiritual consciousness — the white Light.

*

It is quite clear; it is the Vedic image. In the Veda the Cow is the Divine Light — the white Cow is the pure Consciousness in which there is the Light. The milk is the Knowledge and Power descending from the divine Consciousness.

*

The Cow usually means the Higher Consciousness. Perhaps the calf indicates the truth of the higher consciousness (white) in the physical (red).

*

The white calf is the sign of a pure and clear consciousness, — the cow or calf being the symbol of Light in the consciousness, something psychic or spiritual that you felt natural and intimate to you and inseparable.

*

The vision of the cows must have taken place in the psychic world. It has also a symbolic significance. The sun is the symbol of the Divine Truth, the cows are its powers, rays of the sun, sources of true knowledge, true feeling, true experience.

The descent you felt must have been into some depth of light, probably in the psychic nature.

*

Milk is always the symbol of the flow of the higher consciousness.

Bull

The bull is an emblem of strength and force. It is also in the Veda an image of the Gods, the male powers in Nature. Again the bull is the *vāhana* of Shiva. It may in a dream or an experience be any of these symbols—but it is probably the first here.

Horse

A horse always indicates some power.

*

The Horse is the symbol in dream or vision of a Power or Energy.

*

The Horse is Power—white is pure. It is the pure Power.

*

The Horse is Power, usually Life-Power, but also it may mean Mind-Power in Tapas if it is dynamic and mobile.

*

The Horse is the symbol of Power in motion—often of the Power that makes for rapid progress in sadhana.

*

The horse is a force acting for progress.

*

The horse is always the symbol of Power; it must be then a Power which you were trying to catch and make your own while sometimes it was trying to come up with you, perhaps to use you. This is what happens in the vital where there are these uncertain and elusive movements. The high platform was evidently the

level of a higher Consciousness which stilled this fluctuating movement and made control of the Power more possible, as it became still and near.

*

The ass is the symbol of the inertia and obstruction in the body. The horse is the symbol of force or power. The tunnel of water must be the vital physical and the arch is a passage out, by which, if the ass can cross it or rather be pulled across, then it becomes a horse. In other words, the inertia and obstruction in the physical will be changed into Power and Force of Progress.

Lion

The Lion is the vital force.

*

The lion means vital force, strength, courage—here full of the light, illumined by the spiritual consciousness.¹

*

The lion indicates force and courage, strength and power. The lower vital is not lionlike.

Tiger

It all depends on the attitude of the tiger. If fierce and hostile, it may be a form of an adverse force, otherwise it is simply a power of vital nature which may be friendly.

Elephant

The elephant is Strength—sometimes Strength illumined with Wisdom.

*

¹ *In the correspondent's vision, the lion's face was full of shining light and the hairs of its mane were like rays of spreading light. —Ed.*

The elephant is Strength — sometimes Strength removing obstacles.

*

The blue elephant is the strength of the Higher Consciousness fulfilling itself and removing obstacles.

Giraffe

The Giraffe symbolises aspiration.

Camel

[*Camel manifesting violet light*] Patient progress and endurance as a gift of the Divine Grace.

Deer and Antelope

The deer = speed in the spiritual path.

*

The deer is perhaps a symbol of speed in the spiritual progress.

*

The deer is Immortality, the antelope is Rapid Movement.

Boar

It [*the boar*] is rajasic strength and vehemence. Much however depends upon the context,—these figures have also other meanings.

*

The wild boar points to attacks of the crude vital rajas.

Buffalo

A buffalo conveys the idea often of an obscure violence in the

nature — here [*in the correspondent's dream*] it seems tied up — i.e. under control but not eliminated. But it is not clear to what it refers — if it is symbolic at all.

*

The buffalo is a symbol of unnecessary or blind anger — perhaps it meant that that was still somewhere in your nature.

*

[*Buffaloes*:] Rash and obscure vital forces.

Goat

The goat in vision is often symbolic of lust.

*

Goats usually indicate sex tendencies.

Monkey

The monkey is a symbol of the leaping restless mind; these monkeys are the doubts and suggestions that have been assailing you.

*

The monkey is a symbol of the restless vital consciousness or of one or other of its movements.

Dog

The dog is the symbol of devoted affection and obedience.

*

The dog generally signifies devoted obedience — so it² may indicate the action of a devoted obedience spiritualised in the

² *In a vision the correspondent saw a dog's face bathed in blue light, with its eyes full of white light.* — Ed.

higher consciousness.

*

The dog usually indicates fidelity and as it is yellow, it would be fidelity in the mind to the Divine—but the other black and white one is difficult to interpret—it is something in the vital, but the meaning of the black spots is not clear.

Black Cat

The black cat is usually the symbol of magic of an evil kind or of an evil influence of the vital world acting on the physical as magic does. It is effective so long as its nature and mode of action are not discovered, so long as it can act invisibly—when it is seen it can be dealt with. The others had not seen it and were not aware that it was taking the life of the sick person and that she was not dead and need not die if this force could be destroyed or prevented from acting; you saw it and were therefore able to fight and catch it and kill it. That it took long to kill shows that it was not representing a particular process of magic which can be annulled quickly and decisively, but a Force of evil magic from the vital plane.

Snake or Serpent

The serpent is the symbol of energy, it may be a bad or hostile energy—but it may also be a good, even a divine energy.

*

The snake indicates some kind of energy always—oftener bad, but also it can indicate some luminous or divine energy. It is [*in this case*] the ascent of some such force from the physical upwards. The other details are not clear.

*

About the snake you saw in your meditation—serpents indicate always energies of Nature and very often bad energies of the vital

plane; but they can also indicate luminous or divine energies like the snake of Vishnu. The one you saw was evidently of this latter type—a luminous divine energy and therefore there was no cause for alarm, it was a good sign.

*

A snake is a bad symbol only when it comes from the vital or other lower plane.

*

What you saw was not what is in yourself, but a symbol of the things that are in vital Nature. Scorpions and usually snakes also are symbols of harmful energies; the vital nature of earth is full of these energies and that is why the purification of man's outer vital nature also is so difficult and there are so many wrong movements and happenings in him,—because his vital is easily open to all these earth movements. In order to get rid of them, the inner being must wake and grow and its nature replace the outer nature. Sometimes serpents indicate energies simply, not harmful ones; but more often it is the other way. On the other hand the peacocks you saw were powers of victory, the victory of the energies of light over the energies of darkness.

*

The serpent Ananta is the infinite energy in infinite Time-Space which supports the universe.

*

It is in answer to your aspiration that the Mahakali force descended—the Serpent is the Energy from above working in the vital answering to the Serpent Kundalini which rises from below.

*

The Serpent is the symbol of energy—especially of the Kundalini Shakti which is the divine Force coiled up in the lowest (physical) centre, Muladhara—and when it rises it goes up through the spine and joins the higher consciousness above.

Energies are of all kinds and the snakes can also symbolise the evil powers of the unregenerate vital nature—but here it is not that.

*

The serpent symbolises an energy good or bad, divine or un-divine according to its nature. Here, it looks as if it were the Kundalini trying to ascend to the Brahmarandhra, but it has not yet reached beyond the vital and is stopped—probably because the time has not yet come.

*

This [*vision*] is the symbol of the opening of the centres to the Light.

The swan is the Indian symbol of the individual soul, the central being, the divine part which is turned towards the Divine, descending from there and ascending to it.

The two serpents interlaced are the two channels in the spine, through which the Shakti moves upward and downward.

The serpent with the six hoods is the Kundalini Shakti, the divine Power asleep in the lowest physical centre which, awakened in the Yoga, ascends in light through the opening centres to meet the Divine in the highest centre and so connect the manifest and the unmanifested, joining Spirit and Matter.

*

The golden serpent in the Muladhara is a symbol of the energy of the transformed physical consciousness.

*

The cobra is a symbol of the Energy in Nature—the upraised hood and light indicate the illumination and victorious position of the emerged Energy.

*

The opening of the hood indicates the victorious or successful activity of the Energy indicated by the snake.

*

The serpent with the hood over the head generally indicates future siddhi.

*

Snakes and scorpions always indicate attacks or threats of attack of one kind or another, more often threats from the vital plane or hostile influences on the physical.

*

The serpent is a symbol of force, very often a hostile or evil force of the vital plane. The sea is a symbol of a plane of consciousness. The white light is a manifestation of pure divine force descending from one of the truth-planes leading to the supramental.

The indication is that of a hostile vital force being expelled and the purifying light from above descending to illumine and deliver the part of the plane formerly occupied by it.

Crocodile

The crocodile signifies greed, *lobha*, of some kind.

Frog

Frog = modest usefulness.

Fish

The fish is the always moving vital mind making all sorts of formations.

*

Fish might be formations in the vital consciousness — for water most often indicates the vital consciousness.

Bird

The bird is often a symbol of the being.

*

The bird is a symbol of the individual soul.

*

A bird is a very frequent symbol of the soul, and the tree is the standing image of the universe—the Tree of Life.

*

Birds often indicate either mind-powers or soul-powers.

*

The bird is usually a symbol of some soul power when it is not the soul itself—here it is a power (awakened in the soul) of the whitish blue light—Sri Aurobindo's light.

*

The Blue Bird is always a symbol of aspiration towards something Beyond.

*

The blue bird is the symbol of aspiration to the heights.

Swan or Hansa

The swan is a symbol of the soul on the higher plane.

*

The swan is the liberated soul.

*

Both [*the goose and the swan*] are symbols of the beings in a man—but the goose or ordinary Hansa usually refers to the *manomaya puruṣa*.

*

The Hansa is the symbol of the being—it regains its original purity as it rises until it becomes luminous in the Highest Truth.

*

The Hansa is a symbol of the soul or the self—the peacock is the bird of victory. The golden Hansa is the soul living in the Truth, the golden peacock is the victory of the Truth.

Duck

The duck is the symbol of the soul—silvery colour = the spiritual consciousness—golden wings = the power of the Divine Truth.

*

The duck is usually a symbol of the soul or inner being; perhaps it was the four beings—mental, psychic, vital and physical—that you saw.³

Crane

The crane is the messenger of happiness.

Peacock

The peacock is the Bird of Victory.

*

A peacock is the symbol of spiritual victory.

*

The peacock signifies victory—in Yoga the divine victory. The clear sky would indicate perhaps the mental part cleared of obscurities. Seeing the higher part of the bodies [*of the peacocks*] would mean a victory in the higher parts of the consciousness, in the mental (head and neck) and perhaps also in vital mind and in emotional.

³ *The correspondent saw four ducks with uplifted necks, illuminated with white light, advancing in a row.—Ed.*

Dove or Pigeon

The dove signifies peace. The colours indicate the vital—green would be self-giving in the vital; blue the higher consciousness in the vital. So it must be peace casting its influence from above on the vital.

*

The white pigeon must be Peace.

Crow, Eagle, Kite

The crow signifies practical cleverness, the eagle Intelligence. The kite is Krishna's *vāhana*.

Ostrich

The ostrich may mean rapidity of movement.

Spider

The image of the spider in the Upanishads is used for the Brahman creating the world out of itself, dwelling in it and withdrawing it into itself. But what matters in a symbol is what it means for you. It may mean for you success or successful formations.

White Ants

Obviously it [*white ants seen in a dream*] must have been symbolic of small but destructive forces in the lower vital or physical.

Flies

Something small in the smaller vital.

Chapter Nine

The Plant World

Aswattha or Peepul Tree

The aswattha usually symbolises the cosmic manifestation.

*

It [*the peepul tree*] is the symbol of the cosmic existence.

Jungle

The jungle must be some unregenerated part of the vital nature and the serpent a wrong force emerging from it.

Leaves

Images of leaves and plants usually indicate vital strength or energy.

*

A green leaf means vital strength or energy or vitality.

Fruits

The fruits are the results of the sadhana.

Flowers

Flowers indicate a blossoming in the consciousness, sometimes with special reference to the psychic or the psychicised vital, mental and physical consciousness.

*

The vision of flowers is a symbol usually of psychic qualities or movements whether a potentiality or promise or an actual state of development.

*

It is usually when the psychic is active that this seeing of flowers becomes abundant.

*

The flowers indicate always an opening (usually psychic) in some part of the consciousness.

*

The flowers¹ are the symbols of psychic movements. The sun is the Divine Consciousness. It is the awakening of the psychic consciousness and its activity under the Divine Influence.

*

Red flowers would ordinarily indicate an opening of the consciousness either in the physical or some part of the vital according to the shade.

Lotus

A lotus flower indicates open consciousness.

*

A lotus signifies the opening of the (true) consciousness.

*

The lotus is always the sign of the consciousness opening somewhere — when the consciousness opened from above, you became aware of a new plane of being of which you were not aware before.

*

¹ In a vision the correspondent saw a luminous sun sending forth a multitude of flowers. —Ed.

It [*the lotus*] means consciousness. The opening of the lotus is the opening of some part of the consciousness.

*

The opening of the lotuses² means, I suppose, the opening of the true vital and physical consciousness in which the spiritual being (the Swan) can manifest with all the consequences of that opening.

*

The lotus must represent owing to its numerous petals the “thousand petalled” lotus above the head which is the seat of the higher consciousness above the thinking intelligence. The vision may mean the opening of the consciousness there and in it the adoration of the Divine.

*

A lotus usually indicates an opening into the spiritual. The white and red are symbols of the Mother and the incarnating Divine.

*

The white lotus is the symbol of the Mother’s consciousness,—it does not indicate any part of the individual consciousness.

*

The red lotus is the flower of the Divine Presence.

*

The red lotus is the presence of the Divine on earth—the sun is the Divine Truth. It indicates the Divine manifestation on earth raising earth consciousness towards the Truth.

*

The red lotus signifies the presence of the Divine on the Earth.

*

² *The correspondent wrote about a vision in which two lotuses blossomed in his body, one at the navel region, the other at the base of the spine.—Ed.*

It [*the blue lotus*] can be taken as the (Avatar) incarnation on the mental plane.

Other Flowers

The red rose is the flower of love and surrender, the white is the purity of psychic love.

*

Reddish pink rose = psychic love or surrender.
White rose = pure spiritual surrender.

*

The java [*red hibiscus*] is the flower of the Divine Power.

*

The [*flower named*] eternal smile³ means the self-existent joy and gladness of the Spirit.

*

I told you saffron meant purification—so if it has any significance, it can only mean that the Mother gave you a power of purification to use.⁴

³ Hibiscus micranthus, *a very small white hibiscus*. —Ed.

⁴ The correspondent wrote that in a dream the Mother put a large packet of saffron in her hand. —Ed.

Chapter Ten

Constructions

Building

The building is the symbol of a new creation — the white indicating spiritual consciousness, the coloured lights the different powers.

Workshop

The workshop is probably a symbol of the activity of the ordinary nature which is so full of formations and activities of the ordinary kind that it is difficult to pass through it to the inner or the inmost being.

The walls with the spaces between indicate the different parts of the being to which the outer mind has no access — possibly, the inner vital (the women may be the occult vital nature), emotional etc. The ceiling (yellow) may be the intellect or thinking mind which walls one in and prevents from getting into the open spaces of the higher consciousness. But through all a way lies to the open way of the higher consciousness full of peace, light and Ananda.

Temple

The temple means religious feeling, worship, adoration, consecration.

*

It is a temple and the temple is the symbol of spiritual aspiration. This one being complex meant a rich and many-sided aspiration.

Pyramid and Sphinx

The pyramid is usually a symbol of aspiration — reddish perhaps

because it is in the physical.

*

The Sphinx is a symbol of the eternal quest that can only be answered by the secret knowledge.

Chapter Eleven

Objects

Cross and Shield

The cross is the sign of the triple being, transcendent, universal and individual.

*

The cross indicates the triple Divine (transcendent, universal, individual) — the shield means protection.

Crown

The crown is the sign of fulfilment (here in the intuitive consciousness) and the going up means an ascent to higher planes.

*

The crown indicates the higher consciousness in its static condition, the wheel its dynamic action. The red light is the Power sent down to change the physical.

Diamond

The diamond is the symbol of the Mother's light and energy — the diamond light is that of her consciousness at its most intense.

*

Diamonds may indicate the Mother's Light at its intensest, for that is diamond white light.

*

The diamond in your heart was a formation of the light of Mother's consciousness there, — for the Mother's light is of a white and at its most intense of a diamond radiance. The light

is a sign of the Mother's presence in your heart and that is what you saw once and felt for a moment.

Pearl

It [*a pearl*] may be a representation of the “bindu”, which is a symbol of the infinite in the exceedingly small, the individual point which is yet the Universal.

Flute

The flute is the symbol of a call — usually the spiritual call.

*

The flute is the call of the Divine.

*

The flute is the call of the Divine which descends into you from above and awakes the psychic yearning (the tears) and ends by bringing a vast peace and shows to you the clear sky of the higher consciousness in which there are the Truth-formations (golden stars) some of which begin to descend in a rain upon the physical consciousness (the earth).

Conch

The conch is often the symbol of call or aspiration.

*

The conch is the symbol of the spiritual call.

*

The conch is the call to realisation.

*

The conch is perhaps the proclamation of victory.

*

The lotus is the opened consciousness — the conchshell is the call to victory.

Bells

Bells heard are usually a sign of progress in sadhana, progress to come.

Vina

Harmony.

Wheel, Disc or Chakra

The wheel is the sign of an action of Force (whatever force may be indicated by the nature of the symbol) and as it was surging upwards it must be the fire of aspiration rising from the vital (navel centre) to the Higher Consciousness above.

*

A revolving disc means a force in action on the nature. The whitish blue light is known as Krishna's light, also as Sri Aurobindo's light. White is the Mother's. Perhaps here it is a combination.

*

The [*Sudarshan*] Chakra symbolises the action of Sri Krishna's force.

*

The chakra is the energy at work and it brings the first opening of the consciousness in the gross physical plane, i.e. of the mental physical, psychic physical, vital physical and the material.

*

Yes, the circular movement and the Chakra are always signs of energy in action, generally creative action.

Bow and Arrow

The bow is a symbol of the force sent out to reach its mark.

*

The arrow is the symbol of the Force which goes to its aim. Gold = the Truth, Yellow = the mind, Green = the vital energy. The arrow of the spiritual Truth using the mind and the vital energy.

Key

Is it a key you saw?¹ If so the meaning is clear; it is the key to the divine realisation; the Mother is the key because it is her light (white is her colour) that enables us to open the gate of realisation.

Book

The book indicates some kind of knowledge.

Mirror, Square and Triangle

The mirror between the eyebrows indicates that something in the inner mind has become able to reflect the Truth from above (golden light)—a square is a symbol of the truth beyond the mind as a triangle is the symbol of mind, life, body.

Incense Stick and Tobacco

The incense stick is the symbol of self-consecration.

*

Tobacco is associated with tamas and incense sticks with adoration.

¹ *The correspondent wrote that in a vision he saw a key with the word "MOTHER" written on it in white letters, with white light around it.—Ed.*

Gramophone

The gramophone is obviously symbolic of the mechanical mind.

Chapter Twelve

Numbers and Letters

Numbers

In one form or another all these ideas [*such as the significance of numbers*] have existed in the past. The significance of numbers was one of the chief elements in the teaching of Pythagoras 5 centuries before Christ.

*

The number 7 is the number of realisation — when there are four 7's it indicates perfect realisation.

*

7 is the figure of realisation. 3×3 means the descent from above and the answer from below.

*

There is no unlucky number. Numbers all have their powers and why should 13 not have its chance?

Letters (Writing)

The writing [*floating before the eyes*] is often seen by sadhaks either in meditation and sleep or with the waking eyes or in both states. But if you see it only in sleep or an inward condition, it is not so easy to remember when waking unless you train yourself to remember.

OM

OM there [*above the crown of the head*] indicates the realisation of the Brahman on that level of the (higher) consciousness.

Part Three

Experiences of
the Inner Consciousness
and the Cosmic Consciousness

Section One

Experiences on the Inner Planes

Chapter One

Experiences on the Subtle Physical, Vital and Mental Planes

Subtle Physical Experiences

Is it [*a strong and rapid heartbeat that shakes the whole body*] the physical nerves and heart — or in the subtle body? Often one feels a shaking and vibration of the subtle body and can feel as if heartbeats there, but if not experienced, it impresses as if it were a material phenomenon.

*

It is evidently in a subtle world, not the physical that you move; that is evident from the different arrangement of things, by such details as the third arm and the book marker removed yet there; but they show also that it is a subtle world very near to the physical; it is either a subtle physical world or a very material vital domain. In all the subtle domains the physical is reproduced with a change, the change growing freer and more elastic as one gets farther away. Such details as the lameness show the same thing, — the hold of the physical is still there. It is possible to move about in the physical world, but usually that can only be done by drawing on the atmosphere of other physical beings for a stronger materialisation of the form — when that happens one moves among them and sees them and all the surroundings exactly as they are at that time in the physical world and can verify the accuracy of the details if immediately after returning to the body (which is usually done with a clear consciousness of the whole process of getting into it) one can traverse the same scene in the physical body. But this is rare; the subtle wandering is on the contrary a frequent phenomenon, only when it is near to the physical world, all seems very material and concrete and the association of physical habits and physical

mental movements with the subtle events is closer.

Vital Experiences

The place where you were [*in a dream*] is as much a world of fact and reality as is the material world and its happenings have sometimes a great effect on this world. What an ignorant lot of disciples you all are! Too much modernisation and Europeanisation by half!

These things are meetings on the vital plane, but very often in the transcription of what happened some details get in that are contributed by the subconscious mind. I rather suspect all that about X was such a contribution. The rest seems all right. The writing on the forehead means of course something that is fixed in you in the vital plane and has to come out hereafter in the physical consciousness.

*

You are too physically matter of fact. Besides you are quite ignorant of occult things. The vital is part of what European psychologists sometimes call the subliminal and the subliminal, as everybody ought to know, can do things the physical cannot do — e.g. solve a problem in a few minutes over which the physical has spent days in vain etc. etc.

What is the use of the same things happening on both planes; it would be superfluous and otiose. The vital plane is a field where things can be done which for some reason or other can't be done now on the physical.

There are of course hundreds of varieties of things in the vital as it is a much richer and more plastic field of consciousness than the physical, and all are not of equal validity and value. I am speaking above of the things that are valid. By the way, without this vital plane there would be no art, poetry or literature — these things come through the vital before they can manifest here.

*

At this stage you have only to watch the experiences and observe their significance. It is only when the experiences are in the vital realm that some are likely to be false formations. These of which you write are simply the common experiences of an opening Yogic consciousness and they have to be understood, simply.

Here it is the breaking up of the small surface vital into the largeness of the true or inner vital being which can at once open to the Higher Consciousness, its power, light and Ananda. There is also begun a similar breaking of the small physical mind and sense into the wideness of the inner physical consciousness. The inner planes are always wide and open into the Universal while the outer surface parts of the being are shut up in themselves and full of narrow and ignorant movements.

*

It is plain. The lower being (vital and physical) was receiving an influence (mental light, yellow) from the thinking mind and higher vital which was clearing it of the old habitual lower vital reactions: very often in the sadhana one feels the inner being speaking to the outer or the mind or higher vital speaking to the lower so as to enlighten it.

*

These things that come [*in dreams*] to frighten you are merely impressions thrown on you by small vital forces which want to prevent you (by making you nervous) pushing on the sadhana. They can really do nothing to you, only you must reject all fear. Keep always this thought when these things come, "The Mother's protection is with me, nothing bad can happen"; for when there is the psychic opening and one puts one's faith in the Mother, that is sufficient to ward these things off. Many sadhaks learn, when they have alarming dreams, to call the Mother's name in the dream itself and then the things that menace them become helpless or cease. You must therefore refuse to be intimidated and reject these impressions with contempt. If there is anything frightening, call down the Mother's protection.

The heat you felt was probably due to some difficulty in the

force coming down below the centre between the eyes where it has been working up till now. When such sensations or the unease you once felt or similar things come, you must not be alarmed, but remain quiet and let the difficulty pass.

What you had before that, the moonlight in the forehead, was this working in the centre there between the eyebrows, the centre of the inner mind, will and vision. The moonlight you saw is the light of spirituality and it was this that was entering into your mind through the centre, with the effect of the widening in the heart like a sky filled with moonlight. Afterwards came some endeavour to prepare the lower part of the mind whose centre is in the throat and join it with the inner mind and make it open; but there was some difficulty, as is very usually the case, which caused the heat. It was probably the fire of tapas, Agni, trying to open the way to this centre.

The experience of being taken up into the sky is a very common one and it means an ascent of the consciousness into a higher world of light and peace.

The idea that you must go more and more within and turn wholly to the Mother is quite right. It is when there is no attachment to outward things for their own sake and all is only for the Mother and the life through the inner psychic being is centred in her that the best condition is created for the spiritual realisation.

*

Your series of experiences are very interesting by the constant (though interspaced) development they illustrate. Here two new significant elements have been added to the previous substance of the experience. The first is the very precise localisation of the uprush of the consciousness from the pit of the stomach—that is to say, from above the navel, the movement itself starting from the navel or even below it. The navel-centre (*nābhi-padma*) is the main seat of the centralised vital consciousness (dynamic centre) which ranges from the heart level (emotional) to the centre below the navel (lower vital, sensational desire centre). These three mark the domain of the vital being. It is therefore

clear that it was your inner vital being which had this experience, and its intensity and vehemence was probably due to the whole vital (or most of it) being awake and sharing in it this time. The experience itself was psychic in its origin, but was given a strong emotional-vital form in its expression. I may add, for completeness, that the centre of the psychic is behind the heart and it is through the purified emotions that the psychic most easily finds an outlet. All from the heart above is connected with the mental-vital and above it is the mind with its three centres, one in the throat (the outward-going or externalising mind), one between the eyes or rather in the middle of the forehead (the centre of vision and will) and one above, communicating with the brain, which is called the thousand-petalled lotus and where are centralised the highest thought and intelligence communicating with the greater mind planes (illuminated mind, intuition, overmind) above.

The second new significant feature is the self-manifestation of the inner mind; for it was your inner mind that was watching, observing and criticising the vital being's psychic experience. You found this clear division in you curious, but it will no longer seem curious once you know the perfectly normal divisibility of the different parts of the being. In the outer surface nature mind, psychic, vital, physical are all jumbled together and it needs a strong power of introspection, self-analysis, close observation and disentanglement of the threads of thought, feeling and impulse to find out the composition of our nature and the relation and interaction of these parts upon each other. But when one goes inside as you have done, we find the sources of all this surface action and there the parts of our being are quite separate and clearly distinct from each other. We feel them indeed as different beings in us, and just as two people in a group can do, they too are seen to observe, criticise, help or oppose and restrain each other; it is as if we were a group-being, each member of the group with its separate place and function, and all directed by a central being who is sometimes in front above the others, sometimes behind the scenes. Your mental being was observing the vital and not quite easy about its vehemence,—

for the natural base of the mental being is calm, thoughtfulness, restraint, control and balance, while the natural turn of the vital is dynamism, energy thrown into emotion, sensation and action. All therefore was perfectly natural and in order.

*

As for the experience stated it was probably in the vital plane and such suddennesses and vividnesses of experience are characteristic of the vital — but they are not lasting, they only prepare. It is when one has got into contact with what is beyond mind and vital and body and risen there that the great lasting fundamental realisations usually come.

Influence or Possession by Beings of Other Planes

The case of the girl in question seems to be of a fairly common kind. In one way or another a certain subtle faculty is awakened by which there is contact with some other plane of consciousness and its beings, usually with the vital or larger “life” worlds behind the material plane. These experiences are often of little value, trivial and full of misleading conceptions, messages or suggestions; the inexperienced *voyant* or seer adds to them the formations and delusions of his own subliminal mind. It is only by training and experience that one can arrive at an elimination of these errors and establish the true use of the subtle faculties. These powers are often enough dangerous to their unexperienced or indisciplined possessor and the hysteria of the girl in question was obviously the result (a result that happens in many cases) of her allowing some being of the vital plane to delude and influence her. This kind of thing has no connection at all with the spiritual or psychic experience of the Rishis and sages; it is rather akin to the experiences of mediums and others in Europe.

*

It seems that you do not pay sufficient attention to the instructions that are sent to you from here. You were specially warned

not to allow anything to take possession of you. But in relating one of your experiences repeated for several days you speak of something that was taking possession of you, even obliging you to make incoherent noises, and yet you say you do not know whether it was good or bad or what kind of force it was! It is evident from your description that it was a vital force trying to take violent possession of the body. Nothing can be more dangerous than to allow this kind of loss of control and intrusion of an alien influence. In your present condition of ignorance, the vital being not yet sufficiently open, the psychic not yet sufficiently awake, a hostile power can easily intrude and pass itself off as the divine Force. Remember that no personality and no power is to be allowed to possess you. The divine Force will not act in this way; it will work first to purify, to widen and enlighten and transform the consciousness, to open it to Light and Truth, to awaken the heart and the psychic being. Only afterwards will it take gradual and quiet control through a pure and conscious surrender.

*

I have omitted all this time to reply to your letter forwarding your friend's statement about his experiences. I am not very sure of its significance. The "double" voice is a frequent phenomenon; it happens very often when one has been long repeating a mantra that a voice or consciousness within begins to repeat it automatically—also prayer can be taken up in the same way from within. It is usually by an awakening of the inner consciousness or by the going in of the consciousness more deeply within from its outward poise that this happens. This is supported in his case by the fact that he feels himself halfway to trance, his body seems to melt away, he does not feel the weight of the book etc.; all these are well-known signs of the inner consciousness getting awake and largely replacing the outer. The moral effects of his new condition would also indicate an awakening of the inner consciousness, the psychic or psychic-mental perhaps. But on the other hand, he seems to feel this other voice as if outside him and to have the sense of

another being than himself, an invisible presence in the room. The inner being is often felt as someone separate from or other than the ordinary self, but it is not usually felt outside. So it may be that in this state of withdrawal he comes into contact with another plane or world and attracts to himself one of its beings who wants to share in his sadhana and govern it. This last is not a very safe phenomenon, for it is difficult to say from the data what kind of being it is and the handing over of the government of one's inner development to any other than the Divine, the Guru or one's own psychic being may bring with it serious peril. That is all I can say at present.

*

All the other circumstances which you relate¹ are normal and would be the phenomena of an invasion of Ananda occupying the whole instrumental being while the silent inner being within remains separate as it does usually from all that comes from outside. The circumstance that is not clear is the Presence. There is nothing to indicate who or what it is. If it were an undesirable vital Presence producing a vital joy, there would usually be vital phenomena which would enable you to detect their origin, but these are not apparent here. In the circumstances the only course is to observe the experience without accepting any occupation of the being by what comes, taking it as only an experience which the inner being looks on as a witness, until the point that remains veiled is made clear.

P.S. There are several possible explanations but I do not speak of them as that might influence and interfere with the pure observation of the experience by bringing in a mental suggestion.

*

I have read your letter and I have also read it to the Mother. My conclusion about the experience—I had suspended judgment till now—is the same as hers.

We consider that it will be wiser for you to be on your guard

¹ *This letter and the four that follow it were written to the same person.—Ed.*

about it in future. In the first place it cannot be the Buddha — the Buddha's presence would bring peace but could never give this kind of Ananda. Next, the suggestion based on an old subjective feeling of yours seems to be thrown on you to make you more readily admit some *emprise* that the experience is a means of establishing on you. Again the feeling you have that the Ananda is more than you can bear is a sign not favourable to the experience; you suppose that it is a want of adaptation that gives you the feeling, but it is more likely that it is because it is something foreign thrown on you through the vital with which the psychic being in you does not feel at home. Finally, it is not safe to admit while you are doing the Yoga here another influence, *whatever it may be*, which is not ours or part of the movement of this sadhana. If that takes place anything might happen and we would not be able to protect you against it because you would have stepped out of the circle of protection. You have hitherto been proceeding on a very sound line of development; a diversion of this kind which seems to be on the vital level might be a serious interference. No trust can be put on the beauty of the eyes or the face. There are many Beings of the inferior planes who have a captivating beauty and can enthrall with it and they can give too an Ananda which is not of the highest and may on the contrary by its lure take away from the path altogether. When you have reached the stage of clear discernment where the highest Light is turned on all things that come, then experiences of many kinds may be safely faced, but now a strict vigilance must be exercised and all diversions rejected. It is necessary to keep one's steps firmly on the straight road to the Highest; all else must wait for the proper time.

*

For the eyes, that experience had got a certain hold and it was not to be expected that it would altogether disappear all at once. These things try to persist, but if the refusal is firm and unchanging, they fade away after a time or cease. The lessening of the intensity of the ananda is already a sign that the rejection is having its effect. You have only to persist and after a time the

vital consciousness will be free.

*

I have no doubt that the action of this force once rejected will disappear in time. It is something with which you have been brought into contact, not something intimate to yourself to which part of your being is naturally responsive. That is shown by the inability to catch what the being who manifested wanted to convey to you. It seems to have been an onslaught, as you say, an attempted invasion by force and ruse. It is quite true that when there is the opening to the Light, the adverse Forces as well as the lower forces become active when they can do so. The consciousness of the seeker has come out of its normal limits and is opening to the universal as well as upwards to the Self above and they take advantage of that to attempt an entrance. Such onslaughts however are not inevitable and you are probably right in thinking that you caught it in the atmosphere of X. He has made experiments of many kinds in the occult field and there one comes easily into contact with forces and beings of a darker nature and one needs a great power and light and purity — one's own or a helping Power's — to face them and overcome. There are also deficiencies or errors in one's own nature which can open the door to these beings. But the best is if one can have nothing to do with them; for the conquest of the forces of the lower nature is a sufficiently heavy task without that complication. If the work one has to do necessitates the contact and conflict with them, that is another matter. In your case I think this has been something of an accident and not a necessity of the development of your sadhana.

*

No, there was no special concentration or call from the Mother at that time. It was at a time when she never sees anyone, so evidently she would not have put such a force upon you, nor does she usually exercise her power in this way. You did well to resist the impulsion. It is always necessary to keep the inner perception and will clear, conscious and in perfect balance and

never to allow any force of impulsion, however it may present itself, to sweep without their discerning consent the vital or the body into action. Whatever appearance they may assume, such forces cannot be trusted; once the discriminating intelligence gives up its control, any kind of force can intervene in this way and a path is opened for unbalanced vital impulses to be used to the detriment of the sadhana. A psychic or spiritual control replacing the mental would not act in this way, but whatever intensity or ardour it may give, would maintain a clear perception of things, a perfect discrimination, a harmony between the inward and the outward reality. It is only the vital that is swept by these impulses; the vital must always be kept under the control of the intelligence, the psychic or when that becomes dynamic, the higher spiritual consciousness.

An Experience on the Mental Plane

The vision you had was of the mental plane and symbolic. It symbolised not so much your own position as the general difficulties which lie in the way of one's going deep inside into the psychic centre and living there. The *maidān* full of light was the inmost psychic centre; the dark place in between represents the veil of ignorance created by the gulf between this inmost psychic and the outer nature. The chakra turning round and round which prevents the approach from one side (the mental side) is the activity of the ordinary mind; when the mind becomes quiet, then it is easier. The serpent is the vital energy which covers up the psychic and prevents approach from another (the vital) side. Here again if the vital becomes quiet, then the approach is easier.

The blows on the forehead were perhaps the working of a force to open the centre there—for there between the eyes is the centre of the inner mind, will and vision. All these centres are closed in the ordinary consciousness or else only very slightly open on the surface. If the inner mind centre opens, then the peace etc. from above can enter easily into the mind and afterwards into the vital and both mind and vital will become quiet.

The difficulty about the two parts of the mind is one that everybody has when the tendency to go within begins. It is solved in this sadhana by a sort of harmony being established by which even in doing one's work and keeping the necessary outer activities one can still live within in the fullness of the inner life and experience.

Rely on the Mother always. These things are the first beginnings of Yogic experience and the difficulties of the mind and vital (which are not the old ones you had but simply the ordinary difficulties of the adjustment and harmonisation of the different parts of the being) will get solved of themselves.

Chapter Two

Exteriorisation or Going Out of the Body

The Experience of Exteriorisation

The experience you had was that of exteriorisation or going out of the body. The consciousness went up and remained above the body for a time. The feeling or vision of oneself in the form of an egg is frequent in such cases. It is not always so, for many go out in an individualised consciousness with an awareness of a subtle body, subtle thought, subtle sensation etc. and move about in the vital or even in the physical world till they come back to the body. But when one begins, the vital body is at first a little vague and the consciousness also with the result that all is at first dim and unorganised. The serpent must be the Kundalini force which had left its coiled sleeping position in the Muladhara and taken the lengthened one in which it joins the embodied consciousness with the consciousness above.

The power of exteriorisation is one that can be used for many purposes by the Yogi when it has been developed.

*

It was a partial exteriorisation, part of the consciousness going out to the scene and surroundings described by you while the rest remained in the body and was aware both of the normal surroundings and, by communication or indirect participation, of what the other was experiencing. This is quite possible and for that no form of trance or loss of external consciousness is necessary. As for the cause of such an experience, it does not depend at all on one's own ordinary mental or other interests; it comes by a sort of attraction or touch from someone who is there on the scene and who feels the need of sympathy, support or help of some kind, a need so strong that it forms a sort of call; it is very

usually somebody quite unknown and it just depends on whom the call happens to touch because he is open at the time and receives the vibration and has the capacity to answer. Usually there is a sort of identification of consciousness with that of the person calling so that one can see the surroundings and the things happening through him. It is the physical that becomes nervous at these experiences and this must be overcome; as the inner mental, vital, physical consciousness opens to things behind the thick physical veil all kinds of experiences may happen that are strange to the physical mind and its tendency to be apprehensive or nervous at these things must disappear. It must be able to face even formidable things without fear.

*

A feeling like that of the shock and the stopping of the breath for a second and as if of falling down comes to many when the consciousness for a moment or a longer time exteriorises itself (goes up out of the body); the shock comes from the going up of the consciousness or from the return into the body. The Mother used to have that hundreds of times. It is not anything physical (the Doctor, as you say, found nothing). When this movement of the consciousness is more normal, the feeling will probably disappear.

*

You must have gone out of your body leaving it unprotected and there was an attack which you got rid of after coming into the body. This part of the head from the ears down to the neck is the seat of the physical mind—the centre of the physical or externalising mind is in the throat joining the spine at the back. It was an attack on the physical mind.

Going Out in the Vital Body

It looks as if it were an exteriorisation¹ in which she goes out in

¹ *The correspondent reported the case of a woman who, without willing it, entered into a state of trance at any time, even while writing or talking with someone. —Ed.*

her vital body. When one does so consciously and at will, it is all right, but this unconscious exteriorisation is not always safe. The important question is what effect it has on her. If she comes out of it strong and refreshed or quite normal, there is no cause for distress or anxiety; if she comes out exhausted or depressed, then there are forces that are pulling her out into the vital world to the detriment of her vital sheath and it should not continue.

*

It is clear that when you go out of your body like that you pass into a vital plane and as you are constantly attacked there and have fear, it is not desirable.

It seems to me I have explained all that to you before. Everybody goes out into the vital world in that way, but it is not indispensable to the sadhana to have these experiences and it is better to postpone them till you have the truly helpful experiences—such as those narrated in a recent letter—and can build up a strong consciousness which can enter any plane without fear or danger.

*

As to your experience about the inkstand. When the vital being goes out, it moves on the vital plane and in the vital consciousness, and, even if it is aware of physical scenes and things, it is not with a physical vision. It is possible for one who has trained his faculties to enter into touch with physical things although he is moving about in the vital body, to see and sense them accurately, even to act on them and physically move them. But the ordinary sadhaka who has no knowledge or organised experience or training in these things cannot do it. He must understand that the vital plane is different from the physical and that things that happen there are not physical happenings, though, if they are of the right kind and properly understood and used, they may have a meaning and value for the earth life. But also the vital consciousness is full of false formations and many confusions and it is not safe to move among them without knowledge and without a direct protection and guidance.

*

Your three experiences related in your letter mean that you are going out in your vital body into the vital worlds and meeting the beings and formations of these worlds. The old man of the temple and the girls you saw are hostile beings of the vital plane.

It is better not to go out in this way, unless one has the protection of someone (physically present) who has knowledge and power over the vital world. As there is no one there who can do this for you, you should draw back from this movement. Aspire for perfect surrender, calm, peace, light, consciousness and strength in the mind and the heart. When the mental being and psychic being are thus open, luminous and surrendered, then the vital can open and receive the same illumination. Till then premature adventures on the vital plane are not advisable.

If the movement cannot be stopped, then observe the following instructions:

(1) Never allow any fear to enter into you. Face all you meet and see in this world with detachment and courage.

(2) Ask for the protection of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother before you sleep or meditate. Use their names when you are attacked or tempted.²

(3) Do not indulge in this world in any kind of sympathy such as you felt for the old man in the temple or accept such suggestions, e.g., that he was your spiritual preceptor, which was obviously false since you could have no other spiritual preceptor than Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. It was because of this sympathy and the accepted suggestion that he was able to go inside you and create the pain you felt.

(4) Do not allow any foreign personality to enter into you, only the Light, Power etc. from above.

² Sri Aurobindo refers to himself in the third person here and below; he wrote this letter to be sent over the signature of his secretary.—Ed.

Section Two

Experiences of the Inner Being and the Inner Consciousness

Chapter One

The Inward Movement

The Importance of Inner Experiences

The outer work is only half the matter. There is also the consciousness within which does the work and that must develop from the mental-vital to the spiritual-psychic. How can it do that without experiences? Also one can develop an intuitive consciousness which is helpful to the work.

*

What you say about the outer being is correct; it must change and manifest what is within in the inner nature. But for that one must have experiences in the inner nature and through these the power of the inner nature grows till it can influence wholly and possess the outer being. To change the outer consciousness entirely without developing this inner consciousness would be too difficult. That is why these inner experiences are going on to prepare the growth of the inner consciousness. There is an inner mind, an inner vital, an inner physical consciousness which can more easily than the outer receive the higher consciousness above and put itself into harmony with the psychic being; when that is done the outer nature is felt as only a fringe on the surface, not as oneself, and is more easily transformed altogether.

Whatever difficulties there may still be in the outer nature, they will not make any difference to the fact that you are now awake within, the Mother's force working in you and you her true child destined to be perfectly that in all ways. Put your faith and your thought entirely on her and you will go through all safely.

*

What you express in the letter is the right way of thinking and seeing. The self-will of the mind wanting things in its own way

and not in the Divine's way was a great obstacle. With that gone the way should become much less rough and hard to follow.

The outer consciousness can grow in faith, fidelity to the Divine, reverence, love, worship and adoration, great things in themselves,—though in fact these things too come from within,—but realisation can only take place when the inner being is awake with its vision and feeling of things unseen. Till then, one can feel the results of the divine help and, if one has faith, know that they are the work of the Divine; but it is only then that one can feel clearly the Force at work, the divine Presence, the direct communion.

*

So long as you live only in thoughts and other movements of the surface consciousness, you cannot be conscious in the Yogic sense. It is when the mind becomes quiet that the real (inner) consciousness comes out or the higher consciousness above the mind comes down. It is only then also that the inner physical being becomes active and brings an alert consciousness and an intuitive sense into the body. Also the higher thought and the inner will comes then only.

*

The exterior being has to become aware of the inner—the veil between the inner and outer consciousness has to be removed, it is only then that a real Yogic consciousness begins. The outer has to be merely an instrument or channel for the inner to express itself and communicate with the outer physical world. The inner again has to have free communication with the universal on all the planes—it has to enter into the cosmic consciousness. The outer consciousness has to be remoulded and reshaped through the inner consciousness and the processes that must do it are the psychic by its influence and the higher consciousness by its descent. Naturally, in the process the outer being also will lose its separateness and become aware of and, in a way, unified with the universal.

Becoming Aware of the Inner Being

It is not that anything has been taken from you, but as you say at the end, your being is seen by you in two parts. That is a thing that happens as the sadhana proceeds and must happen in order that one may have completely the knowledge of oneself and the true consciousness. These two parts are the inner being and the outer being. The outer being (mind, vital and physical) has now become capable of quietude and it sits in meditation in a free, happy, vacant quietude which is the first step towards the true consciousness. The inner being (inner mind, vital, physical) is not lost but gone inside—the outer part does not know where—but probably gone inside into union with the psychic. The only thing that can have gone is something of the old nature that was standing in the way of this experience.

*

The silence descends into the inner being first—as also other things from the higher consciousness. One can become aware of this inner being, calm, silent, strong, untouched by the movements of Nature, full of knowledge or light, and at the same time be aware of another lesser being, the small personality on the surface which is made up of the movements of Nature or else still subject to them or else, if not subject to them, still open to invasion by them. This is a condition that any number of sadhaks and Yogis have experienced. The inner being means the psychic, the inner mind, the inner vital, the inner physical. In this condition none of these can be even touched, so there has been an essential purification. All need not feel this division into two consciousnesses, but most do. When it is there, the will that decides the action is in the inner being, not in the outer—so the invasion of the outer by vital movements can in no way compel the action. It is on the contrary a very favourable stage in the transformation because the inner being can bring the whole force of the higher consciousness in it to change the nature wholly, observing the action of Nature without being affected by it, putting the force for change wherever needed

and setting the whole being right as one does with a machine. That is if one wants a transformation. For many Vedantins don't think it necessary — they say the inner being is *mukta*, the rest is simply a mechanical continuation of the impetus of Nature in the physical man and will drop away with the body so that one can depart into Nirvana.

*

In fact all these ignorant vital movements originate from outside in the ignorant universal nature; the human being forms in his superficial parts of being, mental, vital, physical a habit of certain responses to these waves from outside. It is these responses that he takes as his own character (anger, desire, sex etc.) and thinks he cannot be otherwise. But that is not so; he can change. There is another consciousness deeper within him, his true inner being, which is his real self, but is covered over by the superficial nature. This the ordinary man does not know, but the Yogi becomes aware of it as he progresses in his sadhana. As the consciousness of this inner being increases by sadhana, the surface nature and its responses are pushed out and can be got rid of altogether. But the ignorant universal Nature does not want to let go and throws the old movements on the sadhak and tries to get them inside him again; owing to a habit the superficial nature gives the old responses. If one can get the firm knowledge that these things are from outside and not a real part of oneself, then it is easier for the sadhak to repel such notions, or if they lay hold, he can get rid of them sooner. That is why I say repeatedly that these things are not in yourself, but from outside.

The Piercing of the Veil

The cry you heard was not in the physical heart, but in the emotional centre. The breaking of the wall meant the breaking of the obstacle or at least of some obstacle there between your inner and your outer being. Most people live in their ordinary outer ignorant personality which does not easily open to the

Divine; but there is an inner being within them of which they do not know, which can easily open to the Truth and the Light. But there is a wall which divides them from it, a wall of obscurity and unconsciousness. When it breaks down, then there is a release; the feelings of calm, Ananda, joy which you had immediately afterwards were due to that release. The cry you heard was the cry of the vital part in you overcome by the suddenness of the breaking of the wall and the opening.

*

The piercing of the veil between the outer consciousness and the inner being is one of the crucial movements in Yoga. For Yoga means union with the Divine, but it also means awaking first to your inner self and then to your higher self,—a movement inward and a movement upward. It is, in fact, only through the awakening and coming to the front of the inner being that you can get into union with the Divine. The outer physical man is only an instrumental personality and by himself he cannot arrive at this union,—he can only get occasional touches, religious feelings, imperfect intimations. And even these come not from the outer consciousness but from what is within us.

There are two mutually complementary movements; in one the inner being comes to the front and impresses its own normal motions on the outer consciousness to which they are unusual and abnormal; the other is to draw back from the outer consciousness, to go inside into the inner planes, enter the world of your inner self and wake in the hidden parts of your being. When that plunge has once been taken, you are marked for the Yogic, the spiritual life and nothing can efface the seal that has been put upon you.

This inward movement takes place in many different ways and there is sometimes a complex experience combining all the signs of the complete plunge. There is a sense of going in or deep down, a feeling of the movement towards inner depths; there is often a stillness, a pleasant numbness, a stiffness of the limbs. This is the sign of the consciousness retiring from the body inwards under the pressure of a force from above,—that

pressure stabilising the body into an immobile support of the inner life, in a kind of strong and still spontaneous *āsana*. There is a feeling of waves surging up, mounting to the head, which brings an outer unconsciousness and an inner waking. It is the ascending of the lower consciousness in the Adhara to meet the greater consciousness above. It is a movement analogous to that on which so much stress is laid in the Tantrik process, the awakening of the Kundalini, the Energy coiled up and latent in the body and its mounting through the spinal cord and the centres (*cakras*) and the Brahmarandhra to meet the Divine above. In our Yoga it is not a specialised process, but a spontaneous uprush of the whole lower consciousness sometimes in currents or waves, sometimes in a less concrete motion, and on the other side a descent of the Divine Consciousness and its Force into the body. This descent is felt as a pouring in of calm and peace, of force and power, of light, of joy and ecstasy, of wideness and freedom and knowledge, of a Divine Being or a Presence — sometimes one of these, sometimes several of them or all together. The movement of ascension has different results: it may liberate the consciousness so that one feels no longer in the body, but above it or else spread in wideness with the body either almost non-existent or only a point in one's free expanse. It may enable the being or some part of the being to go out from the body and move elsewhere, and this action is usually accompanied by some kind of partial *samādhi* or else a complete trance. Or it may result in empowering the consciousness, no longer limited by the body and the habits of the external nature, to go within, to enter the inner mental depths, the inner vital, the inner (subtle) physical, the psychic, to become aware of its inmost psychic self or its inner mental, vital and subtle physical being and, it may be, to move and live in the domains, the planes, the worlds that correspond to these parts of the nature. It is the repeated and constant ascent of the lower consciousness that enables the mind, the vital, the physical to come into touch with the higher planes up to the supramental and get impregnated with their light and power and influence. And it is the repeated and constant descent of the Divine Consciousness and its Force

that is the means for the transformation of the whole being and the whole nature. Once this descent becomes habitual, the Divine Force, the Power of the Mother begins to work, no longer from above only or from behind the veil, but consciously in the Adhara itself, and deals with its difficulties and possibilities and carries on the Yoga.

Last comes the crossing of the border. It is not a falling asleep or a loss of consciousness, for the consciousness is there all the time; only, it shifts from the outer and physical, becomes closed to external things and recedes into the inner psychic and vital part of the being. There it passes through many experiences and of these some can and should be felt in the waking state also; for both movements are necessary, the coming out of the inner being to the front as well as the going in of the consciousness to become aware of the inner self and nature. But for many purposes the ingoing movement is indispensable. Its effect is to break or at least to open and pass the barrier between this outer instrumental consciousness and that inner being which it very partially strives to express, and to make possible in future a conscious awareness of all the endless riches of possibility and experience and new being and new life that lie untapped behind the veil of this small and very blind and limited material personality which men erroneously think to be the whole of themselves. It is the beginning and constant enlarging of this deeper and fuller and richer awareness that is accomplished between the inward plunge and the return from this inner world to the waking state.

The sadhak must understand that these experiences are not mere imaginations or dreams but actual happenings, for even when, as often occurs, they are formations only, of a wrong or misleading or adverse kind, they have still their power as formations and must be understood before they can be rejected and abolished. Each inner experience is perfectly real in its own way, although the values of different experiences differ greatly, but it is real with the reality of the inner self and the inner planes. It is a mistake to think that we live physically only or only with the outer mind and life. We are all the time living and acting on other planes of consciousness, meeting others there and acting upon

them, and what we do and feel and think there, the forces we gather, the results we prepare have an incalculable importance and effect, unknown to us, upon our outer life. Not all of it comes through, and what comes through takes another form in the physical — though sometimes there is an exact correspondence; but this little is at the basis of our outward existence. All that we become and do and bear in the physical life is prepared behind the veil within us. It is therefore of immense importance for a Yoga which aims at the transformation of life to grow conscious of what goes on within these domains, to be master there and be able to feel, know and deal with the secret forces that determine our destiny and our internal and external growth or decline.

It is equally important for those who want that union with the Divine without which the transformation is impossible. The aspiration could not be realised if you remained bound by your external self, tied to the physical mind and its petty movements. It is not the outer being which is the source of the spiritual urge; the outer being only undergoes the inner drive from behind the veil. It is the inner psychic being in you that is the bhakta, the seeker after the union and the Ananda, and what is impossible for the outer nature left to itself becomes perfectly possible when the barrier is down and the inner self in the front. For the moment this comes strongly to the front or draws the consciousness powerfully into itself, peace, ecstasy, freedom, wideness, the opening to light and a higher knowledge begin to become natural, spontaneous, often immediate in their emergence.

Once the barrier breaks by the one movement or the other, you begin to find that all the processes and movements necessary to the Yoga are within your reach and not as it seems in the outer mind difficult or impossible. The inmost psychic self in you has already in it the Yогин and the bhakta and if it can fully emerge and take the lead, the spiritual turn of your outer life is predestined and inevitable. In the initially successful sadhak it has already built a deep inner life, Yogic and spiritual, which is veiled only because of some strong outward turn the education and past activities have given to the thinking mind and lower

vital parts. It is precisely to correct this outward orientation and take away the veil that he has to practise more strenuously the Yoga. Once the inner being has manifested strongly whether by the inward-going or the outward-coming movement, it is bound to renew its pressure, to clear the passage and finally come by its kingdom. A beginning of this kind is the indication of what is to happen on a greater scale hereafter.

The Movement Inward

The movement inward is all to the good — for going inward if one goes far enough brings one to the psychic. The more peace there is the better; even if it is only a little at first, that is so much gained. If the inward-drawing movement is held to, it will grow and the power to reject anger and other such movements will increase. It is this peace and inward psychic movement in you that we shall try for till it is done.

*

It is rather a pity that the fear came in and spoiled the inward movement — for this inward movement is exceedingly important for the sadhana. The increasing frequency and completeness of the psychic consciousness in you coming in and replacing the ordinary one has hitherto been the most hopeful sign of progress — but the establishment of an inward movement would be a still greater thing; for its natural result would be to liberate the soul within and to give you a stand in the inner being so that you would be able to regard any fluctuations in the outer consciousness without being subjugated by them and without any interruption of the inner poise and freedom. But the movement is bound to come back and fulfil itself. It is very good that the help comes when you call and that you can shake yourself free — it is another sign of the psychic growth.

*

It takes time of course to make the transition from one state of consciousness to another. The depth of feeling will come more

and more as your consciousness draws back from the claim of external things and goes deeper in into the heart region seeing and feeling from there with the psychic to prompt and enlighten it. Faith also will increase with that movement—for it is the outer intellect that is infirm or deficient in faith, the inner being in the heart has it always.

*

That is quite natural [*an inward movement during the afternoon nap*]. The usual movement does not take place, but there is still a pressure habitual at the time under which the consciousness goes inside not into sleep but into some kind of samadhi in which a working takes place in the inner consciousness. As yet you have not developed the power of being conscious in this state nor the power of remembering what took place.

*

It was probably not so much a sleep as a going inward under the pressure of the influence at the Pranam. In any case it was not a dream but an experience, an ascent into one of the higher ranges of consciousness above the mind—all of which have this character of vastness and peace everywhere.

*

X's experiences are those which usually attend the withdrawal from the outer consciousness into an inner plane of experience. The feeling of coldness of the body in the first is one of the signs—like the immobility and stiffness of Y's experience—that the consciousness is withdrawing from the outer or physical sheath and retiring inside. The crystallisation was the form in which he felt the organisation of an inner consciousness which could receive at once firmly and freely from above. The crystals at once indicate organised formation and a firm transparency in which the greater vision and experience descending from the higher planes could be clearly reflected.

As for the other experience, his rejection of the waking consciousness evidently had the result of throwing him into an

inner awareness in which he began to have contact with the supraphysical planes. What was meant by the sea of red colour and stars depends on the character of the red colour. If it was crimson, what he saw was the sea of the physical consciousness and physical life as it is represented to the inner symbolic vision; if it was purple red, then it was the sea of the vital consciousness and the vital life-force. Perhaps, if he had not stopped his sense of the Mother's presence, it would have been better,—he should rather, if he can, take it with him into the inner planes, then he would have had no occasion to fear.

In any case, if he wants to go into the inner consciousness and move in the inner planes — which will inevitably happen if he shuts off the waking consciousness in his meditation — he must cast away fear. Probably he expected to get the silence or the touch of the divine consciousness by following out the suggestion of the Gita. But the silence or the touch of the divine consciousness can be equally and for some more easily got in the waking meditation through the Mother's presence and the descent from above. The inward movement, however, is probably unavoidable and he should try to understand and, not shrinking or afraid, to go to it with the same confidence and faith in the Mother as he has in the waking meditation. His dreams are of course experiences on the inner (vital) plane.

P.S. The dream about the Mahadeva image may mean that someone (not of this world, of course) wanted to mislead him and make him confuse some narrower traditional form of the past with the greater living Truth that he is seeking.

*

The difficulty indicated by you in your last (long) letter indicates that you enter into the inner being and begin to have experiences there, but there is a difficulty in organising them or seeing them coherently. The difficulty is because the inner mind is not yet sufficiently habituated to act and see the inside things and therefore the ordinary outer mind interferes and tries to arrange them; but the outer mind is unable to see the meaning of inner things. When the outer mind is left outside altogether,

the things inside begin to be seen vividly and clearly, but the inner mind not being active, either their coherence is not seen or the consciousness lingers in the confused experiences of the lower vital plane and does not get through to the deeper, more coherent and significant experiences. A development of the inner consciousness is needed — when that development takes place, then all will become more clear and coherent. This development will take place if, without getting disturbed, you quietly aspire and go on calling the Mother's Force to do what is needed.

Your call will always reach the Mother. If you remain quiet and confident, you will in time become aware of the answer. The more the mind becomes quiet, the clearer will it become to you and you will feel her working. From time to time you can write of your experiences; wherever an answer is needed, I will answer.

The Inner Consciousness and the Body

It is the inner consciousness that you felt separated from the body, liberated from the identification with the body, and yet in touch with all the material surroundings. It is a very helpful experience — indispensable for the Yoga.

*

It is that the consciousness is detaching itself from the body.¹ Usually in men it is identified with the body and bound to it — in Yoga it detaches itself and becomes free. The body is no longer felt as oneself, but as something not oneself, something that one carries with oneself or else as an instrument which one uses for certain purposes.

*

If you went inside and lost consciousness of the outer world, it would be called a kind of samadhi — but this experience can

¹ *The correspondent wrote that sometimes he felt raindrops or sunlight falling on his body as if they were touching something other than himself; at other times he felt very light, as if he had no body at all. — Ed.*

be got in the waking state also. It is a liberation from body consciousness and an awakening into the spiritual wideness. At first it is usually felt as a void of all other things but consciousness alone or existence alone.

*

The feeling [*in meditation*] of having no head usually means that the mental consciousness is no longer imprisoned in the head at the time — but silent and extended.

A Transitional State of Inwardness

The condition which you feel is one which is very well known in sadhana. It is a sort of passage or transition, a state of inwardness which is growing but not yet completed — at that time to speak or throw oneself outward is painful. What is necessary is to be very quiet and remain within oneself all the time until the movement is completed; one should not speak or only a little and in a low quiet way nor concentrate the mind on outward things. You should also not mind what people say or question; although they are practising sadhana, they know nothing about these conditions and if one becomes quiet or withdrawn they think one must be sad or ill. The Mother did not find you at all like that, sad or ill; it is simply a phase or temporary state in the sadhana that she has experience of and knows very well.

*

The condition [*of inwardness*] lasts often for a number of days, sometimes many, until something definite begins. Remain confident and quiet.

The Growth of the Inner Being and the Inner Consciousness

What you feel as the new life is the growth of the inner being in you; the inner being is the true being and as it grows the whole consciousness begins to change. This feeling and your new attitude towards people are signs of the change. The seeing

of inner things also usually comes with this growth of the inner being and consciousness; it is an inner vision which awakes in most sadhaks when they enter this stage.

It is also a characteristic of this inner consciousness that even when it is active, there is felt behind the action or containing it a complete quietude or silence. The more one concentrates, the more this quietude and silence increases. That is why there seems to be all quiet within even though all sorts of things may be taking place within.

It is also quite usual that what takes place in the inner consciousness should not express itself at present in the outer physical. It at first creates changes inside, but takes possession of the outer instruments only afterwards.

*

The things you feel are due to the fact that the consciousness goes inside, so physical things are felt as if they were at a distance. The same phenomenon can happen when one goes into another plane of consciousness and sees physical things from there. But it is probably the first that is happening with you. When one goes quite inside, then physical things disappear,—when some connection is kept, then they become distant. But this is a transitory change. Afterwards you will be able to have the two consciousnesses together, be in your psychic in one part of yourself with all the experience and activities of the psychic being and nature and yet with your surface self fully awake and active in physical things with the psychic support and influence behind this outer action.

*

It is a very good sign that when the thoughts and the attempt at disturbance come there is something that remains calm and cool — for that, like the psychic reply from within, shows that the inner consciousness is fixed or fixing itself in part of the being. This is a well-recognised stage of the inner change in sadhana. Equally good is the emerging of the self-existent Ananda from within not dependent on outward things. It is a fact that this

inner gladness and happiness is something peaceful and happy at once—it is not an excited movement like the vital outward pleasure, though it can be more ardent and intense. Another good result is the fading out of the feeling that “the work is mine” and the power to do it with the outward consciousness not engaging the inner being.

The sense of release as if from jail always accompanies the emergence of the psychic being or the realisation of the self above. It is therefore spoken of as a liberation, *mukti*. It is a release into peace, happiness, the soul’s freedom not tied down by the thousand ties and cares of the outward ignorant existence.

It was of course the Mother’s face you saw in your vision, but probably in one of her supraphysical, not her physical form and face—that is also indicated by the great light that came from the form and rendered it invisible.

*

I am glad to hear of the development you speak of in your dealing with others. It is a power proper to the Yoga consciousness that is developing in you, because the Mother’s force is at work and is developing the inner consciousness. For it is one of the powers of this inner consciousness to bring about what it sees to be the right thing by simply communicating in entire silence to the consciousness of another. That is the true way of acting—through the power of the inner consciousness, its knowledge, vision and will. The other thing, the coming of what you want to see on the street, is another form of the same action of the inner conscious force. As for the anger it is evidently in process of control and elimination and its recurrences cannot fail to disappear after a time as the new consciousness increases.

Living Within

There is an inner being in man of which he is not usually conscious; he lives in a superficial consciousness which he calls himself and which is normally concerned with outer things; one is aware of the inner being either not at all or only as something

behind from which feelings, ideas, impulses, imperatives etc. come occasionally into the outer. When one ceases to be mainly concerned with outer and surface things one can go more inside nearer to this inner being and become aware of things other than the ego and the outer nature. One can become aware of the inner being and live in it and get detached from the hold of outer things, dealing with them from an inner consciousness (felt as separate from the outer consciousness) according to an inner truth of the soul and spirit and no longer according to the demands of the outer Nature.

*

If one lives within, then it is the inner consciousness that one depends on, not the outer. The inner consciousness can then always go on independent of the outer state to which it gives attention only when it chooses.

*

It is good. Fasten on the true thing, the concentration in the inner being and the inner life. All these outer things are of minor importance and it is only when the inner life is well established that the difficulties with which they are hampered can get their true solution. That you have seen several times when you went inside. To be too much occupied in mind with the outer difficulties keeps it externalised. Living inwardly you will find the Mother close to you and realise her will and her action.

*

Do not allow outward events to disturb you or be the cause of suggestions. It is as with the words of people and the suggestions they raise which disturb uselessly the consciousness. Both should be rejected. Live in the inner consciousness which can remain in its own calm and light whatever happens outside.

*

To remain within, above and untouched, full of the inner consciousness and the inner experience,—listening, when need be,

to X or another with the surface consciousness, but with even that undisturbed, not either pulled outwards or invaded, that is the perfect condition for the sadhana.

*

You must gather yourself within more firmly. If you disperse yourself constantly, go out of the inner circle, you will constantly move about in the pettinesses of the ordinary outer nature and under the influences to which it is open. Learn to live within, to act always from within, from constant inner communion with the Mother. It may be difficult at first to do it always and completely, but it can be done if one sticks to it—and it is at that price, by learning to do that that one can have the siddhi in the Yoga.

*

It is a very serious difficulty in one's Yoga—the absence of a central will always superior to the waves of the Prakriti forces, always in touch with the Mother, imposing its central aim and aspiration on the nature. That is because you have not yet learned to live in your central being; you have been accustomed to run with every wave of Force, no matter of what kind, that rushed upon you and to identify yourself with it for the time being. It is one of the things that has to be unlearned; you must find your central being with the psychic as its basis and live in it.

*

To be aware of one's central consciousness and to know the action of the forces is the first definite step towards self-mastery.

*

In the things of the subtle kind having to do with the working of consciousness in the sadhana, one has to learn to feel and observe and see with the inner consciousness and to decide by the intuition with a plastic look on things which does not make set definitions and rules as one has to do in outward life.

*

Yes. When one is in the right consciousness, then there is the right movement, the right happiness, everything in harmony with the Truth.

When there is the wrong consciousness, there is demand, dissatisfaction, doubt, all kinds of disharmony.

*

It [*calmness*] is only the proper condition for receptivity. Naturally, it is the proper thing to do if you want to be receptive or become conscious of inner things. So long as the mind is jumping about or rushing out to outside things, it is not possible to be inward, collected, conscious within.

*

Obviously to live in the silent Brahman, the best way is to live within where one can have the silence and resist all outward pulls. As much avoidance of outer pulls—contact does not matter, if there is no pull outward—as will help that, can be very helpful. It is only an entire seclusion that for occult rather than mental reasons is not altogether desirable unless one has already a great inner strength and poise.

Living Within and the External Being

It is the past habit of the vital that makes you repeatedly go out into the external part; you must persist and establish the opposite habit of living in your inner being which is your true being and of looking at everything from there. It is from there that you get the true thought, the true vision and understanding of things and of your own self and nature.

*

You must have somehow externalised yourself too much. It is only by living in one's inner consciousness and doing everything from there that the right psychic condition can be kept. Otherwise it goes inside and the external covers it up. It is not lost, but hidden—one must go inside again to recover it.

*

When one comes out of the inner condition, one gets externalised in the outer consciousness. It is difficult for the outer nature to remain always within, its nature is to pull outward. But when this happens, one must learn to look quietly at what is happening, observe what the outer nature does but not identify with it, not feel that it is oneself that is doing that, but only something that one is observing, while one's real self is that which observes and that which goes within. If one can do that, then there is no disturbance and it is easier to go back again inward.

*

As for the activity going on, it is so with everybody. What has to be done, is not to be upset by it, but to learn to live inside where one always feels the force — or even if one does not feel because the consciousness is covered up, it is still there and after a time dispels the covering and is visible again. Outside the imperfect activities will go on till the whole being is changed and that cannot be done in a day.

Your mistake is to get upset because the exterior being is still there with its imperfections. What you ought to do is not to mind too much, to aspire for changing it but not get upset, to have confidence that it will change in time and meanwhile to stand back from it, to live in the part of you that is open to the force and to regard the rest as you would a cut that has to be cleaned or anything else belonging to you but external.

*

The large inner mind and the true vital having shown themselves are bound to get the mastery; but the old lower nature, especially the vital part of it, is bound to struggle for reaffirming its hold on the consciousness. To remain very firm and repel its attacks till they lose their strength, is necessary.

*

The difficulty is that you attach so much importance to things that are of quite a small value. You behave as if to have or have not a table is something of supreme importance and worry

and excite yourself so much about the rights and wrongs of the matter that you allow it to upset your whole peace of mind and make you fall from the true condition. These things are small and relative—you may have a new table or you may not have a new table, neither way is of any very great importance and it makes no difference to the Divine Purpose in you. The one thing important is to increase calm and peace and the descent of the Divine Force, to grow in equality and inward light and consciousness. Outward things have to be done with a great quiet, doing whatever is necessary but not exciting or upsetting yourself about anything. It is only so that you can advance steadily and quickly. When you feel the Mother's Force about you, the peace closely round you that is the one thing of importance—these small outward things can be settled in a hundred different ways, it does not really matter.

*

The entire dependence on the inner realisation and not on outward things for their own sake and the seeking of the Divine for the sake of the Divine and without any tinge of ego motive is indeed the most difficult thing for the mind even of the Sadhak to learn; but it is the essence of the highest realisation and the condition of a perfect self-finding.

*

When you come to the Divine, lean inwardly on the Divine and do not let other things affect you.

Acting from Within on the Outer Being

Detach yourself from the outer being; live in the inner; let the Force work from the inner being—it will change the outer being.

*

It is on the surface that the transformation is done. One comes up to the surface with what one has gained in the depths, to

change it. It may be you need to go in again and find it difficult to make the movement back quickly. When the whole being becomes plastic you will be able to make whatever movement is needed more quickly.

*

Yes, that is right. Relying on outer methods mainly never succeeds very well. It is only when there is the inner poise that the outer movement is really effective — and then it comes of itself.

*

The difference [*in learning something*] is when a thing is done with the inner mind and when it is done only with the outer brain. What you feel is the inner mind taking it up — then it becomes part of the consciousness and things are really learned — the working of the outer mind is always difficult and superficial.

It is evident that the inner being in you is beginning to come more and more forward. As it does so, these outer difficulties will be more and more pushed out and the consciousness will keep the peace and force at first in the greater part of it, afterwards in the whole.

*

It is a wall of consciousness that one has to build [*against undesirable things*]. Consciousness is not something abstract, it is like existence itself or ananda or mind or prana, something very concrete. If one becomes aware of the inner consciousness one can do all sorts of things with it, send it out as a stream of force, erect a circle or wall of consciousness around oneself, direct an idea so that it shall enter somebody's head in America etc. etc.

*

It is simply that you became conscious of the inner being and the inner world and rose up to a higher plane of being where the outer difficulties do not exist. The object of Yoga is to establish the inner consciousness and the higher being in you and by their strength change the outer existence.

The Double Consciousness

The condition you describe in your work shows that the inner being is awake and that there is now the double consciousness. It is the inner being which has the inner happiness, the calm and quiet, the silence free from any ripple of thought, the inwardly silent repetition of the name. The automatic repetition of the mantra is part of the same phenomenon—that is what ought to happen to the mantra, it must become a conscious but spontaneous thing repeating itself in the very substance of the consciousness itself, no longer needing any effort of the mind. All these doubts and questionings of the mind are useless. What has to happen is that this inner consciousness should be always there not troubled by any disturbance with the constant silence, inner happiness, calm quietude, etc., while the outer consciousness does what is necessary in the way of work etc. or, what is better, has that done through it—it is the latter experience that you have some days as someone pushing the work with so much continuous force without your feeling tired.

If you feel more quiet and the surrender feels more intense, then that is a good, not a bad condition—and if it makes the mind an empty room receiving the light, so much the better. Experiences and descents are very good for preparation, but change of the consciousness is the thing wanted—it is the proof that the experiences and descents have had an effect. Descents of peace are good, but an increasingly stable quietude and silence of the mind is something more valuable. When that is there then other things can come—usually one at a time, light or strength and force or knowledge or ananda. It is not necessary to go on for ever having always the same preparatory experiences—a time comes when the consciousness begins to take a new poise and another state.

The Inner Being and Calmness, Silence, Peace

The calmness you feel is that of the inner being which remains the same whatever the surface experience. But the use to be made

of these things is to liberate oneself from the desires and mental or vital sanskaras of the past so that one may be free to reach that greater Truth consciousness in which there is no need of an Adesh, for all one's action there is the direct conscious movement of the self-knowing Truth and the Mother herself is the doer.

*

The absence of thought is quite the right thing — for the true inner consciousness is a silent consciousness which has not to think out things, but gets the right perception, understanding and knowledge in a spontaneous way from within and speaks or acts according to that. It is the outer consciousness which has to depend on outside things and to think about them because it has not this spontaneous guidance. When one is fixed in this inner consciousness, then one can indeed go back to the old action by an effort of will, but it is no longer a natural movement and, if long maintained, becomes fatiguing. As for the dreams, that is different. Dreams about old bygone things come up from the subconscious which retains the old impressions and the seeds of the old movements and habits long after the waking consciousness has dropped them. Abandoned by the waking consciousness, they still come up in dreams; for in sleep the outer physical consciousness goes down into the subconscious or towards it and many dreams come up from there.

The silence in which all is quiet and one remains as a witness while something in the consciousness spontaneously calls down the higher things is the complete silence which comes when the full force of the higher consciousness is upon mind and vital and body.

*

All experiences come in the silence² but they do not come all pell-mell in a crowd at the beginning. The inner silence and peace have first to be established.

*

² The correspondent wrote that although he was sometimes able to achieve silence of mind, experiences were not coming in the silence. — Ed.

The consciousness from which these experiences come [*such as the division of the mind into an active surface mind and a silent inner mind*] is always there pressing to bring them in. The reason why they don't come in freely or stay is the activity of the mind and vital always rushing about, thinking this, wanting that, trying to perform mountaineering feats on all the hillocks of the lower nature instead of nourishing a strong and simple aspiration and opening to the higher consciousness that it may come in and do its own work. Rasa of poetry, painting or physical work is not the thing to go after. What gives the interest in Yoga is the rasa of the Divine and of the divine consciousness which means the rasa of Peace, of Silence, of inner Light and Bliss, of growing inner Knowledge, of increasing inner Power, of the Divine Love, of all the infinite fields of experience that open to one with the opening of the inner consciousness. The true rasa of poetry, painting or any other activity is truly found when these activities are part of the working of the Divine Force in you and you feel it as that and you feel in it the joy of that working.

This condition you had of the inner being and its silence, separated from the surface consciousness and its little restless workings, is the first liberation, the liberation of Purusha from Prakriti, and it is the fundamental experience. The day when you can keep it, you can know that the Yogic consciousness has been founded in you. This time it has increased in intensity, but it must also increase in duration.

These things do not "drop"—what you have felt was there in you all the time, but you did not feel it because you were living on the surface altogether and the surface is all crowd and clamour. But in all men there is this silent Purusha, base of the true mental being, the true vital being, the true physical being. It was by your prayer and aspiration that the thing came, to show you in what direction you must travel in order to have the true rasa of things, for it is only when one is liberated that one can get the real rasa. For after this liberation come others and among them the liberation and Ananda in action as well as in the static inner silence.

I don't think it is at all owing to the suggestion from what I wrote in the letter that you got the experience [*of a deep spiritual peace*]. The fundamental reason of these things does not belong to the surface, it is in the depths — or on the heights, at any rate, in the inner being behind the veil of the frontal consciousness. The actual occasional cause of the spiritual experience, — the match that sets the fire, so to say, — may be something very slight and looking accidental on the surface, a chance word or happening or something else quite fortuitous in its appearance. The person also through whom it comes may seem very much like a fortuitous instrument. It is true that this is only in appearance; for things slight and seemingly fortuitous have a reason for happening as they do, but that reason too is not on the surface.

As for the experience itself it takes up the movement which had started in you a long time ago and was interrupted by the vital upheaval that brought you so much trouble and struggle. Only, there has been since a widening of the consciousness and a step forward which made this form of the experience possible. At that time you had not much appreciation for calm and peace — you hankered only after bhakti and Ananda. But calm, peace, shanti are the necessary basis for any establishment of other things. Otherwise there is no solid foundation in the consciousness; if there is only unrest and movement, bhakti, Ananda and everything else can only come and go in starts and fits and find no ground to live on. It must, however, be not a mere mental quiet, but the deep spiritual peace of the shantimaya Shiva. It was this that touched you (descending through the head) in this experience. For the rest it is a resumption of the piercing of the veil, the beginning of the power of inner experience as opposed to the lesser experiences of the surface, the opening of the inner being, which is necessary for bringing the Yogic consciousness. A certain amount of vital purification has taken place which made the resumption of this kind of experience possible.

You certainly need not be afraid of going into unconsciousness, for it is not unconsciousness that you would go into, but simply the *inner* consciousness, — that going quite inward which

is the result of intense *dhyāna* and the beginning of a certain kind of *samādhi*.

The Inner Being and the Inmost or Psychic Being

There is an inner being and an inmost being which we call the psychic. When one meditates, one tries to go into the inner being. If one does it, then one feels very well that one has gone inside. What can be realised in meditation can also become the ordinary consciousness in which one lives. Then one feels what is now the ordinary consciousness to be something quite external and on the surface, not one's real self.

*

The inner being is composed of the inner mental, the inner vital, the inner physical. The psychic is the inmost—supporting all the others. Usually it is in the inner mental that this separation first happens and it is the inner mental Purusha who remains silent observing the Prakriti as separate from himself. But it may also be the inner vital Purusha or inner physical or else without location simply the whole Purusha consciousness separate from the whole Prakriti. Sometimes it is felt above the head—but then it is usually spoken of as the Atman and the realisation is that of the silent Self.

*

It is not possible to distinguish the psychic being at first. What has to be done is to grow conscious of an inner being which is separate from the external personality and nature—a consciousness or Purusha calm and detached from the outer action of the Prakriti.

*

The reason why she remembers nothing when she comes out of her meditation is that the experience is taking place in the inner being and the outer consciousness is not ready to receive it. Formerly her sadhana was mainly on the vital plane which is

often the first to open and the connection of that plane with the body consciousness is easy to establish because they are nearer to each other. Even then however her body was suffering because of attacks from the hostile elements in the vital plane. Now the sadhana seems to have gone inward into the psychic being. This is a great advance and she need not mind the want of connection with the most external consciousness at present. The work goes on all the same and it is probably necessary that it should be so just now. Afterwards, if she keeps steadily to the right attitude, it will descend into the outer consciousness.

Chapter Two

Inner Detachment and the Witness Attitude

Inner Detachment

It [*the individual consciousness*] is not by its nature detached from the mental and other activities. It can be detached, it can be involved. In the human consciousness it is as a rule always involved, but it has developed the power of detaching itself—a thing which the lower creation seems unable to do. As the consciousness develops, this power of detachment also develops.

*

Detachment means standing back with part of the consciousness and observing what is being done without being involved in it. There is no “how” to that; you do it or try it until it succeeds.

*

That sense of separate being and concentration behind the frontal consciousness is very good. It helps to liberate the inner being and make it stand back from the movements of the outer nature.

*

That is the condition of progress,—if, whenever there is an attempt to cloud the consciousness, you can stand back, remain quiet and prevent the clouding. Do that always and the progress is sure.

*

All that you have written here is perfectly correct. It is so, by standing back from these forces [*in the surrounding world*], neither attracted nor disturbed by them, that one gets freedom,

perceives their falsity or imperfection and is able to rise above and overcome them. The consciousness that comes forward may be either the psychic or the spiritualised mind — it is probably the former.

*

Well, but it [*the need for detachment*] is not individual to you. Everyone has to do that with his difficulties. Detach means that the Witness in oneself has to stand back and refuse to look on the movement as his own (the soul's own) and look on it as a habit of past nature or an invasion of general Nature. Then to deal with it as such. It may seem difficult, but it comes perfectly well by trying persistently.

*

One must get the power to quiet the mental and vital, if not at first at all times, yet whenever one wills — for it is the mind and vital that cover up the psychic being as well as the self (Atman) and to get at either one must get in through their veil; but if they are always active and you are always identified with their activities, the veil will always be there. It is also possible to detach yourself and look at these activities as if they were not your own but a mechanical action of Nature which you observe as a disinterested witness. One can then become aware of an inner being which is separate, calm and uninvolved in Nature. This may be the inner mental or vital Purusha and not the psychic, but to get at the consciousness of the inner *manomaya* and *prāṇamaya* Purusha is always a step towards the unveiling of the psychic being.

*

The condition in which all movements become superficial and empty with no connection with the soul is a stage in the withdrawal from the surface consciousness to the inner consciousness. When one goes into the inner consciousness, it is felt as a calm, pure existence without any movement, but eternally tranquil, unmoved and separate from the outer nature. This

comes as a result of detaching oneself from the movements, standing back from them and is a very important movement of the sadhana. The first result of it is an entire quietude, but afterwards that quietude begins (without the quietude ceasing) to fill with the psychic and other inner movements which create a true inner and spiritual life behind the outer life and nature. It is then easier to govern and change the latter.

At present there are fluctuations in your consciousness because this inner state is not yet fully developed and established. When it is, there will still be fluctuations in the outer consciousness, but the inner quiet, force, love etc. will be constant and the superficial fluctuations will be watched by the inner being without its being shaken or troubled, until they are removed by the complete outer change.

As for X, it is best to let it pass and try to remain steady within and detached; one cannot separate from all contacts; one must become more and more superior to their customary reactions.

*

Detachment is the beginning of mastery, but for complete mastery there should be no reactions at all. When there is something within undisturbed by the reactions that means the inner being is free and master of itself, but it is not yet master of the whole nature. When it is master, it allows no wrong reactions—if any come they are at once repelled and shaken off, and finally none come at all.

*

The experience you have of a division in the being with the inner void and indifferent, *udāśīna*,—not sorrowful, but neutral and indifferent,—is an experience which many pass through and is highly valued by the Sannyasis. For us it is a passage only to something larger and more positive. In it the old small human feelings fall away and a sort of calm neutral void is made for a higher nature to manifest. It must be fulfilled and replaced by a sense of large silence and freedom into which the Mother's

consciousness can flow from above.

*

In the ordinary consciousness one takes a personal interest in what is done, feels joy or feels sorrow. When one does sadhana, a condition may come in which the consciousness draws back from these reactions of joy and sorrow and does work and action impersonally as a thing that ought or has to be done but without desire or reactions. The Yogis value this condition of complete detachment very highly. In our Yoga it is a passage only, if it comes, through which one goes from the ordinary consciousness to a deeper one in which one acts out of a deep peace and union with the Divine or else of a self-existent Ananda not depending on anything but the presence of the Divine, in which all works are done not out of personal interest or satisfaction but for the sake of the Divine.

The Witness Attitude

A man with a very developed introspective mind often identifies himself with the witness part of his mind and observes his own thoughts and studies their nature. That is a beginning which makes it easy for the full detachment to come. For others it is less easy, but it can be done by all.

*

There is a stage in the sadhana in which the inner being begins to awake. Often the first result is the condition made up of the following elements:

- (1) A sort of witness attitude, in which the inner consciousness looks at all that happens as a spectator or observer, observing things but taking no active interest or pleasure in them.
- (2) A state of neutral equanimity in which there is neither joy nor sorrow, only quietude.
- (3) A sense of being something separate from all that happens, observing it but not part of it.

(4) An absence of attachment to things, people or events.

It seems as if this condition were trying to come in you; but it is still imperfect. For instance in this condition (1) there should be no disgust or impatience or anger when people talk, only indifference and an inner peace and silence. Also (2) there should not be a mere neutral quiet and indifference, but a positive sense of calm, detachment and peace. Again (3) there should be no going out of the body so that you do not know what is happening or what you are doing. There may be a sense of not being the body but something else,—that is good; but there should be a perfect awareness of all that is going on in or around you.

Moreover this condition even when it is perfect is only a transitional stage—it is intended to bring a certain state of freedom and liberation. But in that peace there must come the feeling of the Divine Presence, the sense of the Mother's power working in you, the joy or Ananda.

If you can concentrate in the heart as well as in the head, then these things can more easily come.

*

The mind can become quiet only when you detach yourself from it and see the thoughts as things that pass. Then you don't think yourself but see thoughts passing through your mind. Afterwards you can stop attending to these passers-by and concentrate on the Mother.

Thoughts and feelings are passing from one human being to another all the time, only people don't know or observe it. Especially if people live together the same life, as in the Asram, a sort of atmosphere is formed in which the same thoughts and feelings are moving about and constantly passing from one to another.

You have to become conscious—that is to say, there must be something in you which is not carried away by thoughts and feelings, but looks at them and observes how they work and how they affect you. The part that observes and knows is called the Witness *sākṣī* in man. It is always possible to develop this in oneself.

It is not by thinking and reading that consciousness comes. There are many who read and think a great deal but are not conscious, have not the witness developed in them. There are others who work all day like X, yet are very strongly conscious. When one has the power of stopping thinking altogether and only looking, then the Witness becomes very strong and conscious. This consciousness can come by practice, but it can also come by turning to the Mother and thinking of her always and offering to her everything. The being opens, the Mother's force begins to work and one becomes more and more conscious.

*

It is indeed a great thing that you can keep this calm and this unaffected witness attitude. It is always the sign of a strong inner foundation in the consciousness and that even the physical being shares in this result of the realisation.

*

As for the "spectator" and the coils of the dragon, it is the Chino-Japanese image for the world-force extending itself in the course of the universe and this expresses the attitude of the Witness seeing it all and observing in its unfolding the unrolling of the play of the Divine, Lila. It is this attitude that gives the greatest calm, peace, samata in face of the riddle of the cosmic workings. It is not meant that action and movement are not accepted but they are accepted as the Divine Working which is leading to ends which the mind may not always see at once, but the soul divines through all the supreme purpose and the hidden guidance.

Of course there is afterwards an experience in which the two sides of the Divine Whole, the Witness and the Player, blend together; but this poise of the spectator comes first and leads to that fuller experience. It gives the balance, the calm, the increasing understanding of soul and life and their deeper significances without which the full supramental experience cannot come.

The Witness Purusha or Witness Consciousness

By itself the Purusha is impersonal, but by mixing itself with the movements of Prakriti it makes for itself a surface ego or personality. When it appears in its own separate nature then it is seen to be detached and observing.

*

The consciousness you speak of would be described in the Gita as the witness Purusha. The Purusha or basic consciousness is the true being or at least, on whatever plane it manifests, represents the true being. But in the ordinary nature of man it is covered up by the ego and the ignorant play of the Prakriti and remains veiled behind as the unseen Witness supporting the play of the Ignorance. When it emerges, you feel it as a consciousness behind, calm, central, unidentified with the play which depends upon it. It may be covered over, but it is always there. The emergence of the Purusha is the beginning of liberation. But it can also become slowly the Master—slowly because the whole habit of the ego and the play of the lower forces (which also you describe correctly here) is against that. Still it can dictate what higher play is to replace the lower movement and then there is the process of that replacement, the higher coming, the lower struggling to remain and push away the higher movement. You say rightly that the offering to the Divine shortens the whole thing and is more effective, but usually it cannot be done completely at once owing to the past habit and the two methods continue together until the complete surrender is possible.

*

The attitude of the witness consciousness within—I do not think it necessarily involves an external seclusion, though one may do that also—is a very necessary stage in the progress. It helps the liberation from the lower prakriti—not getting involved in the ordinary nature movements; it helps the establishment of a perfect calm and peace within, for there is then one part of the being which remains detached and sees without

being disturbed the perturbations of the surface; it helps also the ascent into the higher consciousness and the descent of the higher consciousness, for it is through this calm, detached and liberated inner being that the ascent and descent can easily be done. Also, to have the same witness look on the movements of Prakriti in others, seeing, understanding but not perturbed by them in any way is a very great help towards both the liberation and the universalisation of the being. I could not therefore possibly object to this movement in a sadhak.

As for the surrender it is not inconsistent with the witness attitude. On the contrary by liberating from the ordinary Prakriti, it makes easier the surrender to the higher or divine Power. Very often when this witness attitude has not been taken but there is a successful calling in of the Force to act in one, one of the first things the Force does is to establish the witness attitude so as to be able to act with less interference or immixture from the movements of the lower Prakriti.

There remains the question of the avoidance of contact with others and there there is some difficulty or incertitude. Part of your nature has a strong turn towards contact with others, action on others, interchange, almost a need of it. This brings about some fluctuation between the turn to an inner isolation and the turn towards contact and action. There is the same double and fluctuating movement in others here like X. In such cases I generally do not stress upon either tendency but leave the consciousness to find its own poise, because I have seen that to press too much on the isolation tendency when the nature is not mainly contemplative does not succeed very well — unless of course the sadhak himself gets a strong and fixed determination that way. This may be the cause of what you felt. But the question between witness attitude and surrender does not arise, for the reason I have explained — one can very well aid or lead to the other as ours is a Yoga which joins these things together and does not keep them always separate.

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It is by a constant repetition and development of the experience

[*that the witness consciousness can become constant*]. But the witness being does not always remain as a point. It becomes something extended supporting the rest.

The Purusha and Change of the Prakriti

That is the old Vedantic idea — to be free and detached within and leave the Prakriti to itself. When you die, the Purusha will go to glory and the Prakriti drop off — perhaps into Hell. This theory is a source of any amount of self-deception and wilful self-indulgence.

*

The witness attitude is not meant as a convenient means for disowning the responsibility of one's defects and thereby refusing to mend them. It is meant for self-knowledge and, in our Yoga, as a convenient station (detached and uninvolved, therefore not subject to Prakriti) from which one can act on the wrong movements by refusal of assent and by substituting for them the action of the true consciousness from within or above.

*

You can certainly go on developing the consciousness of the Witness Purusha above, but if it is only a witness and the lower Prakriti is allowed to have its own way, there would be no reason why it [*an unquiet and disturbed condition*] should ever stop. Many take that attitude — that the Purusha has to liberate itself by standing apart, and the Prakriti can be allowed to go on till the end of the life doing its own business, — it is *prārabdha karma*; when the body falls away, the Prakriti will drop also and the Purusha go off into the featureless Brahman! This is a comfortable theory, but of more than doubtful truth; I don't think liberation is so simple and facile a matter as that. In any case, the transformation which is the object of our Yoga would not take place.

The Purusha above is not only a Witness, he is the giver (or withholder) of the sanction; if he persistently refuses the sanction

to a movement of Prakriti, keeping himself detached, then, even if it goes on for a time by its past momentum, it usually loses its hold after a time, becomes more feeble, less persistent, less concrete and in the end fades away. If you take the Purusha consciousness, it should be not only as the Witness but as the Anumanta, refusing sanction to the disturbing movements, sanctioning only peace, calm, purity and whatever else is part of the divine nature. This refusal of sanction need not mean a struggle with the lower Prakriti; it should be a quiet, persistent, detached refusal leaving unsupported, unassented to, without meaning or justification the contrary action of the nature.

Chapter Three

Inner Experiences in the State of Samadhi

Samadhi or Trance

The experience you had is of course the going inside of the consciousness which is usually called trance or *samādhi*. The most important part of it however is the silence of the mind and vital which is fully extended to the body also. To get the capacity of this silence and peace is a most important step in the sadhana. It comes at first in meditation and may throw the consciousness inward in trance, but it has to come afterwards in the waking state and establish itself as a permanent basis for all the life and action. It is the condition for the realisation of the Self and the spiritual transformation of the nature.

*

The experience you relate, the stillness, the emptiness of mind and vital and cessation of thoughts and other movements, was the coming of the state called “samadhi” in which the consciousness goes inside in a deep stillness and silence. This condition is favourable to inner experience, realisation, the vision of the unseen truth of things, though one can get these in the waking condition also. It is not sleep but the state in which one feels conscious within, no longer outside.

*

It [*the experience of samadhi*] is not indispensable at this stage; but if it comes of itself, it can be allowed to develop. But experience in the waking state is more important for this Yoga. Samadhi is a help for reaching the inner depths of the consciousness. One is able to go more easily by it inward below the surface being, to get into direct contact with other supraphysical

planes of experience, to pass into other worlds and return, to contact happenings distant in space and time, to see what is in the supraconscious and to enter into what is supraconscious to our mental status.

*

What she speaks of as losing the body consciousness is probably a tendency of the consciousness to go inside — into Samadhi of some kind. Samadhi means a state in which one is not awake and aware of outward things, but also one is not asleep, one is conscious inwardly with another than the waking consciousness. If this comes, it is not to be avoided, as Yogic realisation can take place in this condition as well as in the waking state.

*

It is a state of inner immobile silence that one gets in Samadhi when the outer mind is stilled and there is only some inner or some higher consciousness which may itself be either in silent concentration or else experiencing some state of Knowledge or Ananda or Peace.

*

Going inside does not bring always Ananda. There are many kinds of samadhi and many sorts of experience in each kind. What happens when one goes in is that one enters into the inner planes of consciousness, it may be the subconscious, it may be the mental, vital or subtle physical plane. From there one goes into the corresponding worlds or else one rises up into higher planes superconscious to us — to the ranges above our mind or to the spiritual mental plane in which one can unite with the Sachchidananda consciousness or to the Supramental. What you describe seems to be the subconscious, but that may be only a first step in the going inside.

*

In samadhi it is the inner mental, vital, physical which are separated from the outer, no longer covered by it — therefore they

can freely have inner experiences. The outer mind is either quiescent or in some way reflects or shares the experience. As for the central consciousness being separated from all mind that would mean a complete trance without any recorded experiences.

*

It is the subtle parts of the physical that go up. The external consciousness can also go up, but then there is a complete trance. There is not much utility for the complete trance in this sadhana.

*

Trance in English is usually used only for the deeper kinds of samadhi; but, as there is no other word, we have to use it for all kinds.

*

Samadhi is not a thing to be shunned — only it has to be made more and more conscious.

Trance Not Essential

It is not necessary to be in samadhi to be in contact with the Divine.

*

Yes, they [*all the stages of higher realisation*] can be attained even in full activity. Trance is not essential — it can be used, but by itself it cannot lead to the change of consciousness which is our object, for it gives only an inner subjective experience which need not make any difference in the outer consciousness. There are plenty of instances of sadhaks who have fine experiences in trance but the outer being remains as it was. It is necessary to bring out what is experienced and make it a power for transformation both of the inner and the outer being. But it can be done without going into Samadhi in the waking consciousness itself. Concentration of course is indispensable.

Kinds of Samadhi

Nirvikalpa Samadhi according to tradition is simply a trance from which one cannot be awakened even by burning or branding—i.e. a trance in which one has gone completely out of the body. In more scientific parlance it is a trance in which there is no formation or movement of the consciousness and one gets lost in a state from which one can bring back no report except that one was in bliss. It is supposed to be a complete absorption in the Sushupti or the Turiya.

*

“Nirvikalpa samadhi” properly means a complete trance in which there is no thought or movement of consciousness or awareness of either inward or outward things—all is drawn up into a supracosmic Beyond. But here it cannot mean that—it probably means a trance in a consciousness beyond the Mind.

*

As to the dream, it was not a dream but an experience of the inner being in a conscious dream state, *svapna-samādhi*. The numbness and the feeling of being about to lose consciousness are always due to the pressure or descent of a Force to which the body is not accustomed but feels strongly. Here it was not the physical body that was being directly pressed, but the subtle body, the *sūksma śarīra* in which the inner being more intimately dwells and in which it goes out in sleep or trance or in the moment of death. But the physical body in these vivid experiences feels as if it were itself that was having the experience; the numbness was the effect on it of the pressure. The pressure on the whole body would mean a pressure on the whole inner consciousness, perhaps for some modification or change which would make it more ready for knowledge or experience; the 3rd or 4th rib would indicate a region which belongs to the vital nature, the domain of the life-force, some pressure for a change there.

*

It [*the kind of samadhi one has*] depends on the nature of the physical consciousness you keep. When there is the descent of consciousness into the body one becomes aware of a subtle physical consciousness and that can remain in samadhi — one seems to be aware of the body, but it is really the subtle body and not the outward physical. But also one can go deep within and yet be aware of the physical body also and of working upon it, but not of outward things. Finally one can be absorbed in a deep concentration but strongly aware of the body and the descent of the Force in it. This last is accompanied with consciousness of outward things, though no attention may be paid to them. This last is not usually called samadhi, but it is a kind of waking samadhi. All conditions from the deep samadhi of complete trance to the working of the Force in the fully waking consciousness are used in this Yoga; one need not insist on complete trance always, for the others also are necessary and without them the complete change cannot take place.

It is good that the higher consciousness and its powers are descending into the parts below the head and heart. That is absolutely necessary for the transformation, since the lower vital and the body must also be changed into stuff of the higher consciousness.

*

For this Yoga these divisions [*the classifications of samadhi in Vedanta*] are not so important.

Samadhi and the Waking State

Trance is a going inside away from the waking state. What corresponds to trance in the waking state would be a complete concentration indifferent to outward movements or else a silence of the whole being in Brahman realisation, the *samāhita* state of the Gita.

*

Immersion in Sachchidananda is a state one can get in the waking

condition without Samadhi — dissolution can come only after the loss of the body on condition that one has reached the highest state and does not will to return here to help the world.

*

On the contrary it is in the waking state that this realisation must come and endure in order to be a reality of the life. If experienced in trance it would be a superconscious state true for some part of the inner being, but not real to the whole consciousness. Experiences in trance have their utility for opening the being and preparing it, but it is only when the realisation is constant in the waking state that it is truly possessed. Therefore in this Yoga most value is given to the waking realisation and experience.

What you write about the work is correct; to work in this calm ever-widening consciousness is at once a *sādhanā* and a *siddhi*.

*

The entire oblivion of the experience means merely that there is still no sufficient bridge between the inner consciousness which has the experience in a kind of samadhi and the exterior waking consciousness. It is when the higher consciousness has made the bridge between them that the outer also begins to remember.

Samadhi and Sleep

It [*a tendency to fall asleep while meditating*] is the result of the attempt to go above. It is not sleep that comes, but a tendency to go inside under the pressure — the old Yogas did this going above precisely in this way, by going into samadhi. For us, it has to come in the waking condition — for until it does, it cannot be made the basis for a new consciousness governing the life.

*

It [*the tendency to fall asleep during meditation*] is a common obstacle with all who practise Yoga at the beginning. The sleep disappears gradually in two ways — (1) by the intensifying of the

force of concentration, (2) by the sleep itself becoming a kind of swapna samadhi in which one is conscious of inner experiences that are not dreams (i.e. the waking consciousness is lost for the time, but it is replaced not by sleep but by an inward conscious state in which one moves in the supraphysical of the mental or vital being).

*

There is no reason why one should not have a burning aspiration in sleep, provided one is conscious in sleep. In fact, the condition you describe was not sleep—it was simply that the consciousness was trying to go inside in a sort of indrawn condition (a kind of half-samadhi) while the external mind was constantly coming out of it. What you have, if you go into this indrawn condition, is not dreams but spiritual experiences or visions or experiences in other supraphysical planes of consciousness. Your burning aspiration was just such a spiritual experience.

*

No, it was not sleep. You went inside into an inner consciousness; in this inner consciousness one is awake inside, but not outside, not conscious of external things but of inner things only. Your inner consciousness was busy doing what your outer mind had been trying to do, that is to work upon the thoughts and suggestions that bring restlessness and to put them right; it can be done much more easily by the inner consciousness than by the outer mind.

As for the things that are necessary to be done, they can be done much more easily by the Force and Peace descending (bringing the solid strength) than by your own mental effort.

*

It was not half sleep or quarter sleep or even one-sixteenth sleep that you had; it was a going inside of the consciousness, which in that state remains conscious but shut to outer things and open only to inner experience. You must distinguish clearly between

these two quite different conditions, one is *nidrā*, the other the beginning at least of *samādhi* (not *nirvikalpa* of course!). This drawing inside is necessary because the active mind of the human being is at first too much turned to outward things; it has to go inside altogether in order to live in the inner being (inner mind, inner vital, inner physical, psychic). But with training one can arrive at a point when one remains outwardly conscious and yet lives in the inner being and has at will the indrawn or the out-poured condition; you can then have the same dense immobility and the same inpouring of a greater and purer consciousness in the waking state as in that which you erroneously call sleep.

*

About your experiences:

(1) The sleep which you felt when meditating was not sleep but an inward condition of the consciousness. When this inward condition is not very deep one can be aware of various scenes, voices etc. which belong not to the physical but to some inner plane of consciousness — their value or truth depends on the plane to which one reaches. Those of the surface are of no importance and one has simply to pass through them till one gets deeper.

(2) The fear, anger, depression etc. which used to rise when making the japa of the names came from a vital resistance in the nature (this resistance exists in everyone) which threw up these things because of the pressure on the vital part to change which is implied in sadhana. These resistances rise and then, if one takes the right attitude, slowly or quickly clear away. One has to observe them and separate oneself from them, persisting in the concentration and sadhana till the vital becomes quiet and clear.

(3) The things you saw (moon, sky etc.) are due to the opening of the inner vision; this usually comes when the concentration begins to open up the inner consciousness of which this subtle vision is a part. This faculty of vision has its importance in the development of the inner being, and need not be discouraged, even though too much importance should not be attached to the

things seen in the earlier stages.

(4) There are some however that are part of the growing spiritual experience, such as the sun you saw overhead and the piece of golden light—for these are signs of an opening within and symbolic. Both are symbols of the Divine Truth and Light and of one action of their influence.

(5) The most important experience, however, is that of the peace and quiet which comes with a good concentration. It is this that must grow and fix itself in the mind and vital and body—for it is this peace and quiet that make a firm basis for the sadhana.

*

The starting of the body happens very often when it is in a kind of sleep of samadhi and something touches whether from within or without.

The Trance of Mediums

The medium trance is of a different kind—they get not into touch with Sachchidananda but with the beings of the lower vital plane. To develop the power of going into this higher kind of trance, one must have done some sadhana. As to purification, entire purification is not necessary, but some part of the being must have turned to higher things.

Chapter Four

Three Experiences of the Inner Being

Opening into the Inner Mental Self

The three experiences of which you speak belong all to the same movement or the same stage of your spiritual life; they are initial movements of the consciousness to become aware of your inner being which was veiled, as in most, by the outer waking self. There are, we might say, two beings in us, one on the surface, our ordinary exterior mind, life, body consciousness, another behind the veil, an inner mind, an inner life, an inner physical consciousness constituting another or inner self. This inner self once awake opens in its turn to our true real and eternal self. It opens inwardly to the soul, called in the language of this Yoga the psychic being which supports our successive births and at each birth assumes a new mind, life and body. It opens above to the Self or spirit which is unborn and by conscious recovery of it we transcend the changing personality and achieve freedom and full mastery over our nature.

You did quite right in first developing the sattwic qualities and building up the inner meditative quietude. It is possible by strenuous meditation or by certain methods of tense endeavour to open doors on to the inner being or even break down some of the walls between the inner and outer self before finishing or even undertaking this preliminary self-discipline, but it is not always wise to do it as that may lead to conditions of sadhana which may be very turbid, chaotic, beset with unnecessary dangers. By adopting the more patient course you have arrived at a point at which the doors of the inner being have begun almost automatically to swing open. Now both processes can go on side by side, but it is necessary to keep the sattwic quietude, patience, vigilance, — to hurry nothing, to force nothing, not to

be led away by any strong lure or call of the intermediate stage which is now beginning before you are sure that it is the right call. For there are many vehement pulls from the forces of the inner planes which it is not safe to follow.

Your first experience is an opening into the inner mental self—the space between the eyebrows is the centre of the inner mind, vision, will and the blue light you saw was that of a higher mental plane, a spiritual mind, one might say, which is above the ordinary human mental intelligence. An opening into this higher mind is usually accompanied by a silence of the ordinary mental thought. Our thoughts are not really created within ourselves independently in the small narrow thinking machine we call our mind; in fact, they come to us from a vast mental space or ether either as mind-waves or waves of mind-force that carry a significance which takes shape in our personal mind or as thought-formations ready-made which we adopt and call ours. Our outer mind is blind to this process of Nature; but by the awakening of the inner mind we can become aware of it. What you saw was the receding of this constant mental invasion and the retreat of the thought-forms beyond the horizon of the wide space of mental Nature. You felt this horizon to be in yourself somewhere, but evidently it was in that larger self-space which even in its more limited field just between the eyebrows you felt to be bigger than the corresponding physical space. In fact, though the inner mind spaces have horizons, they stretch beyond those horizons—illimitably. The inner mind is something very wide projecting itself into the infinite and finally identifying itself with the infinity of universal Mind. When we break out of the narrow limits of the external physical mind we begin to see inwardly and to feel this wideness, in the end this universality and infinity of the mental self-space. Thoughts are not the essence of mind-being, they are only an activity of mental nature; if that activity ceases, what appears then as a thought-free existence that manifests in its place is not a blank or void but something very real, substantial, concrete we may say—a mental being that extends itself widely and can be its own field of existence silent or active as well as the Witness, Knower, Master of that

field and its action. Some feel it first as a void, but that is because their observation is untrained and insufficient and loss of activity gives them the sense of blank; an emptiness there is, but it is an emptiness of the ordinary activities, not a blank of existence.

The recurrence of the experience of the receding away of thoughts, the cessation of the thought-generating mechanism and its replacement by the mental self-space, is normal and as it should be; for this silence or at any rate the capacity for it has to grow until one can have it at will or even established in an automatic permanence. For this silence of the ordinary mind-mechanism is necessary in order that the higher mentality may manifest, descend, occupy by degrees the place of the present imperfect mentality and transform the activities of the latter into its own fuller movements. The difficulty of its coming when you are at work is only at the beginning—afterwards when it is more settled one finds that one can carry on all the activities of life either in the pervading silence itself or at least with that as the support and background. The silence remains behind and there is the necessary action on the surface or the silence is our wide self and somewhere in it an active Power does the works of Nature without disturbing the silence. It is therefore quite right to suspend the work while the visitation of the experience is there—the development of this inner silent consciousness is sufficiently important to justify a brief interruption or pause.

In the case of the other two experiences, on the contrary, it is otherwise. The dream-experience must not be allowed to take hold of the waking hours and pull the consciousness within; it must confine its operation to the hours of sleep. So too there should be no push or pressure to break down the wall between the inner self and the outer "I"—the fusion must be allowed to take place by a developing inner action in its own natural time. I shall explain why in another letter.

The Awakening of the Inner Being in Sleep

Your second experience is a first movement of the awakening of the inner being in sleep. Ordinarily when one sleeps a complex

phenomenon happens. The waking consciousness is no longer there, for all has been withdrawn within into the inner realms of which we are not aware when we are awake, though they exist; for then all that is put behind a veil by the waking mind and nothing remains except the surface self and the outward world — much as the veil of the sunlight hides from us the vast worlds of the stars that are behind it. Sleep is a going inward in which the surface self and the outside world are put away from our sense and vision. But in ordinary sleep we do not become aware of the worlds within either; the being seems submerged in a deep subconscious. On the surface of this subconscious floats an obscure layer in which dreams take place, as it seems to us, but, more correctly it may be said, are recorded. When we go very deeply asleep, we have what appears to us as a dreamless slumber; but in fact dreams are going on, but they are either too deep down to reach the recording surface or are forgotten, all recollection of their having existed even is wiped out in the transition to the waking consciousness. Ordinary dreams are for the most part or seem to be incoherent, because they are either woven by the subconscious out of deep-lying impressions left in it by our past inner and outer life, woven in a fantastic way which does not easily yield any clue of meaning to the waking mind's remembrance, or are fragmentary records, mostly distorted, of experiences which are going on behind the veil of sleep — very largely indeed these two elements get mixed up together. For in fact a large part of our consciousness in sleep does not get sunk into this subconscious state; it passes beyond the veil into other planes of being which are connected with our own inner planes, planes of supraphysical existence, worlds of a larger life, mind or psyche which are there behind and whose influences come to us without our knowledge. Occasionally we get a dream from these planes, something more than a dream, — a dream experience which is a record direct or symbolic of what happens to us or around us there. As the inner consciousness grows by sadhana, these dream experiences increase in number, clearness, coherence, accuracy and after some growth of experience and consciousness, we can, if we observe, come to understand them

and their significance to our inner life. Even we can by training become so conscious as to follow our own passage, usually veiled to our awareness and memory, through many realms and the process of the return to the waking state. At a certain pitch of this inner wakefulness this kind of sleep, a sleep of experiences, can replace the ordinary subconscious slumber.

It is of course an inner being or consciousness or something of the inner self that grows aware in this way, not, as usually it is, behind the veil of sleep, but in the sleep itself. In the condition which you describe, it is just becoming aware of sleep and dream and observing them — but as yet nothing farther — unless there is something in the nature of your dreams that has escaped you. But it is sufficiently awake for the surface consciousness to remember this state, that is to say, to receive and keep the report of it even in the transition from the sleep to the waking state which usually abolishes by oblivion all but fragments of the record of sleep-happenings. You are right in feeling that the waking consciousness and this which is awake in sleep are not the same — they are different parts of the being.

When this growth of the inner sleep consciousness begins, there is often a pull to go inside and pursue the development even when there is no fatigue or need of sleep. Another cause aids this pull. It is usually the vital part of the inner being that first wakes in sleep and the first dream experiences (as opposed to ordinary dreams) are usually in the great mass experiences of the vital plane, a world of supraphysical life, full of variety and interest, with many provinces, luminous or obscure, beautiful or perilous, often extremely attractive, where we can get much knowledge too both of our concealed parts of nature and of things happening to us behind the veil and of others which are of concern for the development of our parts of nature. The vital being in us then may get very much attracted to this range of experience, may want to live more in it and less in the outer life. This would be the source of that wanting to get back to something interesting and entralling which accompanies the desire to fall into sleep. But this must not be encouraged in waking hours, it should be kept for the hours set apart for

sleep where it gets its natural field. Otherwise there may be an unbalancing, a tendency to live more and too much in the visions of the supraphysical realms and a decrease of the hold on outer realities. The knowledge, the enlargement of our consciousness of these fields of inner Nature is very desirable, but it must be kept in its own place and limits.

A Touch of the Inner Self

In my last letter I had postponed the explanation of your third experience. What you have felt is indeed a touch of the Self,—not the unborn Self above, the Atman of the Upanishads, for that is differently experienced through the silence of the thinking mind, but the inner being, the psychic supporting the inner mental, vital, physical being, of which I have spoken. A time must come for every seeker of complete self-knowledge when he is thus aware of living in two worlds, two consciousnesses at the same time, two parts of the same existence. At present he lives in the outer consciousness, the outer being and sees within the inner self—but he will go more and more inward, till the position is reversed and he lives within in this new inner consciousness, inner self and feels the outer as something on the surface formed as an instrumental personality for the inner's self-expression in the material world. Then from within a Power works on the outer to make it a conscious plastic instrument so that finally the inner and the outer may become fused into one. The wall you feel is indeed the wall of the ego which is based on the insistent identification of oneself with the outer personality and its movements. It is that identification which is the keystone of the limitation and bondage from which the outer being suffers, preventing expansion, self-knowledge, spiritual freedom. But still the wall must not be prematurely broken down, because that may lead to a disruption or confusion or invasion of either part by the movements of the two separated worlds before they are ready to harmonise. A certain separation is necessary for some time after one has become aware of these two parts of the being as existing together. The force of the Yoga must be given

time to make the necessary adjustments and openings, and to take the being inward and then from this inward poise to work on the outer nature.

This does not mean that one should not allow the consciousness to go inward so that as soon as possible it should live in the inward world of being and see all anew from there. That inward going is most desirable and necessary and that change of vision also. I mean only that all should be done by a natural movement without haste. The movement of going inward may come rapidly, but even after that something of the wall of ego will be there and it will have to be steadily and patiently taken down so that no stone of it may abide. My warning against allowing the sleep world to encroach on the waking hours is limited to that alone and does not refer to the inward movement in waking concentration or ordinary waking consciousness. The waking movement carries us finally into the inner self and by that inner self we grow into contact with and knowledge of the supraphysical worlds, but this contact and knowledge need not and should not lead to an excessive preoccupation with them or a subjection to their beings and forces. In sleep we actually enter into these worlds and there is the danger, if the attraction of the sleep consciousness is too great and encroaches on the waking consciousness, of this excessive preoccupation and influence.

It is quite true that an inner purity and sincerity, in which one is motived only by the higher call, is one's best safeguard against the lures of the intermediate stage. It keeps one on the right track and guards from deviation until the psychic being is fully awake and in front and, once that happens, there is no farther danger. If in addition to this purity and sincerity there is a clear mind with a power of discrimination, that increases the safety in the earlier stages. I do not think I need or should specify too fully or exactly the forms the lure or pull is likely to take. It may be better not to call up these forces by an attention to them which may not be necessary. I do not suppose you are likely to be drawn away from the path by any of the greater perilous attractions. As for the minor inconveniences of the intermediate

stage, they are not dangerous and can easily be set right as one goes by the growth of consciousness, discrimination and sure experience.

As I have said, the inward pull, the pull towards going inward is not undesirable and need not be resisted. At a particular stage it may be accompanied by an abundance of visions due to the growth of the inner sight which sees things belonging to all the planes of existence. That is a valuable power helpful in the sadhana and should not be discouraged. But one must see and observe without attachment, keeping always the main object in front, realisation of the inner Self and the Divine—these things should only be regarded as incidental to the growth of consciousness and helpful to it, not as objects in themselves to be followed for their own sake. There should also be a discriminating mind which puts each thing in its place and can pause to understand its field and nature. There are some who become so eager after these subsidiary experiences that they begin to lose all sense of the true distinction and demarcation between different fields of reality. All that takes place in these experiences must not be taken as true—one has to discriminate, see what is mental formation or subjective construction and what is true, what is only suggestion from the larger mental and vital planes or what has reality only there and what is of value for help or guidance in inner sadhana or outer life.

Section Three

Experiences of the Cosmic Consciousness

Chapter One

The Universal or Cosmic Consciousness

The Terms “Universal” and “Cosmic”

There is no difference between the terms “universal” and “cosmic” except that “universal” can be used in a freer way than “cosmic”. Universal may mean “of the universe”, cosmic in that general sense. But it may also mean “common to all”, — e.g., “This is a universal weakness” — but you cannot say, “This is a cosmic weakness.”

*

Universal applies to everything in the universe — there are individual beings everywhere, but not physical in the terrestrial sense — the composition being different.

The Nature of the Cosmic Consciousness

Man is shut up at present in his surface individual consciousness and knows the world (or rather the surface of it) only through his outward mind and senses and by interpreting their contacts with the world. By Yoga there can open in him a consciousness which becomes one with that of the world; he becomes directly aware of a universal Being, universal states, universal Force and Power, universal mind, life, matter and lives in conscious relations with these things. He is then said to have the cosmic consciousness.

*

Men are usually shut up in the sense of their separate existence and know of the world and of other beings only what they see, hear, feel by their senses and their mental images and inferences. By Yoga one can get free of this limitation and become directly

aware of the Cosmic Self, the self of other beings, of their movements, of the movements of the cosmic forces, etc. etc. That is the cosmic consciousness.

*

Everyone has a universal consciousness standing concealed behind the individualised personality. When one becomes aware of it one feels in contact with the universal self and forces or one with them.

*

When one has the cosmic consciousness, one can feel the cosmic self as one's own self, one can feel one with other beings in the cosmos, one can feel all the forces of Nature as moving in oneself, all selves as one's own self.

There is no why except that it is so, since all is the One.

*

The ordinary consciousness of man is confined to his own individuality — he can enter into the consciousness of others and of the universe only by indirect means or a superficial and incomplete apprehension, by sense experience, contacts of emotional sympathy, mental concepts, analogy with his own movements, inference. In Yoga at a certain point this limitation breaks down, the consciousness enlarges itself, becomes directly aware of the Cosmic Self and knows the individual self to be one with it; of the Cosmic Energy and meets directly the action of the cosmic forces; of the cosmic mind, life, matter and feels first a contact of its individual mind, life, body with them, then a unity in which one's own individual mentality, vitality, physicality is felt as only a part of the universal, a wave of the ocean, a dynamo receiving and formulating the universal forces. Finally, the individual melts into the cosmic consciousness, the whole world is felt in oneself and oneself suffused through the world — it is the cosmic Consciousness, Mind, Life, material Energy that works through the individual function. The separate ego either does not exist or is only a convenience for the universal Spirit

and its action. This is the complete consummation of the cosmic Consciousness, but in its fullness it is not common, belonging properly to what we may call the Overmind realisation; but a constant partial and growing experience of it or an increasing contact with the cosmic Consciousness is a normal part of Yoga.

The Cosmic Consciousness and the Overmind

The cosmic consciousness does not belong to overmind in especial; it covers all the planes.

*

The overmind is the basis of the total cosmic consciousness, but the cosmic consciousness itself can be felt on any plane, not only above mind, but in mind, life, matter.

The Cosmic Consciousness and the Transcendent

The consciousness in the individual widens itself into the cosmic consciousness outside and can have any kind of dealing with it, penetrate, know its movements, act upon it or receive from it, even become commensurate with or contain it—which was what was meant in the language of the old Yogas by having the *brahmāṇḍa* within you.

The cosmic consciousness is that of the universe, of the cosmic Spirit and cosmic Nature with all the beings and forces within it. All that is as much conscious as a whole as the individual separately is, though in a different way. The consciousness of the individual is part of this, but a part feeling itself as a separate being. Yet all the time most of what he is comes into him from the cosmic consciousness. Only there is a wall of separative ignorance between. Once it breaks down he becomes aware of the cosmic Self, of the consciousness of the cosmic Nature, of the forces playing in it etc. He feels all that as he now feels physical things and impacts. He finds it all to be one with his larger or universal self.

There is the universal mental, the universal vital, the universal physical nature, and it is out of a selection of their forces and movements that the individual mind, vital and physical are made. The soul comes from beyond this nature of mind, life and body. It belongs to the Transcendent and because of it we can open to the higher Nature beyond.

The Divine is always One that is Many. The individual spirit is part of the “Many” side of the One, and the psychic being is what it puts forth to evolve here in the earth-nature. In liberation the individual self realises itself as the One (that is yet Many). It may plunge into the One and merge or hide itself in its bosom—that is the Laya of the Adwaita; it may feel its oneness and yet as part of the Many that is One enjoy the Divine, that is the Dwaitadwaita liberation; it may lay stress on its Many aspect and be possessed by the Divine, the Visishtadwaita, or go on playing with Krishna in the eternal Vrindavan, the Dwaita liberation. Or it may, even being liberated, remain in the Lila or manifestation or descend into it as often as it likes. The Divine is not bound by human philosophies—it is free in its play and free in its essence.

*

One has to get above the cosmic consciousness of the mind, life and matter by entering into the spiritual levels above the ordinary mind, into the higher consciousness. This does not cut one off from the cosmic consciousness, but one sees it without being involved in it.

*

It [*the correspondent's experience*] is the release from the limitations by the body consciousness and the opening into the wider being which is universal although it has an individual centre. As this develops one becomes aware of the true Self silent and illimitable and the cosmic consciousness. The concentration at the apex above the head is the station in the thousand-petalled lotus. There one becomes aware of states of mind above the ordinary human *buddhi*, the higher mind, the illumined mind,

the intuition, the overmind — finally when one has achieved the overmind one opens directly to the supramental consciousness.

*

The cosmic consciousness has many levels — the cosmic physical, the cosmic vital, the cosmic Mind, and above the higher planes of cosmic Mind there is the Intuition and above that the Overmind and still above that the Supermind where the Transcendental begins. In order to live on the Intuitive plane (not merely to receive intuitions), one has to live in the cosmic consciousness because there the cosmic and individual run into each other as it were, and the mental separation between them is already broken down, so nobody can reach there who is still in the separative ego.

A reflected static realisation of Sachchidananda is possible on any of the cosmic planes, but the full entering into it, the entire union with the Supreme Divine dynamic as well as static, comes with the transcendence.

*

It [*realisation of the Cosmic Divine*] is sufficient if only a static Consciousness is aimed at — but if transformation and the dynamic Divine is the aim, then the whole must be known. To realise the Cosmic Divine is after all impossible without entering into or opening to the cosmic consciousness — but one has to know the cosmic Prakriti as well as the cosmic Purusha.

Spiritual, Cosmic and Ordinary Consciousness

1. The spiritual consciousness is that in which we enter into the awareness of Self, the Spirit, the Divine and are able to see in all things their essential reality and the play of forces and phenomena as proceeding from that essential Reality.

2. The cosmic consciousness is that in which the limits of ego, personal mind and body disappear and one becomes aware of a cosmic vastness which is or is filled by a cosmic Spirit and aware also of the direct play of cosmic forces, universal

mind forces, universal life forces, universal energies of Matter, universal Overmind forces. But one does not become aware of all these together; the opening of the cosmic consciousness is usually progressive. It is not that the ego, the body, the personal mind disappear, but one feels them as only a small part of oneself. One begins to feel others too as part of oneself or varied repetitions of oneself, the same self modified by Nature in other bodies or, at the least, as living in the larger universal self which is henceforth one's own greater reality. All things in fact begin to change their value and appearance; one's whole experience of the world is radically different from that of those who are shut up in their personal selves. One begins to know things by a different kind of experience, more direct, not depending on the external mind and the senses. It is not that the possibility of error disappears, for that cannot be so long as mind of any kind is one's instrument for transcribing knowledge, but there is a new vast and deep way of experiencing, seeing, knowing, contacting things, and the confines of knowledge can be rolled back to an almost immeasurable degree. The things one has to be on guard against in the cosmic consciousness are the play of a magnified ego, the vaster attacks of the hostile forces—for they too are part of the cosmic consciousness—and the attempt of the cosmic Illusion (Ignorance, Avidya) to prevent the growth of the soul into the cosmic Truth. These are things that one has to learn by experience; mental teaching or explanation is quite insufficient. To enter safely into the cosmic consciousness and to pass safely through it, it is necessary to have a strong central unegoistic sincerity and to have the psychic being, with its divination of truth and unfaltering orientation towards the Divine, already in front in the nature.

3. The ordinary consciousness is that in which one knows things only or mainly by the intellect, the external mind and the senses and knows forces etc. only by their outward manifestations and results and the rest by inferences from these data. There may be some play of mental intuition, deeper psychic seeing or impulsions, spiritual intimations etc.—but in the ordinary

consciousness these are incidental only and do not modify its fundamental character.

The Widening of the Consciousness

It is very good. The widening of the consciousness so as to be in touch with the Universal Infinite is an important stage in the sadhana.

*

The ordinary man lives in his own personal consciousness knowing things through his mind and senses as they are touched by a world which is outside him, outside his consciousness. When the consciousness subtilises, it begins to come into contact with things in a much more direct way, not only with their forms and outer impacts but with what is inside them, but still the range may be small. But the consciousness can also widen and begin to be first in direct contact with an immense range of things in the world, then to contain them as it were,—as it is said to see the world in oneself,—and to be in a way identified with it. To see all things in the self and the self in all things—to be aware of one being everywhere, aware directly of the different planes, their forces, their beings—that is universalisation.

*

Opening is when it [*the consciousness*] receives the higher forces —widening is when it is no longer limited to the body but widens to meet the cosmic consciousness.

*

The widening of the consciousness beyond the body means that there is a preparation to pass out of the limitation by the body consciousness and feel oneself either in the cosmic consciousness or in contact with it. If one has this feeling of enlargement or wideness above the head one is in contact with the universal Self; below it is according to the level with the cosmic Mind, the cosmic vital or the cosmic physical consciousness. When

one is entirely freed from the body limitation, then one feels the consciousness as infinite with the body only as something very small within it.

*

It [*separation of the consciousness from the body*] means the liberation from the body sense in which one can truly say, “I am not the body.” This liberation is part of the cosmic consciousness — as is also the realisation of the cosmic Will.

It is the liberation from the body sense only. That is quite different from the control of the body.

*

Yes, your experience was a very good one and your feeling about it was correct. When the consciousness is narrow and personal or shut in the body, it is difficult to receive from the Divine — the wider it expands, the more it can receive. A time comes when it feels as wide as the world and able to receive all the Divine into itself.

*

If you feel the barrier in which you lived broken down and an inner ocean of wideness, then a great thing has happened in you. For it is this wideness that comes when the consciousness opens to the Divine. Into this wideness the Divine’s peace, love, light and joy can pour and fix themselves there.

Go on calling the Mother and opening yourself to her. All the rest will come.

*

By a widening of all the parts of the being, a sense of largeness and liberation of the mind, vital and physical, an opening to the Divine everywhere and many other signs [— so the Divine’s wideness manifests itself].

*

Yes — it [*wideness*] is felt as if a great substantial vastness full

of power and giving the sense of oneness free and infinite and the same from top to bottom.

*

The emptiness and wideness in the brain is a very good sign. It is a condition for the opening horizontally into the cosmic consciousness and upward into the Self and higher spiritual Mind above the head.

*

The lightness, the feeling of the disappearance of the head and that all is open is a sign of the wideness of the mental consciousness which is no longer limited by the brain and its body sense—no longer imprisoned but wide and free. This is felt in the meditation only at first or with closed eyes, but at a later stage it becomes established and one feels always oneself a wide consciousness not limited by any feeling of the body. You felt something of this wideness of your being in the second experience when the Mother's foot pressed down your physical mind (head) till it went below and left room for this sense of an infinite Self. This wide consciousness not dependent on the body or limited by it is what is called in Yoga the Atman or Self. You are only having the first glimpses of it, but later on it becomes normal and one feels that one was always this Atman infinite and immortal.

*

It is an experience of the extension of consciousness. In Yoga experience the consciousness widens in every direction, around, below, above, in each direction stretching to infinity. When the consciousness of the Yогин becomes liberated, it is not in the body, but in this infinite height, depth and wideness that he lives always. Its basis is an infinite void or silence, but in that all can manifest—Peace, Freedom, Power, Light, Knowledge, Ananda. This consciousness is usually called the consciousness of the Self or Atman, for it is a pure existence or self that is the source of all things and contains all things.

*

You must dismiss the fear of the concentration. The emptiness you feel coming on you is the silence of the great peace in which you become aware of your self, not as the small ego shut up in the body, but as the spiritual self wide as the universe. Consciousness is not dissolved; it is the limits of the consciousness that are dissolved. In that silence thoughts may cease for a time, there may be nothing but a great limitless freedom and wideness, but into that silence, that empty wideness descends the vast peace from above, light, bliss, knowledge, the higher Consciousness in which you feel the oneness of the Divine. It is the beginning of the transformation and there is nothing in it to fear.

*

If these were imaginations, you would be able to reproduce them exactly each time you thought of them. The idea that it is imagination comes from the physical mind which cannot believe in anything supraphysical.

This opening of the chest into the void (not really the void, but the infinite Akash of the Chit universal and illimitable) is always the sign of an opening of the emotional being into the wideness of the Universal Divine. The image of the Akash is often seen by sadhaks in Dhyanā. When the consciousness is liberated, whether in the mind or other part, there is always this sense of the wide infinite emptiness. From the top of the head to the throat is the mental plane of the being—a similar opening and emptiness or wideness here is the sign of the mind being freed into the Universal. From the throat to the stomach is the higher vital or emotional region. Below is the lower vital plane.

*

It is of course the inner wideness in which you were absorbed so that outward things went on of themselves without engaging the interest. In the meditation it was the same descent into the head—when it fills the head, there is often this feeling of there being no head, only that which is coming down or else a wideness in which that is acting. In the end one gets the feeling of being not something confined in the head and body, but a

wide consciousness with the body only as something comparatively small inside it. The vision was a figure of this wider consciousness with the Mother's inner presence always there.

*

Yes, what you see is right.¹ It is why the former Yogins preferred to remain in the wide consciousness aloof from the play of the energies — they regarded the latter as something belonging to the life of illusion which would fall away only by the rejection of the physical life through knowledge. It is when you oscillate from one consciousness to another that you seem to lose the higher one or feel as if it were lost. By keeping it within always, one is able to regard both sides and change the recalcitrant lower nature.

*

The wideness comes when one exceeds or begins to exceed the individual consciousness and spread out towards the universal. But the psychic can be active even in the individual consciousness.

*

At the beginning the experience of wideness like other experiences comes only from time to time. It is only afterwards that it becomes frequent and remains long, till finally it settles and the consciousness remains always wide.

The Cosmic Consciousness and the Cosmic Self

In the cosmic consciousness the personal I disappears into the one Self of all. The I which alone exists is not that of the person, the individualised I, but the universalised I identical with all and with the cosmic Self (Atman).

*

¹ *The correspondent said that when he lived in the wide consciousness above, he could remain undisturbed by the energies of the lower nature. But when he tried to change those energies, he became troubled and confused by their downward pull. — Ed.*

It is what it represents itself to be — an experience of the universal consciousness aspiring to the Divine Truth and beginning to receive its light. It is not your own consciousness, although you feel it in yourself, but a symbolic experience of this universal Vishwa-Purusha. These things one sees when one opens to the Cosmic Consciousness. Observed, felt and taken rightly they help to liberate, universalise and impersonalise. But keep the ego out of it — *everybody* opening to the Cosmic Divine will have these or similar experiences. Observe and go forward.

*

There is no doubt that you will succeed in your endeavour — all that is needed is firm persistence till the success is complete.

What you saw in the vision was the wide and luminous infinite of what is called the universal Self or spirit. It is that which is one of the fundamental things into which one enters when one reaches the higher consciousness and goes above. The personal being naturally feels itself as something very small and insignificant in that Infinite. But in that Infinite there are higher and higher levels and it is to these levels that the Mother was leading you when she took you by the hand. This often happens in meditation or trance when one has once gone upward into the spiritual infinity. The reason why you did not see the Mother's form was not that the Mother hid herself, or anything in you came between, but that you were both moving in the formless Infinite as spiritual beings and so it was easier to feel the presence than to see any physical form. Not that the form cannot be there, but it is less insistent and therefore not so soon seen as on the physical plane.

The silence in the head and heart and the emptiness are both necessary and desirable. When they are there, the consciousness finds them natural and they give it the sense of lightness and release; that is why the thoughts or speech of the old kind are foreign to it and when they come give fatigue. This silence and emptiness must grow, so that the higher consciousness with its knowledge, light, Ananda, peace can come down in it and progressively replace the old things. They must indeed occupy

not only head and heart but the whole body.

The Cosmic Consciousness and Self-Realisation

Liberation is the first necessity — to live in the peace, silence, purity, freedom of the Self. Along with that or afterwards if one wakens to the cosmic consciousness, then one can be free, yet one with all things.

To have the cosmic consciousness without the liberation etc. is possible, but then there is no freedom anywhere in the being from the lower nature and one may become in one's extended consciousness the playground of all kinds of forces without being able to be either free and detached from the Prakriti or free and master.

On the other hand, if there has been self-realisation, there is one part of the being that remains untouched amid the play of the cosmic forces — while if the peace and purity of the self has been established in the whole inner consciousness, then the outer touches of the lower nature cannot come in or overpower. This is the advantage of self-realisation preceding the cosmic consciousness and supporting it.

*

When there is the development of the Self-realisation or of the cosmic consciousness or if there is the emptiness which is the preliminary condition for these things, there comes an automatic tendency for a unity with all — their affections, mental, vital, physical may easily touch. One has to keep oneself free.

*

Affections here [*in the preceding letter*] has not the ordinary sense — it means “ways in which they are affected by things”, e.g. joy, grief, pleasure, pain, illness etc.

*

What you feel is the normal condition when the liberation takes place. The work of the senses etc. goes on as before, but the

consciousness is different, so that one feels not only the sense of liberation, separation etc., but that one is living in quite another world than that of the ordinary mind, life or senses. It is another consciousness with another knowledge and way of looking at things that begins. Afterwards as this consciousness takes possession of the instruments, there is a harmony of it with the sense and life; but these too become different, with a changed outlook, seeing the world no more as before but as if made of another substance with another significance.

*

It is when you feel the universal or divine beauty or presence in things that the senses are open to the Divine.

Chapter Two

Aspects of the Cosmic Consciousness

The Cosmic Ignorance and the Cosmic Truth

I think you are speaking of two different sides of the cosmic Consciousness, that which is behind all Cosmos and that which is expressed in the apparent universe.

*

There are in the cosmic consciousness two sides — one the contact with and perception of the ordinary cosmic forces and the beings behind these forces, that is what I call the cosmic Ignorance — the other is the perception of the cosmic Truths, the realisation of the one universal, the one universal Force, all the Vedantic truths of the One in all and all in one; all the various aspects of the Divine in the cosmic and a host of other things can come which do help to realisation and knowledge — provided they are taken in the right way. However all that can be best dealt with when it actually comes. It does not always come as soon as there is the widening — many pass through the widening of the consciousness to what is beyond the cosmic and take the cosmic in detail afterwards — and it is perhaps the safest order.

*

Each defect of the nature of the Ignorance is a deformation of something in the higher nature — a deformation which amounts to a contradiction even. It is a concretised perception of this that you got in your experience.

*

There is no ignorance that is not part of the cosmic Ignorance — only in the individual it becomes a limited formation and

movement, while the cosmic Ignorance is the whole movement of world-consciousness separated from the supreme Truth and acting in an inferior motion in which the Truth is perverted, diminished, mixed and clouded with falsehood and error. The cosmic Truth is the view on things of a cosmic Consciousness in which things are seen in their true essence and their true relation to the Divine and to each other.

*

The Yogi's cosmic experiences are spiritual experiences — experience of the play of the Forces and its relation with the self, the action of the Guide, what is behind the appearance of things, occurrences etc. etc., the actual relations of the workings of Purusha and Prakriti etc. The Divine Truth is the truth of the divine Essence, Consciousness, Self-Knowledge, Light, Power, Bliss. It is something from which the cosmos derives with all its movements, but it is more than the cosmos.

*

The cosmic Truth is the truth of things as they are at present expressed in the universe. The Divine Truth is independent of the universe, above it and originates it.

The Cosmic Harmony and Discords

A cosmos or universe is always a harmony, otherwise it could not exist, it would fly to pieces. But as there are musical harmonies which are built out of discords partly or even predominantly, so this universe (the material) is disharmonious in its separate elements — the individual elements are at discord with each other to a large extent, — it is only owing to a sustaining divine Will behind that the whole is still a harmony to those who look at it with the cosmic vision. But it is a harmony in evolution, in progress — that is, all is combined to strive towards a goal which is not yet reached, and the object of our Yoga is to hasten the arrival to this goal. When it is reached, there will be a harmony of harmonies substituted for the present harmony built up on

discords. This is the explanation of the present appearance of things.

*

This harmony of the lower consciousness is a harmony of dis- cords brought about by a clash and mixture of forces.

*

It [*a rhythmic word like a song*]¹ is a representation in sound of the cosmic harmony from which the Ignorance is a fall and a discord.

*

There is a rhythm in everything unheard by the physical ear and by that rhythm things exist.

The Cosmic Will

It is not possible for the individual mind, so long as it remains shut up in its personality, to understand the workings of the Cosmic Will, for the standards made by the personal consciousness are not applicable to them. A cell in the body, if conscious, might also think that the human being and its actions are only the resultant of the relations and workings of a number of cells like itself and not the action of a unified self. It is only if one enters into the Cosmic Consciousness that one begins to see the forces at work and the lines on which they work and get a glimpse of the Cosmic Self and the Cosmic Mind and Will.

*

Everything here is not perfect, but all works out the cosmic Will in the course of the ages.

¹ *The correspondent heard a rhythmic word entering into his ears from above. The word was like a song and its rhythm sustained the universe, though it worked through destruction.—Ed.*

Opening to the Cosmic Mind

What is happening is that you have got into touch with the cosmic Mind where all sorts of ideas, possibilities, formations are moving about. The individual mind takes up those which appeal to it or perhaps come into distinct form when they touch it. But these are possibilities, not truths, so it is better not to let them run free like that.

*

One [*who is open to the cosmic Mind*] is aware of the cosmic Mind and the mental forces that move there and how they work on one's mind and that of others and one is able to deal with one's own mind with a greater knowledge and effective power. There are many other results, but this is the fundamental one. This is of course if one opens in the right way and does not merely become a passive field of all sorts of ideas and mental forces.

*

The opening to cosmic mind makes the experience of the Divine everywhere for instance more easy—but it is not essentially spiritual; if there is not a coming of wider spiritual experiences, then it need not be spiritual at all.

Opening to the Cosmic Life

One [*who is open to the cosmic Life*] becomes aware of all the life-forces and of how they act upon oneself and others, upon mind, upon body—also the force movements behind events. One becomes too directly aware of the vital plane, its worlds, its beings, and the direct action of their formations on the earth-life. One has to become aware also at the same time of one's own true vital being and act from it and not from the surface or desire vital in relation to all these things. All this effect does not come at once,—it develops as the contact with the cosmic Life increases.

*

In the universal vital especially there is a deceptive attraction and an exhilarating rush of power (not true quiet power but mere force) which those who yield to it cling to as a drunkard to his intoxicants. It gives them a sense of being strong and great and full of interesting things — when it is taken from them, they feel “like ordinary people” and ask for it back again.

*

You had a mental and the beginning of a vital opening to the cosmic consciousness — kept on the spiritualised level, the vision or feeling of the Divine Ananda without seeking for possession or a gross outer enjoyment, it would have established a Yogic consciousness and made a base for knowledge and peace and power and psychic love and surrender to come down.

The Cosmic Consciousness and the Physical

One cannot be high in the cosmic consciousness unless one has taken one's station above the body in a cosmic wideness which envelops the whole being. What you did was to open to it to a certain extent and then, instead of plunging into it at once as some do, your sadhana took the turn of coming down into the physical to prepare it. That is not altogether an undesirable turn — for many suffer by not having taken it. X for instance got a very evident opening into the cosmic, but he lost his way in it altogether because neither his vital nor his physical were cleared of certain very serious imperfections.

*

Yes, it is the psychising and purification that have been going on, but you had some openings of contact with the cosmic consciousness which did not prolong themselves when you came into the physical. X's ascents, I suppose, are more a going out of the body in his mind and vital than any stationing of his consciousness above. The latter would have brought a calm and peace and liberation which he does not possess as yet. This kind of ascent brings a conscious contact with cosmic forces of the

mental and vital planes (in his case more the vital) and some extraordinary experiences which are not altogether safe. There is great danger there of entering into and getting perplexed in the intermediate zone. I would rather see him liberated from these things than pursuing them any farther. A descent from above of the higher forces would be far more helpful to him than these ascensions.

Chapter Three

The Universal or Cosmic Forces

The Nature of the Universal or Cosmic Forces

Universal forces means all forces good or bad, favourable or hostile, of light or of darkness that move in the cosmos.

*

The cosmic forces here whether good or bad are forces of the Ignorance. Above them is the Truth-Consciousness that can only manifest when ego and desire are overcome — it is the force from the Divine Truth-Consciousness that must descend — the higher Peace, Light, Knowledge, Purity, Power, Ananda must work upon the cosmic forces in the individual so as to change them and substitute the Truth-Forces in place of the ordinary working.

*

They [*the cosmic forces*] act on everyone, according to the person's nature — and his will and consciousness.

*

It [*knowledge of the working of the cosmic forces*] is necessary — it comes of itself as one gets more and more forward in the cosmic consciousness.

*

They [*pain and misery*] are perhaps rather the result of the action of universal forces — but in a certain sense grief and pain may be said to be universal forces — for there are waves of these things that arrive and invade the being often without apparent cause.

*

The universal forces move by their own force and the consciousness within them — but there is also the Cosmic Spirit

who supports them and determines by his onlook and disposing will their play — although the direct action is left to the forces — it is the play of universal Prakriti with the universal Purusha watching behind it. In the individual also there is the individual Purusha who can, if he wills, not merely assent to the play of Prakriti, but accept or reject or will for its change. All that is in the play itself as we see it here. There is something above — but the action of that is an intervention rather than a moment to moment control; it can become a constant direct control only when one replaces the play of the forces by the government of the Divine.

*

One can live in contact with the Divine even amidst the universal forces — but to live in the Divine one must be able to rise beyond the lower universal nature or to call down the Divine consciousness here. The beginnings are difficult for most — and at no time is it really easy.

The Universal Energies and the Divine Force

There is only one Force or Energy here in reality; what is called the individual energy does not belong to the individual, but to the one universal Power.

In the one infinite Energy itself a distinction has to be made between the Divine Force that descends from above the mind and the inferior universal Energy with all its different forms, movements, waves and currents that come into you from outside. The inferior Energy proceeds from the Divine Shakti, but it has fallen from the truth of its source and has no longer its direct guidance.

When these universal energies come into touch with the Divine Force, rise to meet it and allow it to take hold of them and occupy and change them, then they are purified and uplifted and transformed and become a movement of the Divine Force.

When they are not in touch with the Divine Force, not obedient to it, but act for themselves, they are unenlightened, erring,

impure, mixed and confused — powers of the Ignorance.

Always, therefore, keep in touch with the Divine Force. The best thing for you is to do that simply and allow it to do its own work; wherever necessary, it will take hold of the inferior energies and purify them; at other times it will empty you of them and fill you with itself. But if you let your mind take the lead and discuss and decide what is to be done, you will lose touch with the Divine Force and the lower energies will begin to act for themselves and all go into confusion and a wrong movement.

It is still worse to try to draw these lower universal energies from those around you and keep up with them a vital interchange; what gain can there be in that? On the contrary, it will lead to greater confusion and even bring in all kinds of mischief and trouble.

Often the association of these universal energies with others is a mistake of your mind. Your mind is seeking always to fix them on to somebody, and often it fixes on one or another at random or else according to old experiences which are no longer valid. For instance, what you call X's force was not his, but a universal hostile force which used X at one time and, owing to a continued association in your mind, still presents itself to you as his, but may now no longer have anything to do with him. By keeping up the old association, you simply give greater opportunity for this undesirable energy to come upon you.

Follow always the one rule, to open yourself directly to the Divine Force and not to others; if you keep in touch with it, all else will progressively arrange itself.

The Cosmic Force and the Overmind

The cosmic Force is under the control of the Overmind. The Supermind does not act on it directly — whatever comes down from there is modified so as to pass through the Overmind and takes a lesser form suitable to the plane on which it acts, mental, vital or physical. But this intervention is exceptional in the ordinary play of the cosmic forces.

The Entry of the Universal Forces

There is no rule for that [*the points at which the universal forces enter one*]. The human being is ordinarily conscious only on the surface — but the surface records only the results of subliminal agencies at work. It is often through the centres that the forces come in, for then they get the greatest power to act on the nature — but they can enter anywhere.

*

The universal forces act very often through the subconscious — especially when the force they send is something the person has been in the habit of obeying and of which the seeds, impressions, “complexes” are strongly rooted in the subconscious — or, even if that is no longer the case, of which there is a memory still in the subconscious.

The Universal Forces and the Individual

Egoism is part of the machinery — a chief part — of universal Nature, first to develop individuality out of indiscriminate force and substance of Nature and, secondly, to make the individual (through the machinery of egoistic thought, feeling, will and desire) a tool of the universal forces. It is only when one gets into touch with a higher Nature that it is possible to get free of this rule of ego and subjection to these forces.

*

Yes, certainly, there is nothing in the individual that is not in the cosmic Energy. For all ordinary purposes the individual is only a differentiated centre of the universal forces — although his soul comes from beyond.

Time Vision and the Cosmic Movement

Time vision is the perception of the cosmic movement of things

developing from state to state and in that the individual movements which make it up. There is also possible a sense of the All as Time in flow or of Time as a dimension interwoven with Space like warp and woof of a cloth etc.

Section Four

The Dangers of Inner and Cosmic Experiences

Chapter One

The Intermediate Zone

The Nature of the Intermediate Zone

I mean by it [*the intermediate zone*] that when the sadhak gets beyond the barriers of his own embodied personal mind he enters into a wide range of experiences which are not the limited solid physical truth of things and not yet either the spiritual truth of things. It is a zone of formations, mental, vital, subtle physical, and whatever one forms or is formed by the forces of these worlds in us becomes for the sadhak for a time the truth — unless he is guided and listens to his guide. Afterwards if he gets through he discovers what it was and passes on into the subtle truth of things. It is a borderland where all the worlds meet, mental, vital, subtle physical, pseudo-spiritual — but there is no order or firm foothold — a passage between the physical and the true spiritual realms.

*

The intermediate zone means simply a confused condition or passage in which one is getting out of the personal consciousness and opening into the cosmic (cosmic Mind, cosmic vital, cosmic physical, something perhaps of the cosmic higher Mind) without having yet transcended the human mind levels. One is not in possession of or direct contact with the divine Truth *on its own levels*, but one can receive something from them, even from the Overmind, indirectly. Only, as one is still immersed in the cosmic Ignorance, all that comes from above can be mixed, perverted, taken hold of for their purposes by lower, even by hostile Powers.

It is not necessary for everyone to struggle through the intermediate zone. If one has purified oneself, if there is no abnormal vanity, egoism, ambition or other strong misleading element, or if one is vigilant and on one's guard, or if the psychic is in front,

one can either pass rapidly and directly or with a minimum of trouble into the higher zones of consciousness where one is in direct contact with the Divine Truth.

On the other hand the passage through the higher zones—higher Mind, illumined Mind, Intuition, Overmind—is obligatory; they are the true Intermediaries between the present consciousness and the Supermind.

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All these experiences are of the same nature and what applies to one applies to another. Apart from some experiences of a personal character, the rest are either idea-truths, such as pour down into the consciousness from above when one gets into touch with certain planes of being, or strong formations from the larger mental and vital worlds which, when one is directly open to these worlds, rush in and want to use the sadhak for their fulfilment. These things, when they pour down or come in, present themselves with a great force, a vivid sense of inspiration or illumination, much sensation of light and joy, an impression of widening and power. The sadhak feels himself freed from the normal limits, projected into a wonderful new world of experience, filled and enlarged and exalted: what comes associates itself, besides, with his aspirations, ambitions, notions of spiritual fulfilment and Yogic siddhi; it is represented even as itself that realisation and fulfilment. Very easily he is carried away by the splendour and the rush and thinks that he has realised more than he has truly done, something final or at least something sovereignly true. At this stage the necessary knowledge and experience are usually lacking which would tell him that this is only a very uncertain and mixed beginning; he may not realise at once that he is still in the cosmic Ignorance, not in the cosmic Truth, much less in the Transcendental Truth, and that whatever formative or dynamic idea-truths may have come down into him are partial only and yet farther diminished by their presentation to him by a still mixed consciousness. He may fail to realise also that if he rushes to apply what he is realising or receiving as if it were something definitive, he may either fall into confusion

and error or else get shut up in some partial formation in which there may be an element of spiritual Truth but it is likely to be outweighed by more dubious mental and vital accretions that deform it altogether. It is only when he is able to draw back (whether at once or after a time) from his experiences, stand above them with the dispassionate witness consciousness, observe their real nature, limitations, composition, mixture that he can proceed on his way towards a real freedom and a higher, larger and truer siddhi. At each step this has to be done. For whatever comes in this way to the sadhak of this Yoga, whether it be from Overmind or Intuition or illumined Mind or some exalted Life-Plane or from all these together, it is not definitive and final; it is not the supreme Truth in which he can rest, but only a stage. And yet these stages have to be passed through, for the Supramental or the Supreme Truth cannot be reached in one bound or even in many bounds; one has to pursue a calm patient steady progress through many intervening stages without getting bound or attached to their lesser Truth or Light or Power or Ananda.

This is in fact an intermediary state, a zone of transition between the ordinary consciousness in mind and the true Yoga knowledge. One may cross without hurt through it, perceiving at once or at an early stage its real nature and refusing to be detained by its half-lights and tempting but imperfect and often mixed and misleading experiences; one may go astray in it, follow false voices and a mendacious guidance, and that ends in a spiritual disaster; or one may take up one's abode in this intermediate zone, care to go no farther and build there some half-truth which one takes for the whole truth or become the instrument of the Powers of these transitional planes,—that is what happens to many sadhaks and Yogis. Overwhelmed by the first rush and sense of power of a supernormal condition, they get dazzled with a little light which seems to them a tremendous illumination or a touch of force which they mistake for the full Divine Force or at least a very great Yoga Shakti, or they accept some intermediate Power (not always a Power of the Divine) as the Supreme and an intermediate consciousness as the supreme

realisation. Very readily they come to think that they are in the full cosmic consciousness when it is only some front or small part of it or some larger Mind, Life-Power or subtle physical ranges with which they have entered into dynamic connection. Or they feel themselves to be in an entirely illumined consciousness, while in reality they are receiving imperfectly things from above through a partial illumination of some mental or vital plane; for what comes is diminished and often deformed in the course of transmission through these planes; the receiving mind and vital of the sadhak also often understands or transcribes ill what has been received or throws up to mix with it its own ideas, feelings, desires which it yet takes to be not its own but part of the Truth it is receiving because they are mixed with it, imitate its form, are lit up by its illumination and get from this association and borrowed light an exaggerated value.

There are worse dangers in this intermediate zone of experience. For the planes to which the sadhak has now opened his consciousness,—not as before getting glimpses of them and some influences, but directly, receiving their full impact,—send a host of ideas, impulses, suggestions, formations of all kinds, often the most opposite to each other, inconsistent or incompatible, but presented in such a way as to slur over their insufficiencies and differences, with great force, plausibility and a wealth of argument or a convincing sense of certitude. Overpowered by this sense of certitude, vividness, appearance of profusion and richness the mind of the sadhak enters into a great confusion which it takes for some larger organisation and order; or else it whirls about in incessant shiftings and changes which it takes for a rapid progress but which lead nowhere. Or there is the opposite danger that he may become the instrument of some apparently brilliant but ignorant formation; for these intermediate planes are full of little Gods or strong Daityas or smaller beings who want to create, to materialise something or to enforce a mental and vital formation in the earth life and are eager to use or influence or even possess the thought and will of the sadhak and make him their instrument for the purpose. This is quite apart from the well-known danger of actually hostile beings whose

sole purpose is to create confusion, falsehood, corruption of the sadhana and disastrous unspiritual error. Anyone allowing himself to be taken hold of by one of these beings, who often take a divine Name, will lose his way in the Yoga. On the other hand, it is quite possible that the sadhak may be met at his entrance into this zone by a Power of the Divine which helps and leads him till he is ready for greater things; but still that itself is no surety against the errors and stumblings of this zone; for nothing is easier than for the powers of these zones or hostile powers to imitate the guiding Voice or Image and deceive and mislead the sadhak or for himself to attribute the creations and formations of his own mind, vital or ego to the Divine.

For this intermediate zone is a region of half-truths—and that by itself would not matter, for there is no complete truth below the Supermind; but the half-truth here is often so partial or else ambiguous in its application that it leaves a wide field for confusion, delusion and error. The sadhak thinks that he is no longer in the old small consciousness at all, because he feels in contact with something larger or more powerful, and yet the old consciousness is still there, not really abolished. He feels the control or influence of some Power, Being or Force greater than himself, aspires to be its instrument and thinks he has got rid of ego; but this delusion of egolessness often covers an exaggerated ego. Ideas seize upon him and drive his mind which are only partially true and by overconfident misapplication are turned into falsehoods; this vitiates the movements of the consciousness and opens the door to delusion. Suggestions are made, sometimes of a romantic character, which flatter the importance of the sadhak or are agreeable to his wishes and he accepts them without examination or discriminating control. Even what is true, is so exalted or extended beyond its true pitch and limit and measure that it becomes the parent of error. This is a zone which many sadhaks have to cross, in which many wander for a long time and out of which a great many never emerge. Especially if their sadhana is mainly in the mental and vital, they have to meet here many difficulties and much danger; only those who follow scrupulously a strict guidance or have

the psychic being prominent in their nature pass easily as if on a sure and clearly marked road across this intermediate region. A central sincerity, a fundamental humility also save from much danger and trouble. One can then pass quickly beyond into a clearer Light where if there is still much mixture, incertitude and struggle, yet the orientation is towards the cosmic Truth and not to a half-illumined prolongation of Maya and Ignorance.

I have described in general terms with its main features and possibilities this state of consciousness just across the border of the normal consciousness, because it is here that these experiences seem to move. But different sadhaks comport themselves differently in it and respond sometimes to one class of possibilities, sometimes to another. In this case it seems to have been entered through an attempt to call down or force a way into the cosmic consciousness — it does not matter which way it is put or whether one is quite aware of what one is doing or aware of it in these terms, it comes to that in substance. It is not the Overmind which was entered, for to go straight into the Overmind is impossible. The Overmind is indeed above and behind the whole action of the cosmic consciousness, but one can at first have only an indirect connection with it; things come down from it through intermediate ranges into a larger mind-plane, life-plane, subtle physical plane and come very much changed and diminished in the transmission, without anything like the full power and truth they have in the Overmind itself on its native levels. Most of the movements come not from the Overmind, but down from higher mind ranges. The ideas with which these experiences are penetrated and on which they seem to rest their claim to truth are not of the Overmind, but of the higher Mind or sometimes of the illumined Mind; but they are mixed with suggestions from the lower mind and vital regions and badly diminished in their application or misapplied in many places. All this would not matter; it is usual and normal, and one has to pass through it and come out into a clearer atmosphere where things are better organised and placed on a surer basis. But the movement was made in a spirit of excessive hurry and eagerness, of exaggerated self-esteem and self-confidence, of a premature

certitude, relying on no other guidance than that of one's own mind or of the "Divine" as conceived or experienced in a stage of very limited knowledge. But the sadhak's conception and experience of the Divine, even if it is fundamentally genuine, is never in such a stage complete and pure; it is mixed with all sorts of mental and vital ascriptions and all sorts of things are associated with this Divine guidance and believed to be part of it which come from quite other sources. Even supposing there is any direct guidance,—most often in these conditions the Divine acts mostly from behind the veil,—it is only occasional and the rest is done through a play of forces; error and stumbling and mixture of Ignorance take place freely and these things are allowed because the sadhak has to be tested by the world-forces, to learn by experience, to grow through imperfection towards perfection—if he is capable of it, if he is willing to learn, to open his eyes to his own mistakes and errors, to learn and profit by them so as to grow towards a purer Truth, Light and Knowledge.

The result of this state of mind is that one begins to affirm everything that comes in this mixed and dubious region as if it were all the Truth and the sheer Divine Will; the ideas or the suggestions that constantly repeat themselves are expressed with a self-assertive absoluteness as if they were Truth entire and undeniable. There is an impression that one has become impersonal and free from ego, while the whole tone of the mind, its utterance and spirit are full of vehement self-assertiveness justified by the affirmation that one is thinking and acting as an instrument and under the inspiration of the Divine. Ideas are put forward very aggressively that can be valid to the mind, but are not spiritually valid; yet they are stated as if they were spiritual absolutes. For instance, equality, which in that sense—for Yogic Samata is a quite different thing—is a mere mental principle, the claim to a sacred independence, the refusal to accept anyone as Guru, the opposition made between the Divine and the human Divine etc., etc. All these ideas are positions that can be taken by the mind and the vital and turned into principles which they try to enforce on the religious or even the spiritual life, but they are not and cannot be spiritual in their nature. There also begin to come in

suggestions from the vital planes, a pullulation of imaginations romantic, fanciful or ingenious, hidden interpretations, pseudo-intuitions, would-be initiations into things beyond, which excite or bemuse the mind and are often so turned as to flatter and magnify ego and self-importance, but are not founded on any well-ascertained spiritual or occult realities of a true order. This region is full of elements of this kind and, if allowed, they begin to crowd on the sadhak; but if he seriously means to reach the Highest, he must simply observe them and pass on. It is not that there is never any truth in such things, but for one that is true there are nine imitative falsehoods presented and only a trained occultist with the infallible tact born of long experience can guide himself without stumbling or being caught through the maze. It is possible for the whole attitude and action and utterance to be so surcharged with the errors of this intermediate zone that to go farther on this route would be to travel far away from the Divine and from the Yoga.

Here the choice is still open whether to follow the very mixed guidance one gets in the midst of these experiences or to accept the true guidance. Each man who enters the realms of Yogic experience is free to follow his own way; but this Yoga is not a path for anyone to follow, but only for those who accept to seek the aim, pursue the way pointed out upon which a sure guidance is indispensable. It is idle for anyone to expect that he can follow this road far, much less go to the end by his own inner strength and knowledge without the true aid or influence. Even the ordinary long-practised Yogas are hard to follow without the aid of the Guru; in this which as it advances goes through untrodden countries and unknown entangled regions, it is quite impossible. As for the work to be done it also is not a work for any sadhak of any path; it is not, either, the work of the "impersonal" Divine—who, for that matter, is not an active Power but supports impartially all work in the universe. It is a training ground for those who have to pass through the difficult and complex way of this Yoga and none other. All work here must be done in a spirit of acceptance, discipline and surrender, not with personal demands and conditions, but with a vigilant

conscious submission to control and guidance. Work done in any other spirit only results in an unspiritual disorder, confusion and disturbance of the atmosphere. In it too difficulties, errors, stumblings are frequent, because in this Yoga people have to be led patiently and with some field for their own effort, by experience, out of the ignorance natural to Mind and Life to a wider spirit and a luminous knowledge. But the danger of an unguided wandering in the regions across the border is that the very basis of the Yoga may be contradicted and the conditions under which alone the work can be done may be lost altogether. The transition through this intermediate zone — not obligatory, for many pass by a narrower but surer way — is a crucial passage; what comes out of it is likely to be a very wide or rich creation; but when one founders there, recovery is difficult, painful, assured only after a long struggle and endeavour.

The Dangers of the Intermediate Zone

As for the letter, I suppose you will have to tell the writer that his father committed a mistake when he took up Yoga without a Guru — for the mental idea about a Guru cannot take the place of the actual living influence. This Yoga especially, as I have written in my books, needs the help of the Guru and cannot be done without it. The condition into which his father got was a breakdown, not a state of siddhi. He passed out of the normal mental consciousness into a contact with some intermediate zone of consciousness (not the spiritual) where one can be subjected to all sorts of voices, suggestions, ideas, so-called inspirations which are not genuine. I have warned against the dangers of this intermediate zone in one of my books.¹ The sadhak can avoid entering into this zone — if he enters, he has to look with indifference on all these things and observe them without lending any credence; by so doing he can safely pass into the true spiritual light. If he takes them all as true or real without discrimination,

¹ The Riddle of This World. Sri Aurobindo is referring to the preceding letter (pp. 296–303), which appeared in this book.—Ed.

he is likely to land himself in a great mental confusion and if there is in addition a lesion or weakness of the brain — the latter is quite possible in one who has been subject to apoplexy — it may have serious consequences and even lead to a disturbance of the reason. If there is ambition or other motive of the kind mixed up in the spiritual seeking, it may lead to a fall in the Yoga and the growth of an exaggerated egoism or megalomania — of this there are several symptoms in the utterances of his father during the crisis. In fact one cannot or ought not to plunge into the experiences of this sadhana without a fairly long period of preparation and purification (unless one has already a great spiritual strength and elevation). Sri Aurobindo himself does not care to accept many into his path and rejects many more than he accepts. It would be well if he can get his father to pursue the sadhana no farther — for what he is doing is not really Sri Aurobindo's Yoga but something he has constructed in his own mind and once there has been an upset of this kind, the wisest course is discontinuance.

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All these experiences of yours belong to what I have called the intermediate zone; a large proportion of them are of the vital plane. In the vital plane there are all kinds of things, good and bad, helpful and dangerous, true, half true and false, genuine and deceptive. One has therefore to be very careful and be always vigilant and turned towards the true source of Light. The difficulty is that here one may have a true spiritual experience and afterwards all sorts of imitative deceptions come in and bring with them the danger of a false experience. One has to watch, observe one's experiences and try to discriminate and understand, — waiting for two things, the opening of a wider higher consciousness from above and the coming forward of the psychic being from behind. When these two things happen, then the chance of error is diminished and the true inner guidance begins to make itself more and more felt in the sadhana.

Lights are of all kinds, supramental, mental, vital, physical, divine or Asuric — one has to watch, grow in experience and

learn to know one from another. The true lights however are by their clarity and beauty not difficult to recognise.

The current from above and the current from below are familiar features of Yogic experience. It is the energy of the higher Nature and the energy of the lower Nature that become active and turned towards each other and move to meet, one descending, the other ascending. What happens when they meet, depends on the sadhaka. If his constant will is for the purification of the lower by the higher consciousness, then the meeting results in that and in spiritual progress. If his mind and vital are turbid and clouded, there is a clash, an impure mixture and much disturbance.

The division of the being into two parts — one a large consciousness behind, the other a smaller consciousness in front, is also a familiar feature of sadhana. In itself it is a necessary movement; it should naturally result in the growth of a larger Yogic consciousness prevailing over the small external consciousness and becoming a means for transformation under the pressure of the Divine Shakti. But here too it is possible for errors to take place — especially an outside Force may come in and replace the larger consciousness behind by a larger vital ego which pretends to be that. One must be on one's guard against any such intrusion; for many sadhaks suffer long and severely owing to such an intrusion which spoils the course of the sadhana.

On the whole aspire for the growth of the psychic and its control of the rest of the nature and for the opening, not to a larger vital consciousness, but to the higher consciousness above. And at all stages open yourself to the protection of the Mother and her grace and call on that for your safeguard and your guidance.

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There is no utility in such experiences; they may happen on the vital plane so long as one has still to pass through the vital range of experiences, but the aim should be to get beyond them and live in a pure psychic and spiritual experience. To admit or call the invasion of others into one's own being is to remain always in

the confusions of the intermediate zone. Only the Divine should be called into one's personal adhar — by which is not meant the loss of one's personal being or any idea of becoming the Divine, for that should be avoided. The ego has to be overcome, but the central personal being (which is not the ego but the individual self, soul, a portion of the Divine) has to remain a channel and instrument of the Divine Shakti. As for others, sadhaks etc. one can feel them in one's universalised consciousness, be aware of their movements, live in harmony with them in the Divine All, but not allow or call their presence within the personal adhar. Very often that leads to the invasion of the consciousness by vital powers or presences which assume the forms of those who are so admitted — and that is most undesirable. The sadhak must make his basic consciousness silent, calm, pure, peaceful and preserve or attain an absolute control over what he shall or shall not admit into it — otherwise, if he does not keep this control, he is in danger of becoming a field of confused and disorderly experiences or a plaything of all sorts of mental and vital beings and forces. Only one rule or influence other than one's own should be admitted, the rule of the Divine Shakti over the adhar.

Avoiding the Dangers of the Intermediate Zone

You are taking the first steps towards the cosmic consciousness in which there are all things good and bad, true and false, the cosmic Truth and the cosmic Ignorance. I was not thinking so much of ego as of these thousand voices, possibilities, suggestions. If you avoid these, then there is no necessity of passing through the intermediate zone. By avoid I mean really not admit — one can take cognizance of their nature and pass on.

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Anybody passing the border of the ordinary consciousness can enter into this [*intermediate*] zone, if he does not take care to enter into the psychic. In itself there is no harm in passing through, provided one does not stop there. But ego, sex, ambition etc., if

they get exaggerated, can easily lead to a dangerous downfall.

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It [*the breaking of the veil*] comes of itself with the pressure of the sadhana. It can also be brought about by specific concentration and effort.

It is certainly better if the psychic is conscious and active before there is the removing of the veil or screen between the individual and the universal consciousness which comes when the inner being is brought forward in all its wideness. For then there is much less danger of the difficulties of what I have called the intermediate zone.

Chapter Two

Inner Voices and Indications

The Nature of Voices

There are many voices, and all are not divine; this may be only a voice of desire. All that keeps one faithful to the Truth and insists on peace, purity, devotion, sincerity, a spiritual change of the nature can be listened to with profit; the rest must be observed with discrimination and not followed blindly. Keep the fire of aspiration burning, but avoid all impatient haste.

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Anybody can get “voices”—there are first the movements of one’s nature that take upon themselves a voice—then there are all sorts of beings who either for a joke or for a serious purpose invade with their voices.

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These voices are sometimes one’s own mental formations, sometimes suggestions from outside. Good or bad depends on what they say and on the quarter from which they come.

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This kind of manifestation [*hearing voices*] comes very often at a certain stage of the practice of Yoga. My experience is that it does not come from the highest source and cannot be relied upon and it is better to wait until one is able to enter a higher consciousness and a greater truth than any that these communications represent. Sometimes they come from beings of an intermediate plane who want to use the sadhak for some work or purpose. Many sadhaks accept and some, though by no means all, succeed in doing something, but it is often at the cost of the greater aims of Yoga. In other cases they come from beings who are hostile to the sadhana and wish to bring it to nothing

by exciting ambition, the illusion of a great work or some other form of ego. Each sadhak must decide for himself (unless he has a guru to guide him) whether to treat it as a temptation or a mission.

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It is possible to have a guiding Voice, but it is also easy to make a mistake in this matter. For the mind imitates the guiding voice and, if there are demands and desires in the vital, these also put themselves in the same form and are mistaken for a guiding voice. Make yourself pure of demand and desire, full only of psychic aspiration, surrendered, and in time a real guidance from within will come.

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An inner voice is a voice only—it may give the direction, but not the force. A voice speaks, it does not act. There is a great difference between reading a book [*for guidance*] and receiving the inner direction.

The Danger of Following Inner Voices

No, these indications of time and these voices were not commands from the Mother. I have indicated to you the truth of this matter; you must follow the rules laid down by the Mother for the physical life; if any change has to be made, either she herself will let you know or you have to get sanction for it from her. No voice heard within can prevail against her word and no intimation that comes through your mind can be accepted as binding unless it is confirmed by her.

You have made a confusion which is often made at the beginning of this kind of experience. It is no doubt the Mother's Force that was working within you or upon you, and some of the experiences, such as that of feeling the Mother in your heart, were perfectly genuine. But when the pressure of the Force works upon the consciousness, then in the plane on which it happens to be working, a great activity of different forces is set in play, e.g. if it is the mind, various mental forces, if it is the vital,

various vital forces. It is not safe to take all these for true things, to be accepted without question and followed as commands of the Mother. You received a pressure of a force so strong that it made your head shake for a long time; if the head shook like that, it is a sign that the mind or at least the mental physical was not able yet to receive all the force and assimilate it; if it had done so, there would have been no movement of the head, all would have been perfectly at ease, calm and still. But your mind started working, interpreting, beginning to put its own meaning on this particular phenomenon and again on others, trying to make a system by which to regulate your conduct and to give it authority, put it as the command of the Mother. The action of the Force was a fact, the interpretation you put on its details of coming and going was a mental formation and had no very positive value.

If you look at it carefully—as I have looked at the details reported by you—you will see that these suggestions were of a very shifting and changeful character, now one thing, now the other; only your mind adapted itself to the changes, adjusted its interpretation to suit them and tried to keep the consistency of a system. But in fact all was irregular and chaotic and it tended to make your action and conduct irregular and chaotic. True intuition would not do that; it would at least tend to balance, harmony, order.

You speak of intuition as regards the indication of time. There is an intuition of Time which is not of the mind and when it plays is always accurate to the very minute and if need be to the very second; but this was not that Intuition,—for it was not always accurate; it came right perhaps several times, then it began to be deceptive, it made you late for Pranam; it began to push towards lateness for the noon meal, make you clash with the convenience of the dining-room workers. It pushed you to be late for the evening and abandoned you altogether, so that in the end you had no evening meal. But your mind had got attached to its own formations and tried to justify, to put a meaning on these chaotic caprices, to explain them by the (very changeful) will of the Mother. All this is well-known to those

experienced in Yoga, and it means that these things were not intuitions, but constructions of the mind, mental formations. If there was an intuition at all, it was movements of the intuitive mind, but what the intuitive mind gives to us is the intuition of possibilities, some of which realise themselves, some do not or do it partly only, others miss altogether. Behind these mental constructions are Forces that want to realise themselves and try to use men as their instruments for realisation. These Forces need not be hostile, but they play for their own hand, they want to rule, use, justify themselves, create their own results. If they can do it by getting the Mother's sanction or passing themselves off as commands of the Mother, they are ready to do so; if they cannot get the embodied Mother's sanction, they are ready to represent themselves as sanctions of the Mother in her subtle unseen universal Form or Presence. Some they persuade to make not only a distinction but an opposition between their inner Mother who always tells them what they want to hear and the embodied Mother who, they find, is not so complaisant, checks them, corrects their fancies and their errors. At this stage there is the danger of a more serious invasion of Falsehood, of a hostile vital Force coming in, taking advantage of the mind's errors, which either tries to take the place of the Mother using her name or else creates revolt against her. A persuasion not to come to Pranam, not to keep her acquainted with your experiences and submit to correction, not to accord the life with her expressed will is a danger-signal at this stage,—for it means that the intruding Force wants space to work free from all control—and that was why I felt compelled to call your attention to the peril of a hostile Maya.

As for voices, there are many voices; each Force, each movement of the mental, vital, physical plane may equip itself with a voice. Your voices were not even at one with each other; one said one thing, when it did not work out another said something inconsistent with it; but you were attached to your mental formation and still tried to follow.

All this happens because the mind and vital in these exaltations of the stress of the sadhana become very active. That is

why it is necessary, first, to found your sadhana on a great calm, a great equality, not eagerly rushing after experiences or their fruit, but looking at them, observing, calling always for more and more Light, trying to be more and more wide, open, quietly and discerningly receptive. If the psychic being is always at the front, then these difficulties are greatly lessened, because there is here a light which the mind and vital have not, a spontaneous and natural psychic perception of the divine and the undivine, the true and the false, the imitation and the genuine guidance. It is also the reason why I insist on your referring your experiences to us, because, apart from anything else, we have the knowledge and experience of these things and can immediately put a check on any tendency to error.

Keep yourself open to the Mother's Force, but do not trust all forces. As you go on, if you keep straight, you will come to a time when the psychic becomes more predominantly active and the Light from above prevails more purely and strongly so that the chance of mental constructions and vital formations mixing with the true experience diminishes. As I have told you, these are not yet and cannot be the supramental Forces; it is a work of preparation which is only making things ready for a future Yoga-siddhi.

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How can the people in this Asram judge whether a man has progressed in Yoga or not? They judge from outward appearances —if a sadhak secludes himself, sits much in meditation, gets voices and experiences, etc. etc. they think he is a great sadhak! X was always a very poor Adhar. He had a few experiences of an elementary kind — confused and uncertain, but at every step he was getting into trouble and going off on a side path and we had to pull him up. At last he began to get voices and inspirations which he declared to be ours—I wrote to him many letters of serious warning and explanation but he refused to listen, was too much attached to his false voices and inspirations and, to avoid rebuke and correction, ceased to write or inform us. So he went wholly wrong and finally became hostile. You can tell this

by my authority to anybody who is puzzled like yourself about this matter.

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Higher experiences hurt nobody — the question is what is meant by higher? X for instance thought his experiences to be the highest Truth itself — I told him they were all imaginations but only with the result that he became furious with me. There are imitation higher experiences when the mind or vital catches hold of an idea or suggestion and turns it into a feeling, and while there is a rush of forces, a feeling of exultation and power etc. All sorts of “inspirations” come, visions, perhaps “voices”. There is nothing more dangerous than these voices — when I hear from somebody that he has a “voice”, I always feel uneasy, though there can be genuine and helpful voices, and feel inclined to say, “No voices please, — silence, silence and a clear discriminating brain.” I have hinted about this region of imitation experiences, false inspirations, false voices into which hundreds of Yogis enter and some never get out of it in my letter about the intermediate zone. If a man has a strong clear head and a certain kind of spiritual scepticism, he can go through and does — but people without discrimination like X or Y get lost. Especially ego enters in and makes them so attached to their splendid (?) condition that they absolutely refuse to come out. Now a retirement into seclusion gives free scope for this kind of action, as it makes one live entirely in one’s own subjective being without any control except what one’s own native discernment can bring in — and if that is not strong? Ego is of course the strong support of these subjective falsehoods, but there are other supports also. Work and mixing with others — with the contact of the objective that that brings — is not an absolute defence against these things, but it is a defence and serves as a check and as a kind of corrective balance. I notice that those who enter into this region of the intermediate zone usually make for retirement and seclusion and insist on it. These are the reasons why I prefer usually that sadhaks should not take to an absolute retirement, but keep a certain poise between silence and action, the inner and the outer together.

Part Four

The Fundamental Realisations of the Integral Yoga

Section One

Three Stages of Transformation:
Psychic, Spiritual, Supramental

Chapter One

The Psychic and Spiritual Realisations

The Fundamental Realisations¹

1. The psychic change so that a complete devotion can be the main motive of the heart and the ruler of thought, life and action in constant union with the Mother and in her Presence.
2. The descent of the Peace, Power, Light etc. of the Higher Consciousness through the head and heart into the whole being, occupying the very cells of the body.
3. The perception of the One and Divine infinitely everywhere, the Mother everywhere and living in that infinite consciousness.

Four Bases of Realisation

You know the four things on which the realisation has to be based—(1) on a rising to a station above the mind, (2) on the opening out of the cosmic consciousness, (3) on the psychic opening, (4) on the descent of the higher consciousness with its peace, light, force, knowledge, Ananda etc. into all the planes of the being down to the most physical. All this has to be done by the working of the Mother's force aided by your aspiration, devotion and surrender. That is the Path. The rest is a matter of the working out of these things for which you have to have faith in the Mother's working.

Three Realisations for the Soul

When one speaks of the Divine spark, one is thinking of the soul

¹ The letter under this heading is Sri Aurobindo's reply to the question, "What are the fundamental realisations in the Yoga?" — Ed.

as a portion of the Divine which has descended from above into the manifestation rather than of something which has separated itself from the cosmos. It is the nature that has formed itself out of the cosmic forces—mind out of cosmic mind, life out of cosmic life, body out of cosmic matter.

For the soul there are three realisations—(1) the realisation of the psychic being and consciousness as the divine element in the evolution, (2) the realisation of the cosmic Self which is one in all, (3) the realisation of the supreme Divine from which both individual and cosmos have come and of the individual being (Jivatma) as an eternal portion of the Divine.

Foundations of the Sadhana

What you are experiencing is the true foundation of the spiritual life and realisation. It has three elements—first, the love which is the heart of Bhakti; then the descent of peace and equanimity which is the first necessary basis for realisation of self and the higher knowledge—what comes with it is the descent of the force which will work out in you the whole sadhana; thirdly, the feeling of a guiding presence or power which is the basis of Karma—of work and action founded in the spiritual consciousness.

*

You can reply to X that the three experiences he is having are the right ones—viz. the opening of the psychic through the heart, the descent of peace and the consciousness of his true being as the witness. But these experiences must be developed, deepened, completed and made the ordinary state of the consciousness. So established they become the triple foundation of the sadhana.

*

If you keep the wideness and calm as you are keeping it and also the love for the Mother in the heart, then all is safe—for it means the double foundation of the Yoga—the descent of the higher consciousness with its peace, freedom and security from

above and the openness of the psychic which keeps all the effort or all the spontaneous movement turned towards the true goal.

*

To quiet the mind in such a way that no thoughts will come is not easy and usually takes time. The most necessary thing is to feel a quietude in the mind so that if thoughts come they do not disturb or hold the mind or make it follow them, but simply cross and pass away. The mind first becomes the witness of the passage of thought and not the thinker, afterwards it is able not to watch the thoughts but lets them pass unnoticed and concentrates in itself or on the object it chooses without trouble.

There are two main things to be secured as the foundations of sadhana — the opening of the psychic being and the realisation of the Self above. For the opening of the psychic being, concentration on the Mother and self-offering to her are the direct way. The growth of Bhakti which you feel is the first sign of the psychic development. A sense of the Mother's presence or force or the remembrance of her supporting and strengthening you is the next sign. Eventually, the soul within begins to be active in aspiration and psychic perception guiding the mind to the right thoughts, the vital to the right movements and feelings, showing and rejecting all that has to be put away and turning the whole being in all its movements to the Divine alone. For the self-realisation, peace and silence of the mind are the first condition. Afterwards one begins to feel release, freedom, wideness, to live in a consciousness silent, tranquil, untouched by any or all things, existing everywhere and in all, one with or united with the Divine. Other experiences come on the way, or may come, such as the opening of the inner vision, the sense of the Force working within and various movements and phenomena of the working etc. One may also be conscious of ascents of the consciousness and descents of Force, Peace, Bliss or Light from above.

*

I do not know why you doubt your experiences — you should

accept them as genuine unless we expressly say anything to the contrary. In all the experiences you have sent me up to now, I have never found any that were not perfectly genuine; moreover, your observation of them is quite sound and accurate.

Your first experience was that of the opening of the psychic; you became aware of the psychic being and its aspirations and experiences and of the external being in front, as two separate parts of your consciousness. You were not able to keep this experience because the vital was not purified and pulled you out into the ordinary external consciousness. Afterwards, you got back into the psychic and were at the same time able to see your ordinary vital nature, to become aware of its defects and to work by the power of the psychic for its purification. I wrote to you at the beginning that this was the right way; for if the psychic is awake and in front, it becomes easy to remain conscious of the things that have to be changed in the external nature and it is comparatively easy too to change them. But if the psychic gets veiled and retires into the background, the outer nature left to itself finds it difficult to remain conscious of its own wrong movements and even with great effort cannot succeed in getting rid of them. You can see yourself, as in the matter of the food, that with the psychic active and awake the right attitude comes naturally and whatever difficulty there was soon diminishes or even disappears.

I told you also at that time that there was a third part of the nature, the inner being (inner mind, inner vital, inner physical) of which you were not yet aware, but which must also open in time. It is this that has happened in your last experience. What you felt as a part of you, yourself but not your physical self, rising to meet the higher consciousness above, was this inner being; it was your (inner) higher vital being which rose in that way to join the highest Self above—and it was able to do so, because the work of purifying the outer vital nature had begun in earnest. Each time there is a purification of the outer nature, it becomes more possible for the inner being to reveal itself, to become free and to open to the higher consciousness above.

When this happens, several other things can happen at the

same time. First, one becomes aware of the silent Self above—free, wide, without limits, pure, untroubled by the mental, vital and physical movements, empty of ego and limited personality,—this is what you have described in your letter. Secondly, the Divine Power descends through this silence and freedom of the Self and begins to work in the Adhara. This is what you felt as a pressure; its coming through the top of the head, the forehead and eyes and nose meant that it was working to open the mental centres—especially the two higher centres of thought and will and vision in the inner mental being. These two centres are called the thousand-petalled lotus and the *ājñā-cakra* between the eyebrows. Thirdly, by this working the inner parts of the being are opened and freed; you are liberated from the limitations of the ordinary personal mind, vital and physical and become aware of a wider consciousness in which you can be more capable of the needed transformation. But that is necessarily a matter of time and long working and you are only taking the first steps in this way.

When one goes into the inner being, the tendency is to go entirely inside and lose consciousness of the outside world—this is what people call Samadhi. But it is also necessary to be able to have the same experiences (of the Self, the workings in the inner consciousness etc.) in the waking state. The best rule for you will be to allow the entire going inside only when you are alone and not likely to be disturbed, and at other times to accustom yourself to have these experiences with the physical consciousness awake and participating in them or at least aware of them. You did therefore quite right in stopping the complete going inside while you were at X's place. There was no harm in having these experiences there or anywhere, but there should be nothing to draw the attention of others—especially of those who are not in the Yoga or in the atmosphere.

The Central Process of the Yoga

I have said that the most decisive way for the Peace or the Silence to come is by a descent from above. In fact, in reality

though not always in appearance, that is how they always come; — not in appearance always, because the sadhak is not always conscious of the process; he feels the peace settling in him or at least manifesting, but he has not been conscious how and whence it came. Yet it is the truth that all that belongs to the higher consciousness comes from above, not only the spiritual peace and silence, but the Light, the Power, the Knowledge, the higher seeing and thought, the Ananda come from above. It is also possible that up to a certain point they may come from within, but this is because the psychic being is open to them directly and they come first there and then reveal themselves in the rest of the being from the psychic or by its coming into the front. A disclosure from within or a descent from above are the two sovereign ways of the Yoga-siddhi. An effort of the external surface mind or emotions, a tapasya of some kind may seem to build up something of these things, but the results are usually uncertain and fragmentary compared to the result of the two radical ways. That is why in this Yoga we insist always on an “opening”—an opening inwards of the inner mind, vital, physical to the inmost part of us, the psychic, and an opening upwards to what is above the mind—as indispensable for the fruits of the sadhana.

The underlying reason for this is that this little mind, vital and body which we call ourselves is only a surface movement and not our “self” at all. It is an external bit of personality put forward for one brief life and for the play of the Ignorance. It is equipped with an ignorant mind stumbling about in search of fragments of truth, an ignorant vital rushing about in search of fragments of pleasure, an obscure and mostly subconscious physical receiving the impacts of things and suffering rather than possessing a resultant pain or pleasure. All that is accepted until the mind gets disgusted and starts looking about for the real Truth of itself and things, the vital gets disgusted and begins wondering whether there is not such a thing as real bliss and the physical gets tired and wants liberation from itself and its pains and pleasures. Then it is possible for this little ignorant bit of surface personality to get back to its real Self and with it to these

greater things — or else to extinction of itself, Nirvana.

The real Self is not anywhere on the surface but deep within and above. Within is the soul supporting an inner mind, inner vital, inner physical in which there is a capacity for universal wideness and with it for the things now asked for, — direct contact with the Truth of self and things, taste of a universal bliss, liberation from the imprisoned smallness and sufferings of the gross physical body. Even in Europe the existence of something behind the surface is now very frequently admitted, but its nature is mistaken and it is called subconscious or subliminal, while really it is very conscious in its own way and not subliminal but only behind the veil. It is, according to our psychology, connected with the small outer personality by certain centres of consciousness of which we become aware by Yoga. Only a little of the inner being escapes through these centres into the outer life, but that little is the best part of ourselves and responsible for our art, poetry, philosophy, ideals, religious aspirations, efforts at knowledge and perfection. But the inner centres are, for the most part, closed or asleep — to open them and make them awake and active is one aim of Yoga. As they open, the powers and possibilities of the inner being also are aroused in us; we awake first to a larger consciousness and then to a cosmic consciousness; we are no longer little separate personalities with limited lives but centres of a universal action and in direct contact with cosmic forces. Moreover, instead of being unwilling playthings of the latter, as is the surface person, we can become to a certain extent conscious and masters of the play of nature — how far this goes depending on the development of the inner being and its opening upward to the higher spiritual levels. At the same time the opening of the heart centre releases the psychic being which proceeds to make us aware of the Divine within us and of the higher Truth above us.

For the highest spiritual Self is not even behind our personality and bodily existence but is above it and altogether exceeds it. The highest of the inner centres is in the head, just as the deepest is the heart; but the centre which opens directly to the Self is above the head, altogether outside the physical body,

in what is called the subtle body, *sūkṣma śarīra*. This Self has two aspects and the results of realising it correspond to these two aspects. One is static, a condition of wide peace, freedom, silence: the silent Self is unaffected by any action or experience; it impartially supports them but does not seem to originate them at all, rather to stand back detached or unconcerned, *udāsīna*. The other aspect is dynamic and that is experienced as a cosmic Self or Spirit which not only supports but originates and contains the whole cosmic action — not only that part of it which concerns our physical selves but also all that is beyond it, this world and all other worlds, the supraphysical as well as the physical ranges of the universe. Moreover, we feel the Self as one in all, but also we feel it as above all, transcendent, surpassing all individual birth or cosmic existence. To get into the universal Self — one in all — is to be liberated from ego; ego either becomes a small instrumental circumstance in the consciousness or disappears from our consciousness altogether. That is the extinction or *nirvāṇa* of the ego. To get into the transcendent self above all makes us capable of transcending altogether even the cosmic consciousness and action — it can be the way to that complete liberation from the world-existence which is called also extinction, *laya*, *mokṣa*, Nirvana.

It must be noted however that the opening upward does not necessarily lead to peace, silence and Nirvana only. The sadhak becomes aware not only of a great, eventually an infinite peace, silence, wideness above us, above the head as it were and extending into all physical and supraphysical space, but also he can become aware of other things — a vast Force in which is all power, a vast Light in which is all knowledge, a vast Ananda in which is all bliss and rapture. At first they appear as something essential, indeterminate, absolute, simple, *kevala*; a Nirvana into any of these things seems possible. But we can come to see too that this Force contains all forces, this Light all lights, this Ananda all joy and bliss possible. And all this can descend into us. Any of them and all of them can come down, not peace alone; only the safest is to bring down first an absolute calm and peace for that makes the descent of the

rest more secure; otherwise it may be difficult for the external nature to contain or bear so much Force, Light, Knowledge or Ananda. All these things together make what we call the higher, spiritual or divine consciousness. The psychic opening through the heart puts us primarily into connection with the individual Divine, the Divine in his inner relations with us; it is especially the source of love and bhakti. This upward opening puts us into direct relation with the whole Divine and can create in us the divine consciousness and a new birth or births of the spirit.

For when the Peace is established, this higher or Divine Force from above can descend and work in us. It descends usually first into the head and liberates the inner mind centres, then into the heart centre and liberates fully the psychic and emotional being, then into the navel and other vital centres and liberates the inner vital, then into the Muladhara and below and liberates the inner physical being. It works at the same time for perfection as well as liberation; it takes up the whole nature part by part and deals with it, rejecting what has to be rejected, sublimating what has to be sublimated, creating what has to be created. It integrates, harmonises, establishes a new rhythm in the nature. It can bring down too a higher and yet higher force and range of the higher Nature until, if that be the aim of the sadhana, it becomes possible to bring down the supramental force and existence. All this is prepared, assisted, farthered by the work of the psychic being in the heart centre; the more it is open, in front, active, the quicker, safer, easier the working of the Force can be. The more love and bhakti and surrender grow in the heart, the more rapid and perfect becomes the evolution of the sadhana. For the descent and transformation imply at the same time an increasing contact and union with the Divine.

That is the fundamental rationale of the sadhana. It will be evident that the two most important things here are the opening of the heart centre and the opening of the mind centres to all that is behind and above them. For the heart opens to the psychic being and the mind centres open to the higher consciousness and the nexus between the psychic being and the higher consciousness is the principal means of the siddhi. The

first opening is effected by a concentration in the heart, a call to the Divine to manifest within us and through the psychic to take up and lead the whole nature. Aspiration, prayer, bhakti, love, surrender are the main supports of this part of the sadhana—accompanied by a rejection of all that stands in the way of what we aspire for. The second opening is effected by a concentration of the consciousness in the head (afterwards, above it) and an aspiration and call and a sustained will for the descent of the divine Peace, Power, Light, Knowledge, Ananda into the being—the Peace first or the Peace and Force together. Some indeed receive Light first or Ananda first or some sudden pouring down of knowledge. With some there is first an opening which reveals to them a vast infinite Silence, Force, Light or Bliss above them and afterwards either they ascend to that or these things begin to descend into the lower nature. With others there is either the descent, first into the head, then down to the heart level, then to the navel and below and through the whole body, or else an inexplicable opening—without any sense of descent—of peace, light, wideness or power or else a horizontal opening into the cosmic consciousness or, in a suddenly widened mind, an outburst of knowledge. Whatever comes has to be welcomed—for there is no absolute rule for all,—but if the peace has not come first, care must be taken not to swell oneself in exultation or lose the balance. The capital movement however is when the Divine Force or Shakti, the power of the Mother comes down and takes hold, for then the organisation of the consciousness begins and the larger foundation of the Yoga.

The result of the concentration is not usually immediate—though to some there comes a swift and sudden outflowering; but with most there is a time longer or shorter of adaptation or preparation, especially if the nature has not been prepared already to some extent by aspiration and tapasya. The coming of the result can sometimes be aided by associating with the concentration one of the processes of the old Yogas. There is the Adwaita process of the way of knowledge—one rejects from oneself the identification with the mind, vital, body, saying continually “I am not the mind”, “I am not the vital”, “I am not the

body”, seeing these things as separate from one’s real self—and after a time one feels all the mental, vital, physical processes and the very sense of mind, vital, body becoming externalised, an outer action, while within and detached from them there grows the sense of a separate self-existent being which opens into the realisation of the cosmic and transcendent Spirit. There is also the method—a very powerful method—of the Sankhyas, the separation of the Purusha and the Prakriti. One enforces on the mind the position of the Witness—all action of mind, vital, physical becomes an outer play which is not myself or mine, but belongs to Nature and has been enforced on an outer me. I am the witness Purusha who am silent, detached, not bound by any of these things. There grows up in consequence a division in the being; the sadhak feels within him the growth of a calm silent separate consciousness which feels itself quite apart from the surface play of the mind and the vital and physical Nature. Usually when this takes place, it is possible very rapidly to bring down the peace of the higher consciousness and the action of the higher Force and the full march of the Yoga. But often the Force itself comes down first in response to the concentration and call and then, if these things are necessary, it does them and uses any other means or process that is helpful or indispensable.

One thing more. In this process of the descent from above and the working it is most important not to rely entirely on oneself, but to rely on the guidance of the Guru and to refer all that happens to his judgment and arbitration and decision. For it often happens that the forces of the lower nature are stimulated and excited by the descent and want to mix with it and turn it to their profit. It often happens too that some Power or Powers undivine in their nature present themselves as the Supreme Lord or as the Divine Mother and claim the being’s service and surrender. If these things are accepted, there will be an extremely disastrous consequence. If indeed there is the assent of the sadhak to the Divine working alone and the submission or surrender to that guidance, then all can go smoothly. This assent and a rejection of all egoistic forces or forces that appeal to the ego are the safeguard throughout the sadhana. But the

ways of Nature are full of snares, the disguises of the ego are innumerable, the illusions of the Powers of Darkness, Rakshasi Maya, are extraordinarily skilful; the reason is an insufficient guide and often turns traitor; vital desire is always with us tempting to follow any alluring call. This is the reason why in this Yoga we insist so much on what we call *samarpana*—rather inadequately rendered by the English word surrender. If the heart centre is fully opened and the psychic is always in control, then there is no question; all is safe. But the psychic can at any moment be veiled by a lower upsurge. It is only a few who are exempt from these dangers and it is precisely those to whom surrender is easily possible. The guidance of one who is himself by identity or represents the Divine is in this difficult endeavour imperative and indispensable.

What I have written may help you to get some clear idea of what I mean by the central process of the Yoga. I have written at some length but, naturally, could cover only the fundamental things. Whatever belongs to circumstance and detail must arise as one works out the method, or rather as it works itself out,—for the last is what usually happens when there is an effective beginning of the action of the sadhana.

Chapter Two

Conditions of Transformation

Realisation and Transformation

Transformation is something progressive, but certainly there must be realisation before the complete transformation is possible.

The Three Transformations

There are three stages of the sadhana, psychic change, transition to the higher levels of consciousness — with a descent of their conscious forces — the supramental. In the last even the control over death is a later, not an initial stage. Each of these stages demands a great length of time and a high and long endeavour.

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To be *sthitaprajña* merely means to have one's thinking mind settled in the spiritual consciousness in the realisation of Self. That does not necessarily transform the other parts of the nature. The bringing down of the Force and Light of the higher consciousness, the opening of the psychic and the centres of the mind, vital and physical, the consent and receptive opening of the nature to the workings of the psychic and the higher consciousness, finally the opening to the supramental are the conditions of transformation. What do you mean by "attaining" the higher consciousness? The higher consciousness is something above the mind, vital and body of the human being. It is wholly spiritual. To attain may mean only to be able to go into it at will or to remain in it with a part of one's consciousness, while the rest goes on in the old way. Psychic transformation is when the whole being is remoulded into the nature of the psychic; spiritual transformation is when the whole being is spiritualised; supramental transformation is when the whole being is supramentalised —

that cannot be done automatically by merely being aware of the higher consciousness or attaining it in the ordinary limited sense.

The physical is of course the basis—that of the Overmind is in between the two hemispheres. The lower hemisphere must contain all the mind including its higher planes, the vital, the physical. The upper hemisphere contains the Divine existence-consciousness-bliss, with the Supermind as its means of self-formulation. The Overmind is at the head of the lower hemisphere and is the intermediate or transitional plane between the two.

The psychic being stands behind the heart supporting the mind, life and body. In the psychic transformation there are three main elements: (1) the opening of the occult inner mind, inner vital, inner physical, so that one becomes aware of all that lies behind the surface mind, life and body; (2) the opening of the psychic being or soul by which it comes forward and governs the mind, life and body turning all to the Divine; (3) the opening of the whole lower being to the spiritual truth—this last may be called the psycho-spiritual part of the change. It is quite possible for the psychic transformation to take one beyond the individual into the cosmic. Even the occult opening establishes a connection with the cosmic mind, cosmic vital, cosmic physical. The psychic realises the contact with all existence, the oneness of the Self, the universal love and other realisations which lead to the cosmic consciousness.

But all that is a result of the opening to the spiritual above and it comes by an infiltration or reflection of the spiritual light and truth in mind, life and body. The spiritual transformation proper begins or becomes possible when one rises above the mind and lives there governing all from above. Even in the psychic transformation one can rise above by a sort of going above of the mental, vital, physical being and a return, but one does not yet live above in the summit consciousness where Overmind has its seat with the other planes that are above the human Mind.

The supramental transformation can only come when the lid

between the lower and higher hemispheres or halves of existence is removed and the Supermind instead of the Overmind becomes the governing power of the existence — but of that nothing can be spoken now.

Preparation for the Supramental Change

Get the psychic being in front and keep it there, putting its power on the mind, vital and physical — so that it shall communicate to them its force of single-minded aspiration, trust, faith, surrender, direct and immediate detection of whatever is wrong in the nature and turned towards ego and error, away from Light and Truth.

Eliminate egoism in all its forms; eliminate it from every movement of your consciousness.

Develop the cosmic consciousness — let the egocentric outlook disappear in wideness, impersonality, the sense of the cosmic Divine, the perception of universal forces, the realisation and understanding of the cosmic manifestation, the play.

Find in place of ego the true being — a portion of the Divine, issued from the World-Mother and an instrument of the manifestation. This sense of being a portion of the Divine and an instrument should be free from all pride, sense or claim of ego or assertion of superiority, demand or desire. For if these elements are there, then it is not the true thing.

Most, even in doing Yoga, live in the mind, vital, physical, lit up occasionally or to some extent by the higher mind and by the illumined mind; but to prepare for the supramental change it is necessary (as soon as, personally, the time has come) to open up to the Intuition and the Overmind, so that these may make the whole being and the whole nature ready for the supramental change. Allow the consciousness quietly to develop and widen, and the knowledge of these things will progressively come.

Calm, discrimination, detachment (but not indifference) are all very important, for their opposites impede very much the transforming action. Intensity of aspiration should be there, but it must go along with these. No hurry, no inertia — neither

rajasic over-eagerness nor tamasic discouragement—a steady and persistent but quiet call and working. No snatching or clutching at realisation, but allowing realisation to come from within and above and observing accurately its field, its nature, its limits.

Let the power of the Mother work in you, but be careful to avoid mixture or the substitution in its place of either a magnified ego-working or a force of Ignorance presenting itself as Truth. Aspire especially for the elimination of all obscurity and unconsciousness in the nature.

These are the main conditions of preparation for the supramental change, but none of them is easy, and they must be complete before the nature can be said to be ready. If the true attitude (psychic, unegoistic, open only to the Divine Force) can be established, then the process can go on much more quickly. To take and keep the true attitude, to further the change in *oneself*, is the help that can be given, the one thing needed to assist the general change.

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1. Loss of egoism—including all ambition (even “spiritual” ambition), pride, desire, self-centred life, mind, will.
2. Universalisation of the consciousness.
3. Absolute surrender to the transcendental Divine.

Section Two

The Psychic Opening, Emergence and Transformation

Chapter One

The Psychic Being and Its Role in Sadhana

The Importance of the Psychic Change

What is meant in the terminology of the Yoga by the psychic is the soul element in the nature, the pure psyche or divine nucleus which stands behind mind, life and body (it is not the ego) but of which we are only dimly aware. It is a portion of the Divine and permanent from life to life, taking the experience of life through its outer instruments. As this experience grows it manifests a developing psychic personality which insisting always on the good, true and beautiful, finally becomes ready and strong enough to turn the nature towards the Divine. It can then come entirely forward, breaking through the mental, vital and physical screen, govern the instincts and transform the nature. Nature no longer imposes itself on the soul, but the soul, the Purusha, imposes its dictates on the nature.

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The soul, the psychic being, is in direct touch with the divine Truth, but it is hidden in man by the mind, the vital being and the physical nature (*manas, prāṇa, anna* of the Taittiriya Upanishad). One may practise Yoga and get illuminations in the mind and the reason; one may conquer power and luxuriate in all kinds of experiences in the vital; one may establish even surprising physical siddhis; but if the true soul-power behind does not manifest, if the psychic nature does not come into the front, nothing genuine has been done. In this Yoga, the psychic being is that which opens the rest of the nature to the true supramental light and finally to the supreme Ananda. Mind can open by itself to its own higher reaches; it can still itself and widen into the Impersonal; it may too spiritualise itself in

some kind of static liberation or Nirvana; but the supramental cannot find a sufficient base in spiritualised mind alone. If the inmost soul is awakened, if there is a new birth out of the mere mental, vital and physical into the psychic consciousness, then this Yoga can be done; otherwise (by the sole power of the mind or any other part) it is impossible. If there is a refusal of the psychic new birth, a refusal to become the child new born from the Mother, owing to attachment to intellectual knowledge or mental ideas or to some vital desire, then there will be a failure in the sadhana.

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It seems to me that you must know by this time about the psychic being—that it is behind the veil and its consciousness also; only a little comes out into the mind and vital and physical. When that consciousness is not concealed, when you are aware of your soul (the psychic being), when its feelings and aspirations are yours, then you have got the consciousness of the psychic being. The feelings and aspirations of the psychic being are all turned towards truth and right consciousness and the Divine; it is the only part that cannot be touched by the hostile forces and their suggestions.

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Everything is dangerous in the sadhana or can be, except the psychic change.

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That [*feeling the Mother's Presence, Love, Joy, Beauty*] is one part of the psychic experience—the other is a complete self-giving, absence of demand, a prominence of the psychic being by which all that is false, wrong, egoistic, contrary to the Divine Truth, Divine Will, Divine Purity and Light is shown, falls away, cannot prevail in the nature. With all that the increase of the psychic qualities, gratitude, obedience, unselfishness, fidelity to the true perception, true impulse etc. that comes from the Mother or leads to the Mother. When this side grows, then the other,

the Presence, Love, Joy, Beauty, can develop and be permanently there.

The Role of the Psychic in Sadhana

The contribution of the psychic being to the sadhana is: (1) love and bhakti, a love not vital, demanding and egoistic but without conditions or claims, self-existent; (2) the contact or the presence of the Mother within; (3) an unerring guidance from within; (4) a quieting and purification of the mind, vital and physical consciousness by their subjection to the psychic influence and guidance; (5) the opening up of all this lower consciousness to the higher spiritual consciousness above for its descent into a nature prepared to receive it with a complete receptivity and right attitude — for the psychic brings in everything right thought, right perception, right feeling, right attitude.

One can raise up one's consciousness from the mental and vital and bring down the power, ananda, light, knowledge from above; but this is far more difficult and uncertain in its result, even dangerous if the being is not prepared or not pure enough. To ascend with the psychic for the purpose is by far the best way. If you are thus rising from the psychic centre, so much the better.

What you say indicates that the psychic and mental centres are in communication and through them you are able to bring down things from the higher consciousness. But you have not changed your head centre for the above-head centre or for the above-head wideness. That usually comes by a gradual rising of the consciousness first to the top of the head and then above it. But this must not be strained after or forced; it will come of itself.

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The psychic being not only helps openly, when it is strong and in front, but can govern the mind and vital and physical nature, give it the clear intimation of what is true and false, divine or undivine, right or wrong and repel all invasion of the hostile forces.

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It is true that if the consciousness remains quiet, the psychic will manifest more and more from deep inside and a clear feeling will come of what is true and spiritually right and what is wrong or untrue and with it also will come the power to throw away what is hostile, wrong or untrue.

*

If the psychic is active—or in so far as it is active, there is something in it which is like an automatic test for the universal forces—warning against (not by thought so much as by an essential feeling) and rejecting what should not be, accepting and transmuting what should be.

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That is the special work of the psychic being, to receive the true things from above and to send away the false things from below.

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This is the function of the psychic—it has to work on each plane so as to help each to awaken to the true truth and the divine reality.

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You are right in thinking that this psychic attitude is your true need; it is that which can make the progress simple, happy and easy.

Persevere; there is no reason for giving up. Let no uprising of difficulties discourage you. At the end there is victory and lasting peace.

The Psychic Deep Within

The place of the psychic is deep within the heart,—but *deep within*, not on the surface where the ordinary emotions are. But it can come forward and occupy the surface as well as be within,—then the emotions themselves become no longer vital things, but psychic emotions and feelings. The psychic so standing in

front can also extend its influence everywhere, to the mind for instance so as to transform its ideas or to the body so as to transform its habits and its reactions.

*

The psychic being is in the heart centre in the middle of the chest (not in the physical heart, for all the centres are in the middle of the body), but it is deep behind. When one is going away from the vital into the psychic, it is felt as if one is going deep deep down till one reaches that central place of the psychic. The surface of the heart centre is the place of the emotional being; from there one goes deep to find the psychic. The more one goes, the more intense becomes the psychic happiness which you describe.

*

If it was something in the heart, it must be the psychic being which is often felt as if deep down somewhere or rising out of a depth. If one goes to it, it is felt often as if one were going into a deep well.

The shock must have been the psychic force trying to open the mental and vital lid which covers the soul.

*

It is evidently the psychic—it is often seen as a deep well or abyss into which one plunges and finds no end; but here it is evidently the psychic penetrating down into all the lower planes and also rising up to the higher planes above.

*

The empty condition by itself is not called samadhi—it is when one goes inside, is conscious within but not conscious of outside things. What you describe yourself as doing involuntarily is this going inside and being conscious there. It was into the psychic centre inside that you were going, the place that you saw as a luminous *maidān* in a former experience. When one goes there it is just this peace and sweetness that one feels and also this

sense of the Mother being there not far away or very near. So it is a very good development of the sadhana.

The Psychic and the Mental, Vital and Physical Nature

The mind, life and body are the instruments for manifestation. Of course the psychic can manifest things by itself inwardly or in its own plane, but for manifestation in the physical plane the instrumentality of the other parts is needed.

*

These [*questions about the transformation of the lower worlds*] are questions with which we need not concern ourselves at present. To answer them would be to stimulate merely the curiosity of the mind—what is important now is to liberate the psychic from its veils and to open the mind and vital and body to the higher consciousness. Until that is done, there can be no individual transformation and so long as there is not the individual transformation what is the use of speculating about the transformation of worlds and its results?

*

The soul is the witness, upholder, inmost experiencer, but it is master only in theory, in fact it is not-master, *anīśa*, so long as it consents to the Ignorance. For that is a general consent which implies that the Prakriti gambols about with the Purusha and does pretty well what she likes with him. When he wants to get back his mastery, make the theoretical practical, he needs a lot of tapasya to do it.

The psychic has always been veiled, consenting to the play of mind, physical and vital, experiencing everything through them in the ignorant mental, vital and physical way. How then can it be that they are bound to change at once when it just takes the trouble to whisper or say, “Let there be Light”! They have a tremendous negating power and can refuse and do refuse point-blank. The mind resists with an obstinate persistency in argument and a constant confusion of ideas, the vital with a fury

of bad will aided by the mind's obliging reasonings on its side, the physical resists with an obstinate inertia and crass fidelity to old habit, and when they have done, the general Nature comes in and says, "What, you are going to get free from me so easily? Not if I know it," and it besieges and throws back the old nature on you again and again as long as it can.

*

You should never listen to these suggestions of unfitness or anything else that denies the possibility of progress and fulfilment. Whatever the difficulties or the slowness or periods of emptiness, keep before you the firm idea that succeed you must and will. Do not be discouraged by the time taken. There are people who have laboured for many years together thinking they were making no progress and yet finally the opening has come. The Force is there working behind the veil to remove difficulties and prepare the Adhar — if one is constant, finally the result will appear.

It does not matter with what motive you or anyone began the sadhana. There are always two elements, the psychic within which wants the Divine, and the mind, vital, physical which are pushed to enter the way through some idea, desire or feeling — it may be the feeling of *vairāgya* with the ordinary life, disgust of it and a desire for freedom and peace, or it may be something else, the idea of a greater knowledge or joy or calm which mind and life cannot give, or the seeking of Yoga power for one object or another. All that does not matter — for as the psychic pushes one farther on the way, these things drop away and the one longing for the Divine takes their place, or else they themselves are transformed and put in their proper place. The only thing you must be careful about is that, when the experience develops, you do not replace the first motives by Yogic ambition or desire for greatness or get misled by vital desires; but this can always be avoided if your mind knows and holds to it firmly that union with the Divine alone is the true central object of sadhana.

The Psychic Awakening

The psychic being is always there, but is not felt because it is covered up by the mind and vital; when it is no longer covered up, it is then said to be awake. When it is awake, it begins to take hold of the rest of the being, to influence it and change it so that all may become the true expression of the inner soul. It is this change that is called the inner conversion. There can be no conversion without the awakening of the psychic being.

*

The experiences that are coming cannot be permanent at the beginning; they come and go and do their work and afterwards there is a permanent result. What must be permanent is the psychic awakening, the psychic condition and attitude and what you have written in your letter is an exact description of this psychic condition and psychic attitude. One has to keep this and see what happens and the Mother's Force will do the rest.

*

Let the sweetness and the happy feeling increase, for they are the strongest sign of the soul, the psychic being awake and in touch with us. Let not mistakes of thought or speech or action disturb you — put them away from you as something superficial which the Power and Light will deal with and remove. Keep to the one central thing — your soul and these higher realities it brings with it.

*

That is good — the awakening of the psychic consciousness and its control over the rest is one of the most indispensable elements of the sadhana.

Living in the Psychic

The division of the being of which you speak is a necessary stage in the Yogic development and experience. One feels that there

is a twofold being, the inner psychic which is the true one and the other, the outer human being which is instrumental for the outward life. To live in the inner psychic being and in union with the Divine while the outer does the outward work, as you feel, is the first stage in Karmayoga. There is nothing wrong in these experiences; they are indispensable and normal at this stage.

If you feel no bridge between the two, it is probably because you are not yet conscious of what connects the two. There is an inner mental, an inner vital, an inner physical which connect the psychic and the external being. About this, however, you need not be anxious at present.

The important thing is to keep what you have and let it grow, to live always in the psychic being, your true being. The psychic will then in due time awaken and turn to the Divine all the rest of the nature, so that even the outer being will feel itself in touch with the Divine and moved by the Divine in all it is and feels and does.

*

If it is the sense of the presence that you have, then you are living in the consciousness of the psychic centre. Thinking with the mind is good because it leads towards that but it is not in itself that living in the psychic centre.

*

It is necessary [*in order to be constantly aware of the psychic*] to accustom oneself to do things from within, not to let the consciousness be thrown outward. If it is thrown outward, then to step back inwardly and regard the action or movement from within. Of course there must be the habit of self-offering too or turning all to the Divine.

*

It [*the psychic being*] has to be surrendered consciously and with more and more knowledge. The psychic aspires to the Divine or answers to things divine, it is surrendered in principle, but it has

to develop its surrender in detail carrying with it the surrender of all the being.

*

There are always unregenerate parts tugging people backwards and who is not divided? But it is best to put one's trust in the soul, the spark of the Divine within and foster that till it rises into a sufficient flame.

Chapter Two

The Psychic Opening

The Meaning of Psychic Opening

The psychic in the ignorant human being is always behind a veil and can act on the mind or vital but not in its own power, for that is limited and obscured by the instruments. A psychic opening means the removal of the veil and the increasingly direct action of the psychic.

*

The present nature is ignorant and full of wrong actions and reactions. But there is a being within you, the psychic, which answers to the Truth and not to the Ignorance. If one turns to the Divine and becomes open, then this psychic being shows itself and gives to the nature the true thoughts, feelings, will, action. This is the first change to be made.

*

What you feel is the true psychic opening and it is that for which you should always aspire and reject other things until it becomes your normal base of consciousness. Once that is there, it is possible to call down through it a strength from above which will make the vital strong and remove the weakness. Your sadhana is still too mental and therefore difficult and slow; it is the psychic opening that makes a more satisfying and rapid progress possible.

*

It does not matter if strenuous meditation leads to experiences or not. Remember what I told you that it is the psychic growth and not experiences that are the road for you just now. That means three things — 1st, the drawing back from the vital ego and its perturbations to a quiet attitude of faith and surrender; 2nd, the

growth of something within that sees what is to be changed in the nature and gives the impulse to change it; 3rd, the psychic feeling in sadhana which presses towards the growth of bhakti, feels it a joy simply to think, feel, write, speak of, remember the Divine, grows full of a quiet self-upliftment towards the Divine and lives in that more than in outward things. When the consciousness is full of these things altogether, i.e. when there is the full psychic state or opening, then experiences begin to come of themselves. The first two at least had started of themselves in you — let them grow and the third should necessarily follow. The psychic opening first, the higher consciousness and its experiences afterwards.

*

What you desire about the self-giving free from demand is sure to fulfil itself when there is the full opening of the psychic.

*

X has been always like that. It is the activity of his mind which is very restless; sometimes he gets a psychic opening and is all right, then the mind comes across and he becomes confused and miserable. Going away will not cure him; “thinking over things” will only make him more confused and lost. He is a man who can be rescued from all that only by a complete and permanent psychic opening, through the heart not the mind.

Conditions for the Psychic Opening

It is good that you go back from this struggle towards the quiet foundation that helps the opening. All this struggling and confusion and harassing self-depreciation is the old wrong way of proceeding; it is mental and vital and cannot succeed; it is in the quiet mind that the opening must come. Then the psychic being, the soul in you, begins to come forward. The soul knows and sees the Truth; the mind and vital do not — until they are enlightened by the soul’s knowledge.

*

Then only can the psychic being fully open when the sadhaka has got rid of the mixture of vital motives with his sadhana and is capable of a simple and sincere self-offering to the Mother. If there is any kind of egoistic turn or insincerity of motive, if the Yoga is done under a pressure of vital demands, or partly or wholly to satisfy some spiritual or other ambition, pride, vanity or seeking after power, position or influence over others or with any push towards satisfying any vital desire with the help of the Yogic force, then the psychic cannot open, or opens only partially or only at times and shuts again because it is veiled by the vital activities; the psychic fire fails in the strangling vital smoke. Also, if the mind takes the leading part in the Yoga and puts the inner soul into the background, or, if the bhakti or other movements of the sadhana take more of a vital than of a psychic form, there is the same inability. Purity, simple sincerity and the capacity of an unegoistic unmixed self-offering without pretension or demand are the conditions of an entire opening of the psychic being.

*

If desire is rejected and no longer governs the thought, feeling or action and there is the steady aspiration of an entirely sincere self-giving, the psychic usually after a time opens of itself.

An Experience of Psychic Opening

It was certainly an experience and as X very accurately described it an experience of great value, a psychic experience par excellence. A feeling of velvety softness within — an *ineffable plasticity within* is a psychic experience and can be nothing else. It means a modification of the substance of the consciousness especially in the vital emotional part, and such a modification prolonged or repeated till it became permanent would mean a great step in what I call the psychic transformation of the being. It is just these modifications in the inner substance that make transformation possible. Farther, it was a modification that made a beginning of knowledge possible — for by knowledge

we mean in Yoga not thought or ideas about spiritual things but psychic understanding from within and spiritual illumination from above. Therefore the first result was this feeling “that there was no ignominy in not understanding it, that the true understanding would come only when one realised that one was completely impotent”. This was itself a beginning of true understanding, a psychic understanding, something felt within which sheds a light or brings up a spiritual truth that mere thinking would not have given, also a truth that is effective bringing both the enlightenment and solace you needed—for what the psychic being brings with it always is light and happiness, an inner understanding and relief and solace.

Another very promising aspect of this experience is that it came as an immediate response to an appeal to the Divine. You asked for the understanding and the way out and at once Krishna showed you both—the way out was the change of the consciousness within, the plasticity which makes the knowledge possible and also the understanding of the condition of mind and vital in which the true knowledge or power of knowledge could come. For the inner knowledge comes from within and above (whether from the Divine in the heart or from the Self above) and for it to come the pride of the mind and vital in the surface mental ideas and their insistence on them must go. One must know that one is ignorant before one can begin to know. This shows that I was not wrong in pressing for the psychic opening as the only way out. For as the psychic opens, such responses and much more also become common and the inner change also proceeds by which they are made possible.

*

What was meant [*by “plasticity within”*], I suppose, was the psychic plasticity which makes surrender possible along with a free openness to the Divine working from above—plasticity within as opposed to the rigidity which insists on maintaining one's own ideas, feelings, habitual ways of consciousness as opposed to the higher things from above or from the psychic within.

The Psychic Opening and the Inner Centres

There is no doubt that the inner being and the psychic in you are opening and that the psychic is influencing all including the physical centre.

As to the centres. The psychic is placed behind the heart-lotus, the centre of the emotional being, the Anahata chakra — it is therefore the opening of the Anahata that is most important for the unveiling of the psychic. The Manipura (navel centre) and the Swadhisthana below it are the seats of the vital being, the Muladhara is the seat of the physical. The opening of the Manipura gives one the free play of the inner vital consciousness and it is very helpful, no doubt, for the influence of the psychic on the vital, but it is not the direct or first condition of the psychic opening itself. But so also the opening of the higher centres is helpful for the influence of the psychic on the mental being. All the centres have to open, because otherwise the inner consciousness is not opened out and liberated to its full working in all its parts.

There is however no invariable rule as to the order of the opening. By concentration on the heart centre that can open first liberating the psychic action, which is veiled by the emotional, into free play. In many there is first some opening of the vital centre and for a long time there is an abundant but unpurified play of experiences on the vital plane. In the Tantric discipline there is a process of opening all the centres from the Muladhara upward. In our Yoga very often the Power descends from above and opens the Ajnachakra first, then the others in order. But it is perhaps the safest to open by concentration the heart-lotus first so as to have the psychic influence from the beginning.

The psychic cannot lose its consciousness in the enjoyment of experiences; when it is in free action, it has the unfailing discrimination of which you speak. It has besides no push to outward enjoyment, though it has Ananda. It is the vital that is carried away by enjoyment and carries away with it the mind and other lower parts — and it can also cover up the psychic; but then what happens is not that the psychic loses its own

consciousness, which is impossible, but that the sadhak loses for the time being the full possession of the psychic consciousness. But it can always be recovered by a rectification of the wrong movement. But if one lives firmly in the psychic, there is not much danger of this aberration. What one must not do is to throw oneself out into the mind and vital; one must live within and from there command one's experience.

“Opening” and “Coming in Front”

In using the expression “opening of the psychic” I was thinking not of an ordinary psychic opening producing some amount of psychic (as opposed to vital) love and bhakti, but of what is called the coming in front of the psychic. When that happens one is aware of the psychic being with its simple spontaneous self-giving and feels its increasing direct control (not merely a veiled or half-veiled influence) over mind, vital and physical. Especially there is the psychic discernment which at once lights up the thoughts, emotional movements, vital pushes, physical habits and leaves nothing there obscure, substituting the right movements for the wrong ones. It is this that is difficult and rare, more often the discernment is mental and it is the mind that tries to put all in order. In that case, it is the descent of the higher consciousness through the mind that opens the psychic, instead of the psychic opening directly.

*

Nobody said it [*the opening of the psychic*] must be done necessarily from above. Naturally it is done direct and is most effective then. But when it is found difficult to do direct, as it is in certain natures, then the change begins from above, and the consciousness descending from there has to liberate the heart centre. As it acts on the heart centre, the psychic action becomes more possible.

*

The direct opening of the psychic centre is easy only when

the ego-centricity is greatly diminished and also if there is a strong bhakti for the Mother. A spiritual humility and sense of submission and dependence is necessary.

Chapter Three

The Emergence or Coming Forward of the Psychic

The Meaning of “Coming to the Front”

What is meant by [*the psychic's*] coming to the front is simply this. The psychic ordinarily is deep within. Very few people are aware of their souls — when they speak of their soul, they usually mean the vital + mental being or else the (false) soul of desire. The psychic remains behind and acts only through the mind, vital and physical wherever it can. For this reason the psychic being except where it is very much developed has only a small and partial, concealed and mixed or diluted influence on the life of most men. By coming forward is meant that it comes from behind the veil, its presence is felt clearly in the waking daily consciousness, its influence fills, dominates, transforms the mind and vital and their movements, even the physical. One is aware of one's soul, feels the psychic to be one's true being, the mind and the rest begin to be only instruments of the inmost within us.

The inner mental, vital, physical are also veiled, but much nearer to the surface and much of their movements or inspirations get through the veil (but not in any fullness or purity) in the lives of developed human beings, something even in the lives of ordinary people. But these too in Yoga throw down the veil after a time and come in front and their action predominates in the consciousness while the external is no longer felt as one's own self but only as a front or even a fringe of the being.

*

Awakening [*of the psychic being*] is a different thing [*from its coming to the front*], it means the conscious action of the psychic from behind. When it comes to the front it invades the mind

and vital and body and psychicises their movements. It comes best by aspiration and an unquestioning and entire turning and surrender to the Mother. But also it sometimes comes of itself when the Adhar is ready.

*

That is what we speak of as the psychic being coming in front—to psychicise the whole consciousness, i.e. make it subject to the psychic truth and full of the psychic nature. At the same time the ordinary vital being has to disappear and be changed into the true vital.

*

The soul in itself contains all possible strength, but most of it is held behind the veil and it is what comes forward in the nature that makes the difference. In some people the psychic element is strong and in others weak; in some people the mind is the strongest part and governs, in others the vital is the strongest part and leads or drives. But by sadhana the psychic being can be more and more brought forward till it is dominant and governs the rest. If it were already governing, then the struggles and difficulties of the mind and vital would not at all be serious; for each man in the light of the psychic would see and feel the truth and more and more follow it.

Signs of the Psychic's Coming Forward

It is the psychic being in you that has come forward—and when the psychic being comes forward all is happiness, the right attitude, the right vision of things. Of course in one sense it is the same I that puts forward different parts of itself. But when these different parts are all under the control of the psychic and turned by it towards the reception of the higher consciousness, then there begins the harmonisation of all the parts and their progressive recasting into moulds of the higher consciousness growing in peace, light, force, love, knowledge, Ananda which is what we call the transformation.

*

The psychic being in you is open always to the Divine Power, and when it comes in front, your spiritual capacity awakens and you are fully within the protection and can be moved by the Mother's force. The other parts are divided and can be carried away by the wrong movements of the ordinary nature. Especially if you trust your physical mind and mistake its ideas and suggestions for the true inspiration, you are liable to fall into serious errors both in your attitude and your choice of action and may lose the results of the protection and of the Force. Aspire to live always in your psychic being and to be open to the Mother; let the psychic part in you dominate the instruments, mind, life and body. Then the habit of the true intuition and the true impulse to action will come and you will be able to live in conscious communion, to feel her presence and be moved only by her Force. This is your true way in the Yoga.

*

A central love, bhakti, surrender, giving everything, a sight within that sees always clearly what is spiritually right or wrong and automatically rejects the latter—a movement of entire consecration and dedication of all in one to the Mother [*are the signs of the psychic's coming forward*].

*

It is your psychic being which came in front, probably, or else it is the true vital being in you which was able to come in front because you took the psychic attitude. When the psychic being comes in front, then there is an automatic perception of the true and untrue, the divine and the undivine, the spiritual right and wrong of things and the false vital and mental movements and attacks are immediately exposed and fall away and can do nothing; gradually the vital and physical as well as the mind get full of this psychic light and truth and sound feeling and purity and such violent attacks as you have are impossible. When the true vital being comes forward, it is something wide and strong and calm, an unmoved and powerful warrior for the Divine and the Truth repelling all enemies, bringing in a true strength and

force and opening the vital to the greater Consciousness above. It has to be seen which of the two it is you feel within you.

*

That is good. It means that the psychic has come up again. When the psychic is in the front, the sadhana becomes natural and easy and it is only a question of time and natural development. When the mind or the vital or the physical consciousness is on the top, then the sadhana is a tapasya and a struggle.

*

Excuse me,—if it [*the soul*] goes on with its karma, then it does not get liberation. If it wants only farther experience, it can just stay there in the ordinary nature. The aim of Yoga is to transcend karma. Karma means subjection to lower Nature; through Yoga the soul goes towards freedom.

You are describing the action of the ordinary existence, not the Yoga. Yoga is a seeking (not a mental searching), it is not experimenting in contraries and contradictions. It is the mind that does that and the mind that analyses. The soul does not search, analyse, experiment—it seeks, feels, experiences.

The only grain of truth is that the Yoga is very usually a series of ups and downs till you get to a certain height. But there is a quite different reason for that—not the vagaries of the soul. On the contrary when the psychic being gets in front and becomes master, there comes in a fundamentally smooth action and although there are difficulties and undulations of movement, these are no longer of an abrupt or dramatic character.

*

It is very good; all you write is a strong sign of the psychic emergence of which I spoke in yesterday's letter. There is at once the deep plunge into the psychic and the emergence of the psychic influence in mind and heart. The depth of the plunge is the reason why action has become so slow, because the consciousness is too much inside to act swiftly on outside things. This is a stage which one passes through in the process of the

inner change. At the same time the ideas in the mind and the perceptions and the mental and vital attitude towards things and happenings and people are becoming more and more of a psychic character. Love and devotion to the Divine is the central feeling of the psychic nature and that is growing in you towards the Mother, pervading your being. A psychic love towards all is also emerging; this love is a thing inward and does not seek to express itself outwardly like the vital love which men usually have. The psychic and spiritual attitude is also not dependent on the good and bad in beings, but is self-existent regarding them as souls who carry the Divine in them however thickly concealed and are children of the Mother.

*

Once the condition has come in which the thoughts that cross are not believed, accepted or allowed to govern the conduct, it must be understood that the vital mind is no longer dominant—for the nature of the vital mind is always to cloud the true mind's perception and drive it towards action. Neither the vital mind nor the physical mind are things that have to be got rid of, but they must be quietened, purified, controlled and transformed. That will take place fully when the thinking mind becomes fully conscious and when the psychic comes forward and leads and governs both it and the vital and physical being. Your thinking mind is becoming more and more conscious; that is shown by what you write, for the perceptions there expressed are quite clear-seeing and correct and show an increasingly right understanding. Moreover what is making you conscious is the increasing pressure of the psychic behind to come forward. For what you felt as trying to come out from behind was the psychic itself. The feeling of flowers and fragrance and a coolness and peace are always sure signs that the psychic is becoming active. It has been developing in you for some time past, only it was covered over by rushes of the old vital mind which did not want to lose its hold or its place. Now that the vital mind is quiet, it is again the psychic that is pressing to come forward and establish its influence.

The thoughts that came afterwards about the defects of your action towards others, repentance and the reasons why you could not establish proper relations with others were the result of this psychic emergence. For when the psychic comes forward or when it strongly influences mind or vital, then one begins to see clearly and rightly about one's own nature and action and about things and about others and to have the right feelings. It was under this pressure of the psychic also that while the mind got these right thoughts and perceptions, the vital felt repentance for what had been done and wished to ask forgiveness. But while this readiness to ask forgiveness was in itself a right feeling, to do so physically would not have been quite the wisest or best action. So the psychic itself at once told you what was the true thing to do, to ask forgiveness instead from the Mother. What was necessary having been done in the mind and vital, the psychic then cleared the whole consciousness and brought back its own quiet and peace. I explain all that to you so that you may begin to understand how these things work within and what is meant by the psychic and its action and influence.

The vision you had of the other luminous and peaceful and beautiful world was a sort of symbolic image of the true physical consciousness and the world in which it lives, the physical consciousness as it is when it is directly under the control of the psychic, and the character of the world which it tends to create for itself.

The Psychic and the Relation with the Divine

The psychic knows that the Divine is and affirms its knowledge against all appearances.

*

The direct relation with the Divine can only grow from within — it is there in the soul and it has to come out by sadhana — that is indeed the reason for doing sadhana. The natural mind of man follows its own ideas, the vital clings to its own desires, the physical follows its own habits — these divide from the Divine.

It is only when the psychic being grows and comes forward and governs the mind and vital and physical and changes them that this veil of personal ideas, desires and habits can fall — then the direct relation and nearness grows in the being till the whole consciousness is united with the Divine. When you go deep into the psychic, then you begin to feel the Mother near — when the mind or vital is under the influence of the psychic this sense grows in them also. That is the way in which it must come.

*

The realisation of the psychic being, its awakening and the bringing of it in front depend mainly on the extent to which one can develop a personal relation with the Divine, a relation of bhakti, love, reliance, self-giving, rejection of the insistences of the separating and self-asserting mental, vital and physical ego.

*

It may be either way [*that the psychic comes to the front — before the realisation of the Divine or after it*]. There is a touch and the realisation comes and the psychic takes its proper place as the result; or the psychic may come to the front and prepare the nature for the realisation.

Means of Bringing Forward the Psychic

Aspiration constant and sincere and the will to turn to the Divine alone are the best means of bringing forward the psychic being.

*

There is no approved method of bringing forward the psychic being. It depends on the aspiration, the growth of faith and devotion, the diminution of the hold of the mental and vital ego and their movements — at a certain point in this development the screen between the psychic and the rest of the nature thins and begins to break, the psychic becomes more and more visible and active and finally takes over charge. Sometimes it may come

suddenly, but there is no rule for that.

*

There is no process for it [*getting the psychic in front*]. It comes like the other things—you have to aspire for it and it can only happen when you are sufficiently advanced.

*

It [*the psychic*] comes forward of itself either through constant love and aspiration or when the mind and vital have been made ready by the descent from above and the working of the Force.

*

It [*the dynamic descent from above into the heart*] can help the psychic to come forward, but it does not always do so automatically—it at least creates better conditions for the psychic.

*

To bring the psychic forward, selfishness and demand (which is the base of the vital feelings) must be got rid of—or at least never accepted.

*

Nothing done in the past or present can prevent the psychic from coming forward if there is the true will to get rid of these things and live in the psychic and spiritual consciousness.

*

If there is the will to surrender in the central being, then the psychic can come forward.

*

There is absolutely no reason why you should return when you have come with the intention of staying here for a sufficient time and it is better to keep to your intention.

It is not necessary to make an effort to bring your psychic being to the front; all that is necessary is a steady and quiet

aspiration; if that is there always, all that is necessary to prepare for the result will be done by degrees and the psychic being will come fully to the front when all is ready and it is time. It happens usually that much in the mental, vital and physical has to be prepared before it can happen. This preparation cannot fail to be hastened by your stay here.

Bhakti and love are part of the psychic movement, a large part of it; in aspiring for the psychic change, you are aspiring for bhakti and love. But it is not useful to restrict your aspiration by a single movement like that of the Vaishnava sadhana; for this Yoga is more ample and contains, but is not confined to, what is essential in the Vaishnava sadhana. Whether you visit the physical Brindavan or not does not matter; what is necessary is to find the inner union through love and bhakti.

As for weeping, there is nothing against the tears that come from the inner aspiration; it is only when it is vital, outward, too much on the surface that it becomes a movement of disturbance and emotional disorder. Intensity of prayer is not at all to be rejected; it is one of the most powerful means of the sadhana.

As for the obstacle to meditation or experience, it would usually be when some part of the being is dealt with which has still to be prepared and to open. Such periods always occur in sadhana and one has to meet these with a patient and persistent aspiration and a quiet vigilance of self-introspection that will bring about the necessary opening. It should not awaken depression or lead to any relaxation of will and the effort of sadhana. Open yourself more and more, that is all that is needed.

Obstacles to the Psychic's Emergence

You have been keeping the psychic in the background during a thousand lives and indulging the vital. That is why the psychic is not strong.

*

The mind and the vital have always been dominant and developed themselves and are accustomed to act for themselves. How

do you expect an influence [*of the psychic*] coming forward for the first time to be stronger than they are?

*

Of course the ego and the vital with its claims and desires is always the main obstacle to the emergence of the psychic. For they make one live, act, do sadhana even for one's own sake and psychicisation means to live, act and do sadhana for the sake of the Divine.

*

The psychic being emerges slowly in most men, even after taking up sadhana. There is so much in the mind and vital that has to change and readjust itself before the psychic can be entirely free. One has to wait till the necessary process has gone far enough before it can burst its agelong veil and come in front to control the nature. It is true that nothing can give so much inner happiness and joy — though peace can come by the mental and vital liberation or through the growth of a strong samata in the being.

*

It is the action of the psychic being, not the being itself, that gets mixed with the mental, vital and physical distortions because it has to use them to express what little of the true psychic feeling gets through the veil. It is by the heart's aspiration to the Divine that the psychic being gets free from these disabilities.

*

Even when the psychic is in front, there may be and are likely to be mental and vital difficulties — only then, there is also the right psychic power and perception behind to deal with them.

*

It [*the flow of love and joy from the heart centre*] can be misused on a large scale only if there is a strong and vehement vital ego not accustomed to correction or else a vital full of the *kāmavāsanā*. On a small scale it can be misused by the small

selfishnesses, vanities, ambitions, demands of the lower vital supporting themselves upon it. If you are on guard against these things then there is no danger of misuse. If the psychic puts forth psychic discernment along with the love, then there is no danger, for the light of psychic discernment at once refuses all mixture or misuse.

*

That is of course the difficulty, even when one sees what is to be done and wishes to do it. One forgets at the moment when the control is needed. The habit of remembering and applying one's knowledge at the right moment comes only by a great patience and perseverance which refuses to be discouraged by frequent failure. Only if the psychic being is in front, then it reminds the mind and the thing can be more quickly done. It was your physical ill-health combined with the difficulty of the physical consciousness (which is always a thing of habits and repeats and clings to the old habits even when the mind wants to get rid of them) that prevented the emergence of the psychic from completing itself. With the disappearance of ill-health the difficulty may be more successfully tackled and achieved. As for the long period of seven years without the spiritual success there is nothing unusual in that — the old Yogins used to say that one must be ready for 12 years of preparation before the old nature will be sufficiently modified to allow of the spiritual opening. That is of course not inevitable; it can be done more briefly; but still it takes usually a long time — it has done so with most in the Asram. But in your case the first opening did come, it is only temporarily and not altogether closed, awaiting a second opening which should free the nature for the external as well as the inner change.

*

It [*the psychic*] may and does retire from the front or gets clouded over, but once it has been in front it is never relegated back behind the veil altogether and it can always return to the front with comparative ease.

*

The conversion which keeps the consciousness turned towards the light and makes the right attitude spontaneous and natural and abiding and rejection also spontaneous is the psychic conversion. That is to say, man usually lives in his vital and the body is its instrument and the mind its counsellor and minister (except for the few mental men who live mostly for the things of the mind, but even they are in subjection to the vital in their ordinary movements). The spiritual conversion begins when the soul begins to insist on a deeper life and is complete when the psychic becomes the basis or the leader of the consciousness and mind and vital and body are led by it and obey it. Of course if that once happens fully, doubt, depression and despair cannot come any longer, although there may be and are difficulties still. If it is not fully, but still fundamentally accomplished, even then these things either do not come or are brief passing clouds on the surface — for there is a rock of support and certitude at the base, which even if partially covered cannot disappear altogether.

Mostly however the *constant* recurrence of depression and despair or of doubt and revolt is due to a mental or vital formation which takes hold of the vital mind and makes it run round always in the same circle at the slightest provoking cause or even without cause. It is like an illness to which the body consents from habit and from belief in the illness even though it suffers from it, and once started the illness runs its habitual course unless it is cut short by some strong counteracting force. If once the body can withdraw its consent, the illness immediately or quickly ceases — that was the secret of the Coué system. So too if the vital mind withdraws its consent, refuses to be dominated by the habitual suggestions and the habitual movements, these recurrences of depression and despair can be made soon to cease. But it is not easy for this mind, once it has got into the habit of consent, even a quite passive and suffering and reluctant consent, to cancel the habit and get rid of the black circle. It can be done easily only when the mind refuses any longer to believe in the suggestions or accept the ideas or feelings that start the circle.

*

The facts or arguments you put forward to support your diffidence or depression cannot stand in the light of the Yoga experience of others—if they were enough to justify discouragement, how many would have had to turn back from the way who are now far on towards the goal? I cannot now deal with them in detail, but they do not, any of them, justify your inference [*of unfitness for Yoga*].

Also, your psychic being does not deserve the censure you have bestowed upon it. What prevents it from coming out in its full power is the crust of past habits, formations, active vibrations of the mind-stuff and vital stuff which come from a mind and life which have been more creative and outgoing and expansive than indrawn and introspective. In many who are like this—active men and intellectuals—the first stage of Yoga is long and difficult with slow development and sparse experiences, most of the work being done in the subliminal behind the veil—until things are ready.

When the time comes for the definite opening and removal of the purdah between the inner and the outer man, I think I can promise you that you will find your power of Yoga and Yogic experience at least as unexpectedly complete as you, and others, have found your power for poetry—though necessarily its working out will take time, because it is not a detail but the whole life and the whole nature in which there must be the divine victory.

Chapter Four

Experiences Associated with the Psychic

The Psychic Touch or Influence

The psychic influence in the ordinary life of man tries to bring the truth of the soul into human action, human thought and feelings. When it is spiritualised, it tries to turn the human towards the Divine.

*

These are movements of the vital under the psychic touch. If there is the firm psychic foundation underneath, it will be felt as an underlying quietude and confidence or a fixed spirit of surrender.

*

The demands were there already — when the psychic touches there is an intensification of love but the lower vital mixes up the love with all sorts of demands.

*

The soft feeling [*in the head and below*] must be that of the psychic being spreading itself through the higher centres. Faithfulness is one of the first characteristics of the psychic being.

The Psychic Condition

What you describe shows that things are going on very well within, it is the psychic condition that is being gradually prepared as a basis for the sadhana. The special experiences of the burning of the psychic fire, descent of peace etc. are always

intermittent until this basis is ready, but they help it to grow.

*

It is this freedom from all ties and entire and sole turning to the Mother that is the deepest psychic condition. It is coming to you as touches of that condition from the psychic, therefore there is not yet the permanent state; but these touches prepare the future permanence.

The fire which you feel in the chest must surely be the psychic fire, for it is there that is the seat of the psychic and the fact that it burns strongly when you sit alone points to the same thing.

The Psychic Fire

The psychic fire is the fire of aspiration, purification and tapasya which comes from the psychic being. It is not the psychic being, but a power of the psychic being.

*

The psychic being is a Purusha, not a flame—the psychic fire is not the being, it is something proper to it.

*

It [*a flame in the heart as big as a man's thumb*] is the psychic fire kindled in the heart. The psychic being in the heart is described by the Upanishads as of the size of a thumb, *aṅgustha-mātrah puruso'ntarātmā*—it may manifest first as this psychic flame.

*

The fire [*one feels within*] is always the fire of sacrifice and self-offering, the fire of aspiration or the fire of tapasya.

*

That the constant fire of aspiration has to be lit is true; but this fire is the psychic fire and it is lit or burns up and increases as the psychic grows within and for the psychic to grow quietude is needful. That is why we have been working for the psychic to

grow in you and for the quietude also to grow and that is why we want you to wait on the Mother's working in full patience and confidence. To be always remembering the Mother and always with the equal unwavering fire within means itself a considerable progress in sadhana and it must be prepared by various means such as the experiences you have been having. Keep steadfast in confidence therefore and all that has to be done will be done.

*

The experience of the Fire is quite correct,—it is the great fire of purification and concentration (i.e. gathering up of the consciousness and turning it fixedly towards the Divine), the psychic fire which all must pass through so as to reach the Mother permanently and completely.

*

It is egoistic if the ego thinks that it is the psychic fire. If the consciousness feels identified with the psychic fire and becomes conscious that the fire can burn out all impurities, then it is a true experience.

*

The central fire is in the psychic being, but it can be lit in all the parts of the being.

The Psychic Fire and Some Inner Visions

The fire you saw was the fire of the psychic being, the fire of aspiration and tapasya, burning under the earth, that is to say, in the subconscious. It opens the earth, the physical consciousness to the Divine Light. Moonlight may symbolise the spiritual consciousness and the room your own personal being or individual physical consciousness. With these clues it will be easy for you to understand the significance of your experience.

*

The fire you saw was again the psychic fire of purification and

tapasya and the garland was the offering it was preparing for the Mother, the psychic and divine consciousness (pearl and diamond) in the sadhak. The beautiful place was also probably a symbol of the psychic and the lotus indicated the opening of the psychic consciousness.

The twelve-petalled lotus and the twelve-rayed sun indicate the same thing, the complete Truth-consciousness of the Divine Mother. It was rising but only half risen. The red colour was the sign of Power.

*

All these things are signs, now often repeated, of the process that is going on. The heat is the result of the psychic fire burning away obstacles—the coolness and complete quietude come as a result. The tendency to sleep is really a tendency to go inside into the depths of the inner consciousness due to the pressure for the change.

The wideness of light you saw was the wideness of the true consciousness liberated from the narrow limits of the human mind, human vital, human body consciousness. It is true that the mind is narrow, not only yours, but all human minds even the most developed,—compared with the wideness of the true consciousness which has no limits. It is precisely this wideness which will come by the sadhana and which these processes are preparing. The rain of flowers means a plenty of the psychic qualities and movements and the white flower of mental victory indicates the step towards it which is now being led up to—the victory in the mind of the inner light over the outer ignorance.

*

The difficulty in giving up habits is common to the physical mind in all people; nothing is more difficult to it. The fire you feel must be what we call Agni, the fire of purification acting on this physical mind to change it.

The bridge you saw was the symbol of transition from the ordinary to the spiritual consciousness; the wide plain was a symbol of the large peace and silence which comes with the

spiritual consciousness when one rests in the Divine.

The perfumes you felt were true perfumes but not of the physical world. This body of flesh and blood is not the whole of ourselves; there is unseen by the eyes a subtle body also and one becomes aware of it when the inner consciousness opens. It was from deep within there that the perfumes came, perfumes of purity, of love and surrender (rose) etc. It is there deep within that the psychic being dwells and it is there that you are trying to go when the inward-going impulse or pressure comes; it is why you felt more and more peaceful, because you were going deeper and deeper into the psychic from which these fragrances came.

*

The heat in the body is due simply to the working that is going on within; it is what is called the heat of tapas — there is nothing unhealthy in it as in the heat of fever. The beautiful scent that you get is a subtle or psychic fragrance, just as the vision of the lotus is a subtle or psychic sight.

The psychic being is often seen or felt within in the form of a child, — it is perhaps that that you are feeling within you; it is calling for a complete sincerity, but sincerity is used here in the sense of opening to nothing but the divine influences and impulses. It does not mean that you have committed any fault, but only that the psychic in you wants you to be completely under its sole government, so that all in you may be for the Divine only. The feeling of sorrow is probably a response of the vital in you to this demand — thinking that it must have erred; but such a feeling of sorrow is not necessary. The vital can quietly wait for the psychic working to do all that is needed in due time.

Agni

It is the Agni fire that you feel. Agni is at once a fire of aspiration, a fire of purification, a fire of tapasya, a fire of transformation.

*

Agni in the form of an aspiration full of concentrated calm and surrender is certainly the first thing to be lighted in the heart.

*

It [*a feeling of warmth in the heart*] comes sometimes from the approach of Agni fire, sometimes from that of love or Ananda, sometimes simply from a touch of the Force.

*

The fear of the fire you saw is misplaced, for it is the fire of the purifying Agni that you see burning and that does no harm; it only clears away what should not be there. That is why it is followed by a lightness or an emptiness. You have only to be quiet and let the fire do its work. The heat one feels at that time is not the heat of fever or any other morbid heat. Afterwards, as you felt, all becomes cool and light.

*

The burning is sometimes the heat of a difficulty and resistance, but then it disturbs. When it does not disturb, it is usually the purifying fire of Agni.

*

It may be pressure of the Agni fire that you feel [*around the head and shoulders*] as the heat — especially if there is something that has to be purified or a difficulty burned away. The cool spray on the other hand comes as an accompaniment of the sense of purification.

*

The Fire [*felt in the forehead and eyes*] is the power of the Yoga — Yogashakti.

*

That kind of pull [*towards the Divine*] is not the same thing as the lighting of Agni. Agni meets men who are not leading the religious life at all but who have Agni burning in them and are

intent to keep the fire ablaze — scientists, artists etc. who have the intense will of perfecting what they do and all their central energies are thrown into this flame. The same intense fire should burn in the Yoga.

*

It is the Mother's Force that works in the Agni.

Agni and the Psychic Fire

If it is in the heart it may be psychic fire — it is possibly not the joy that created the fire, but the decision you had come to to believe in the Mother's action whether the mind understood or not. Such an attitude encourages the opening of the psychic and would therefore bring at once the psychic joy and the kindling of Agni in the psychic centre.

*

It is some association in the mind probably coupling Agni with the psychic. Of course the individual Agni fire has its starting-point in the psychic, but the mere burning of the fire does not show that the psychic is coming forward.

When it burns in the heart, it is the fire *in* the psychic. The psychic fire is individual and takes usually the form of a fire of aspiration or personal tapasya. This Fire is universal and it came from above.

*

The psychic fire may burn in the vital. It all depends on whether it is the fire of the general Force that comes from above or the fire of your soul's aspiration and tapasya.

*

All that [*fire in the heart and elsewhere*] is simply the burning of the Agni in various parts of the being. It prepares it for transformation. But the coming forward of the psychic is another matter and its signs are psychological.

*

Agni is the psychic fire—it is not the Divine Presence. If the psychic is active and open, the Presence may be felt—it is not necessary for that that it should be in the front. Also it may be in the front, but the Divine Presence in the heart may not be felt as yet, there may be only the aspiration, bhakti, self-giving. There is no fixed law about these things—it develops differently in different natures.

Psychic Joy

It [*a feeling of joy, intense but calm and pure*] is not mere vital excitement or heightened nerve sensation, it is an attempt of the psychic to emerge from behind the veil and what you feel is the psychic joy. (The psychic is seated behind the heart, behind the emotional centre.) But when this psychic joy comes, it communicates itself to the mind, the vital and the body. You have then to be careful that no mixture comes in from the vital and the physical—such as the sex impulse. The mind, the vital, the physical must receive the psychic Ananda and make it their own, but not bring in their own deviations or any degraded mixture into it.

*

There is a dynamic joy as well as the self-existent joy in the soul itself.

Psychic Sorrow

There is a psychic sorrow which usually comes when the soul feels how strong is the resistance in the world and how much the Forces in it rage against the Mother.

*

It is the soul, the psychic being in you, behind the heart, that is awake and wants to concentrate the mind on the Divine. It is the nature of the mind to go out to other things, but now when it does that, there is the unease in the heart, the psychic sorrow because the heart feels at once that this is wrong and the head

also aches because of the resistance to the Divine Force at work. This is a thing that often happens at an early stage, after the opening of the consciousness to the sadhana.

*

The vital took it up perhaps and gave it a more vehement and turbid expression — otherwise there is nothing disturbing in a psychic sorrow.

*

The psychic sadness is of a purifying and not a depressing kind.

*

There are many things that are spiritual that are not the essence of the higher consciousness. All that tends towards the transformation and helps to prepare it is spiritual. Psychic sorrow is a spiritual movement, but sorrow is not part of the essential character of the higher consciousness. Resignation, the ego's submission to the divine will, is a spiritual movement, but the higher consciousness has no need of resignation and a submitted ego is not a part of its essence, for it has no ego.

Psychic Tears or Weeping

Yes, there is a psychic sorrow of that kind [*tears of longing for the Mother*] — but psychic tears need not be sorrowful, there are also tears of emotion and joy.

*

The tears probably come from the inner psychic being (behind the heart) which is touched in this state of quietness and peace. It is the sign of an aspiration and devotion in the soul which is trying to come to the surface. If the psychic being can come to the surface and a harmony be established in the nature, all of it being turned towards the Divine, this kind of expression will cease.

*

The weeping that comes to you comes from the psychic being—it is the tears of psychic yearning and aspiration. At a particular stage it so comes to many and is a very good sign. The other feelings and tendencies are also from the same source. They show that the psychic is exercising a strong influence and preparing, as we say, to come in front. Accept the movement and let it fulfil itself.

*

A weeping that comes with the feeling you speak of is the sign of a psychic sorrow—for it translates as an aspiration of the psychic being. But depression and hopelessness ought not to come. You should rather cling to the faith that since there is a true aspiration in you—and of that there can be no doubt—it is sure to be fulfilled, whatever the difficulties of the external nature. You must recover in that faith the inner peace and quietude while at the same time keeping the clear insight into what has to be done and the steady aspiration for the inner and outer change.

*

It is quite correct that [*ordinary*] weeping brings in the forces that should be kept outside—for the weeping is a giving way of the inner control and an expression of vital reaction and ego. It is only the psychic weeping that does not open the door to these forces—but that weeping is without affliction, tears of bhakti, spiritual emotion or Ananda.

Your experience was a very beautiful one—the inner being realises by such experiences that which must be established in the waking state as the foundation of the spiritual consciousness and spiritual life.

Psychic Yearning

The yearning of the heart may be there but it should not disturb the peace.

*

I think it is better to stop it [*the yearning of the heart*] for the present. It is very possible that the vital is taking advantage of it to create dissatisfaction with the progress of the sadhana. The psychic yearning brings no reaction of impatience, dissatisfaction or disturbance.

*

Your new attitude towards food and outward things is the true attitude, the psychic attitude and shows that the psychic is already controlling the vital physical as well as the other parts of the vital nature.

As for the heart, the movement of longing for the Divine, weeping, sorrowing, yearning is not essential in this Yoga. A strong aspiration there must be, an intense longing there may very well be, an ardent love and will for union; but there need be no sorrow or disturbance. The quiet and silence you feel in your heart is the result of the pressure of the higher consciousness to come down. That always brings a quietude in mind and heart and as it descends a great peace and silence. In the silent heart and mind, there must be the true attitude and thus you have the feeling that you are the Mother's child, the faith and the will to be united with her. Along with that there may be an aspiration or silent expectation of what is to come. That also you seem to have. All therefore is well.

Psychic Intensity

I have read your letter of explanation of the "strange" ideas. I still maintain that your views on the lack of all intensity in the psychic things or in the spiritual or their inferiority to vital pleasure *are* strange, because they contradict all psychic and spiritual experience except that of the mere vairagis and make the choice of the spiritual life itself (Nirvana seekers excepted) quite inexplicable. Your arguments are not convincing. What have Ramakrishna's excesses or the fluctuations of Vivekananda's vital receptivity between exaltation and depression or Chaitanya's *viraha* to do with the question in issue? These are difficulties

of the body and the vital. The question was of the intensity of *psychic* and *pure spiritual* experience—psychic devotion and love, peace, Ananda. You cannot base a general denial on your own particular experience, because you have only the initial experiences of calm etc. and have *not* got to the intensities as I have done and others before me have done. It is only when one lives centrally in the psychic with the mental, vital and physical as provinces held under its rule that one knows what psychic intensity is. It is only when the higher consciousness comes down in its floods that one can know what can be the intensities or ecstasies of spiritual peace, light, love, bliss. You can say, “I have not yet had these intensities”, but you cannot say in a sweeping way, “They do not exist and I shall never have them”, or “They are only tepid quiet little things, soothing and more capable of lasting, but not intense and glorious like the vital joys and pleasures.” Do not cling to these notions born of the past limitations, but keep yourself open and plastic to greater possibilities in the future.

My own experience is *not* limited to a radiant peace; I know very well what ecstasy and Ananda are from the Brahmananda down to the *sārīra ānanda*, and can experience them at any time. But of these things I prefer to speak only when my work is done—for it is in a transformed consciousness here and not only above where the Ananda always exists that I seek their base of permanence.

The Psychic and Uneasiness

The psychic is not uneasy, it makes you uneasy when you do the wrong thing.

*

The uneasiness created by the psychic is not depression—it is in the nature of a rejection of the wrong movement.

If the uneasiness causes depression or vital dissatisfaction, it is not psychic.

*

The uneasiness is simply a reminder to you to be more vigilant in future.

*

The unhappiness is not necessary or inevitable in the sadhana, but it comes because your inner nature feels the touch of the Divine Presence indispensable to it and uneasy when it does not feel it. To feel it always a certain constant detachment within allowing you to remain within and do everything from within is necessary. This can more easily be done in quiet occupations and quiet contacts. For it is quietness and inwardness that enable one to feel the Presence.

Chapter Five

The Psychic and Spiritual Transformations

Psychisation and Spiritualisation

Psychisation means the change of the lower nature, bringing right vision into the mind, right impulse and feeling into the vital, right movement and habit into the physical — all turned towards the Divine, all based on love, adoration, bhakti — finally, the vision and sense of the Mother everywhere in all as well as in the heart, her Force working in the being etc., faith, consecration, surrender.

The spiritual change is the established descent of the peace, light, knowledge, power, bliss from above, the awareness of the self and the Divine and of a higher cosmic consciousness and the change of the whole consciousness to that.

*

Between psychisation and spiritualisation there is a difference. The spiritual is the change that descends from above, the psychic is the change that comes from within by the psychic dominating mind, vital and physical.

*

The psychic is the first of two transformations necessary — if you have the psychic transformation it facilitates immensely the other, i.e., the transformation of the ordinary human into the higher spiritual consciousness — otherwise one is likely to have either a slow and dull or exciting but perilous journey.

*

I never said anything about a “transformation of the psychic”; I have always written about a “psychic transformation” of the

nature which is a very different matter. I have sometimes written of it as a psychisation of the nature. The psychic is in the evolution, part of the human being, its divine part — so a psychisation will not carry one beyond the present evolution but will make the being ready to respond to all that comes from the Divine or Higher Nature and unwilling to respond to the Asura, Rakshasa, Pishacha or Animal in the being or to any insistence of the lower nature which stands in the way of the divine change.

*

It is not the psychic but the mind that gets raised and transformed and its action intensified by the intuitivising of the consciousness. The psychic is always the same essence and adapts its action without need of transformation to any change of consciousness.

*

I have read your account of your sadhana. There is nothing to say, I think, — for it is all right — except that the most important thing for you is to develop the psychic fire in the heart and the aspiration for the psychic being to come forward as the leader of the sadhana. When the psychic does so, it will show you the “undetected ego-knots” of which you speak and loosen them or burn them in the psychic fire. This psychic development and the psychic change of mind, vital and physical consciousness is of the utmost importance because it makes safe and easy the descent of the higher consciousness and the spiritual transformation without which the supramental must always remain far distant. Powers etc. have their place, but a very minor one so long as this is not done.

The Psychic and the Higher Consciousness

What you see above is of course the true or higher consciousness — the Mother’s — in which one sees all the world as one, a vast free consciousness full of freedom, peace and light — it is that that we speak of as the higher or divine consciousness. Even if it comes and goes, yet its effect on the heart shows that a

connection has been established through the psychic—for the psychic is behind the heart. It is there above the head that the consciousness has to ascend and remain, while it also descends into the head and heart and lower vital and physical and brings there its wideness, light, peace and freedom.

*

It is the union of the consciousness above with the awakened psychic being that makes the true connection between what is above and the universe.

*

There is something in you that has become aware of the higher consciousness and gone up there—above the head where the ordinary consciousness and the higher planes meet. That has to be developed till the whole source of the consciousness is there and all the rest directed from there—with, at the same time, a liberation of the psychic so that it may support the action from above in the mind, the vital and the physical parts.

*

If the development of a higher consciousness did not bring things that were not before heard of by the mind, it would not be good for much. The unification of the psychic and the higher consciousness forces and activities is indispensable for the sadhana at one time or another.

*

Complete psychisation brings entire openness of the being to the Divine and to the Higher Consciousness and an entire inability to accept anything untrue and undivine.

*

The psychic when it acts as the main power, acts through a certain feeling and inherent psychic sense which repels the falsehood. But the ranges of mind above mind do not act in that way—there it is discrimination and will that act and their action is

wider but less sure and less automatic so to speak.

*

When the concentration is at the top of the head, it means that the mental being is joining the higher consciousness there and there is not much resistance or none. The other place indicates the joining is of the psychic being to the higher consciousness, hence the greater silence, as the psychic is more central than the mental being; but also there is the attempt to join through the psychic the rest of the lower consciousness to the higher and there there is a resistance. The mental joining does not affect the vital and physical, so they remain quiet or can do so for the present—the psychic joining puts on them a pressure to which the first reaction is the sense of fatigue and the last might be a turmoil. But the psychic joining if effectual is much more powerful for the change of the whole being.

The Psychic and Spiritual Movements

The two feelings are both of them right—they indicate the two necessities of the sadhana. One is to go inward and open fully the connection between the psychic being and the outer nature. The other is to open upward to the Divine Peace, Force, Light, Ananda above, to rise up into it and bring it down into the nature and the body. Neither of these two movements, the psychic and the spiritual, is complete without the other. If the spiritual ascent and descent are not made, the spiritual transformation of the nature cannot happen; if the full psychic opening and connection is not made, the transformation cannot be complete.

There is no incompatibility between the two movements; some begin the psychic first, others the spiritual first, some carry on both together. The best way is to aspire for both and let the Mother's Force work it out according to the need and turn of the nature.

*

The experiences you describe are coherent with each other and very clearly explicable. The first shows that some part of your

mind was open and this aided by an opening in the psychic enabled you to ascend into the regions above, the ranges of the liberated spiritual mind with the infinite path of the spirit leading to the highest realisation. But the rest of the nature was not ready. The straining to recover the experience was not the right thing to do then; what should have been done was the aspiration for the purification and preparation of the nature, the permanent psychic opening and the increase of the higher spiritual opening above till there could be a total release of the being. The vehemence of the action of the forces was due to the resistance and the breaking of the knots in the head and different parts of the nature was their working for the release. The “electricity” passing through the spinal column was the passage of the Force making its way down through the centres. Obviously it is the dark resisting force of the vital, the desire nature, that rises up and clouds all up to the heart. On the other hand the flow from above and the silence it creates is a sign of the opening above being still there; for the silence, the quietude of the nature is a touch from above and very necessary for purification and release. What is lacking is the full opening of the psychic being behind the heart—for that could liberate the heart from the dark force and make possible a cleaning of the rest by a quiet and steady rather than a vehement working attended by chaotic action and struggle. When there is an opening in the spiritual mind but not a sufficient psychic change, there is or can be this kind of vehement force-action and resistance; when the psychic opens, then it acts on the whole nature, mind, vital, physical, governing them from within, to transform themselves and become ready for the complete spiritual opening and spiritual consciousness. Devotion and a more and more complete inner consecration are the best way to open the psychic.

*

It is very good. The ideas and feelings that came up from within you were those of the newborn psychic nature.

The feeling you had in the afternoon of the cessation of thought and the sensation of something within you going up

above the head is part of the movement of the sadhana. There is a higher consciousness above you, not in the body, so above the head, which we call the higher, spiritual or divine consciousness, or the Mother's consciousness. When the being opens then all in you, the mind (head), emotional being (heart), vital, even something in the physical consciousness begin to ascend in order to join themselves to this greater higher consciousness. One has when one sits with eyes closed in meditation the sensation of going up which you describe. It is called the ascension of the lower consciousness. Afterwards things begin to descend from above, peace, joy, light, strength, knowledge etc. and a great change begins in the nature. This is what we call the descent of the higher (the Mother's) consciousness.

The unease you felt was because of the unaccustomed nature of the movement. It is of no importance and quickly goes away.

The Psychic Consciousness and the Descent from Above

As I have written often, there are two transformations in this Yoga. The first is when the psychic being comes forward and controls and changes the nature. This is what has happened in you with great rapidity; it must complete itself, but that it will do naturally. The second is the descent of the Mother's consciousness from above the head and its transformation of the whole being and nature. This also is now preparing in you. It is the reason of the pressure, the silence in the heart etc. What you experienced this time when you went above was the wideness of the higher being in that higher consciousness above with the Light coming down through it. That wideness and that light will afterwards come down into you and your consciousness will be changed into the light and wideness and all that is in them.

*

It is evident from what you write that the true consciousness is growing in you and that when it is there all is right—for what you describe in this morning's letter is the true psychic consciousness come up in some fullness. This fullness was not

there before, so that is a very encouraging progress. But its remaining seems to depend on the concentration on the Mother. When there is the concentration on the Mother, then the progress can be smooth and continuous; when there is a failure of the concentration, you come into the outward physical mind and at once there is a conflict between the growing quietude and the inner psychic fire and the physical consciousness. The quietude seeks to hold and control the physical consciousness and the fire to burn out the wrong activities and imperfections, but the consciousness finds the pressure hard to bear; it feels dull and troubled by the heat. For when the fire has won, all is cool; when it has to burn the resistances, then there is heat, it becomes a fire of tapasya. This seems to be the explanation of these alternating conditions. It is important therefore to keep the concentration and remain fixed in the Mother; nothing else for the time has any importance comparatively with that.

As for the experience at the Pranam it was the other thing, the descent of the higher consciousness (the Mother's consciousness) from above, with its light, peace and wideness. When the individual consciousness is enveloped in that, rests in it, then you feel that you are lying in the Mother's lap. As the psychic consciousness grows from within, it becomes more and more possible for this to descend from above.

*

The concentration in the heart which is intended to bring out the psychic being and the calling down of the descent from above are two sides of the same thing and are complementary and can go naturally together.

*

Certainly the concentration in the heart is very necessary for the full transformation. When peace is established in the heart, it is possible for the psychic being to come forward and rule the mind, life and body. The descent from above prepares the being, but unless the psychic acts fully it cannot change by itself the outer being, though one can have a settled inner peace,

freedom, light, not disturbed by the outer movements, but the outer movements will remain. It is only the combined action of the psychic and the spiritual power that can change it.

*

It is by meditation, by concentration, by the constant turning or call [*that aspiration and openness may be cultivated*]—secondly, by the keeping of the mind and vital still for the descent of the Presence, peace, light, Ananda and for the psychic being to emerge. When the psychic being is in front, the descent constant, then the constant feeling of the Divine in you and of yourself in the Divine becomes more easy to have.

*

One can receive [*forces from above*] always through the psychic part of the being, even before the veil is broken.

The Psychic and the Supermind

You were quite right in what you wrote about the supermind—people here do indeed use the “big word” much too freely as if it were something quite within everybody’s grasp. The first thing to be done is the psychic change and until that has progressed sufficiently, supermind is a far-off thing and people need not think of it at all. You have certainly progressed, but the change of the outer nature is always a slow movement, so that need not distress you.

*

To merge the consciousness in the Divine and to keep the psychic being controlling and changing all the nature and keeping it turned to the Divine till the whole being can live in the Divine is the transformation we seek. There is farther the supramentalisation, but this only carries the transformation to its own highest and largest possibilities—it does not alter its essential nature.

*

The psychic when sufficiently developed can be strong enough to make the preliminary clearance [*of the lower vital*].

It is the supramental alone that can transform the material being, but the physical mind and physical vital can be very much changed by the action of the psychic and of the overmind. The entire change however is made only when there is the supramental influence. But for the present the psychic is the force that may be relied on for the preliminary purification of the lower nature.

Section Three

Spiritual Experiences and Realisations

Chapter One

Experiences of the Self, the One and the Infinite

Peace, Calm, Silence and the Self

That [*state of vast peace and calm*] is the basic experience of the higher consciousness — it is what is called the realisation of the Atman (the Self).

*

It is the Atman, the spiritual being above the mind — the first experience of it is a silence and calm (which one perceives afterwards to be infinite and eternal) untouched by the movements of mind and life and body. The higher consciousness lives always in touch with the Self — the lower is separated from it by the activities of the Ignorance.

*

When one becomes aware of the Self calm, silent, wide, universal, it is no longer covered over by the ignorance; when one identifies with the Self and not with the mind, life and body and their movements or with the small ego, that is the release of the Self.

*

And how is the outer nature to rise into the higher Prakriti before you realise the Self? The higher nature is that of the higher consciousness of which the first basis is the peace and wideness and realisation of the Self, the One that is all.

*

The gaining of peace makes it easier to get the experience of the pure and free Self.

*

If not aspiration, at least keep the idea of what is necessary—(1) that the silence and peace shall become a wideness which you can realise as the Self, (2) the extension of the silent consciousness upwards as well so that you may feel its source above you, (3) the presence of peace etc. all the time. These things need not all come at once, but by realising what has to be in your mind, any falling towards a condition of inertia can be avoided.

*

What one feels first [*in the silence*] is the pure existence of the self, without any idea, characteristic or movement—existence pure and simple, Sat Brahman—or else one feels that and a vast peace and wideness. Afterwards other things are felt such as Ananda, but always with this as the basis.

*

A great wave (or sea) of calm and the constant consciousness of a vast and luminous Reality—this is precisely the character of the fundamental realisation of the Supreme Truth in its first touch on the mind and the soul. One could not ask for a better beginning or foundation—it is like a rock on which the rest can be built. It means certainly not only a Presence, but *the* Presence—and it would be a great mistake to weaken the experience by any non-acceptance or doubt of its character.

It is not necessary to define it and one ought not even to try to turn it into an image; for this Presence is in its nature infinite. Whatever it has to manifest of itself or out of itself, it will do inevitably by its own power, if there is a sustained acceptance.

It is quite true that it is a grace sent and the only return needed for such a grace is acceptance, gratitude and to allow the Power that has touched the consciousness to develop what has to be developed in the being—by keeping oneself open to it. The total transformation of the nature cannot be done in a moment; it must take long and proceed through stages; what is now experienced is only an initiation, a foundation for the new consciousness in which that transformation will become possible. The automatic spontaneity of the experience ought by

itself to show that it is nothing constructed by the mind, will or emotions; it comes from a Truth that is beyond them.

*

The vastness, the overwhelming calm and silence in which you feel merged is what is called the Atman or the silent Brahman. It is the whole aim of many Yogas to get this realisation of Atman or silent Brahman and live in it. In our Yoga it is only the first stage of the realisation of the Divine and of that growing of the being into the higher or divine Consciousness which we call transformation.

*

A sadhak of integral Yoga who stops short at the Impersonal is no longer a sadhak of integral Yoga. Impersonal realisation is the realisation of the silent Self, of the pure Existence, Consciousness and Bliss in itself without any perception of an Existent, Conscient, Blissful. It leads therefore to Nirvana. In the integral knowledge the realisation of the Self and of the impersonal Sachchidananda is only a step, though a very important step, or part of the integral knowledge. It is a beginning, not an end of the highest realisation.

The True Self Within

The experience described in your letter is a glimpse of the realisation of the true Self which is independent of the body. When this settles itself there is the liberation (*mukti*). Not only the body, but the vital and mind are felt to be only instruments and one's self is felt to be calm, self-existent and free and wide or infinite. It is then possible for the psychic being to effect in that freedom the full transformation of the nature. All your former experiences were preparing for this, but the physical consciousness came across. Now that you have had the glimpse of the self separate from the body, this physical difficulty may soon be overcome.

*

The experience you have is the experience of the true self. Un-touched by grief and joy, desire, anxiety or trouble, vast and calm and full of peace, it observes the agitations of the outer being as one might the play of children. It is indeed the divine element in you. The more you can live in that, the firmer will be the foundation of the sadhana. In this self will come all the higher experiences, oneness with the Divine, light, knowledge, strength, Ananda, the play of the Mother's higher forces. It does not always become stable from the first, though for some it does; but the experience comes more and more frequently and lasts till it is no longer covered by the ordinary nature.

The Self and the Sense of Individuality

Yes, the sense of individuality can disappear altogether when all is peace and wideness. One feels that the peace and wideness are oneself, but not in an individual sense—for it is the “Atman” of everybody else also. Afterwards there can come an experience of another kind of I, but it is a universalised I which contains everybody else and is in unison with everybody else and is itself contained in the Divine. This is what Yogins sometimes call the “large” as opposed to the small Aham. I have written of it as the true Person.

*

The Self is essentially universal; the individualised self is only the universal experienced from an individual centre. If what you have realised is not felt to be one in all, then it is not the “Atman”; possibly it is the central being not yet revealing its universal aspect as Atman.

*

The Self is felt as either universal, one in all, or a universalised individual the same in essence as others, extended everywhere from each being but centred here. Of course centre is a way of speaking, because no physical centre is usually felt—only all the action takes place around the individual.

*

All is in the self; when identified with the universal self, all is in you.

Also, the microcosm reproduces the macrocosm — so all is present in each, though all is not expressed (and cannot be) in the surface consciousness.

*

There is the experience of the microcosm (the universe in oneself) in which all that is in the macrocosm (the larger universe) is present. All these things are for experience, for knowledge and must be taken as such. No merely personal turn should be given to them.

The Disappearance of the “I” Sense

The essential “I” sense disappears when there is the stable realisation of the one universal Self in all and that remains at all moments in all conditions under any circumstances. Usually this comes first in the Purusha consciousness and the extension to the Prakriti movements is not immediate. But even if there are “I” movements in the Prakriti reactions, the Purusha within observes them as the continued running of an old mechanism and does not feel them as his own. Most Vedantists stop there, because they think that those reactions will fall away from one at death and all will disappear into the One. But for a change of the nature it is necessary that the experience and seeing of the Purusha should spread to all the parts, mind, vital, physical, subconscious. Then the ego movements of Prakriti can also disappear gradually from one field after another till none is left. For this a perfect samata even in the cells of the body and in every vibration of the being is necessary — *samam hi brahma*. One is then quite free from it in works also. The individual remains but that is not the small separative ego, but a form and power of the Universal which feels itself one with all beings, an acting centre and instrument of the Universal Transcendent, full of the Ananda of the presence and the action but not thinking or moving independently or acting for its own sake. That cannot be called egoism. The Divine can

be called an ego only if he is a separate Person limited as in the Christian idea of God by his separateness (though even there esoteric Christianity abolishes the limitation). An I which is not separate in that way is no I at all.

The Self and the Cosmic Consciousness

One has first to become aware of the Self and its wide silence and eternal peace and acquire the cosmic consciousness in which one is aware of the whole universe as one with oneself and to live in that. One has at the same time to be aware — it becomes possible when one lives in the cosmic consciousness, cosmic Self and cosmic Nature, — of the different beings in oneself, psychic, mental, vital, physical, and then there appears also the central being which stands above all of them and is the source of all the surface personalities. It is only then that one can know the aspect or bhava one is intended to manifest.

*

The Cosmic Spirit or Self contains everything in the cosmos — it upholds cosmic Mind, universal Life, universal Matter as well as the Overmind. The Self is more than all these things which are its formulations in Nature.

A Vision of the Universal Self

What you saw in the vision was the wide and luminous infinite of what is called the universal Self or spirit. It is that which is one of the fundamental things into which one enters when one reaches the higher consciousness and goes above. The personal being naturally feels itself as something very small and insignificant in that Infinite. But in that Infinite there are higher and higher levels and it is to these levels that the Mother was leading you when she took you by the hand. This often happens in meditation or trance when one has once gone upward into the spiritual infinity. The reason why you did not see the Mother's form was not that the Mother hid herself or anything in you came between, but

that you were both moving in the formless Infinite as spiritual beings and so it was easier to feel the presence than to see any physical form. Not that the form cannot be there, but it is less insistent and therefore not so soon seen as on the physical plane.

The silence in the head and heart and the emptiness are both necessary and desirable. When they are there, the consciousness finds them natural and they give it the sense of lightness and release; that is why the thoughts or speech of the old kind are foreign to it and when they come give fatigue. This silence and emptiness must grow, so that the higher consciousness with its knowledge, light, Ananda, peace can come down in it and progressively replace the old things. They must indeed occupy not only head and heart but the whole body.

The Self Experienced on Various Planes

It is probably the true Cosmic Self or spirit with its cosmic consciousness and power that you feel on a plane above the ordinary mind or vital or physical — what plane is not as yet clear — for what you describe is common to this Self on whatever plane it manifests; it is felt like that as soon as the being or any part of the being detaches itself from the surface Ignorance.

*

The Self is met first on the level of the Higher Mind, but it is not limited to one station — it is usually felt as something outspread in wideness, but one may also feel a centralising consciousness in the Sahasrara or above it.

*

A complete silence makes realisation of the Self more possible — but that can be had on the Higher Mind level far below Overmind.

The Self and Time

In the self or pure existence there is no time or space — except

spiritual space or wideness.

*

Yes—in the silence of the self there is no time—it is *akāla*.

*

Yes, that is correct. In the first realisation of silence in the higher consciousness there is no Time—there is only the sense of pure existence, consciousness, peace or a strong featureless Ananda. If anything else comes in it is a minor movement on the surface of this timeless self-existence. This and the sense of liberation that comes with it is the result of the mind's quiescence. At a higher level this peace and liberation remain, but can be united with a greater and freer dynamic movement.

The Self and Life

It is always possible to have realisations of a kind on the mental-spiritual plane even if the vital is still impure. There is a sort of separation of the mental Purusha and Prakriti which results in a knowledge that has no transforming effect on the life. But the theory of these Yogis is that one has to know the Self; life and what one does in life do not matter. Have you not read of the Yogi who came with his concubine and Ramakrishna asked him, "Why do you live like that?" He answered, "All is Maya, so it does not matter what I do so long as I know the Brahman." It is true Ramakrishna replied, "I spit on your Vedanta", but logically the Yogi had a case. For if all life and action are Maya and only the silent Brahman is real—well!

Experiences of Infinity, Oneness, Unity

What you felt as a strong subtle air was the concrete expression of consciousness or conscious existence in itself independent of the body. As yet the experience is still limited by the body, but when it is felt without that limit then it is a sense of a wide ether filling all space, Akash Brahman. As this grows, the body sense

disappears and when the mind also is quite inactive, one feels oneself to be that spreading out to all Infinity.

*

The feeling you have of all being one and not this a tree or that such and such an object, seems to be a first touch of the realisation of all being One. For it is so that one sees things then,—all seems to be One and not something separate like a tree or a house. The tree or house is only a form in the One; the tree is really that One.

*

It is only by feeling all things as one spiritual substance that one can arrive at unity [*of matter, energy and mind*]—unity is in the spiritual consciousness. The material point is only one point among millions of millions—so that is not the base of unity. But once you get the unity in consciousness, you can feel through that the unity of mind substance, mind force, etc., the unity of life substance (mobile) and life force, the unity of material substance and energies. Being—consciousness of being—energy of consciousness—form of consciousness, all things are really that.

*

The spiritual consciousness [*mentioned in the preceding letter*] is that which is in contact with Sachchidananda, that is, with the pure existence, consciousness and bliss of the Divine. Any contact with Sachchidananda must bring either peace or bliss.

Living in the Divine

There can be no mental rule or definition [*of the kind of life possible after union with the Purushottama*]. One has first to live in the Divine and attain to the Truth—the will and awareness of the Truth will organise the life.

*

To be always merged in the Divine is not so easy. It can be done only by an absorption in one's own inner self or by a consciousness that sees all in the Divine and the Divine in all and is *always* in that condition. There is none [*here*] who has attained to that yet.

Chapter Two

Experiences on the Higher Planes

The Higher or Spiritual Consciousness

It [*the consciousness above the head*] is what we call the higher or spiritual consciousness — it contains or supports all the higher planes, the higher worlds. When one begins to feel this always above, it is a great step forward in the sadhana; then the consciousness can go up there and from there see, discern and control all that is in the mind, vital and body. It is the meeting-place of the ascending and descending forces, as you see.

Breaking into the Spiritual Consciousness

Of course, Krishnaprem's view about the canalisation of Niagara is my standpoint also.¹ But for the human mind it is difficult to get across the border between mind and spirit without making a forceful rush or push along one line only and that must be some line of pure experience in which, especially if it is the bhakta way, one gets easily swallowed up in the rapids (did not Chaitanya at last disappear in the waters?) and goes no farther. The first thing is to break into the spiritual consciousness, any part of it, anyhow and anywhere, afterwards one can explore the country, to which exploration there can hardly be a limit, one is always going higher and higher, getting wider and wider; but there is a certain intense ecstasy about the first complete plunge which is extraordinarily seizing. It is not only the bhakta's rapture, but the jnani's plunge into Brahma-Nirvana or Brahmananda or release into the still eternity of the Self that is of that seizing and

¹ In a letter to the correspondent, Krishnaprem said that there are two stages of bhakti. In the first stage of rapturous adoration, the light and bliss of Krishna rush down into the bhakta just as water rushes over Niagara Falls. In the second stage the water flows through great pipes into mighty turbines which supply a continent with power. — Ed.

absorbing character—it does not look at first as if one could or would care or need to get beyond into anything else. One cannot find fault with the Sannyasi lost in his laya or the bhakta lost in his ecstasy; they remain there probably because they are constituted for that and it is the limit of their leap. But all the same it has always appeared to me that it is a stage and not the end; I subscribe fully to the canalisation of Niagara.

Wideness and the Higher Consciousness

The first experience there [*on the higher plane*] is peace and calm and wideness. It is not till these are settled that other experiences of that plane can come.

*

The experience you had of the wideness with many roads opening was an image of the higher consciousness in which all the movements of the being are open, true and happy—the ignorance and incapacity of the lower nature disappear. It is that that the light from above is bringing.

*

Wideness is necessary for the working of the higher consciousness—if the being is shut up in itself, there can be intense experiences and some opening to touches from the heights, but not the full stable basis for the transformation.

*

Wideness is a sign of the extension of the consciousness out of the ordinary limits—whiteness of the wideness means that it is the pure consciousness one is feeling, unless it is white light or luminous white which indicates the Mother's consciousness there or some influence of it. The subtle barrier you felt must have been the same thing that prevents your ascent from the heart and from it going beyond into the regions above. There is always a sort of lid there and it is only when that is opened or disappears that one can go freely above. One can be aware of

the “unseen wideness” but one is not oneself there until that is done.

*

If the workings are really those of the higher consciousness or if these predominate the ego fades out—but there is also often a wideness of opening to the universal mental, vital, physical existence and, if the sadhak responds more to these than to the higher consciousness, then he does not get free. Sometimes even the ego gets aggrandised. But if the psychic is awake, then there is not this danger; one finds one’s true being in place of the ego.

*

She has had experiences but on the mental and vital plane. It is only a real descent of the higher consciousness from above that can give a peaceful and beautiful merging of the atoms (?)² into the wideness of the Divine—that is to say one feels the very cells sharing in that peace and wideness. This is possible even if the material body is ill. In most cases it is the subtle body that feels like that, but as the subtle penetrates everywhere the gross physical, the physical body also feels like that. But then it does not feel disturbed by the pains or motions of the illness—they do not affect its peace or Ananda.

Degrees in the Higher Consciousness

The plane makes a considerable difference in the power and luminosity and completeness etc. of the experience. A mental realisation is very different from an overmental or supramental although the Truth realised may be the same. So also to know Matter as the Brahman has a very different result from knowing Life, Mind, Supermind or Ananda as the Brahman. If realising the Divine through the Mind was just the same as realising him on higher planes, there would be no meaning in this Yoga at all

² The question mark is Sri Aurobindo’s. The sadhika had written, “Every atom of the body is merging peacefully and beautifully into the wideness.” —Ed.

—there would be no need of ascending to Supermind or bringing Supermind down.

*

The consciousness which he calls supramental, is no doubt above the human mind, but it should be called the higher consciousness. In this higher consciousness there are many degrees, of which the supramental is the summit or the source. It is not possible to reach that summit or source all at once; first, all the lower consciousness has to be purified and made ready. That is the meaning of the Light he saw, whose inner body or substance is too dense and powerful to be penetrated at present.

*

The higher consciousness is that above the ordinary mind and different from it in its workings; it ranges from higher mind through illumined mind, intuition and overmind up to the border line of the supramental.

*

The Self governs the diversity of its creation by its unity on all the planes from the Higher Mind upwards, for there some realisation or vision of the One Truth or the Universal is the natural frame and basis of the whole consciousness. But the higher one rises upward, the more the spiritual view changes, the power of consciousness changes, the Light becomes ever more intense and potent. The essential static realisation of Infinity and Eternity and the Timeless One remains the same, but the vision of the workings of the One becomes ever wider and is attended with a greater instrumentality of Force and a more comprehensive grasp of what has to be known and done. All possible forms and constructions of things become more and more visible, more perfectly put in their proper place, more luminously utilisable. A clear spacious thought-knowledge in the Higher Mind becomes a mass of illuminations in the Illumined Mind and heightens into direct intimate vision on the Intuition level. But the Intuition sees in flashes and combines through a constant play of light

—through a chain or coordinated harmony of revelations, inspirations, intuitions, swift discriminations. The Overmind sees calmly, steadily, in great masses and deep and large extensions of space and time and relation, globally, in wholes; it has the universal touch not only in spirit but in its manner. It creates and acts in the same way — for the Overmind is the world of the great Gods, the divine Creators. But each Godhead creates in his own way; he sees all but that all is seen from his own divine viewpoint. There is not the absolute supramental harmony and certitude. These are some of the differences. I speak of these planes in themselves — for when they act in the human consciousness, they are necessarily much diminished in their working, for they have to work with and depend on the human instrumentation or man's smaller seeking mental intelligence, his passionate turbid vital and mental, his cabined and narrow physical intellect — their workings get badly mixed up with these inferior modes of consciousness and their diluted light of ignorance. Only when these lower impotencies are quieted can those higher powers get a fuller force and reveal more of their original luminous character.

The Higher Planes and the Supermind

The Ignorance can act from above the head — but not as part of the higher planes — it comes from outside. The higher planes just above the head are not however the absolute Truth; that you only get in the supermind.

*

Absolute certitude about all things can only come from the supermind. Meanwhile one has to go on with what knowledge the other planes give.

*

The Truth manifesting on all the planes is one thing, the Supramental is another, although it is the source of all Truth.

*

To go into the supermind is impossible for the human mind. One has to rise into the higher planes of consciousness above human mind and transform the human mind into that; only afterwards can we hope to touch the supermind.

*

One has to go by stages, and to reach and be conscious on the higher planes between mind and Overmind is already sufficiently difficult without insisting on Supermind as the immediate goal.

*

One has to know about Overmind and Supermind but there should be no ambition to reach them—it should be regarded as a natural end of the sadhana which will come of itself. The concentration should be all on the immediate step—whatever is being done at the time. So have the working of the Power and let it work all out step by step.

Levels of the Higher Mind

What you see is perfectly correct. These three are three levels of the higher Mind—on the lowest the consciousness is in connection with the Divine not directly but through the touch of the Light, Peace, Power and Knowledge, on the second it is in the Light etc. and already sees the Divine, on the third it is in union with the Divine and surrendered. These are three well known conditions of the higher consciousness in its approach to the Divine.

An Illumined Mind Experience

You probably went up into the illumined Mind which has a pale blue light and were receiving there lights from the higher planes and occasionally seeing the flash of the full orb of the Divine Truth.

It is always a mistake for the mind to become active and wanting to know while the experience is going on—it usually

stops the experience or disturbs or alters it in some way. The mind must remain passive till the experience is over.

Overmind Experiences

Overmind experience comes when one rises to the overmind plane and sees things as they are on that plane or as they look to the consciousness which sees the other planes from the overmind view. When one is in the mind, life or physical plane, then it is the overmind Influence that comes down and modifies the mind, life or physical workings in greater or less degree according to the possibilities or the thing to be done at the moment. It is not the sole power as it is in its own plane but works under mental, vital or physical conditions. Its power is more subjective than objective—it is easy for it to change our view and experience of the object and our knowledge about it, but not so easy for it to change the object or its nature or circumstances or the outward state of things in that plane.

*

It is perfectly simple, it is the attraction towards the Divine Oneness represented in concrete experience. Is it the concreteness of the experiences that puzzles you? All experience there [*in the Overmind*] tends to be concrete, there are no “abstract” truths as in the mind,—even thought in the Overmind is a concrete force and a palpable substance.

*

Yes—it is one aspect of the Truth: for in the Overmind there are many aspects of Truth, separate or combined together or arranged one above the other.

*

Both [*visions*] are true on different levels of the Overmind plane or in different cosmic formulations that come from the Overmind. All aspects are there in the Overmind, even those which the intellect considers contradictory to each other—in

the Overmind they are not contradictions, but complementary to each other.

*

It is perfectly natural. In these experiences you become aware of the consciousness proper to other planes. Thus you get the experience of being a form of the Divine Consciousness, the Mother, and while the experience lasts you feel her power—when the experience ceases, you come back to your normal state, the power withdraws. These experiences impregnate the consciousness with the Overmind knowledge and they prepare it for transformation.

*

The overmind experience does not necessarily deliver from the lower vital and physical movements—it changes them only to a certain extent and prepares them for a greater Truth.

Overmind Experiences and the Supermind

People talk very lightly of the overmind and the supermind as if it were quite easy to enter into them and mistake inferior movements for the overmental or supramental, thereby confusing the Truth and delaying the progress of the sadhana.

*

Certainly, it [*the overmind descent*] is necessary for those who want the supramental change. Unless the overmind opens, there can be no direct supramental opening of the consciousness. If one remains in mind, even illumined mind or the intuition, one can have indirect messages or an influence from the supramental, but not a direct supramental control of the consciousness or the supramental change.

*

It is only the supermind that has an absolute freedom from error. The Overmind presents truths in all sorts of arrangements

all of which taken together presents something like the whole truth—but these again are reflected in you in the terrestrial consciousness or conveyed to your terrestrial consciousness by the descent from the higher planes; but in receiving it the terrestrial consciousness can make mistakes in interpretation, in understanding, in application, in arrangement.

*

It is not very clear [*in the correspondent's letter*] what is meant by this Knowledge-Will. It is usually a description of the Supramental where there is no division between Knowledge and Will, each acting on each other or rather fixed together in oneness and therefore infallible. You say it has taken form in mind, vital and body; if that were so, it would mean the final and decisive transformation; so it cannot be the Supramental. It must be some overmind truth plane.

*

There are certain things in these three letters that are not correct, notably:

(1) He seems to say that beyond the overmind there is a plane of "higher luminous Intelligence". This is impossible. Beyond the overmind there is the Supermind—the overmind is the highest of all the planes below the supramental, and he is not yet in touch with the supramental. What he calls here the overmind cannot be the true overmind. His experiences are those of the mind opening to the higher mental planes and trying to bring down something from them and their powers into the mind, life and body.

(2) E.g. his classification of four worlds (Parvati-Shankar etc.) is an attempt of the mind to interpret something he had seen, but it has not got it at all right. If Mahasaraswati stopped him at this moment, it must have been because his mind was making a wrong formation and it was no use carrying it any farther.

At this stage of his Yoga he must observe what is going on, but not attach a definitive or final importance to any such

classifications or mental arrangements. The mind at this stage sometimes gets these things correctly, sometimes makes formations of them which are not correct and have to be discarded or set right when a higher knowledge comes.

*

Your experience means manifestly the uniting of the Ishwara-Shakti sides of the manifestation—as in the Hara-Gauri figure—with the result of a universalisation of the individual consciousness indicated by the shooting out towards infinite distances. The currents are of course the currents of the double force working to make this liberation. The blue and gold must be the blue of Krishna and the gold of the Mother (Durga-Mahakali).

All this is not a supramental experience, but comes from the Overmind. But the overmind experiences must come first and liberate the consciousness. It is only after the overmind liberation that the true experience of the supermind can come.

*

You must realise that the supramentalisation of the overmind is one of the most difficult things possible and proceed with great care so as to avoid haste and error.

Reflected Experience of the Higher Planes

One can get the experiences of a higher plane by reflection or some partial descent in the lower.

*

It is the experience of the transcendent planes as reflected on the higher planes of consciousness (Overmind, etc.), in relation to them; just as one can have an experience of Sachchidananda and these planes as reflected in the mind or vital or physical consciousness, so one can have it there—but on each plane it appears in a different way.

Trance and the Higher Planes

The higher planes are not planes on which man is naturally conscious and he is even not open to their direct influence—only to some indirect influence from those nearest to the human mind. He can reach them only in a deep inner condition or trance and the higher he goes the less easy is it for him to be conscious of them even in trance. If you are not conscious of your inner being, then it is more difficult to be conscious in trance.

Living in a Higher Plane

To live in a higher plane and see the action on the physical from it as something separate is a definite stage in the movement towards transformation.

Section Four

The Spiritual Transformation

Chapter One

Ascent and Descent

The Meaning of Spiritual Transformation

What I mean by the spiritual transformation is something dynamic (not merely liberation of the self, or realisation of the One which can very well be attained without any descent). It is a putting on of the spiritual consciousness dynamic as well as static in every part of the being down to the subconscious. That cannot be done by the influence of the Self leaving the consciousness fundamentally as it is with only purification, enlightenment of the mind and heart and quiescence of the vital. It means a bringing down of Divine Consciousness static and dynamic into all these parts and the entire replacement of the present consciousness by that. This we find unveiled and unmixed above mind, life and body and not in mind, life and body. It is a matter of the undeniable experience of many that this can descend and it is my experience that nothing short of its *full* descent can thoroughly remove the veil and mixture and effect the full spiritual transformation.

*

The power of concentration above the head is to bring peace, silence, liberation from the body sense, the identification with mind and life and open the way for the lower (mental-vital-physical) consciousness to rise up to meet the higher Consciousness above and for the powers of the higher (spiritual or divine) Consciousness to descend into mind, life and body. This is what is called in this Yoga the spiritual transformation.

A Double Movement in the Sadhana

There is a double movement in the sadhana — the Divine Consciousness, Power, Light, Peace descending into all the body, the

consciousness from all parts of the body rising upwards to meet the Divine Consciousness above—the descent and the ascent.

*

The sadhana is based on the fact that a descent of Forces from the higher planes and an ascent of the lower consciousness to the higher planes is the means of transformation of the lower nature—although naturally it takes time and the complete transformation can only come by the supramental descent. Your experiences here are forms of the widening experiences of this process.

*

The practice of this Yoga is double—one side is of an ascent of the consciousness to the higher planes, the other is of a descent of the power of the higher planes into the earth consciousness so as to drive out the Power of darkness and ignorance and transform the nature.

*

All the consciousness in the human being who is the mental embodied in living matter has to rise so as to meet the higher consciousness; the higher consciousness has also to descend into mind, into life, into matter. In that way the barriers will be removed and the higher consciousness will be able to take up the whole lower nature and transform it by the power of the supermind.

The earth is a material field of evolution. Mind and life, supermind, Sachchidananda are in principle involved there in the earth consciousness, but only matter is at first organised; then life descends from the life plane and gives shape and organisation and activity to the life principle in matter, creates the plant and animal; then mind descends from the mind plane, creating man. Now supermind is to descend so as to create a supramental race.

*

There are two movements—one an ascension of the lower consciousness to meet the higher, the other the descent of the

higher consciousness into the lower. What you first experienced was an uprush of the lower consciousness from all parts so strong as to break the lid of the inner mind—that was the splitting of the skull—and to enable the joining of the two consciousnesses above to be complete. The result was a descent. Usually the first thing that descends from the higher consciousness is its deep and entire peace—the second is the Light, here the white light of the Mother. When the higher consciousness descends or is intensely felt, there is very usually an opening of the limited personal being into the cosmic consciousness—one feels a wide and infinite being which alone exists, the identification with the body and even the sense of the body disappears, the limited personal consciousness is lost in the Cosmic Existence. You had all this first in the impersonal way, but after the burning up of the psychic fire, you felt the Personal wideness, the cosmic consciousness of the Divine Mother and received her blessing.

*

If your consciousness rises above the head, that means that it goes beyond the ordinary mind to the centre above which receives the higher consciousness or else towards the ascending levels of the higher consciousness itself. The first result is the silence and peace of the Self which is the basis of the higher consciousness; this may afterwards descend into the lower levels, into the very body. Light also can descend and Force. The navel and the centres below it are those of the vital and the physical; something of the higher Force may have descended there.

Both Ascent and Descent Necessary

The lower consciousness ascends towards the higher to join it—the higher descends into the lower to transform it. It is the rule of the consciousness in this sadhana.

*

A going up and up higher, though a part of the total necessary

movement, does not by itself have any effect on the outer being. It only divides the consciousness into two and its only logical outcome is Nirvana. I have always written that the descent is necessary to change the nature; ascent is useful to open the higher planes and exalt the level of the consciousness, but it does not change the lower being except superficially by opening to it certain possibilities it had not before. But the descent must first take place in the inner being. When the higher consciousness is settled in the inner being, then it can change the outer. But necessarily the descent must be dynamic, not merely that of a static peace; the inner peace must itself become dynamic.

The descent whether of peace or force or light or knowledge or Ananda must occupy the whole inner being down to the inner physical. Without that how is the outer to be transformed at all? It is an amazing idea to suppose that the outer can be changed while the inner is left to itself. What you had in the inner being was a static stillness which did not even entirely occupy the inner physical except at times—that was why the dynamic descent was necessary, but in the inner being or if possible the whole being, the inner outflowing into the outer, not in the outer being to the exclusion of the inner.

*

In the physical consciousness the descent is the most important. Something of the subtle physical can always go up—but the external physical consciousness can only do it when the force from above comes down and fills it. There is then a sort of unification made when the higher consciousness and the physical are one undivided consciousness and there is an ascent of forces from below and descent from above, simultaneous and mutually interpenetrating.

*

I am not speaking of mere rising above [*as the means of changing the external nature*]. The rising above has to be followed by the descent of the higher consciousness into the different parts of the being. That aided by the psychic development and aiding it

changes the external nature.

*

It was an experience (by ascension) of the spiritual plane of being above in which there is absolute peace and light and Ananda. It is this that has to descend into the mind, vital and body and be the constant condition and the basis for the final transformation of the consciousness and nature.

*

There are two movements that are necessary — one is the ascent through the increasing of peace and silence to its source above the mind,—that is indicated by the tendency of the consciousness to rise out of the body to the top of the head and above where it is easy to realise the Self in all its stillness and liberation and wideness and to open to the other powers of the Higher Consciousness. The other is the descent of the peace, silence, the spiritual freedom and wideness and the powers of the higher consciousness as they develop into the lower down to the most physical and even the subconscious. To both of these movements there can be a block — a block above due to the mind and lower nature being unhabituated (it is that really and not incapacity) and a block below due to the physical consciousness and its natural slowness to change. Everybody has these blocks but by persistent will, aspiration or *abhyāsa* they can be overcome.

The Order of Ascent and Descent

There is no fixed rule in such things. With many the descent comes first and the ascension afterwards, with others it is the other way; with some the two processes go on together. If one can fix oneself above so much the better.

*

I think the descent is more usual than the ascent. Some sadhaks finish the ascent first or ascents and descents but more often the descents come first and the ascent (above the head) takes place

only when there has been much working of peace, force, Ananda etc. in the body.

*

The movement of ascension cannot finish so long as the movement of descent is not ready to finish.

Ascent and Descent of the Kundalini Shakti

The spine is the main channel of the descent and ascent of the Force, by which it connects the lower and the higher consciousness together.

*

The sensation in the spine and on both sides of it is a sign of the awakening of the Kundalini power. More precisely, it is felt as a descending or an ascending current or currents, or both at the same time. There are two main nerve channels for the currents, one on each side of the central channel in the spine. The descending current is the Energy from above coming down to touch the sleeping Power in the lowest nerve centre at the bottom of the spine; the ascending current is the release of energy going up from the awakened Kundalini. This movement as it proceeds opens up the six centres of the subtle nervous system and by the opening one escapes from the limitations of the surface consciousness bound to the gross body, and great ranges of experience proper to the larger subliminal self, mental, vital, subtle-physical, are shown to the sadhaka. When the Kundalini meets the higher consciousness, as it ascends through the summit of the head, there is an opening to the higher superconscious reaches above the normal mind. It is by ascending through these in our consciousness and receiving a descent of their energies that it is possible ultimately to reach the supermind. This is the psycho-physical method which is elaborately systematised in the Tantra. In our Yoga it is not necessary to go through the systematised method,—for this psycho-physical process is only a part of the movement of the Yoga and it takes place spontaneously according to need by the force of the aspiration

and the call for the workings of the Divine Power. As soon as there is an opening, the Divine Power descends and conducts the necessary working, does what is needed, each thing in its time, and the Yogic consciousness begins to be born in the sadhaka.

*

The force which you felt must evidently have been a rising of the Kundalini ascending to join the Force above and bring down the energy needed to ease the depression and then again rising to enforce the connection between the Above and the lower centres. The seeming expansion of the head is due to the joining of the mind with the consciousness of the Self or Divine above. That consciousness is wide and illimitable and when one rises into it the individual consciousness also breaks its limits and feels wide and illimitable. At such times one often feels as if there were no head and no body but all were a wide self and its consciousness, or else the head or the body is only a circumstance in that. The body or the physical mind is sometimes startled or alarmed at these experiences because they are abnormal to it; but there is no ground for alarm,—these are usual experiences in the Yoga.

*

There is a Yoga Shakti lying coiled or asleep in the inner body, not active. When one does Yoga, this force uncoils itself and rises upward to meet the Divine Consciousness and Force that are waiting above us. When this happens, when the awakened Yoga Shakti arises, it is often felt like a snake uncoiling and standing up straight and lifting itself more and more upwards. When it meets the Divine Consciousness above, then the force of the Divine Consciousness can more easily descend into the body and be felt working there to change the nature.

The feeling of your body and eyes being drawn upwards is part of the same movement. It is the inner consciousness in the body and the inner subtle sight in the body that are looking and moving upward and trying to meet the divine consciousness and divine seeing above.

*

Yoga means union with the Divine—a union either transcendental (above the universe) or cosmic (universal) or individual or, as in our Yoga, all three together. Or it means getting into a consciousness in which one is no longer limited by the small ego, personal mind, personal vital and body but is in union with the supreme Self or with the universal (cosmic) consciousness or with some deeper consciousness within in which one is aware of one's own soul, one's own inner being and of the real truth of existence. In the Yogic consciousness one is not only aware of things, but of forces, not only of forces but of the conscious being behind the forces. One is aware of all this not only in oneself but in the universe.

There is a force which accompanies the growth of the new consciousness and at once grows with it and helps it to come about and to perfect itself. This force is the Yoga shakti. It is here asleep and coiled up in all the centres of our inner being (chakras) and is at the base what is called in the Tantras the Kundalini shakti. But it is also above us, above our head as the Divine Force—not there coiled up, involved, asleep, but awake, scient, potent, extended and wide; it is there waiting for manifestation and to this Force we have to open ourselves—to the power of the Mother. In the mind it manifests itself as a divine mind-force or a universal mind-force and it can do everything that the personal mind cannot do; it is then the Yogic mind-force. When it manifests and works in the vital or physical in the same way, it is then apparent as a Yogic life-force or a Yogic body-force. It can awake in all these forms, bursting outwards and upwards, extending itself into wideness from below; or it can descend and become there a definite power for things; it can pour downwards into the body, working, establishing its reign, extending into wideness from above, link the lowest in us with the highest above us, release the individual into a cosmic universality or into absoluteness and transcendence.

Ascent and Descent and Problems of the Lower Nature

If one can remain always in the higher consciousness, so much

the better. But why does not one remain always there? Because the lower is still part of the nature and it pulls you down towards itself. If on the other hand the lower is transformed, it becomes of one kind with the higher and there is nothing lower to pull downwards.

Transformation means that the higher consciousness or nature is brought down into the mind, vital and body and takes the place of the lower. There is a higher consciousness of the true self which is spiritual, but it is above; if one rises above into it, then one is free as long as one remains there, but if one comes down into or uses mind, vital or body—and if one keeps any connection with life, one has to do so, either to come down and act from the ordinary consciousness or else to be in the self but use mind, life and body—then the imperfections of these instruments have to be faced and mended; they can only be mended by transformation.

You say you rise a little above into this higher consciousness, but where do you rise? Into the quieted mind and above the vital or above the mind itself into something always calm and pure and free?

*

No. I did not intend any sarcasm by my question [*at the end of the preceding letter*]. You had written that by rising a little above the ordinary consciousness one was free from difficulties and that this was what one felt—I thought you meant that this was your own experience. So I put the question, as the experience of the quiet mind is one that can easily be broken by the invasions of the vital or the inertia of the physical being. The experience of the deeper freedom and calm which belongs to the self remains, but it can be covered up by the lower consciousness.

*

That [*thoughts about others*] can be only a temporary result of past activities. The endeavour should now be to make the ascent above into the silence of the Self in the higher universal consciousness above, for that was evidently what was trying

to come when the disturbance broke in. That would probably bring also the descent of the permanent spiritual peace into all the being as a basis for the higher activities.

*

That you should be able to keep your consciousness uplifted is already something. As for the opening its coming and apparent closing is a normal experience—it needs several openings before the thing is settled by a permanent poise of the consciousness above and an increasing descent into the head and below. It is the pull from below that should get no indulgence—for that, though most do indulge in it, is a wrong crabby way of doing it. One must be safely stationed above before one can descend without a tumble. Not that the tumble if it comes precludes a going up again—it does not; but that is no reason for letting it happen.

*

Even if the permanent opening does not come at once, you have only to wait and it is bound to come. It is certainly a pity that the restlessness of the vital should kick so much against vacancy of the consciousness; for if you could stand it this emptiness, now neutral, and therefore not interesting to the vital, would become positive and be the peaceful recipient of the pouring from above. The difficulty is that the vital has always been accustomed either to doing something or to something doing and when it is doing nothing or nothing is doing (or it seems like that on the surface), it gets bored and begins to feel and talk or to do nonsense. However even with this obstacle, the Descent can come down—it need not wait for the Supramental.

*

Yes. To ascend is easier than to bring down; the higher consciousness gets entangled and impeded in the physical and the mind and vital.

*

Rising higher and higher and bringing down is the method of

the Yoga; but it is not possible to do it with full effect until one has so prepared oneself that one can rise above the head to the Self in the higher mind. It was the point you had reached but could not confirm before the difficulties came in from the physical consciousness.

Experiences of Ascent and Descent

The ascent of the consciousness in the lower centres into the higher and the descent of the higher powers and the white light indicates a farther preparation of the vital and physical being and its forces by spiritualisation of the centres.

*

All these are different actions of the Force on the adhar with the one intention of opening it up from above and below and horizontally also. The action from above opens it to the descent of forces from above the Mind and the ascent of consciousness above the lid of the ordinary human mind. The horizontal action opens it to the cosmic consciousness on all its levels. The action from below helps to connect the superconscious with the subconscious. Finally the consciousness instead of being limited in the body becomes infinite, rises infinitely above, plunges infinitely below, widens infinitely on every side. There is besides the opening of all the centres to the Light and Power and Ananda that has to descend from above. At present only the mind centres seem to receive fully the descent of Force, while the upper vital centres are being prepared with a minor action on other parts of the body. It is a matter of time and perseverance for the way to be entirely open.

*

The experience you feel is that of the Atman, the cosmic Self supporting the cosmic consciousness—not yet clear but in its first impression. When the consciousness goes down from that condition, it brings something of it into the vital and physical consciousness and the result is either that these parts or at least

the vital open and get into touch with what has been brought down. The inert *tāmasikatā* or the unease in the legs comes because the physical is not able to receive or assimilate. This will disappear when that part opens and receives and is able to assimilate.

It was there the occasional descent of the Force to establish a connection — here the descent is taking another form intended to establish the fundamental experiences of the Realisation.

*

It is the beginning of a very decisive experience and realisation — first, the Ascent above the mind (head) into the spiritual plane. It is here that one releases and is released into the vastness, fullness, solace, freedom, peace and joy of the Infinite and becomes aware of the universal Self and the Divine. Its realisation is the foundation (when it is fixed and when one rises constantly above the body in the wideness of the infinite Being) of the spiritual state and the beginning of the spiritual transformation of the nature. What you have been having up to now is the psychic change; when the psychic and spiritual join together, then the transformation can be complete. For this the Descent is necessary and that is the second thing you are feeling, — the descent of the higher, spiritual or divine consciousness and energy into the whole system down to the bottom of the spine where is the Muladhara or centre of the physical consciousness. The Energy descends through all the levels and centres, mind centres, vital centres, physical centre and fills the whole body with the higher existence and consciousness. The ascent is the liberation (*mukti*) and when once this ascends, one is liberated from the body consciousness, one no longer feels the body as a form, no longer feels contained in the body, but widens out into the formless Vastness of the Divine. Or sometimes the body is felt as something very small in this vastness. In the Descent the body is felt but not as a confining form so much as an instrument and receptacle for this larger consciousness. Your description of the experience is unmistakable. All the elements are there. What has to happen is to get fixed in the wideness, freedom, stillness, peace

of the consciousness above and for the Descent to continue till it has fixed the higher power of being everywhere below—in the body and in the subconscience below it and also all round the body so that one lives enveloped in this new consciousness and being.

*

The experiences you relate mark a great progress—the passage from the perception of the ascending Force to that of the descending Shakti. For the spiral coils of Light you saw and whose effects you felt—the merging in silence and peace, the peace of the Atman or the Brahman consciousness—are usually a first effect, they are visual forms of the dynamic descent of the Divine Force from above; also the passage from the realisation of the static Brahman with the sense of the unreality of the world-existence to the realisation of the status of the dynamic one. This is a considerable step in the integral Yoga.

The Brahman consciousness is sometimes described as a static one, but it has two aspects, static and dynamic, and it is when both are united that it becomes integral. This is the greater consciousness I speak of in the sentence quoted by you, greater than either that which perceives the Brahmic silence and immobility alone or that which perceives the cosmic existence and action alone.

Chapter Two

Ascent to the Higher Planes

Contact with the Above

These are the ordinary normal experiences of the sadhana when there is an opening from above—the contact with the peace of the Brahman, Self or Divine and the contact with the higher Power, the Power of the Mother. He does not know what they are, quite naturally, but feels very correctly and his description is quite accurate. “How beautiful, calm and still all seems—as if in water there were not even a wave. But it is not Nothingness. I feel a Presence steeped in life but absolutely silent and quiet in meditation”,—there could hardly be a better description of this experience,—the experience of the peace and silence of the Divine or of the Divine itself in its own essential peace and silence. Also what he feels about the Force is quite correct, “something from above the manifested creation (mind-matter), a Force behind that is distinct from that which gives rise to emotions, anger, lust which are all purified and transformed gradually”, in other words, the Divine or Spiritual Force, other than the cosmic vital which supports the ordinary embodied consciousness; that is also very clear. I suppose it is only a contact yet, but a very true and vivid contact if it gives rise to so vivid and true a feeling. It looks as if he were going to make a very good beginning.

*

One may get influences from above, but so long as the mind is not full of the higher calm, peace, silence, one cannot be in direct contact. These influences get diminished, mentalised, vitalised and are not the powers of the higher planes in their native character. Nor is this sufficient to get control of the hidden forces of all the planes of consciousness, which is perhaps what he means by occultism.

*

Indirect connection [*with the Divine*] is when one lives in the ordinary consciousness without being able to go up above it and receives influences from above without knowing where they come from or feeling their source.

*

Sometimes one feels an ascension above the head. I think he has had that, but that is the mind going up (when it is not simply a going out of the body) into the higher mental planes. To be above the mind one must first realise the self above the mind and live there.

*

Do you realise it [*the higher being*] as wide and infinite? When you are there do you feel it spread through infinity? Do you feel all the universe within you, yourself one with the self of all beings? Do you feel the one cosmic Force acting everywhere? Do you feel your mind one with the cosmic mind? your life one with the cosmic life? your matter one with the cosmic Matter? separative ego unreal? the body no longer a limitation? What is the use of merely saying that the higher being is wide and infinite? Do these realisations come when you are in the higher being and if not, why not? The inner being easily opens to all these realisations, the outer does not. So unless your inner being becomes conscious of itself, the mere ascent gives only height or some vague sense of other planes, not these concrete realisations.

Ascension or Rising above the Head

This is a fundamental experience of the Yoga. It is the free ascent of the consciousness to join the Divine. When, liberated from its ordinary identification with the body, it rises upward to have experiences of the higher planes, to link itself with the psychic or the true being or to join the Divine Consciousness, then there is this experience of ascension and of speeding or expanding through space. The joy you feel is a sign of this last movement, — rising to join the Divine; the passivity and expectancy of a

descent are signs of the openness to the Divine that is its result; there is also the sense of this openness, an emptiness of the ordinary contents of the consciousness, a wideness not limited by the narrow prison of the physical personality. There is too, usually or very often, a massive immobility of the body which corresponds to the silence that comes on the mind when it is released from itself—the Silence that is the foundation of spiritual experience. What you have felt (the former experiences were probably preparatory touches) is indeed the beginning of this foundation—a consciousness free, wide, empty at will, able to rise into the supraphysical planes, open to the descent of whatever the Mother will pour into it.

*

Nothing needs to be done to bring the ascension—aspiration is sufficient. The object of the ascension is for the lower nature to join the higher consciousness so that (1) the limit or lid between the higher and the lower may be broken and disappear, (2) the consciousness may have free access to higher and higher planes, (3) a free way may be made for the descent of the higher Consciousness into the lower planes.

*

The lower consciousness rises to meet the higher consciousness—when it joins there is the sense of unity and the feeling of the one cosmic Self with Ananda and Peace or both as the result. This is called the ascent of the lower consciousness—it cannot remain all the time but it can become more and more frequent until the descent of the higher consciousness is ready.

*

That [*rising above the head*] is very good. Such risings help to break down the lid between the higher and lower planes in the consciousness and prepare the consciousness.

*

The rising of the energies of the consciousness to the crown of

the head and beyond is a recognised movement of the sadhana. It is the forces of the lower Prakriti rising to connect themselves with the higher spiritual consciousness above. The hearing of bells is usually a sign of an opening of the consciousness; it is mentioned in the Upanishads as one of such significant sounds and is well known to Yogis.

*

(1) Freedom from cares, lightness of mind and body are very good results. They do not usually become permanent at once — it is sufficient if they are frequently or ordinarily there.

(2) Chest and head rising higher are sensations of the subtle body — it means that the mind and heart consciousness (thinking mental and emotional) are rising to meet the spiritual consciousness plane above the head.

(3) The sound is a sign of the opening of the consciousness and of the working of the inner Force. Such subtle sounds are very frequently heard by those who practise Yoga.

*

Everything in the adhar in the sadhana has at one time the tendency to rise and join its source above.

*

The upward movement and the silence are indispensable for the Truth to manifest.

Ascent and Return to the Ordinary Consciousness

I may say that the opening upwards, the ascent into the Light and the subsequent descent into the ordinary consciousness and normal human life is very common as the first decisive experience in the practice of Yoga and may very well happen even without the practice of Yoga in those who are destined for the spiritual change, especially if there is a dissatisfaction somewhere with the ordinary life and a seeking for something more, greater or better. It comes often exactly in the way that she describes

and the cessation of the experience and the descent also come in the same way. This first experience may be followed by a very long time during which there is no repetition of it or any subsequent experience. If there is a constant practice of Yoga, the interval need not be so long; but even so it is often long enough. The descent is inevitable because it is not the whole being that has risen up but only something within and all the rest of the nature is unprepared, absorbed in or attached to ordinary life and governed by movements that are not in consonance with the Light. Still the something within is something central in the being and therefore the experience is in a way definitive and decisive. For it comes as a decisive intimation of the spiritual destiny and an indication of what must be reached some time in the life. Once it has been there, something is bound to happen which will open the way, determine the right knowledge and the right attitude enabling one to proceed on the way and bring a helping influence. After that the work of clearing away the obstacles that prevent the return to the Light and the ascension of the whole being and, what is equally important, the descent of the Light into the whole being can be begun and progress towards completion. It may take long or be rapid, that depends on the inner push and also on outer circumstances but the inner aspiration and endeavour count more than the circumstances which can accommodate themselves to the inner need if that is very strong. The moment has come for her and the necessary aspiration and knowledge and the influence that can help her.

Ascent and Dissolution

Once the being or its different parts begin to ascend to the planes above, any part of the being may do it, frontal or other. The sanskara that one cannot come back must be got rid of. One can have the experience of Nirvana at the summit of the mind or anywhere in those planes that are now superconscious to the mind; the mind spiritualised by the ascent into Self has the sense of *laya*, dissolution of itself, its thoughts, movements, sanskaras into a superconscious Silence and Infinity which it is

unable to grasp,—the Unknowable. But this would bring or lead to some form of Nirvana only if one makes Nirvana the goal, if one is tied to the mind and accepts its dissolution into the Infinite as one's own dissolution or if one has not the capacity to reorganise experience on a higher than the mental plane. But otherwise what was superconscious becomes conscious, one begins to possess or else be the instrument of the dynamis of the higher planes and there is a movement, not of liberation into Nirvana, but of liberation + transformation. However high one goes, one can always return, unless one has the will not to do so.

Ascent and the Psychic Being

Any part of the being can go upward and meet its source there. The central being is always above; the psychic is its counterpart below. If the psychic goes up it may be also to join its source in the central being.

*

The psychic being and other parts can go up to join the higher consciousness there. It is part of the movement of ascent. Naturally the psychic wants a deeper union than can be had so long as it is veiled by the old ignorant nature; it wants the higher consciousness to come down and occupy and transform it so that complete union may be possible.

The Shakti going up from the Muladhara must be the Shakti of the physical nature. It wants transformation also, I suppose, but it has not the quiet and luminous but ardent aspiration of the psychic being — its aspiration is more troubled and tinged with unease.

*

In your experience the ascent was into the regions of the calm and silent Self above; when you came down you went into the depths of the psychic being and found there the same calm and wideness. This experience is of great importance for it means that the way to both these is now open to you — and these two

are the fundamental experiences of our Yoga — the unveiling of the psychic and the self-realisation. Pursue your meditations in the same poise.

Ascent and the Body

The ordinary movement of sadhana is that of the inner being (mind, psychic, higher vital) rising towards the Divine Consciousness,—leaving the external being behind—but for this Yoga that is not enough, the physical and external being must also be able to rise into the Divine Consciousness.

*

What you have written is quite correct. The body is not connected ordinarily with the higher consciousness, it only receives what it can from the mind. It is being prepared for the direct connection by the ascent of the inner or subtle body into that plane and the descent from it of the higher Light.

*

No, the body itself cannot go up—how could it? The body is meant for keeping the consciousness linked to the physical world.

*

If all went up, there would be no more existence in the body. There is always some consciousness and therefore some self supporting the body.

*

When the consciousness is centred above, it can be said to be located above. That does not mean that there is no consciousness left in the lower parts.

Ascent and Going out of the Body

There are two different things. One is the consciousness actually going out of the body — but that brings a deep sleep or trance.

The other is the consciousness lifting itself out of the body and taking its stand outside it—above and spread round in wideness. That can be a condition of the Yogi in the waking state—he does not feel himself to be in the body but he feels the body to be in his wide free self, he is delivered from limitation in the body consciousness.

*

There are two different experiences which from your account would seem to have happened together.

(1) An exteriorisation of the consciousness out of the body. Part of the consciousness, mental, vital or subtle physical or all together rises out of the body, leaving it in a strongly internalised condition, sleep or trance and can move about above on other planes or in the room and outside on the earth plane. In such cases the body can be seen as lying below or in the room, seen clearly as one sees a separate object with the physical eyes. A fear such as you had can come in these exteriorisations and bring the consciousness back with a rush to the body.

(2) An ascension of the consciousness to a position which is no longer in the body but above it. The consciousness can thus ascend and rise higher and higher with the awareness of entering regions above the ordinary mind; usually it does not go very far at first but acquires the capacity to go always higher in repetitions of this experience. At the close of the experience it returns to the body. But also there comes a definitive rise by which the consciousness permanently takes its station above. It is no longer in the body or limited by it; it feels itself not only above it but extended in space; the body is below its high station and enveloped in its extended consciousness. Sometimes indeed the extension is felt only above on the higher level and the enveloping extension below comes only afterwards as a later experience. But the nature of it is to be definitive, it is not merely an experience but a realisation, a permanent change. This brings a liberation from identification with the body which becomes only a circumstance in the largeness of the being, an instrumental part of it; or it is felt as something very small or

even non-existent, nothing seems to be left but a wide practically infinite consciousness which is oneself—or, if not at once infinite, yet what is now called a boundless finite.

This new consciousness is open to all knowledge from above, but it does not think with the brain as does the ordinary mind—it has other and larger means of awareness than thought. No methodical opening of the centres is necessary—the centres are in fact open, otherwise there could not be this ascent. In this Yoga their opening comes automatically—what we call opening is not that, but an ability of the consciousness itself on the various levels to receive the descent of the Higher Consciousness above. By the ascent one can indeed bring down knowledge from above. But the larger movement is to receive it from above and let it flow through into the lower mental and other levels. I may add that on all these levels, in mind, heart and below there comes a liberation from the physical limitation, a wideness which no longer allows an identification with the body.

In this experience there is not usually the fear you had, unless it is in the body consciousness, as it were, which is alarmed by the unfamiliarity of the movement and fears to be abandoned or cast off. But this occurs rarely and does not usually repeat itself. It is therefore likely that there was an exteriorisation at the same time. You speak of being able to leave and enter the body at will; but this capacity is needed only for the phenomenon of exteriorisation—in the ascension of consciousness the ascent and coming down become easy and ordinary actions and in the definitive realisation of a higher station above there is really no more coming down except with a part of the consciousness which may descend to work in the body or on the lower levels while the permanently high-stationed being above presides over all that is experienced and done.

*

It [*walking around as if in a dream*] is a very usual experience. It means that for a moment you were no longer in your body, but somehow either above or outside the body consciousness.

This sometimes happens by the vital being rising up above the head or, more rarely, by its projecting itself into its own sheath (part of the subtle body) out of the physical attachment. But it also comes by a sudden even if momentary liberation from the identification with the body consciousness, and this liberation may become frequent and prolonged or permanent. The body is felt as something separate or some small circumstance in the consciousness or as something one carries about with one etc. etc.; the exact experience varies. Many sadhaks here have had it. When one is accustomed, the strangeness of it (dreamland etc.) disappears.

Fixing the Consciousness Above

It is the aim of the sadhana that the consciousness should rise out of the body and take its station above,—spreading in wideness everywhere, not limited to the body. Thus liberated one opens to all that is above this station, above the ordinary mind, receives there all that descends from the heights, observes from there all that is below. Thus it is possible to witness in all freedom and to control all that is below and to be a recipient or a channel for all that comes down and presses into the body, which it will prepare to be an instrument of a higher manifestation, remoulded into a higher consciousness and nature.

What is happening in you is that the consciousness is trying to fix itself in this liberation. When one is there in that higher station, one finds the freedom of the Self and the vast silence and immutable calm—but this calm has to be brought down also into the body, into all the lower planes and fix itself there as something standing behind and containing all the movements.

*

It [*a feeling of rising above the head in meditation*] is not merely a sensation; it is an actual happening and a most important one. The consciousness is usually imprisoned in the body, centralised in the brain and heart and navel centres (mental, emotional, sensational); when you feel it or something of it go up and take

its station above the head, that is the liberation of the imprisoned consciousness from the body-formula. It is the mental in you that goes up there, gets into touch with something higher than the ordinary mind and from there puts the higher mental will on the rest for transformation. The trembling and the heat come from a resistance, an absence of habituation in the body and the vital to this demand and to this liberation. When the mental consciousness can take its stand permanently or at will above like this, then this first liberation becomes accomplished (*siddha*). From there the mental being can open freely to higher planes or to the cosmic existence and its forces and can also act with greater liberty and power on the lower nature.

*

What you felt was not imagination at all, but the usual experience one has when the consciousness is lifted out of the body and takes its stand above the head. One is no longer bound then by the physical consciousness or the sense of the body — the body becomes only an instrument, a small part of the consciousness which has to be perfected. One enters into a larger free spiritual consciousness in place of the present bound and limited physical consciousness. If this lifting up above the body can be repeated always until it can be maintained, it will be a great landmark in your progress. It is the confinement in the physical consciousness that makes you (and everybody) narrow and selfish and miserable. Hitherto the higher consciousness with its peace etc. has been descending into you with great difficulty and fighting out the vital and physical resistance. If this release upward into the higher consciousness can be maintained, then there will be no longer the same difficulty. Much will still remain to be done, but the foundation will have been made.

*

There are various states of experience in which the expression “taken up out of the body” would be applicable. There is one in which one goes up from the centres in the body to a centre of consciousness extending above the physical head and takes up

a position there in which one is liberated from subjection to the body sense and its heavy hold and this is certainly accompanied by a general sense of lightening. One can then be in direct connection with the higher consciousness and its power and action. It is not altogether clear from the description whether this is what happened. Again, there are phenomena of the breathing which accompany states of release or of ascension. But the breath here perhaps stands, generally, for the Life Principle.

Ascent and Change of the Lower Nature

One can remain in the higher consciousness and yet associate oneself with the change of the lower nature. No doubt, it is the Mother's Force that will do what is necessary, but the consent of the sadhak, the association of his will with her action or at least of his witness vision is necessary also.

*

Your tendency was to go up and to leave the higher consciousness to deal with the lower nature without any personal effort for that. That could have worked all right on two conditions: (1) that the peace and force would come down and occupy all down to the physical, (2) that you succeeded in keeping the inner being unmoved by the outer nature. The physical failed to absorb the peace, inertia arose instead; force could not come down; the suggestions from the outer nature proved too strong for you and between their suggestions and the inertia they interrupted the sadhana.

*

I have not said [*in the preceding letter*] that you made a mistake. I have simply said what happened and the causes. If you had been able to remain above and let the Force come down and act while you were detached from the outer nature, it would have been all right. You were able to go up because the Peace descended. You were not able to remain above because the Peace could not occupy sufficiently the physical and the Force did not descend

sufficiently. Meanwhile the inertia arose, you got troubled more and more because of the vital suggestions in the outer nature and the rush of inertia, so you were unable to keep detached and let the Force descend more and more or call it down more and more. Hence the coming down into the physical consciousness.

*

It is simply that when you go high, or within, you enter into a higher consciousness than the ordinary one. Also then one feels the presence of the Divine, for the Divine is always there within and above in every human being. But to divinise the human consciousness entirely needs a long time — for the whole nature from top to bottom must be transformed.

Chapter Three

The Descent of the Higher Consciousness and Force

The Purpose of the Descent

The descent is that of the powers of the higher consciousness which is above the head. It usually descends from centre to centre till it has occupied the whole being. But at the beginning the action is very variable. It is only when the Peace from above has not only descended but established itself in the whole system that there is a continuous action. The descent comes in order to transform the consciousness but the transformation takes time. It is not done all in a moment.

*

The Force descends for two things:

- (1) To transform the nature.
- (2) To carry on the work through the instrument.

At first one is not conscious of either working, afterwards one becomes conscious of the Force working but not of how it works. Finally one becomes conscious entirely and in detail.

*

Naturally, when any of the higher consciousness descends it works to change the lower consciousness into a part of itself.

Calling in the Higher Consciousness

All limitations [*in one's nature*] can be surmounted, but if they are ingrained in the formation of the present being, it can only be done by calling in a higher power and consciousness than that of the personal mind and will. The higher consciousness

can by what it brings correct or rebuild what is defective in the personal nature.

*

The consciousness is always there above you. It is when one opens oneself and calls it that it descends and works — whether in meditation or in work.

*

What comes from above can come when one is in a clear mind or when the vital is disturbed, when one is meditating or when one is moving about, when one is working or when one is doing nothing. Most often it comes when one is in a clear concentrated state, but it may not, — there is no absolute rule. Moreover the pull or call may produce no immediate effect and yet there may be an effect when one is no longer actually pulling or calling. All these mental reasons alleged for its coming or going are too rigid — sometimes they apply, very often they don't apply. One has to have faith, confidence, aspiration but one cannot bind down the Force as to when, how and why it will act.

*

It [*the higher consciousness*] descends in the atmosphere, but for it to be effective the individual must receive and respond. It descends also in the individual independently of the atmosphere.

Preparatory Experiences and Descent

The illumination above the head as usually seen in this Yoga is the Light of the Divine Truth. It is above the head that there is perpetually the Divine Peace, Force, Light, Knowledge, Ananda. These begin to descend into the body when the personal consciousness is prepared sufficiently. The preparation is usually full of vicissitudes such as these [*illness, sleeplessness, an inability to concentrate*] but one has to persist patiently, opening oneself more and more till that is ready.

*

Why should it [*a sense of purity in the being*] be an imagination? When the higher consciousness touches it creates so long as it is there an essential purity in which all parts of the being can share. Or, even if the exterior being does not share actively in it, it may fall quiescent so that there is nothing to interfere with the whole inner being realising the truth of a certain experience. The state does not last because it is only a preparatory touch, not the full or permanent descent; but while it is there it is real. The sex-sensation is of course the thing in the external being, the perversion or false representation in nature, that is the chief obstacle to the experience becoming frequent and then normal. It usually happens that such an opposite tries to assert itself after an experience.

*

The experiences you have had from above are spiritual experiences. The experience has come, but not yet taken possession of the centres — it is touching them so as to prepare. The Truth consciousness is the consciousness which lives in the Truth or in constant touch with it and not, as the ordinary mind does, in the Ignorance.

*

The experiences you have are a good starting-point for realisation. They have to develop into the light of a deeper state in which there will be the descent of a higher Consciousness into you. Your present consciousness in which you feel these things is only a preparatory one — in which the Mother works in you through the cosmic power according to your state of consciousness and your karma and in that working both success and failure can come — one has to remain equal-minded to both while trying always for success. A surer guidance can come even in this preparatory consciousness if you are entirely turned towards her alone in such a way that you can feel her direct guidance and follow it without any other influence or force intervening to act upon you, but that condition is not easy to get or keep — it needs a great one-pointedness and constant

single-minded dedication. When the higher consciousness will descend, then a closer union, a more intimate consciousness of the Presence and a more illumined intuition will become possible.

*

It is good. The more you keep that dominant sense of the force and the calmness and increase it, the more the other feeling [*of inadequacy and restlessness*] will diminish and fade. It always happens that at first the Power and Peace only press, touch, invade at places, until a time comes when a part of the being always feels in that condition however much disturbance may assail the surface. Afterwards the disturbance is more and more pushed out till it is felt only outside the being, not in it. When that too goes, there is the complete peace and the full foundation.

*

Your letter of today makes it very clear what is happening. The Force that you felt had come down at first, came to open the way for the descent of the higher consciousness into the mind and body. That was why it descended with such force and the difficulty of holding or assimilating it was simply because the body was unaccustomed. But as often happens the Force is preparing its own reception and habituating the body to the descent. Having done that sufficiently it is coming down as a massive peace. The higher consciousness in its descent takes several fundamental forms — peace, power and strength, light, knowledge, Ananda. Usually it is the peace that descends first. This is not a mental, vital or physical peace of the ordinary kind, but something from above (spiritual), very firm, solid and concrete. It is its concreteness that makes you feel like a still massive block — a mass of the higher consciousness in place of the more tenuous substance of the ordinary nature. As for its being worth having, you can see that it is — it is indeed the beginning of the real transformation — all the rest hitherto has been mainly preparation and clearing of difficulties and impediments through all these years. This serene peace and massive stillness

has to stabilise itself, fill the whole nature, widen itself until all existence internal and external seems full of it. This may take time, but the beginning once there it is sure to take place, if one is steady and constant. It becomes besides the sure base on which all the rest,— power and strength, light and knowledge, Ananda and divine love, can come in and securely fill the consciousness.

The usual mental means to widen the consciousness is to think of and feel oneself as spreading out into space beyond the body—as a corrective to the thought and feeling of oneself as identified with the body and shut up in it. After a time this leads to a substantial experience of wide consciousness beyond the body. The means to quieten the physical consciousness is to detach oneself from all restless vibrations, not by any struggle or effort but by a simple easy will of quietude. However now that the higher Force is bringing quietude, these mental means may not be necessary—for the peace from above usually brings the wideness of the self—though for some it brings it at once, for others it takes time.

Anyhow, the spiritual opening has been clearly made in you; the rest is a matter of development and time.

The Order of Descent into the Being

It [*the higher consciousness*] enters usually first into the mind, then into the vital and then into the body, because it is these that have to be changed and that is the natural order.

*

Whatever comes from above the head, whether it is Presence, Peace, Ananda, or anything else, normally descends into the head first, then after occupying all the mental centres it comes down into the heart and from there goes down into the vital centres and occupies the whole body. If there is a resistance, it is felt as a weight and a pressure—when the way is open, the pressure disappears and there is only the thing itself. It enters each centre as soon as the way to it is open.

*

The Force usually comes down through the head and afterwards descends lower in the body to the heart, afterwards through the navel downwards.

The sadhak becomes restless under the Force only if he resists it — otherwise it brings peace and calm and happiness and strength.

It is probably some other part of the mind — the vital mind or physical mind — it is these usually that resist.

*

Usually the descent in the head helps to quiet the mind.

*

If you mean the descent of the higher consciousness, that is felt in the heart region, not only in the centre, just as it is felt in the head. The touching of the head is only a first pressure. Afterwards there is a feeling of a mass of peace, force, light, Ananda or consciousness coming down in the head directly and descending further to the chest and so to the navel and through the body. For some it takes weeks or months, in others it descends rapidly.

*

Yes, it was the same experience [*as an earlier one*]. You went inside under the pressure of the Force — which is often though not always the first result — went into a few seconds' samadhi according to the ordinary language. The Force when it descends tries to open the body and pass through the centres. It has to come in (ordinarily) through the crown of the head (Brahmarandhra) and pass through the inner mind centre which is in the middle of the forehead between the eyebrows. That is why it presses first on the head. The opening of the eyes brings one back to the ordinary consciousness of the outer world, that is why the intensity is relieved by opening the eyes.

*

When things come in this order the head opens up first and the heart afterwards — finally all the centres. So what is there

to be concerned about?¹ If you are satisfied only with peace, knowledge and mukti, then perhaps the heart centre may open to that only. But if you want the love, then the descending Power and Light will work for that also. So cheer up and don't get into a state of pother with imaginary difficulties.

*

The descent into the body first in the head, then down to the neck and in the chest is the ordinary rule. For many there is a big stop before it gets below the navel owing to some vital resistance. Once it passes that barricade it does not usually take long to come down farther. But there is no rule as to the time taken. In some it comes down like a flood, in others it goes through with a methodical and deliberate increase. I don't think the peace descent is in the habit of waiting for companions—more often it likes at first to be all by itself and then call down its friends with the message, "Come along, I have made the place all ready for you."

*

It is possible that there may have been too much haste in this attempt to open the navel and the lower centre. In this Yoga the movement is downward—first the two head centres, then the heart, then the navel and then the two others. If the higher experience is first fully established with its higher consciousness, knowledge and will in the three upper centres, then it is easier to open the three lower ones without too much disturbance.

The Effect of Descent into the Lower Planes

When a higher force comes down into a lower plane, it is diminished and modified by the inferior substance, lesser power and more mixed movements of that lower plane. Thus, if the Overmind Power works through the illumined mind, only part

¹ *The correspondent was concerned that he might receive knowledge but not love since his head centre seemed to be opening before his heart centre.—Ed.*

of its truth and force can manifest and be effective — so much only as can get through this less receptive consciousness. And even what gets through is less true, mixed with other matter, less overmental, more easily modified into something that is part truth, part error. When this diminished indirect Force descends farther down into the mind and vital, it has still something of the Overmind creative Truth in it, but gets very badly mixed with mental and vital formations that disfigure it and make it half effective only, sometimes ineffective.

*

- (1) Part of it [*the descending higher consciousness*] is stored up in the frontal consciousness and remains there.
- (2) Part of it goes behind and remains as a support to the active part of the being.
- (3) Part flows out into the universal Nature.
- (4) Part is absorbed by the Inconscient and lost to the individual conscious action.

Chapter Four

The Descent of the Higher Powers

The Descent of Peace, Force, Light, Ananda

The descent of Peace, the descent of Force or Power, the descent of Light, the descent of Ananda, these are the four things that transform the nature.

*

Light, Peace, Force, Ananda constitute the spiritual consciousness; if they are not among the major experiences, what are?

*

Presence, Peace, Force, Light, Ananda, these are five things that most commonly come down.

*

The being is not supposed to remain always empty. When the calm and peace of the pure existence is established, Force also has to descend as well as Light, Ananda and other things.

*

Wideness is only the first step—there must be the descent of light, knowledge, peace, force or power and the settling of these things and their constant development.

*

There is no rule, but the most normal course is for a certain Peace and Force and Light which is above the mind to descend and as the result of its workings the cosmic consciousness opens and in it higher and higher levels above mind. Many people get an opening into the cosmic consciousness first but without the basis of the higher Peace and Light it brings only a mass of unorganised experiences.

*

It is not really the plane that descends, it is the Power and Truth of it that descends into the material and then the veil between the material and it no longer exists.

Peace, Calm, Quiet as a Basis for the Descent

Peace and movement on the basis of peace are the first aspects of the One to establish themselves. Bliss and light do not fix so easily or so early — they have to grow.

*

The Peace, Purity and Calm of the Self must be fixed — otherwise the active Descent may find the forces it awakes seized on by lower Powers and a confusion created. That has happened with many.

*

It is not a matter of any particular act or feeling, but a sort of excited vibration with which the vital and physical consciousness meets the vital disturbance — it is evident in the tone and language of what you write when there is the stress of vital suggestion — but it used also to rise when you got the experiences in an excited vibration and bubbling of joy which would easily lapse into some rajasic movement or be replaced by the opposite excitement of suffering and disturbance. Quiet, quiet and more quiet, calm strength, calm gladness are what are needed in mind and nerves and body as a basis for the siddhi — precisely because the Force, the Light, the Ananda that come down are extremely intense and need a great stillness in the being to bear and support them.

*

It is the right fundamental consciousness that you have now got. The tamas and other movements of the lower universal Nature are bound to try to come in, but if one has the calm of the inner being which makes them felt as something external to the being, and the light of the psychic which instantly exposes and rejects

them, then that is to have the true consciousness which keeps one safe while the more positive transformation is preparing or taking place.

That transformation comes by the descent of the Force, Light, Knowledge, Ananda etc. from above. So you are right in your feeling that you should open with a quiet *sānta samāhita* aspiration or invocation for the descent of the Light from above. Only it must be an aspiration in this calm and wideness, not disturbing it in the least—and you must be prepared for the result being not immediate—it may be rapid, but also it may take some time.

*

Yes, when things begin to descend, they must come down on a solid basis. That is why it is necessary to have peace as the first descent and that it should become as strong and solid as possible. But in any case to contain is the first necessity—then more and more can come and settle itself. Once these two things are settled—peace and strength, one can bear any amount of everything else, Ananda, Knowledge, or whatever it may be.

*

The experience of this “solid block” feeling indicates the descent of a solid strength and peace into the external being,—but into the vital physical most. It is this always that is the foundation, the sure basis into which all else (Ananda, light, knowledge, bhakti) can descend in the future and stand on it or play safely. The numbness was there in the other experience because the movement was inward; but here the Yogashakti is coming *outward* into the fully awake external nature,—as a first step towards the establishment of the Yoga and its experiences there. So the numbness, which was a sign of the consciousness tending to draw back from the external parts, is not there.

*

It is good—the strength is the next thing that has to come down after the peace and join with it. Eventually the two become one.

The Descent of Peace

When one has gone so far that peace from above can descend, that is a considerable progress.

*

Yes, surely the peace can come into the outer consciousness also; it is meant to do so. It is perfectly possible for the body to bear the peace and stillness. It is more difficult for it to bear the full play of the Force; but if the peace is first established in it, then there is no difficulty of that kind.

*

It [*peace*] has to be brought down to the heart and navel first. That gives it a certain kind of inner stability — though not absolute. There is no method other than aspiration, a strong quiet will and a rejection of all that is not turned towards the Divine in those parts into which you call the peace — here the emotional and higher vital.

*

They [*the mind and vital*] are always more open to the universal forces than the material. But they can be more restless than the material so long as they are not subjected to the peace from above.

*

The movement of universality by itself cannot prevent the vital from disturbing — it is the complete surrender and the complete descent of peace into all the being down to the most material that can do it.

*

Nobody said that you should not take the higher being as a first station. The question was about enforcing the peace of the higher being in the lower parts down to the physical so as to (1) create that separateness which would prevent the inner being

from being affected by the superficial disturbance and resistance, (2) make it easier for the force and other powers of the higher being to descend.

*

Peace can be brought down into the physical to its very cells. It is the active transformation of the physical that cannot be *completely* done without the supramental descent.

*

The peace that descends from above can stop the lower action, if it settles in all the being. But that is not sufficient if one wants to develop the dynamic side of the being also on the lines of Yoga.

*

After the body is accustomed to the peace, the peace itself can become dynamic.

The Descent of Silence

What is trying to come down in you is the silence and peace of the Self — when that comes fully, then there is no ego-perception, it is drowned in the wideness of the silence and peace of the Self. But this realisation is at first in the static condition of the Self only — in the dynamic movements the ego may still be there owing to past habits — but each time an ego-movement is abandoned, the sense of the loss of ego becomes deeper and more complete. It is perhaps some impression of what is trying to come that has touched you.

*

It must have been the descent of the higher silence, the silence of the Self or Atman. In this silence one perceives, but the mind is not active, — things are sensed, but without any responsive connection or vibration. The silent Self is there as a separate reality, not bound or involved in the activity of Nature, aloof, detached and self-existent. Even if thoughts come across this

silence, they do not disturb it; the Self is separate from the thinking mind also. In this connection the feeling "I think" is a survival from the old consciousness; in the full silence what one feels is "thought occurs in me"—the identification with thoughts as well as with the perception of objects ceases.

*

To still the mind *absolutely* is not so easy. It can be done usually only by the descent of the Silence from above and even then it is not complete until the whole system has been occupied by the higher silence and peace.

*

It is the silence and calm of the higher consciousness pressing down into the body. When it comes down fully then there is the "still statue" feeling at first. Afterwards the calm or silence becomes free and normal.

*

It is the wideness and silence of the being which makes transformation possible, because the lower movements disappear and in the emptiness the Truth from above can descend.

*

Who told you that whenever there was silence or genuine silence knowledge would come down? The silence is a fit vessel for anything from above, but it does not follow that when there is silence, everything is bound to come down automatically.

*

In what may be called the first silence, it is like that—silence alone with no emotion or other inner activity. When it deepens one can feel the Nirvana of the Buddhists or the Atmabodha of the Vedantins. Both force and bliss or either can descend into the silence, filling it with calm Tapas or silent Ananda.

The Descent of Force or Power

The experiences you have had are very clear evidence that you have the capacity for Yoga. The first decisive experiences in this Yoga are a calm and peace that is felt, first somewhere in the being and in the end in all the being, and the descent of a Power and Force into the body which will take up the whole adhar and work in it to transform mind, life and body into the instrumentation of the Divine Consciousness. The two experiences of which you wrote in your letter are the beginning of this calm and the descent of this Force. Much has to be done before they can be established or persistently effective, but that they should come at this stage is a clear proof of capacity to receive. It must be remembered however that the Yoga is not easy and cannot be done without the rising of many obstacles and much lapse of time — so if you take it up it must be with a firm resolve to carry it through to the end with a whole-hearted sincerity, faith, patience and courage.

*

It is the Mother's force that descended to work in the system. There are two things that have to be established in order to make a foundation for the workings of the sadhana in the waking consciousness, 1st a descent of Peace from above, 2nd a descent of the Force. If one has these two things permanently established in the consciousness, then one has the basis.

*

By Force I mean not mental or vital energy but the Divine Force from above — as peace comes from above and wideness also, so does this Force (Shakti). Nothing, not even thinking or meditating can be done without some action of Force. The Force I speak of is a Force for illumination, transformation, purification, all that has to be done in the Yoga, for removal of the hostile forces and the wrong movements — it is also of course for external work, whether great or small in appearance does not matter — if that is part of the Divine Will. I do not mean any personal

force egoistic or rajasic.

*

Yes, it [*the Force*] is quite concrete. Usually at first it descends of itself from time to time—and also one calls it in face of a difficulty. But eventually it is always there supporting or determining all the action of the being.

*

The Force comes down as soon as it finds an opening and acts in the Adhara whenever it is ready. What determines the descent cannot always be mentally fixed. Aspiration, call, will, prayer, etc. create a favourable precondition in the head or heart or anywhere else and are sometimes the determining cause.

*

What you feel in the head is probably the first conscious descent into the body of the divine Force from above. Up to now it must have been working unfelt by you from behind the heart. If the concentration takes place naturally in the head you must allow it to do so, but the possibility of this has been prepared by the previous concentration in the heart, so that also need not be discontinued unless the force working in you insists on the upper concentration only. Aspiration can be continued in the same way until the conduct of the sadhana by the Mother's power is clearly felt and becomes to you the normal thing.

*

The experience you had was simply the descent of the Divine Force into the body. By your attitude and aspiration you called for it to work in you, so it came. Such a descent brings naturally a deep inward condition and a silence of the mind, and it may bring much more—peace, a sense of liberation, happiness, Ananda. It is very often attended as in this experience by a light or luminosity. It was felt enveloping the upper part of the body down to the cardiac centre, because it is these centres, the head and heart centres that are first invaded and occupied by

whatever descends from above, Consciousness, Force, Light or Ananda. Usually, there is at first a pressure from above on the head, then one feels something entering the higher part of the head and then the whole head is occupied, as you feel now with the *fourmillement* at the time of concentration. Once the head with its mental centres is open and occupied, the Force descends rapidly to the heart centre, unless there is some obstacle or a resistance in the higher vital parts. From there it sends its stream into the whole body and begins to occupy the vital and physical centres — from the navel to the Muladhara. The coming of this experience, occupation of the body by the Force from above, is a great step forward in the sadhana.

The fear of a syncope was due only to the sanskara in the mind; it must be dismissed. The Force can very well come down in the full waking consciousness; if it brings a kind of samadhi, it is usually a conscious inner condition — the consciousness taken away from outward things, but in full power within. Even if a trance came, it would be a trance and not a swoon.

*

The good condition of openness with the Force descending and the constant remembrance — or whatever other form the condition takes — is the beginning of the true consciousness and its duration is always short at the beginning, because the ordinary consciousness is not accustomed to it, but to something else. But it always increases in duration and power until it is able to maintain itself even when the outer consciousness is occupied with other things. At first it remains there as something behind which emerges as soon as the outer preoccupation ends; afterwards it remains behind, but as something just felt, and in a later stage it is always there, so that there are two consciousnesses, the inner consciousness always connected with the Mother and full of her working or her presence or both and the surface consciousness occupied with outer things. Finally, even the surface consciousness begins to feel the direct connection in action itself. One need not mind if there are intervals when the true condition is not there. It does not prove that you are unfit; it is only a period

in which what is not yet changed comes up to be worked upon and prepared for change. When the inner consciousness is well established, then these periods take place only in the surface consciousness and are no longer troublesome as before.

P.S. Probably the difficulty you feel is in the externalising mind the centre of which is in the throat. When there is no resistance there, the Force comes down to the heart level and below.

*

As for the dynamic descent, you say that the Force has descended to your forehead (inner mind) centre. It seems to be very slow in coming through. It has to come down to the heart centre and below before it can begin to be fully effective. Probably there must be something either in the physical mental (throat) or the emotional vital that obstructs the descent. That may be the reason of the union of the upper Agni and the psychic fire and the push on the psychic centre — something is trying to remove the difficulty.

*

The Power above the head is of course the Mother's — it is the power of the Higher Consciousness which is preparing its way of descent. This Higher Consciousness carrying in it a sense of wide and boundless existence, light, power, peace, Ananda etc. is always there above the head and when something of the spiritual Force comes down to work upon the nature, it is from there that it comes. But nothing like the full descent of the peace, bliss etc. can come so long as the being is not ready. Very usually the first preparation is to work on the mind and vital and physical nature in such a way that the soul, the psychic being can have a chance of manifesting itself and influencing the rest of the nature; for that purpose all the main darknesses in the mind and vital have to be combated and thrown out and the physical also prepared in an initial way so that the descent may be possible. This is what has been done so long in you. It has to be made stronger and more complete; but sufficient has been done for it to be possible to prepare the descent of the higher consciousness. There are two

things that take place; an ascent of one's consciousness to the higher levels in and above the head, and a descent of the higher consciousness which is above into one's mind, vital and body. How it is done or by what stages or how long it will take varies with each person. But this new consciousness is very different from the ordinary one and many things happen in its coming which would not happen to the mind and might seem strange to it — e.g. the dissolution of the ego and the opening into a wider self or spirit not limited by the body, to which the body is only a small instrument and nothing more. One must therefore dismiss all fear of new things and accept with calm and confidence each field of new experience, relying on the Divine Mother-Force for guidance and support and protection throughout the change.

*

The sadhana is a difficult one and time should not be grudged; it is only in the last stages that a very great and constant rapidity of progress can be confidently expected. As for Shakti, the descent of Shakti before the vital is pure and surrendered, has its dangers. It is better for him to pray for purification, knowledge, intensity of the heart's aspiration and as much working of the Power as he can bear and assimilate.

*

Power can be everywhere, on any plane. What descends from above is power of the higher Consciousness — but there is a Power of the vital, mental, physical planes also. Power is not a special characteristic of the psychic or of the spiritual plane.

The Descent of Fire

The fire is the divine fire of aspiration and inner tapasya. When the fire descends again and again with increasing force and magnitude into the darkness of human ignorance, it at first seems swallowed up and absorbed in the darkness, but more and more of the descent changes the darkness into light, the ignorance and unconsciousness of the human mind into spiritual consciousness.

The Descent of Light

The descent of the Light producing a concrete illumination of the consciousness is always one of the decisive experiences of the sadhana.

*

You can tell her that Light like peace is one of the things that come down from the higher consciousness. It is the light of the Truth that is there—it is sometimes golden, sometimes white, sometimes blue of various shades, sometimes sunlight.

*

It is a true experience and the Light that you felt is the Light of the Truth from above. These things indicate that there is already an opening, but it takes time to become constant and complete. That always happens at first—there are periods in which the consciousness or something in it opens, there are others in which the opening is clouded until something more opens. This goes on until the whole consciousness has been sufficiently worked upon for the full opening and lasting experience to be there.

*

These are special forces of the Light and there is a play of them according to need, but the Light in itself can be lived in as much as one can live in Peace or Ananda.¹ As Peace and Ananda can pour through the whole system and fully stabilise themselves so that they are in the body and the body and the whole being are in them—one might almost say, are that, are the Peace and Ananda—so it can be with Light. It can pour into the body, make every cell luminous, fix itself and surround on all sides in one constant mass of Light.

*

¹ *The correspondent asked how one can “live in” the different forces of the Light such as the white light of the Mother, the pale blue light of Sri Aurobindo, the golden light of the Truth and the pink light of the psychic.—Ed.*

It depends upon the colour of the Light. In any case it is the light of a Force from above. All lights are indications of a Force or Power. It is the work of the Lights and the Forces they represent to act in their descent on the lower nature and change it.

The Descent of Knowledge

The knowledge comes from above like the light and peace and everything else. As the consciousness progresses, it comes from a higher and higher level. First it is the higher or illumined mind that predominates, then the intuition, next the overmind, lastly the supermind; but the whole consciousness has to be sufficiently transformed before the supramental knowledge can begin to come.

The Descent of Wideness

Like everything else, peace, Light, Power, so wideness descends.

*

Ananda comes afterwards — even if it comes at the beginning it is not usually constant. Wideness does not come because the consciousness is not yet free from the body. Probably when what is felt above the head comes down, it will be liberated into the wideness.

The Descent of Ananda

It is quite possible that if a too intense Ananda is allowed before the purity and peace are in the nature, it may disturb the system — though I don't know whether there is any instance of madness as a consequence. At any rate it is a fact that normally Ananda comes (in the natural course, I mean, if not pulled down) only occasionally so long as the peace and purity are not there as a base. It is probably right that it should be so.

*

You are dealing in the right way with the sex feeling. As to why it rose when you were using the name there are two reasons. One is that when you use the name, it is the Mother's power that you call there and the first result often is that the difficulty rises like a snake whose head is touched to resist the pressure or—if you look at it from another point of view—it rises to be dealt with. The other is that when what is to be brought down is the Ananda—of the force, light etc., but especially of the love—then the vital-physical passion rises up to try and mix with and get hold of the Ananda hoping to turn it to a sort of sublimated vital pleasure. It is well known that this happens to Vaishnavas very often when they do the Sankirtan. In your case it is probably the first reason, because the love-Ananda or any other is not yet coming, so that explanation is improbable. As for the Force descending into the head, it has two sides to it—one is peace and when that is prominent, there is the sense of coolness; when there is a strong dynamic action instead, the feeling may be of heat, Agni-power. Most people feel these two things; they are not imagination.

*

I did not say it [*a descent of Ananda*] was vital and mental, but that it was Ananda manifesting itself in the mental and vital—a quite different thing—for the one Ananda (the true thing) can manifest in any part of the being.

The Flow of Amrita

It [*a flow of sweet liquid in the mouth*] is a form of the flow of Ananda from above—when it takes a quite physical form the Yogins call it Amrita.

*

Sudhā is nectar or Amrita, the food or drink of the gods. It is applied in Yoga to something that flows down from the Brahmaṇḍra into the palate when there is strong concentration. But this is psychological, so it must be the psychic sweetness flowing into the system.

Chapter Five

Descent and Other Kinds of Experience

Descent and Experiences of the Inner Being

It is good that you felt the peace within and the movement in the heart. That shows the force is working not only from above but inside you, and this promises a farther progress. The full opening will come in time — the important thing is that you are on the right way and advancing more quickly than you realise.

*

Your experiences seem to be sound. The first is that of the higher (Yogic or spiritual) consciousness coming down into the body from above the head. It is felt often like a current flowing through the head into the whole body and the first thing it brings is a descent of peace. One result of this descent is that one feels an inner being in oneself which is detached from the outer action, supports it from behind, but is not involved in it — that is the second experience. The third about the sleep is also felt when one has confidence in the Mother and goes to sleep under her protection, as if in her lap, surrounded by her presence. As for the dream the legs indicate the physical consciousness which is still under a double pull, one upward to the higher consciousness so that the physical consciousness may unite itself with the spiritual, the other downward towards the lower consciousness. The looking towards me indicates the choice of the being for the upward movement.

*

The Power and Peace that come down come down from the higher consciousness above your head, from a greater self of which your mind, the human mind generally, is unaware. They

are the power and peace of the Divine. When they envelop you from outside the body (therefore you feel them external), it is as a protection and an atmosphere. But also they descend into the body, into the head (mind), heart and navel (vital) and through the whole body working in you and doing what is necessary to change the consciousness. When you do not feel it there, when you feel it only as external, it is because you are very much in the external physical consciousness—but in reality it is there in your inner being working in you. When you recover the inner consciousness, you feel it again within and it wakes in you your own true consciousness, the psychic—and it is only the psychic that gives faith and devotion. It is however a great progress if, even when in the external physical consciousness, you feel the Peace enveloping you.

Descent and Psychic Experiences

The infinite calm you felt coming down was the calm of the Divine Consciousness—the higher or spiritual consciousness above the head, which descends as the higher parts of the being open to it. The experience of faith, love or aspiration come from the psychic being. It is when the psychic being is in front and governs all the nature and the Higher Consciousness descends through an open mind, vital and physical that the transformation of the nature begins to take place. The opposite experience of dryness, despair etc. comes from the resistance of the ordinary lower nature (lower vital, physical consciousness, especially). This resistance is to be got rid of—and one condition of that is never to indulge the desires of the lower vital and the body. You must turn them on the contrary wholly to the Divine.

*

The descent of the Silence is not usually associated with sadness, though it does bring a feeling of calm detachment, unconcern and wide emptiness, but in this emptiness there is a sense of ease, freedom, peace. The absorption as if something were drawing deep from within is evidently the pull of the inmost being, the

psychic. There is a psychic sadness often when this inmost soul opens and feels how far the nature and the world are from what they should be, but this is a sweet and quiet sorrow, not distressing. It must be something in the mind and vital which is not yet awake to what has happened within you and gives this colour of dissatisfied and distressed seeking.

*

It is only by peace and light coming down there [*into the subconscious*] and by the rule of the psychic being over the physical that the subconscious parts of the being can be changed entirely. Before that only a certain control can be established.

*

Your description of the solid cool block of peace pressing on the body and making it immobile makes it certain that it is what we call in this Yoga the descent of the higher consciousness. A deep, intense or massive substance of peace and stillness is very commonly the first of its powers that descends and many experience it in that way. At first it comes and stays only during meditation or, without the sense of physical inertness or immobility, a little while longer and afterwards is lost; but if the sadhana follows its normal course, it comes more and more, lasting longer, and in the end an enduring deep peace and inner stillness and release becomes a normal character of the consciousness, the foundation indeed of a new consciousness, calm and liberated.

Your idea of the psychic is certainly a mental construction which should be avoided. The psychic has indeed the quality of peace—but that is not its main character as it is of the Self or Atman. The psychic is the Divine element in the individual being and its characteristic power is to turn everything towards the Divine, to bring a fire of purification, aspiration, devotion, true light of discernment, feeling, will, action which transforms by degrees the whole nature. Quietude, peace and silence in the heart and therefore in the vital part of the being are necessary to reach the psychic, to plunge in it, for the perturbations of the vital nature, desire, emotion turned ego-wards

or world-wards are the main part of the screen that hides the soul from the nature. It is better therefore to be free from the mental constructions when you take the plunge and have only the sense of aspiration, of devotion, of self-giving to the Divine.

*

Yes, it is a very encouraging progress. If you keep the wideness and calm as you are keeping it and also the love for the Mother in the heart, then all is safe—for it means the double foundation of the Yoga—the descent of the higher consciousness with its peace, freedom and security from above and the openness of the psychic which keeps all the effort or all the spontaneous movement turned towards the true goal.

Descent and Other Experiences

The more important of the experiences you enumerate are those below.

(1) The feeling of calm and comparative absence of disturbing thoughts. This means the growth of quietude of mind which is necessary for a fully effective meditation.

(2) The pressure on the head and the movements within it. The pressure is that of the Force of the higher consciousness above the mind pressing on the mind (the mind centres are in the head and throat) and penetrating into it. Once it enters there it prepares the mind for opening to it more fully and the movements within the head are due to this working. Once the head centres and spaces are open one feels it descending freely as a current or otherwise. Afterwards it opens similarly the centres below in the body. The physical movement of the head must be due to the body not being accustomed to the pressure and penetration of the Force. When it is able to receive and assimilate, these movements no longer take place.

(3) The effect of the meditation in the heart extending itself to the head and creating movements there is normal—in whatever centre the concentration takes place the Yoga force

generated extends to the others and produces concentration or workings there.

(4) The sudden cessation of thought and all movements — this is very important, as it means the beginning of the capacity for the inner silence. It lasts only for a short while at the beginning of its manifestation but increases afterwards its hold and duration.

The direction of the sadhana is the right one and you have only to continue upon it.

We cannot say anything definitively about the outside affairs — I suppose in the circumstances you have to think about these things, but the sadhana has the greater importance.

We do not include Hathayoga practices in this sadhana. If you use only for health purposes, it must be as something separate from sadhana — on your own choice.

*

The last experience carries its own meaning. The first is a dream-experience in which the figures of the dream are probably symbols, — unless the Tibetan priest is an impression from a past life. The experience itself is that of concentration in a flame of aspiration with the result of an ascension into the higher planes of consciousness where the separative self disappears into the universal. The second is an experience of the descent of the higher consciousness through the spinal cord from the mental to the vital centres with the result of a momentary experience of that higher consciousness in its wide universality. The experience once had repeated itself but always with the same momentariness. It is the permanence of this experience that is in this Yoga the foundation of the spiritual consciousness and the spiritual transformation — as distinguished from the psychic which proceeds from the inner heart.

*

They are elementary experiences in the practice of Yoga and there is not much to be said about them, — still I will say this much, if it can help him.

(1) What does he mean by concentrating in the heart? I suppose not the physical heart? When we speak of concentrating in the heart in Yoga, we are speaking of the emotional centre and that like all the others is in the middle of the body in a line corresponding to the spinal cord. The places he speaks of are four centres—(1) crown of head = higher mental centre, (2) between the eyebrows = centre of will and vision, (3) throat = centre of externalising mind, (4) heart = (mental-vital) emotional centre with the psychic behind it (the soul, Purusha in the heart).

(2) The lights he sees indicate not some mere “physiological” phenomenon, but the first opening of an inner subtle vision which sees things that are not physical. At a later stage a descent of Light is one of the capital phenomena of the opening of the greater Yogic experience and of the working of the Divine Power on the adhar.

(3) What does he mean by chitta when he speaks of the force? Chitta as opposed to Chit or Vijnana etc. is only the basic mind-life consciousness out of which rises the stuff of (ordinary) thought, feelings, sensations etc. The Force which he feels is something quite different; it is the larger force exceeding the individual and when one feels it in its fullness, it is experienced as the cosmic force or something out of the cosmic force or else the Divine Force from above, according to its nature. His mind is not yet ready for the action of a greater Force, because it is full of mental notions and activities and it is for this reason that heat is generated in the friction between the two; when the other force withdraws and no longer tries to lay hold of the brain then the personal mind-action feels released (that is the reason for the sense of coolness) and goes about its ordinary motions. It is only in a silent (quiet—not necessarily empty) mind that the greater force can be received and work upon the system without too much reaction and resistance.

Chapter Six

Feelings and Sensations in the Process of Descent

Sensations in the Inner Centres

It [*a pressure felt in meditation*] is what we call the pressure of the Force (the Force of the higher spiritual or divine consciousness, the Mother's Force); it comes in various forms, vibrations, currents, waves, a wide flow, a shower like rain etc. It passes to each centre in turn, the crown of the head, the forehead centre, throat, heart, navel centres down to the Muladhara and spreads too throughout the body.

The rotatory movement is the movement of the Force when it is working and forming something in the being.

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Pressure, throbbing, electrical vibrations are all signs of the working of the Force. The places indicate the field of action—the top of the head is the summit of the thinking mind where it communicates with the higher consciousness; the neck or throat is the seat of the physical, externalising or expressive mind; the ear is the place of communication with the inner mind centre by which thoughts etc. enter into the personal being from the general Nature. The sternum at the point indicated¹ holds the psychic and emotional centre, with its apex on the spinal column behind.

Pressure

When the Force comes down one at first feels a pressure. Afterwards it begins to enter the body, when once the way is open

¹ *The correspondent wrote that she felt electrical vibrations in the backbone at a point in the chest parallel to the bottom of the sternum.—Ed.*

for it. After entering the body it goes on working each time it descends, for the transformation of the nature.

*

This pressure on the head always comes at the beginning; it is the pressure of the Force on the adhar preparing to make its way into it. The feeling lasts so long as there is a resistance in the adhar to the entrance and working of the Force. If the mind opens to the Power, it will cease and you will feel the Power working in you or within you.

*

Tell him that the pressure on the head is a sign of the descent and working of the Force from above and of a certain resistance in the adhar which almost all sadhaks have at first. The calm is the result of the working. When the resistance disappears, the pressure is no longer felt but one becomes conscious of the working and of the calm descending into the body from centre to centre.

*

The pressure is that of the Divine Force which he calls by his prayer descending to do its work in the Adhar, its passage being marked by the current which he feels. The pain was due to some resistance in the Adhar; it disappears as soon as the system is accustomed to the descent and grows wide enough to admit it. The first result of the descent is the calm which he experiences; for it is only in a calm mind and vital (*manah-prāṇa*) that the Divine Shakti can do her work rightly.

*

When there is a pressure of the Force on the Adhar to work on it or enter, this [*feeling of heaviness in the head*] is often felt, especially if there is a working of the Force in the head. This heaviness disappears if the system receives and assimilates the Force and there is a free flow in the body — till then the pressure or some kind of heaviness is often felt at one centre or another

where the Force is working.

*

If it is only a weight or pressure on the head, it may be only the pressure of the Mother's Force. It comes like that to most people. Once the consciousness is open and the Force enters, there is no longer this feeling.

*

It is the pressure of the higher consciousness (planes of blue light beyond the ordinary mind) that has come down and is pressing upon the resistances down to the body and below. At the same time the weight of the subconscious Matter is being lifted up for release. That is the sense of these experiences.

*

A heaviness which gives strength is likely to be the indication of a descent. Sensations like a biting or pricking in the head often accompany it. It is usually a sign of some force from above trying to make its way through or to work in the physical stuff so as to prepare it for receiving.

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That is some obstacle in the mind breaking under the pressure of Force, and each time there is a flash and a movement of the Force.

*

All that you note in your letter is very encouraging; it shows that the force is working in you and in the right way. There are two things that are necessary—the full connection of your mind and vital with your psychic being and the opening of the consciousness to Mother's consciousness above. Both of these are beginning. The voice that spoke was that of your soul, your psychic being; the impulse to go deep within was the movement to plunge into the depths of the psychic. The consciousness that rejected and threw away the anger and old movements was also that of the psychic.

The pressure you felt on the head comes always when there is the pressure from above of the Higher Consciousness, the Mother's consciousness, to come in and the coolness etc. you felt are also often felt at that time. The first result was the detachment from personal connections, the freedom, lightness, openness of heart, fearlessness, and also the sense of the Mother's presence. These things are signs of the true consciousness and part of the spiritual nature. They come first as experiences, afterwards they become more frequent, endure longer, settle into the nature.

*

It is the pressure of the Divine Power which you are feeling and it is that which gives you the sense of joy and living fullness. If you keep it and allow it to work in you, it will give you the positive experience and progress in sadhana which you need.

*

The pressure is usually felt only when the Force is acting on the consciousness in order to create an opening somewhere or for some other purpose. As soon as that is done, the pressure is not felt but instead a changed condition or else the working of the Force within but without any sense of pressure. When the condition of lightness, quietude, etc. comes, it means that something has opened to the psychic consciousness and become full of it. Emptiness is of several kinds, one when the consciousness is empty and free, which is a very good condition, another when it is empty and neutral, i. e. simply quiet without any positive power or psychic happiness, but not troubled or disturbed by anything, without any good or bad movement, and, finally, tamasic or inert emptiness. The first two conditions can be brought about by an action of the Force, and the first is a very good basis for spiritual experience and progress; the second also is not unfavourable and is often a needed stage, the consciousness becoming empty in order that it may be filled from within or from above with the true things. The third comes usually when the vital is quiescent and there is a complete inertia.

It is one of the two first that must be coming in you as a result of the action of the Force.

*

If the pressure is too great, the remedy is to widen the consciousness. With the peace and silence there should come a wideness that can receive any amount of Force without any reactions, whether heaviness or compulsion to remain withdrawn or the difficulty of the eyes etc.

*

The action of the Force does not always create a pressure. When it does not need to press, it acts quietly.

*

There is no necessity of feeling pressure. One feels force when something is being done or the force is flowing in or if it is there manifest in the body — but not when what is manifesting is peace and silence.

Perforation

If it is a feeling of a covering being perforated, then that is a sensation one often has when the Force is opening a way for itself through some resistance — here it must be in some part of the physical mind.

Keep full reliance on the Mother. When one does that, the victory even if delayed, is sure.

Vibration

An entire silence and inactivity of the mind cannot come at first — what is possible is a quietude of the mind, that is to say, a cessation of its absorption in its restless miscellaneous activity of ill-connected or unconnected thoughts and a concentration on the object of the sadhana. The imagination which the Mother recommended to you was a means of such concentration. A

mental idea of the omnipresence such as comes to you is a good help for that also, especially if it brings the strong faith and reliance. The feeling of the vibration of the Mother's Force around the head is more than a mental idea or even a mental realisation, it is an experience. This vibration is indeed the action of the Mother's Force which is first felt above the head or around it, then afterwards within the head. The pressure means that it is working to open the mind and its centres so that it may enter. The mind centres are in the head, one at the top and above it, another between the eyes, a third in the throat. That is why you feel the vibration around the head and sometimes up to the neck, but not below. It is so usually, for it is only after enveloping and entering the mind that it goes below to the emotional and vital parts (heart, navel etc.)—though sometimes it is more enveloping before it enters the body. To see the light in the heart one has to go deep, but one can see light elsewhere without going in deep there. Light is often seen between the eyebrows first or in front at that level, for there is the centre of inner vision and a slight opening of it is sufficient for that—so also light is often seen round the head or above it, outside.

*

If it was a Light, you would see the Light. Vibrations are either of a Force or a Presence.

Electricity

Electricity shock always indicates a passage of dynamic Force.

*

It [*the sensation of an electric current in the spine*] is the flowing of the force through the spine. In the Tantric system the spine is considered as the natural passage of the Force, because it is in the spine that all the six centres rest.

Waves

Whatever comes from above can come like that in waves—whether it is Light or Force or Peace or Ananda. In your case it was the Force working on the mind in waves. It is true also that when it was like that, not in currents or as a rain or as a quiet flood, it is Mahakali's Force that is working. The first necessity when it is so, is not to fear.

Flow or Stream

The descent of the Consciousness from above is often felt as a flow of water. Also the image of the drilling open of the head to receive it is frequent (it symbolises the opening of the mind to the higher consciousness).

*

The stream which you feel coming down on the head and pouring into you is indeed a current of the Mother's Force; it is so that it is often felt; it flows into the body in currents and works there to liberate and change the consciousness. As the consciousness changes and develops, you will begin yourself to understand the meaning and working of these things.

*

The quiet flow is necessary for permeating the lower parts. The big descents open the way and bring constant reinforcement and the culminating force at the end—but the quiet flow is also needed.

Drizzle or Shower

I am glad to hear that these experiences are coming—they are a sign of rapid progress coming. The descent as of a drizzling rain is a very characteristic and well-known way of descent of the higher Consciousness; it brings peace but it also brings all other possibilities of the higher Consciousness too and, as you

felt, the seeds of transformation of the physical consciousness — by the coming in it of the seeds of the powers and qualities of the higher Nature.

*

I am very glad that the experience we have been working to bring to you has come with such force and is increasing. It is the concrete descent of the higher consciousness, which once it settles marks always a definite turning-point in the sadhana. Even if it does not settle with a full stability at once, yet when it has once come with so much strength, there cannot be the least doubt that it will come more and more till it has done its work and is your permanent consciousness. The shower and drizzle, the hold² above the head and in the heart, the envelopment, the flaming of Agni within, the sense of firmness and solidity, the Peace and security and devotion, the sense of the Mother's hold are all signs of the descent — eventually it will penetrate everywhere and become something solid and stable occupying the whole consciousness and body.

Coolness

The coolness is always a quieting force making for peace.

*

This coolness [*felt in a passage rising from the heart to the head and then above it*] very often comes with the peace from above. If the passage is felt going up above the head, it means that there is now a direct communication with the higher Consciousness, the necessary opening having been made.

*

The coolness comes when the Force descends with peace and harmony into the vital and the body.

*

² *The correspondent felt "as if held in a hand of the Power". —Ed.*

A sensation of coolness indicates usually some touch or descent of peace. It is felt as very cold by the human vital because the latter is always in a fever of restlessness.

*

Pleasant coolness or coldness usually indicates a pacifying force bringing down calm or release. Knee to toe = the field of physical material consciousness.

*

If the coolness passed into dullness, it may well have been only physical. But perhaps there was an inflow, only afterwards came a reaction of the lower inertia which is the physical Nature's characteristic retort to peace and quietude. When the inertia comes up the old movements which the subconscious is prepared to supply always can mechanically come up with it. In a certain sense this inertia and the peace are the bright and dark counterparts of each other, *tamas* and *śama* — the higher Nature finding repose in peace, the lower seeking it in a relaxation of energy and a return towards the subconscious, *tamas*.

*

The coolness is a very common experience, but the cool smell is unusual. Sometimes people get a fragrance but without this close connection — perhaps they do not observe closely.

Stoniness

The feeling of stoniness is very usually a first impression in the body of the stillness in the cells which comes with the downflow of the Peace.

Sound

A sound³ does sometimes come with a particular descent of the

³ *In this case the correspondent heard the faint sound of dhum . . . dhum . . . dhum.*
—Ed.

consciousness or force from above.

*

Your experience while going to the lawyers was an opening to the Force from above which, if sudden, is often attended by this kind of loud sound and the sensation of the opening of the head—it is in the subtle body that this opening of the head takes place though the sensation is felt as if physical. The Force came down and went up presided over by the Mother's forms of Mahalakshmi and Mahasaraswati and made the movement of ascent and descent (here in the spinal column which is the main channel of the Yogic force passing through the centres) which helps to join the higher with the lower consciousness. As a result came the feeling of identity with myself in your body. The cough shows probably some difficulty against concentration in the physical mind. The best is not to force concentration, but to remain quiet and call and let things work themselves out through the force of the Mother.

Chapter Seven

Difficulties Experienced in the Process of Descent

Alternations in the Intensity of the Force

Sometimes the descent comes with great force in order to open something, afterwards it becomes more quiet and normal until the consciousness is ready for a more sustained descent.

*

There are always alternations in the intensity of the Force at its work. It comes with great power and effects something that had to be done; then it is either concealed or retires a little or is felt but from behind a screen as you say, while something comes up that has to be prepared for illumination and then it comes in front again and does what has to be done there. But formerly while the support, help, even the deeper consciousness was always there, as you now rightly feel, yet when a veil fell, then it was all forgotten and you felt as if there was nothing but darkness and confusion. This happens to most sadhaks in the earlier stages. It is a great progress, a decisive advance if, at the time when the Force is working from behind the screen, you feel that it is there, that the help and support, the more enlightened consciousness is there still; this is a second stage in the sadhana. The third is when there is no screen and the Force and all else are always felt whether actively working or pausing during a transition.

The Need of Assimilation

When a new consciousness comes down, it is not possible at first to keep it all the time — the former consciousness has to get accustomed and receive and assimilate it, and that takes time.

*

It [*the need to rest*] may be simply the need of assimilation in the body. To remain quiet for a time after a descent of Force is the best way of assimilating it.

*

If the peace once becomes stable, there is no farther assimilation needed for that, as that means the whole system is sufficiently prepared to receive and absorb continuously. There may be periods of assimilation necessary for other things, but these periods need not interrupt the inner status. For instance if Force or Ananda or Knowledge begin to descend from above, there might be interruptions and probably would be, the system not being able to absorb a continuous flow, but the peace would remain in the inner being. Or there might even be something like periods of struggle on the surface, but the inner being would remain calm and still, watching and undisturbed and, if there is knowledge established within, understanding the action. Only for that the whole being vital, physical, material must have become open and receptive to the peace. Peace would then go on perhaps deepening and becoming wider and wider, but periods of interruption and assimilation would not be needed.

*

This feeling of being able to break a stone with the hand or for that matter break the world without anything at all except the force itself, is one that comes especially when the mind and vital have not assimilated the Power. It is the feeling of something extraordinary to them and omnipotent; the idea of breaking or crushing is suggested by the rajas in the vital. Afterwards when quietly assimilated this sensation disappears and only the feeling of calm strength and immovable firmness remains.

Pulling Down the Force

I mean [*by writing “let the Force come in”*] that you need not pull it down, but you should aid its entry by your full aspiration and assent.

*

This sort of giddiness and weakness and disturbance ought not to take place. When it comes it shows that more Force is being pulled down than is assimilated by the body. At such times you ought to rest till the disturbance has passed and there is a proper balance.

*

It is certainly a mistake to bring down the light by force—to pull it down. The supramental cannot be taken by storm. When the time is ready it will open of itself—but first there is a great deal to be done and that must be done patiently and without haste.

Shaking or Swaying of the Body

That [*shaking of the body*] sometimes happens when the Force is coming down. It must be allowed to pass off as the body becomes more quiet and assimilative.

*

The swaying motion takes place when the body is not accustomed to the descent; it tries by the movement to assimilate what is coming down.

*

The swaying is due probably to the body not being habituated to receive the Force—it should cease as soon as the body is accustomed.

*

Some have this swaying of the body when the peace or the Force begins to descend upon it, as it facilitates for it the reception. The swaying ceases usually when the body is accustomed to assimilate the descent.

The peace comes fully at the meditation time because the Mother's concentration at that time brings down the power of the higher consciousness and one can receive it if one is able to do so. Once it begins to come, it usually increases its force

along with the receptivity of the sadhak until it can come at all times and under all conditions and stay longer and longer till it is stable. The sadhak on his side has to keep his consciousness as quiet and still as possible to receive it. The Peace, Power, Light, Ananda of the higher spiritual consciousness are there in all veiled above. A certain opening upwards is needed for it to descend—the quietude of the mind and a certain wide concentrated passivity to the descending Influence are the best conditions for the descent.

Headaches Due to Resistance

What you saw was indeed a sun,—the sun of blue light which is the light of a higher mind than the ordinary human mind. The sun is the symbol of Light and Truth. This higher spiritual Mind is trying to wake in you, but at the beginning there is always a difficulty because the consciousness is not habituated to receive, so there is the sense of pressure deepening sometimes into a feeling of headache or this feeling of the head preparing to split. It is nothing but a sensation in the physical created by the inner mind (this part of the head is the seat of the inner mind) trying to open under the touch from above.

*

Headaches “produced by a pressure from above”, as you put it, are not due to the pressure or produced by it, but produced by a resistance. X’s headaches have nothing to do with Yoga or sadhana.

*

The pressure [*from above*] does not “bring” a resistance. “If there were no resistance there would be no headache” is the proper knowledge, not the reverse. So long as you think that it is the pressure that brings the resistance, the very idea will create the resistance. X’s case is not an example either of headache due to resistance or of headache due to pressure—it is due to ordinary physical and psychological causes.

*

To make people ill in order to improve or perfect them is not Mother's method. But sometimes things like headache come because the brain either tries too much or does not want to receive or makes difficulties. But these Yogic headaches are of a special kind and after the brain has found out the way to receive or respond, they don't come at all.

*

Headache is not a sign of the force descending, it is only a result sometimes of some difficulty in receiving it. If there is no difficulty in receiving, there is no headache. The signs of the force coming are the pressure to be quiet, the sense of peace coming or wanting to come and many others, such as a feeling in the head or body of something coming in like a stream or a current or shower etc.

*

Pain in the head and physical strain are due to resistance, but pressure and throbbing and electric sensation are only signs of the Force working, not of resistance. The sensation of coolness is a very good sign.

Talking Loudly

The sensations you describe in the crown of the head and the upper part of the forehead are such as one often gets when the higher consciousness or Force is trying to make an open passage through the mind for itself. So it is possibly that that is happening. As for the uneasiness or feebleness there when you talk loudly etc., that also happens at such times. It is because the concentration of energy which is necessary for the inner work is broken and the energies thrown out, exhausting the parts by two inconsistent pullings. It is better when any working is going on inside to be very quiet in speech and as sparing as possible. At other times it does not so much matter.

Fear of the Descending Force

The first condition of progress in sadhana is not to fear, to have trust and keep quiet during an experience. What happened was simply that the Force came down and tried to quiet the mind and hold the body still so that it might work. If you had not feared, that would have happened. But your terror made the mind and body resist and get the impression that they were being tortured or in danger. The feeling of the tough body and great force like a hand upon it is quite usual in this kind of experience and does not terrify the sadhak, but brings a great joy and release. In future you must try to be quiet and not have any fear or imagination of danger. Naturally when you thought that you could not bear it, the Force withdrew as you are not ready to receive.

Desires and Descent

The descent of Light etc. is always impermanent at first. First the Peace and Force and Light have to be settled in the mind, then in the vital (heart, navel and below) and the physical. The desires etc. will then have been pushed out into a kind of environmental consciousness from which they try to return and must be driven out from there also. This will create a firm basis for the rest of the sadhana.

*

He is to be congratulated on the victory in the matter of sex — it is very important to have that when the intense definitive experiences are beginning. For if once the actual penetrative descent is felt, the less the higher consciousness is met by the sex force the better, for then a dangerous mixture may take place or else a struggle which is better avoided.

The description of the Power he feels — which is obviously the true thing — is very accurate — it is so, like rain or a fall of snow, that it often comes at first. I take it from his use of the word “around”, that it is an enveloping power that he feels. It does not begin for all in the same way — some only feel it above

their heads occasionally descending on them and entering.

Tiredness, Inertia and Sleep

It [*feeling tired and heavy*] is probably a passing symptom of the attempt of peace to come down. I have heard from several in the first stages that the body was disinclined or felt unable to move about. It is of course an unnecessary reaction — the body wants to translate the pressure for inner immobility into an outward immobility.

*

There is no connection between the descent of Peace and depression. Inertia there may be if the physical being feels the pressure for quietude but turns it into mere inactivity — but that cannot be called exactly a descent — at least not a complete one, since the physical does not share in it.

*

By the descent the inertia changes its character. It ceases to be a resistance of the physical and becomes only a physical condition to be transformed into the true basic immobility and rest.

*

You need not worry about that [*the body's tendency to sleep*]. When there is a strong inward tendency, the body not being yet conscious enough to share the experience in a waking state tries to assimilate the descending forces through sleep. This is a common experience. When it has assimilated enough, it will be more ready.

Mixing with the World

That [*problem of "mixture"*]¹ might apply to a sending out

¹ *The correspondent wrote that a person seeking transformation is different from others, like a red wave in the midst of the ordinary blue waves of the sea. Would such a wave, he asked, be dissolved and mixed with the ordinary waves or would it remain separate and transform them? — Ed.*

of the new waves upon the old sea, i.e. an attempt to transform the world. But the problem here is of self-transformation. Mixture comes by the old waves pressing in again; one has to prevent or get rid of the mixture. But the decisive movement is the descent of the things from above—when that becomes complete, then the being depends on the Above not on the Around. If the waves from the Around try to get in, it is they who are transformed (or rejected automatically), the roles are reversed.

Chapter Eight

Descent and the Lower Nature

The Resistance of the Lower Nature

If the habit of the ordinary nature is not any obstacle to the descent, then what is the need of sadhana? What prevents the whole higher consciousness from coming down and changing you into a superman in one second? It is because the things of the lower nature offer an obstinate resistance that long sadhana is necessary.

*

An uneasiness of that kind is always due to a resistance somewhere — something that remains closed and does not open when it is touched by the Force. It is due probably not so much to yourself as to other conflicting influences that are acting upon you.

*

If one brings down more force or light than some part of the being is ready for and that part resists — or if there is a struggle between descending and adverse forces in the body, then these things [*a burning sensation etc.*] can take place.

*

The feeling of resistance [*to the descent of the Force*] may be the result of the effort at response. When there is the free flow there is neither effort nor resistance.

*

The experience of the action in the three centres is perfectly all right (the opening to the higher consciousness and its characteristic action and results already beginning there) except for the pains which mean a resistance. These experiences are quite sound and according to the divine schedule. But the pain at the

bottom of the neck indicates that in trying to pass from mind to higher vital towards the heart, the Consciousness encountered an obstruction. However that too is in the day's work. It will be overcome in due time. So nothing to grumble—there at least.

The concentration is all right—since it is proceeding so well, the concentration in the higher centres should continue, but as the consciousness comes down or to help its coming down to the vital centres, more concentration in the heart may be necessary hereafter.

*

What usually comes is a descent of the Divine Power to work upon the nature and prepare it for the Divine Presence in the heart. There is much in human nature that has to be changed before it can hold what descends—incapacity and limitation of the mind, insufficient purity in the heart and elsewhere, restlessness etc. To contain the descent a quiet mind and pure heart are needed. That is why there is the restlessness and sense of incapacity in her. That is a quite common experience. If she wants to go farther, she must aspire for calm, peace, purity, etc. in the mental and emotional being and allow what is descending to establish it in her.

*

It must be the vital-physical that is in action. It is under the pressure of the Force that the resistance recedes lower and lower down and manifests so as to have the pressure brought there also specifically for its expulsion.

*

The Power that is above your head has not only to be in connection with you, but to occupy the consciousness with its influence. The restlessness is due to a resistance of the lower consciousness which is not accustomed to the process by which this is done and probably feels uneasy—as you say you feel everything unsure. The body becoming unreal and all of one seeming to disappear are very usual results of the higher consciousness taking hold of the mind and they are very good signs—so too the sensation

spreading from the head to the body is probably only the Power coming in. There should be no apprehension, for these things are quite normal in the transforming process. Probably the sense of unsureness is due to the part of the nature which finds itself on the body consciousness and feels nothing sure or solid except the body. In the new consciousness on the contrary what will be felt as sure and solid is the wide spiritual consciousness not limited by the body, in which the body is only a small circumstance hardly felt, an instrument only. The losing all consciousness must also be due to the consciousness going entirely inside as soon as the restlessness is forgotten or is no longer active.

*

That is good progress. As for the resisting part, there is for a long time a resistance from some layer of the physical — one layer opens, another beneath remains obscure. But if the pressure from above is continuous, the resistance gets exhausted at last.

The stillness of which you speak in the meditation is a very good sign. It comes usually in that pervading way when there has been sufficient purification to make it possible. On the other side, it is itself the beginning of the laying of the foundations of the higher spiritual consciousness.

*

You speak of a struggle (*yuddha*) beginning when the Force comes down, but such a result is not inevitable — it is not necessary that the progress should be through a struggle. That rather takes place before the Force is there in the being, while one is still making efforts to open oneself to it or when it is still pressing from above or has taken up something of the nature but not the whole. When the Force is there at work, the imperfections and weaknesses of the nature will necessarily arise for change, but one need not fight with them; one can look on them quietly as a surface instrumentation that has to be changed. It is not with "indifference" that one has to look at them, for that might mean inertia, a want of will or push or necessity to change; it is rather with detachment. Detachment means that one stands

back from them, does not identify oneself with them or get upset or troubled because they are there, but rather looks on them as something foreign to one's true consciousness and true self, rejects them and calls in the Mother's Force into these movements to eliminate them and bring the true consciousness and its movements there. The firm will of rejection must be there, the pressure to get rid of them, but not any wrestling or struggle.

When you felt the Force, the concentration, the peace, it meant evidently the true consciousness coming; that could not produce the restlessness at night. If the restlessness were the result of the Force coming, it would follow that the more the Force comes down, the more the restlessness must increase. But that would be absurd and is not the case. What happened was simply that with the Force came a beginning of the inner or spiritual peace; in the nerves the old restlessness which was lying dormant rose up as a resistance, trying as all these habitual things of the nature do to prolong itself. As the peace enters the vital and the nervous being, these things naturally diminish and are eliminated. One has only to remain quiet and detached and let the Force in its working bring in the peace there also. If the difficulty persists, you will let us know so that we may see to it.

Descent into the Mind and Vital

The danger of the mental forces is that when the higher consciousness descends they tend (unless there is a deep silence) to become active in the consciousness for forming ideas of a mental type which can always be misapplied. First, there should be a basis of entire calm, peace and silence — if there is activity, it should be that of a knowledge coming down and the mind silent receiving it accurately. This you can easily have, provided the mind is quiet.

The danger of the vital is that of taking hold of love, Ananda, the sense of Beauty and using it for its own purposes, for vital human relations or interchange or else some kind of mere enjoyment of its own.

*

The wideness is that of the higher consciousness, golden being the colour of the light of Truth, and the Cow is the symbol of the Light of the higher consciousness descending, turning all into the Truth light.

The state of wideness and of quietude unaffected by anything that happens is the natural result of the descent which you saw in this figure. The impartial condition towards work or not work is also a result of this descent. Usually it is the vital that pushes to work and without this vital push one can do very little. When the higher consciousness descends into the mind and vital, this push becomes silent, but the faculty of work remains, — afterwards when the new consciousness is settled it takes up the work and carries it on with another force which replaces the push of the vital and is much greater.

*

In the first condition you are receiving through the mind and it is drawn back upon itself to receive the Presence and grow in the Light and Power from above. The body or external consciousness is probably not sharing in its outward-going parts, there is no effectuating energy for any work other than what the external consciousness is habituated to do.

In the second the vital is receiving directly and transforming immediately into kinetic energy; for it is the direct reception by the vital or else the active participation of the vital in the Light, Power or Ananda that makes externalisation, effectuation, all kinds of work and action possible and easy.

*

The opening of the vital mind (or any part) does not mean that the vital mind is absolutely open or wholly converted so that there shall never again be any darkness or ignorance or error or resistance or anything else but the higher consciousness there. It only means that the higher consciousness is able to come down there and work and establish something of itself there — as has been done in the thinking mind. Each plane, one after the other, has to open initially in that way down to the physical. So long

as this initial opening is not made in all the parts, there can be no complete and final descent of the higher consciousness anywhere. If the nervous being and other physical parts are not open, even the thinking mind cannot be finally open, for it can be affected by resistance, darkness etc. from below. If the vital mind is open, that does not mean that it is open so wholly that it is already divine and is not feeling pride or other wrong movements.

As for the nervous being, it is part of the physical consciousness, below the physical mind and not above it — the nerves are part of the body.

*

The attitude which he describes, if he keeps it correctly, is the right one. It brought him at first the beginning of a true experience, the Light (white and golden) and the Force pouring down from the Sahasradala and filling the system; but when it touched the vital parts it must have awakened the prana energies in the vital centres (navel and below) and as these were not pure, all the impurities arose (anger, sex, fear, doubt etc.) and the mind became clouded by the uprush of impure vital forces. He says that all this is now subsiding, the mind is becoming calm and in the vital the impulses come but do not remain. Not only the mind but the vital must become calm; these impulses must lose their force of recurrence by rejection and purification. Entire purity and peace must be established in the whole *ādhāra*; it is only then that he will have a safe and sure basis for further progress.

The reason why the force flows out of him must be because he allows himself to become too inertly passive and open to everything. One must be passive only to the Divine Force, but vigilant not to put oneself at the mercy of all forces. If he becomes passive when he tries to see God in another person, he is likely to put himself at the disposal of any force that is working through that person and his own forces may be drained away towards the other. It is better for him not to try in this way; let him aspire for the Peace and Strength that come from above and for entire

purity and open himself to that Force only. Such experiences as the feeling of the Divine everywhere (not in this or that person only) will then come of themselves.

*

It is when the true contact and the Light and Force can be steadily brought down *into the whole being* (including the lower vital and body) that the basis and organisation [*of the being*] can be founded and settled.

Descent into the Physical Consciousness and Body

This is a very great progress—to be able to receive the higher consciousness while doing external things with the physical mind and body—it shows that the physical consciousness is fast opening. What you feel is indeed the Grace coming down and bringing the higher divine or spiritual consciousness with it with all that is there. All that (peace, power, Ananda) will develop afterwards more clearly.

*

It [*the descent of the higher consciousness into the most physical*] brings light, consciousness, force, Ananda into the cells and all the physical movements. The body becomes conscious and vigilant and performs the right movements, obeying the higher will or else automatically by force of the consciousness that has come into it. It becomes more possible to control the functionings of the body and set right anything that is wrong, to deal with illness and pain etc. A greater control comes over the actions of the body and even over happenings to it from outside, e.g. minimising of accidents and small mishaps. The body becomes a more effective instrument for work. It becomes possible to minimise fatigue. Peace, happiness, strength, lightness in the whole physical system. These are the more obvious and normal results which grow as the consciousness grows, but there are many others that are possible. There is also the unity with the earth-consciousness, the constant sense of the Divine in the physical, etc.

It is, of course, not easy to make the physical entirely conscious in this way—for it is the seat of unconsciousness and obscurity and inertia—but a partial and sufficiently effective introduction of the higher consciousness can be established as a basis and the rest of the ground conquered as its force increases in the body.

*

Your recent experiences are of considerable importance: the triple condition of the being, the sense of the Divine everywhere, that of the Divine Child in the universe. The last two are self-evident in their significance. As to the triple condition it indicates the proper direction of the realisation of the sadhana in three parts of the being. The mind has to merge in the one infinite consciousness of the silent self which will then envelop the whole being; the heart has by adoration and love and surrender to live in the dynamic Divine and be its dwelling place; the vital and physical (below the navel) have to be the instruments of the Divine Will, instruments pure, surrendered, expressing nothing but that Will.

The Blue Light coming below the level of the Muladhara means that it has entered into the physical (physical mental, physical vital, material) consciousness. The two main obstacles here are the mechanical mind with its memories and desires of the past and the most outward sex movements; these have to be overcome (especially the mechanical mind, for the other may be easily overcome if not supported by the vital proper) for the Light to possess all the physical consciousness. It is probably why it rose so strongly when the Light came to these parts.

*

That is to say, [*when there is sometimes stillness and sometimes mechanical thoughts*] the Power is still working on the physical consciousness (the mechanical mind and the subconscious) to bring stillness there. Sometimes the stillness comes but not complete, sometimes the mechanical mind reasserts itself. This oscillation usually takes place in a movement of the kind. Even if there is a sudden or rapid transforming shock or downrush,

there has to be some working out of this kind afterwards — that at least has always been my experience. For most, however, there comes, first, this slow preparatory process.

*

It is not a question only of the force working — but of the force descending into the body. The force descends in order to establish quietude, peace, light or whatever else comes from the higher consciousness. When the force comes only to do some work it comes and goes after doing its work. But this is a question of establishing something in the mind, vital and body.

*

It [*how the body receives the higher dynamism*] depends on the condition of the body or rather of the physical and the most material consciousness. In one condition it is tamasic, inert, unopen and cannot bear or cannot receive or cannot contain the force; in another rajas predominates and tries to seize on the dynamism, but wastes and spills and loses it; in another there is receptivity, harmony, balance and the result is a harmonious action without strain or effort.

*

Probably the accumulated Force became more than the physical being could receive. When that happens, the right thing to do is to widen oneself (one can learn to do it by a little practice). If the consciousness is in a state of wideness, then it can receive any amount of Force without inconvenience.

*

It was the descent of the higher consciousness not only into the mind but the whole body and the whole being. That is what you must get fixed in you, having it not only as a descent but as your normal consciousness. Of course that does not happen in a day (except in rare cases). The descent repeats itself until it is strong enough to hold the whole body.

*

What will happen when the supramental consciousness takes hold of the body fully, can be decided only by the descent itself — there must be no premature attempt to do it or decide it with the Mind, before the Descent is an accomplished reality — for that would only retard the Descent and perhaps spoil the body.

Experiences in the Subtle Body and the Physical Body

It [*the higher consciousness*] can come into the physical consciousness direct in the sense that the rest can remain passive, but it must pass through the subtle to reach the material.

*

All experiences that penetrate the centres are recorded in the body and seem to be the body's experiences,¹ but one has to distinguish between the reflection of the experiences there and the experiences that belong to the physical body consciousness itself. It is a matter of consciousness and fine discernment. There is no absolute law about the time.

*

It can be a rushing of Force into the subtle body which the physical records and feels the effect. When Force descends into the head it means that it has come down into the mind, when it is felt in the heart it means it has entered into the emotional vital, when it is in the Muladhara and below it means it is acting on the physical consciousness. The centres are all in the subtle body although there are corresponding parts in the gross physical.

*

I spoke [*in the preceding letter*] only of the fact that what one feels recorded in the physical body may be actually taking place only in the subtle body. Whether in a particular case it is that or a direct experience in the physical body also, is a matter to be

¹ *The correspondent wrote that he sometimes felt peace or silence or force as “tangibly present” in his body.—Ed.*

seen in each case. One must distinguish for oneself which it is.

*

Any reflection or outflowing [*of the Force*] from the subtle body into the physical would also be felt as tangible.

*

Why “mere” record? If you think the experiences in the subtle body are feeble vague things, you are mistaken — they can be quite as intense, swift, palpable, massive as those of the body.

Descent into the Subconscious and Inconscient

It [*the correspondent's experience*] is the approach of the higher consciousness to the subconscious through the psychic and vital which are the connecting links. Without the vital the action would not be complete, without the psychic it would not be possible.

*

I do not see what is your difficulty. That there is a divine force asleep or veiled by Inconscience in Matter and that the Higher Force has to descend and awaken it with the Light and Truth is a thing that is well known; it is at the very base of this Yoga.

Note on the Texts

Note on the Texts

LETTERS ON YOGA — III, the third of four volumes, contains letters in which Sri Aurobindo speaks about the experiences and realisations that may take place in the practice of his system of Yoga. The letters have been arranged in four parts dealing with these broad subject areas:

1. The Place of Experiences in the Practice of Yoga
2. The Opening of the Inner Senses
3. Experiences of the Inner Consciousness and the Cosmic Consciousness
4. The Fundamental Realisations of the Integral Yoga

The letters in this volume have been selected from the extensive correspondence Sri Aurobindo carried on with his disciples and others between 1927 and 1950. Letters from this corpus appear in seven volumes of THE COMPLETE WORKS OF SRI AUROBINDO: *Letters on Poetry and Art* (Volume 27), *Letters on Yoga* (Volumes 28–31), *The Mother with Letters on the Mother* (Volume 32), and *Letters on Himself and the Ashram* (Volume 35). The titles of these works specify the nature of the letters included in the volumes, but there is some overlap. For example, a number of letters in the present volume are also published in *Letters on Himself and the Ashram*. Another volume, *Autobiographical Notes and Other Writings of Historical Interest* (Volume 36), contains letters written by Sri Aurobindo before 1927, as well as some written after that date, mainly to persons living outside the Ashram.

The Writing of the Letters

Between 1927 and 1950, Sri Aurobindo replied to hundreds of correspondents in tens of thousands of letters, some of them many pages in length, others only a few words long. Most of his replies, however, were

sent to just a few dozen disciples, almost all of them resident members of his Ashram; of these disciples, about a dozen received more than half the replies. Sri Aurobindo wrote most of these letters between 1931 and 1937, the prime period of his correspondence. Letters before and after this period were written on a more restricted scale and confined to a few persons for special reasons.

Disciples in the Ashram wrote to Sri Aurobindo on loose sheets or sent him the notebooks in which they kept diaries as a record of their spiritual endeavour and a means of communicating with him. These notebooks and loose sheets reached Sri Aurobindo via an internal “post” once or twice a day. Letters from outside which his secretary thought he might like to see were sent at the same time. Correspondents wrote in English if they knew the language well enough, but a good number wrote in Bengali, Gujarati, Hindi or French, all of which Sri Aurobindo read fluently, or in other languages that were translated into English for him. The disciples usually addressed their letters to the Mother, since Sri Aurobindo had asked them to do so, but most assumed that he would answer them. He generally replied in the notebook or on the sheets sent by the correspondent, writing beneath the correspondent’s remarks or in the margin or between the lines; sometimes, however, he wrote his reply on a separate sheet of paper. In some cases he had his secretary prepare a typed copy of his letter, which he revised before it was sent. For correspondents living outside the Ashram, Sri Aurobindo sometimes addressed his reply not to the correspondent but to his secretary, who quoted, paraphrased or translated the reply and signed the letter himself. In these indirect replies, Sri Aurobindo often referred to himself in the third person.

While going through Sri Aurobindo’s letters, the reader should keep in mind that each letter was written to a specific person at a specific time, in specific circumstances and for a specific purpose. The subjects taken up arose in regard to the needs of the person. Sri Aurobindo varied the style and tone of his replies according to his relationship with the correspondent; to those with whom he was close, he sometimes employed humour, irony and even sarcasm.

Although written to specific recipients, these letters contain much of general interest, which justifies their inclusion in a volume destined

for the general public. For the reasons mentioned above, however, the advice in them does not always apply equally to everyone. Aware of this, Sri Aurobindo himself made some cautionary remarks about the proper use of his letters:

I should like to say, in passing, that it is not always safe to apply practically to oneself what has been written for another. Each sadhak is a case by himself and one cannot always or often take a mental rule and apply it rigidly to all who are practising the Yoga.

The tendency to take what I lay down for one and apply it without discrimination to another is responsible for much misunderstanding. A general statement, too, true in itself, cannot be applied to everyone alike or applied now and immediately without consideration of condition or circumstance or person or time.

It is not a fact that all I write is meant equally for everybody. That assumes that everybody is alike and there is no difference between sadhak and sadhak. If it were so everybody would advance alike and have the same experiences and take the same time to progress by the same steps and stages. It is not so at all.¹

The Typing and Revision of the Letters

Most of the shorter items in this volume, and many of the longer ones, were not typed or revised during Sri Aurobindo's lifetime and are reproduced here directly from his handwritten manuscripts. A good number of the letters, however, as mentioned above, were typed for Sri Aurobindo and revised by him before sending. Other letters were typed by the recipients for their own use or for circulation within the Ashram. At first, circulation of the letters was restricted to members of the Ashram and others whom Sri Aurobindo had accepted as disciples.

¹ First and third passages: *Letters on Himself and the Ashram*, volume 35 of THE COMPLETE WORKS OF SRI AUROBINDO, pp. 473 and 475. Second passage: *The Mother with Letters on the Mother*, volume 32, p. 349.

When these letters were circulated, personal references were removed. Persons mentioned by Sri Aurobindo were indicated by their initials or by the letters X, Y, Z, etc. Copies of these typed letters were kept by Sri Aurobindo's secretary and sometimes presented to Sri Aurobindo for revision before publication. These typed copies sometimes contained errors, most of which were corrected by him while revising.

Sri Aurobindo's revision sometimes amounted merely to making minor changes here and there, sometimes to a complete rewriting of the letter. He generally removed personal references if this had not already been done by the typist. When necessary, he also rewrote the openings or other parts of the replies in order to free them from dependence on the correspondent's question. As a result, some of these letters have an impersonal tone and read more like brief essays than personal communications.

The Publication of the Letters

Around 1933, Sri Aurobindo's secretary Nolini Kanta Gupta began to compile selections from the growing body of letters in order to publish them. During Sri Aurobindo's lifetime, four small books of letters were published: *The Riddle of This World* (1933), *Lights on Yoga* (1935), *Bases of Yoga* (1936) and *More Lights on Yoga* (1948). Sri Aurobindo revised the typescripts of most of the letters in these books. During this revision, he continued the process of removing personal references. A letter he wrote in August 1937 alludes to his approach to the revision:

I had no idea of the book being published as a collection of personal letters—if that were done, they would have to be published whole as such without a word of alteration. I understood the book was meant like the others [*i.e., like Bases of Yoga, etc.*] where only what was helpful for an understanding of things Yogic was kept with necessary alterations and modifications. . . . With that idea I have been not only omitting but recasting and adding freely. Otherwise as a book it would be too scrappy and random for public interest. In the other books things too personal were omitted—it seems

to me the same rule must hold here — except very sparingly where unavoidable.

A number of letters not included in the four books mentioned above were published in the mid and late 1940s in several journals associated with the Ashram: *Sri Aurobindo Circle*, *Sri Aurobindo Mandir Annual*, *The Advent* and *Mother India*. Many letters in these journals were revised by Sri Aurobindo before publication.

By the mid-1940s a significant body of letters had been collected, typed and revised. In 1945 plans were made, with Sri Aurobindo's approval, to publish a collection of his letters. The work of compiling and editing these letters was done under his guidance. At that time, many typed or printed copies of letters, some revised, some not, were presented to Sri Aurobindo for approval or revision. The resulting material was arranged and published in a four-volume series entitled *Letters of Sri Aurobindo*. Series One appeared in 1947, Series Two and Three in 1949 and Series Four in 1951. The first, second and fourth series contained letters on Yoga, the third letters on poetry and literature. In 1958, most of these letters on Yoga, along with many additional ones, were published under the titles *On Yoga II: Tome One* and *On Yoga II: Tome Two*, as Volumes VI and VII of the Sri Aurobindo International University Centre collection. The first tome, with further additions, was reissued in 1969. In 1970 a new edition of the letters was published under the title *Letters on Yoga*; this edition contained many new letters not included in *On Yoga II*. The three volumes of the enlarged edition constituted volumes 22, 23 and 24 of the Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary Library.

The present edition, also titled *Letters on Yoga*, incorporates most of the Centenary Library letters, but also contains a large number of letters that have come to light in the four decades between the two editions. One source of new letters is the correspondences of several disciples which were published in books after the Centenary Library edition had been issued. Govindbhai Patel's correspondence was published in 1974 in a book entitled *My Pilgrimage to the Spirit*; an enlarged edition appeared in 1977. Nagin Doshi's correspondence, *Guidance from Sri Aurobindo: Letters to a Young Disciple*, was brought out in three volumes in 1974, 1976 and 1987. Nirodbaran's Correspondence with

Sri Aurobindo came out in two volumes in 1983 and 1984. Sahana Devi's correspondence came out in 1985 in a book entitled *At the Feet of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother*. Prithwi Singh's correspondence came out in 1988 as *Sri Aurobindo and the Mother to Prithwi Singh*. Dilip Kumar Roy's correspondence was issued in four volumes in 2003, 2005, 2007 and 2011 under the title *Sri Aurobindo to Dilip*. A second source of new material is individual letters and small collections of letters published in Ashram journals and elsewhere after the Centenary Library had been issued. A third source is letters transcribed from manuscripts or from early typed copies. Many unpublished letters were discovered while reviewing correspondences long held by the Ashram; some of these had never been assessed to find letters for publication; others had been assessed, but relatively few letters were selected at the time. Additional letters were received by the Ashram upon the passing away of disciples. From the three sources mentioned above, many letters have been found that are worthy of publication. The present edition contains about one-third more letters than appear in the Centenary Library.

The Selection, Arrangement and Editing of the Letters

In compiling the present edition, all known manuscripts, typed copies or photographic copies of manuscripts and printed texts of letters were checked. From these sources, letters that seemed to be of general interest were selected. Electronic texts of the letters were then made and carefully checked at least twice against the handwritten, typed, photocopied, and printed versions of the texts.

The selected letters have been arranged according to subject and placed in the four volumes of the present edition. Each volume is divided and subdivided into parts, sections, chapters and groups with descriptive headings; each group, the lowest unit of division, contains one or more letters devoted to the specific subject of the group.

The present volume consists of 1164 separate items, an "item" being defined as what is published between one heading or asterisk and another heading or asterisk. Many items correspond exactly to individual letters; a good number, however, contain only part of the individual letters; a small number consist of two or more letters (or

parts of them) that were joined together by early typists or editors and then revised in that form by Sri Aurobindo.

Whenever possible, the letters are reproduced to their full extent. In some cases, however, portions of the letters have been omitted because they are not of general interest. A number of letters, for example, begin with personal remarks by Sri Aurobindo unrelated to the more substantial remarks which follow; these personal openings have often been removed. In some letters, Sri Aurobindo marked the transition from one part of a letter to another with a phrase such as "As to"; these transitional phrases have often been retained and stand at the beginning of abbreviated letters—that is, letters in which the first part of the letter has been omitted or placed elsewhere.

A number of letters, or portions of them, have been published in more than one volume of THE COMPLETE WORKS OF SRI AUROBINDO. Most of this doubling of letters occurs between *Letters on Yoga* and *Letters on Himself and the Ashram*. The form of these letters is not always the same in both places. In *Letters on Himself and the Ashram*, the manuscript version of a given letter has often been used because it contains Sri Aurobindo's remarks on himself or the Mother or members of the Ashram. These personal remarks, as noted above, were usually removed by Sri Aurobindo when he revised the letter for publication as a letter on Yoga. This revised form of the letter has generally been reproduced in *Letters on Yoga*. Thus, a number of letters are available both in their original form and their revised form.

As in previous collections of Sri Aurobindo's letters, the names of Ashram members and others have often been replaced by the letters X, Y, Z, etc. In any given letter, X stands for the first name replaced, Y for the second, Z for the third, A for the fourth, and so on. An X in a given letter has no necessary relation to an X in another letter. Names of Ashram members to whom Sri Aurobindo referred not as sadhaks but as holders of a certain position—notably Nolini Kanta Gupta in his position as Sri Aurobindo's secretary—are given in full. Sometimes the names of people who played a role in the history of the period are also given.

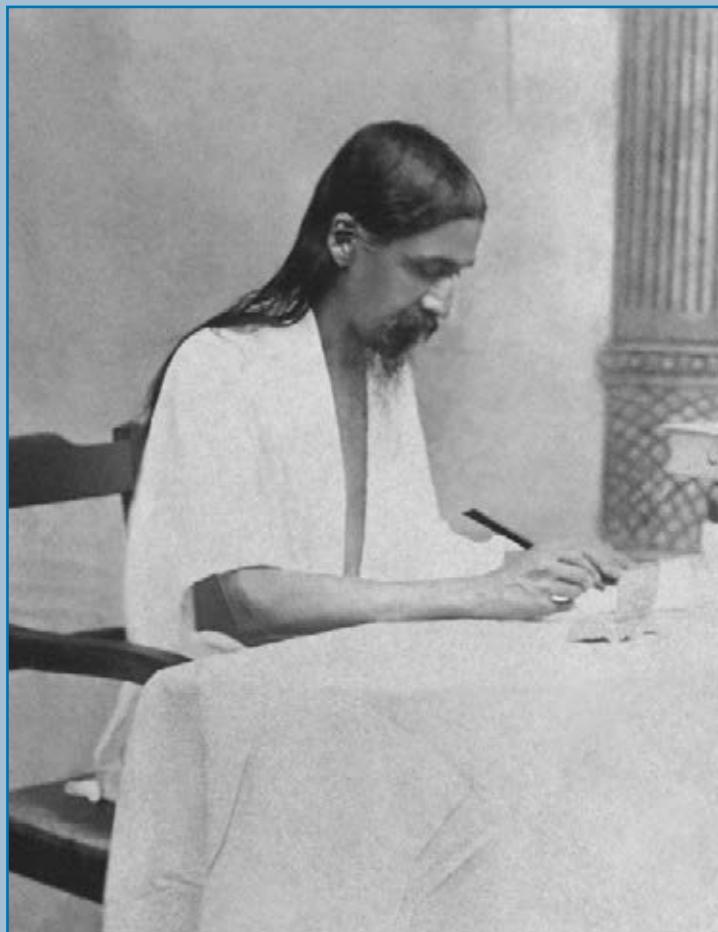
In his letters Sri Aurobindo sometimes wrote Sanskrit words in the devanagari script; these words have been transliterated into roman script in this edition. Words in Bengali script have likewise been

transliterated. This policy is in accord with the practice followed in Sri Aurobindo's lifetime.

The reader may note that Sri Aurobindo almost always spelled the word "Asram" without an "h" in his manuscripts. Around 1945, due to failing eyesight, he began dictating most of his writings to his amanuensis Nirodbaran; Nirodbaran sometimes spelled the word without an "h", sometimes with one. In the present edition, the word is always spelled as it occurs in the manuscripts, both those of Sri Aurobindo and of Nirodbaran. In headings and other editorial matter, the spelling "Ashram" has been used, since this is now the official spelling of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram.

Letters on Yoga

IV



Sri Aurobindo

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Letters on Yoga — IV

Transformation of Human Nature
in the Integral Yoga

Publisher's Note

Letters on Yoga—IV contains letters written by Sri Aurobindo on the transformation of human nature, mental, vital and physical, through the practice of the Integral Yoga. It also includes letters on the difficulties encountered in the practice of this Yoga. This volume is the last of four volumes of *Letters on Yoga*, arranged by the editors as follows:

- I. Foundations of the Integral Yoga
- II. Practice of the Integral Yoga
- III. Experiences and Realisations in the Integral Yoga
- IV. Transformation of Human Nature in the Integral Yoga

The letters in these volumes have been selected from the large body of letters that Sri Aurobindo wrote to disciples and others between 1927 and 1950. Other letters from this period are published in *Letters on Poetry and Art*, *The Mother with Letters on the Mother* and *Letters on Himself and the Ashram*, volumes 27, 32 and 35 of THE COMPLETE WORKS OF SRI AUROBINDO. Letters written before 1927 are reproduced in *Autobiographical Notes and Other Writings of Historical Interest*, volume 36 of THE COMPLETE WORKS.

During Sri Aurobindo's lifetime, relatively few of his letters were published. Three small books of letters on Yoga were brought out in the 1930s. A more substantial collection came out between 1947 and 1951 in a four-volume series entitled *Letters of Sri Aurobindo* (including one volume of letters on poetry and literature). In 1958, many more letters were included in the two large tomes of *On Yoga—II*. A further expanded collection in three volumes entitled *Letters on Yoga* was published in 1970 as part of the Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary Library. The present collection, also entitled *Letters on Yoga*, constitutes volumes 28–31 of THE COMPLETE WORKS. These volumes incorporate

previously published letters and contain many new ones as well. About one-third of the letters in the present volume were not published in the Centenary Library.

This volume is arranged by subject in four parts:

1. Sadhana on the Level of the Mind
2. Sadhana on the Level of the Vital
3. Sadhana on the Physical, Subconscious and Inconscient Levels
4. Difficulties in the Practice of the Integral Yoga

The texts of all the letters have been checked against the available manuscripts, typescripts and printed versions.

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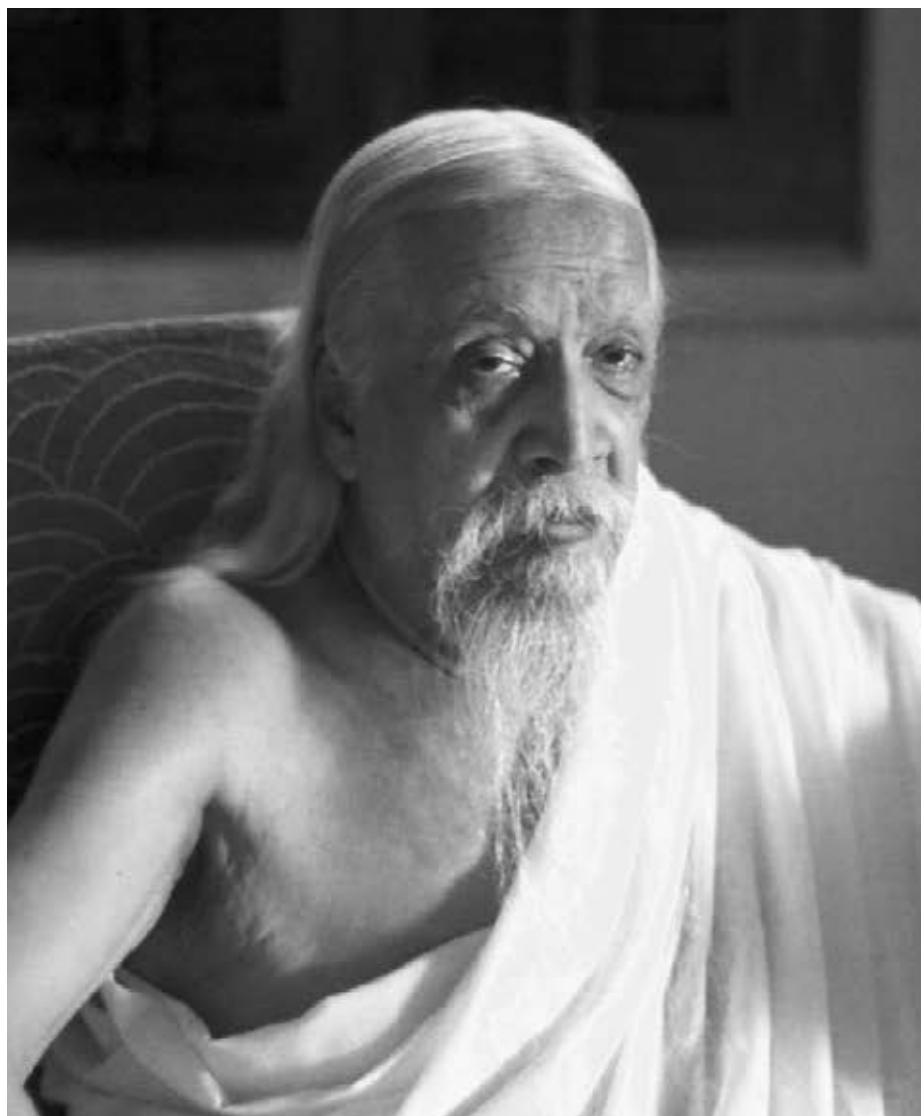
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Sri Aurobindo, 1950

Part One

Sadhana on the Level of the Mind

Section One

The Mind and Sadhana

Chapter One

The Mind and Other Levels of Being

The Mind and the Divine Consciousness

The ways of the Divine are not like those of the human mind or according to our patterns and it is impossible to judge them or to lay down for Him what He shall or shall not do, for the Divine knows better than we can know. If we admit the Divine at all, both true reason and bhakti seem to me to be at one in demanding implicit faith and surrender.

*

To understand divine movements one must enter into the divine consciousness; till then faith and surrender are the only right attitude. How can the mind judge what is beyond all its measures?

The Mind and the Supermind

The less pet ideas are petted and cherished, the better for the supramental Yoga. The mind is always building up ideas, some of which are wrong, some a mixture of truth and error, some true in their way, but true only in a certain field or in certain conditions or for some people, and it proceeds not only to make "pets" of them, but to try to impose them as universal and absolute truths or general standards which everybody must follow. The mind is a rigid instrument: it finds it difficult to adapt itself to the greater plasticity of the play of life or the freedom of the play of the Spirit. It wants to catch hold of either or both of these spontaneous powers and cut them into its own measures. It poses as the mediator and interpreter between life and the spirit; but it knows neither; it only knows itself and its own constructions out of life and its own deformations or half reflections of the truth of the Spirit. Only the supermind can be a true mediator and interpreter. But if you want the supramental

Light, you must not tie yourself to mental ideas, but draw back from them and observe them with an impartial equality in the silence of the spirit. When the supramental Light touches them, it will put them in their place and finally replace them by the true truth of things.

The Mind and Intuition

For the human thinking mind there are always many sides to everything and it decides according to its own bent or preference or its habitual ideas or some reason that presents itself to the intellect as the best. It gets the real truth only when something else puts a higher light into it — when the psychic or the intuition touches it and makes it feel or see.

*

It is very usual for intuitive suggestions to come like that and the mind to disregard them. It is because the mind is too accustomed to follow its own process and cannot recognise or have confidence in the intuition when it comes. The mind has to learn to look at these things when they come and give them value if experience confirms their truth.

*

Yes, the active mind in people with a very intellectual turn can be an obstacle to the deeper more silent spiritual movement. Afterwards when it is turned into the higher thought (intuitive or overmental) it becomes on the contrary a great force.

*

The intuitive perception or discrimination is self-sufficient — it does not need any reasoning or process of thought to justify it. The intellectual depends on data and steps, even if the steps are hurried over or the data rapidly seized and swallowed into the intelligence.

*

It [*the perception of an intuitivised mind*] is when, instead of seeing things as they appear to the external mind and senses, one begins to see things about them with a subtler physical mind and sense — e.g. seeing intuitively what is to be done, how to do it, what the object (even so-called inanimate objects) wants or needs, what is likely to happen next (or sometimes sure to happen), what forces are at play on the physical plane etc. etc. Even the body becomes intuitively conscious in this way, feels without being told by the mind what it has to do, what it has to avoid, what is near it or coming to it (though unseen) etc. etc.

*

The heart has its intuitions as well as the mind and these are as true as any mental perceptions. But neither all feelings nor all mental perceptions nor all rational conclusions can be true.

The Mind and Inspiration

There are different kinds of knowledge. One is inspiration, i.e. something that comes out of the Knowledge planes like a flash and opens up the mind to the Truth in a moment. That is inspiration. It easily takes the form of words as when a poet writes or a speaker speaks, as people say, from inspiration.

*

The pure inspiration and conception is something quite different [*from ordinary thought*] — it comes from deep within or from high above. This is the lower vital mind at work making formations. When the calmness is there all sorts of things may rise on the surface — they have not to be accepted, but simply looked at. In time the calmness will be so developed as to quell the vital and outer mind also and in that complete quietude the true perceptions will come.

The Mind and the Psychic

Most people begin with the power [of Yoga] working in the

mind — it is only when the mind and vital have been changed to some extent that the psychic is ready to come forward.

*

The chief obstacle in you is the mind. If you can quiet your mind and give the psychic being a chance, that will be your spiritual salvation. Your mind is inordinately active, too full of questionings, too shrewd, worldly and practical, too much given to doubt and self-defence. All that is very useful in worldly life, it helps to bring success, but it is not the way to succeed in Yoga. No doubt in Yoga, the critical rational mind (self-critical as well as critical of things outside you) is an element that has its value so long as the true inner discrimination does not come; but of itself it cannot carry you on the way, it will only make your progress slow and stumbling. There must be something in you that will open itself directly to the Truth and Light. The unregenerated vital being of man cannot do that because it demands of the higher Power that it shall satisfy the vital desires, demands, ambitions, vanity, pride, etc., before it will accept the Truth. The unillumined mind also cannot do it because it refuses to recognise the Truth unless the Truth first satisfies its own judgments, ideas, opinions, critical or conventional standards,—unless in a word the Truth consents to narrow itself into the moulds of the mind's own ignorance. It is the psychic being alone that turns to the Truth directly, feels it instinctively behind all appearances and in spite of all disguises, accepts it without any egoistic demand or condition, is ready to serve it without reserve or refusal. It is the psychic being also that can at once feel and reject all imitations of the Truth, all shows, all pretences.

*

In the West the physical mind is too dominant, so that the psychic does not so easily get a chance — except of course in exceptional people.

*

It is the thoughts of the outer mind that have to be refused, the suggestions and ideas that end by disturbing the sadhana. There are also a number of thoughts of all kinds that have no interest, but which the mind is accustomed to allow to come as a habit, mechanically,—these sometimes come up when one tries to be quiet. They must be allowed to pass away without attending to them until they run down and the mind becomes still; to struggle with them and try to stop them is no use, there must be only a quiet rejection. On the other hand if thoughts come up from within, from the psychic, thoughts of the Mother, of divine love and joy, perceptions of truth etc., these of course must be permitted, as they help to make the psychic active.

*

When it [*one's inner perception*] is at the heart, it is probable that the psychic or at least the psychic mental thought is replacing the ordinary mental. Yogic thought comes from two sources, the psychic behind the heart and the higher consciousness from above the head.

*

Your nature has always been very self-centred and the mind active—in such a nature it is easier for the higher mind to act than for the psychic.

The Mind and the Lower Nature

It is necessary first to found the higher consciousness in the mind and heart. To deal with the lower nature before that means to fall into the struggle and confusion and disorder of the vital, for it all comes up. With the mind and heart prepared, one can deal with the vital without all that superfluous trouble.

*

So long as the mind is not entirely transformed, that is, penetrated and changed by the spiritual consciousness, things from below can always run into it more or less and dim the vision of

the higher levels. If you can keep the vision always, even though dimmed, it is already a great progress.

*

There is only one sadhana for all parts, not a separate mental sadhana, vital sadhana or physical sadhana—but the action of the sadhana is applied sometimes separately to each part; sometimes on the contrary the action is on the mental and vital together, or vital and physical together, or all three together. But it is the same sadhana always.

Chapter Two

Intellect and the Intellectual

Limitations of the Intellect

Intellect is part of Mind and an instrument of half-truth like the rest of the Mind.

*

Intellectual activities are not part of the inner being — the intellect is the outer mind.

*

Its [*the intellect's*] function is to reason from the perceptions of the mind and senses, to form conclusions and to put things in logical relation with each other. A well-trained intellect is a good preparation of the mind for greater knowledge, but it cannot itself give the Yogic knowledge or know the Divine — it can only have ideas about the Divine, but having ideas is not knowledge. In the course of the sadhana intellect has to be transformed into the higher mind which is itself a passage towards the true knowledge.

*

It is no use trying to decide the things of the Spirit by the power and in the light of the intellect. The intellect can only reason and infer and its reasonings are partial and its inferences vitiated by error. One has to awaken the divinations in the soul, the psychic being, and wait for a higher knowledge which comes from above.

It is not safe to listen to or be influenced by the mental of other sadhaks. The Yoga aims at union with the Divine which will bring a spiritual oneness with other sadhaks, but a oneness in the Divine, in the Truth, not in the ignorance of the mind and the vital.

*

It is not by intellect that one can progress in the Yoga, but by psychic and spiritual receptivity—as for knowledge and true understanding it grows in sadhana by the growth of the intuition, not of the physical intellect.

*

The intellect can be as great an obstacle as the vital when it chooses to prefer its own constructions to the Truth.

*

What you have said is perfectly right. To see the Truth does not depend on a big intellect or a small intellect. It depends on being in contact with the Truth and the mind silent or quiet to receive it. The biggest intellects can make errors of the worst kind and confuse Truth and falsehood, if they have not the contact with Truth or the direct experience.

*

The intellect of most men is extremely imperfect, ill trained, half developed—therefore in most the conclusions of the intellect are hasty, ill founded and erroneous or, if right, right more by chance than by merit or right working. The conclusions are formed without knowing the facts or the correct or sufficient data, merely by a rapid inference and the process by which it comes from the premisses to the conclusion is usually illogical or faulty—the process being unsound by which the conclusion is arrived at, the conclusion also is likely to be fallacious. At the same time the intellect is usually arrogant and presumptuous, confidently asserting its imperfect conclusions as the truth and setting down as mistaken, stupid or foolish those who differ from them. Even when fully trained and developed, the intellect cannot arrive at absolute certitude or complete truth, but it can arrive at one aspect or side of it and make a reasonable or probable affirmation; but untrained, it is a quite insufficient instrument, at once hasty and peremptory and unsafe and unreliable.

*

Intellectual statements about these things do not lead very far, for the basis of true statement is a consciousness which sees things not as the mind sees them but with a direct inner view, and unless one enters into that consciousness itself, it is difficult really to understand the intellectual statement. It is by sadhana only that one can enter into that consciousness in which one sees the divine reality behind things.

*

The point is that people take no trouble to see whether their intellect is giving them right thoughts, right conclusions, right views on things and persons, right indications about their conduct or course of action. They have their idea and accept it as truth or follow it simply because it is *their* idea. Even when they recognise that they have made mistakes of the mind, they do not consider it of any importance nor do they try to be more careful mentally than before. In the vital field people know that they must not follow their desires or impulses without check or control, they know that they ought to have a conscience or a moral sense which discriminates what they can or should do and what they cannot or should not do; in the field of intellect no such care is taken. Men are supposed to follow their intellect, to have and assert their own ideas right or wrong without any control; the intellect, it is said, is man's highest instrument and he must think and act according to its ideas. But this is not true; the intellect needs an inner light to guide, check and control it quite as much as the vital. There is something above the intellect which one has to discover and the intellect should be only an intermediary for the action of that source of true Knowledge.

*

There is no reason why one should not receive through the thinking mind, as one receives through the vital, the emotional and the body. The thinking mind is as capable of receiving as these are, and, since it has to be transformed as well as the rest, it must be trained to receive, otherwise no transformation of it could take place.

It is the ordinary unenlightened activity of the intellect that is an obstacle to spiritual experience, just as the ordinary unregenerated activity of the vital or the obscure stupidly obstructive consciousness of the body is an obstacle. What the sadhak has to be specially warned against in the wrong processes of the intellect is, first, any mistaking of mental ideas and impressions or intellectual conclusions for realisation; secondly, the restless activity of the mere mind, *cañcalam manah*, which disturbs the spontaneous accuracy of psychic and spiritual experience and gives no room for the descent of the true illuminating knowledge or else deforms it as soon as it touches or even before it fully touches the human mental plane. There are also of course the usual vices of the intellect,—its leaning towards sterile doubt instead of luminous reception and calm enlightened discrimination; its arrogance claiming to judge things that are beyond it, unknown to it, too deep for it by standards drawn from its own limited experience; its attempts to explain the supraphysical by the physical or its demand for the proof of higher and occult things by the criterions proper to Matter and to mind in Matter; others also too many to enumerate here. Always it is substituting its own representations and constructions and opinions for the true knowledge. But if the intellect is surrendered, open, quiet, receptive, there is no reason why it should not be a means of reception of the light or an aid to the experience of spiritual states and to the fullness of an inner change.

The Intellect, the Pure Reason and Knowledge

The intellect is made up of imaginations, perceptions, inferences. The pure reason is quite another thing, but only a few are able to use it. As for knowledge,—in Yoga it comes first from the higher mind, but even that does not see the whole Truth, only sides of it.

*

Pure reason deals with things in themselves, ideas, concepts, the essential nature of things. It lives in the world of ideas. It is

philosophic and metaphysical in its nature.

Intellect, Intellectual and Intelligence

All depends on the meaning you attach to words used — it is a matter of nomenclature. Ordinarily one says a man has intellect if he can think well — the nature and process and field of the thought do not matter. If you take intellect in that sense, then you can say that intellect has different strata and Ford belongs to one stratum of intellect, Einstein to another — Ford has a practical and executive business intellect, Einstein a scientific discovering and theorising intellect. But Ford too in his own field theorises, invents, discovers. Yet would you call Ford an intellectual or a man of intellect? I would prefer to use for the general faculty of mind the word intelligence. Ford has a great and forceful practical intelligence, keen, quick, successful, dynamic. He has a brain that can deal with thoughts also, but even there his drive is towards practicality. He believes in rebirth (metempsychosis), for instance, not for any philosophic reason, but because it explains life as a school of experience in which one gathers more and more experience and develops by it. Einstein has on the other hand a great discovering scientific intellect, not like Marconi a powerful practical inventive intelligence for the application of scientific discovery. All men have of course an “intellect” of a kind, all for instance can discuss and debate (for which you say rightly intellect is needed); but it is only when one rises to the realm of ideas and moves freely in it that you say, “This man has an intellect.” Address an assembly of peasants, you will find if you give them scope that they can put to you points and questions which may often leave the parliamentary debater panting. But we are content to say that these peasants have much practical intelligence.

The power to discuss and debate is, as I say, a common human faculty — and habit. Perhaps it is here that man begins to diverge from the animal; for animals have much intelligence — many animals and even insects — even some rudimentary power of practical reasoning, but so far as we know, they don’t meet

and put their ideas about things side by side or sling them at each other in a debate,¹ as even the most ignorant human can do and very animatedly does. There too is the beginning of intellect—for the reasons you allege. Also for the reason that it is a common faculty of the race, it can be specialised, so much so that a man whom it is dangerous to cross in debate in the field of literature or of science or of philosophy may yet make a fool of himself and wallow contentedly in a quagmire of blunders and fallacies if he discusses politics or economy or, let us say, spirituality or Yoga. His only salvation is the blissful depth of his ignorance which prevents him from seeing what a mess he has made. Again a man may be a keen legal or political debater,—the two very commonly go together,—yet no intellectual. I admit that a man must have some logical intellect to debate well. But after all the object of debate is to win, to make your point and you may do that even if your point is false; success, not truth, is the aim of debate. So I admit what you say, but with reservations.

I agree also that labels are unsatisfactory—even when applied to less developed persons; what we really do is to pick out something prominent and label with that as if it were all the person. But classification is impossible without that and man's intellect is driven always to classify, fix distinctions, set apart with a label. The philosophers have pointed out that Science does that too rigidly and in doing so cuts falsely across the truth of Nature. But if we don't do that, we can't have any Science.

*

X asked me the question and I answered it on the basis of the current meaning of “intellect” and “intellectual”. People in ordinary speech do not make any distinction between intellect and intelligence, though of course it is quite true that a man may have a good or even a fine intelligence without being an intellectual. But ordinarily all thinking is attributed to the “intellect”; an intellectual therefore is a man whose main business or activity it is to think about things—a philosopher, a poet, a

¹ Perhaps the crows do in the “Crow Parliament” sometimes?

scientist, a critic of art and literature or of life, are all classed together as intellectuals. A theorist on economy and politics is an intellectual, a politician or a financier is not, unless he theorises on his own subject or is a thinker on another.

Y's distinction is based on those I have made here, but these distinctions are not current in ordinary speech, except one or two and those even in a very imperfect way. If I go by these distinctions, then the intellectuals will no longer be called intellectuals but thinkers and creators — except a certain class of them. An intellectual or intellectual thinker will then be one who is a thinker by his reason or mainly by his reason — e.g. Bertrand Russell, Bernard Shaw, Wells etc. Tagore thinks by vision, imagination, feeling or by intuition, not by the reason — at least that is true of his writings. C. R. Das himself would not be an intellectual; in politics, literature and everything else he was an "intuitive" and "emotive" man. But, as I say, these would be distinctions not ordinarily current. In ordinary parlance Tagore, Das and everybody else of the kind would all be called intellectuals. The general mind does not make these subtle distinctions: it takes things in the mass, roughly and it is right in doing so, for otherwise it would lose itself altogether.

As for barristers etc., a man to succeed as a barrister must have legal knowledge and the power to apply it. It is not necessary that he should be a thinker even in his own subject or an intellectual. It is the same with all professional men — doctors, engineers etc. etc.: they may be intellectuals as well as successful in their profession, but they need not be.

P. S. Argument properly speaking needs some power of logical intellect; but it can be specialised in a certain line. The power of arguing does not by itself make a man an intellectual.

*

X's main grievance with respect to the intellectuals is that he is cut off from all discussion of mental things and mental stimulus and so his mental energies are becoming atrophied. But a man who has a mental life ought surely not to be dependent on others for it, since that life is found within — there ought to be springs

within that flow by their own force.

The Intellectual Man and the Emotional Man

If the intellectual [*man*] will always have a greater wideness and vastness [*than the emotional man*], how can we be sure that he will have an equal fervour, depth and sweetness with the emotional man?

It may be that *homo intellectualis* will remain wider and *homo psychicus* will remain deeper in heart.

*

Please do not confuse the higher knowledge and mental knowledge. The intellectual man will be able to give a wider and more orderly expression to what higher knowledge he gets than the *homo psychicus*; but it does not follow he will have more of it. He will have that only if he rises to an equal width and plasticity and comprehensiveness of the higher knowledge planes. In that case he will replace his mental by his above-mental capacity. But for many intellectuals, so-called, their intellectuality may be a stumbling block as they bind themselves with mental conceptions or stifle the psychic fire under the heavy weight of rational thought. On the other hand I have seen comparatively uneducated people expressing higher knowledge with an astonishing fullness and depth and accuracy which the stumbling movements of their brain could never have allowed one to suppose possible. Therefore why fix beforehand by the mind what will or will not be possible when the Above-mind reigns? What the mind conceives as "must be" need not be the measure of the "will be". Such and such a *homo intellectualis* may turn out to be a more fervent God-lover than the effervescent emotional man; such and such an emotionalist may receive and express a wider knowledge than his intellect or even the intellect of the intellectual man could have harboured or organised. Let us not bind the phenomena of the higher consciousness by the possibilities and probabilities of a lower plane.

*

An unintellectual mind cannot bring down the Knowledge? What then about Ramakrishna? Do you mean to say that the majority of the sadhaks here who have not learned logic and are ignorant of philosophy will never get Knowledge?

*

Ramakrishna was an uneducated, nonintellectual man, yet his expression of knowledge was so perfect that the biggest intellects bowed down before it.

Chapter Three

Mental Difficulties and the Need of Quietude

The Activity of the Mind

This [*restless thinking*] is what we call the activity of the mind, which always comes in the way of the concentration and tries to create doubt and dispersion of the energies. It can be got rid of in two ways, by rejecting it and pushing it out, till it remains as an outside force only — by bringing down the higher peace and light into the physical mind.

*

It is the Light or the Force which comes from beyond the mind that keeps the mind truly concentrated. Otherwise the mind is naturally restless, unfixed, constantly changing from one thing to another.

*

Then for the tumultuous activity of the mind which prevents your concentration. But that or else a more tiresome obstinate grinding mechanical activity is always the difficulty when one tries to concentrate and it takes a long time to get the better of it. That or the habit of sleep which prevents either the waking concentration or the conscious samadhi or the absorbed and all-excluding trance which are the three forms that Yogic concentration takes. But it is surely ignorance of Yoga, its processes and its difficulties that makes you feel desperate and pronounce yourself unfit for ever because of this quite ordinary obstacle. The insistence of the ordinary mind and its wrong reasonings, sentiments and judgments, the random activity of the thinking mind in concentration or its mechanical activity, the slowness of response to the veiled or the initial touch are the ordinary

obstacles the mind imposes just as pride, ambition, vanity, sex, greed, grasping of things for one's own ego are the difficulties and obstacles offered by the vital. As the vital difficulties can be fought down and conquered, so can the mental. Only one has to see that these are the inevitable obstacles and neither cling to them nor be terrified or overwhelmed because they are there. One has to persevere till one can stand back from the mind as from the vital and feel the deeper and larger mental and vital Purushas within one which are capable of silence, capable of a straight receptivity of the true Word and Force as of the true silence. If the nature takes the way of fighting down the difficulties first, then the first half of the way is long and tedious and the complaint of the want of the response of the Divine arises. But really the Divine is there all the time, working behind the veil as well as waiting for the recognition of his response and for the response to the response to be possible.

*

If the thoughts are not regarded as one's own, it should become possible to look at them from a silent mind, detached and separate from the thoughts.

*

It is more difficult to separate oneself from the mind when it is active than from the body. It is quite possible however for one part of the mind to stand back and remember the Mother and receive her presence and the force while the other is busy with the work. Meanwhile what you are doing is the right way. Remember always that whatever the difficulties the Mother's love is with you and will lead you through.

Imaginations

The first necessity is not to allow yourself to be upset by this difficulty [*of a restless mind full of imaginations*]. It is one that often occurs, for these imaginations come easily to the human mind, but they can be got rid of in time, and even in a comparatively

short time if one faces them with calm resolution, detachment and patience. It is simply a habit that has taken hold of the mind — it can be dissolved and cease to recur.

It will help if you can cease to regard them as creations of your own mind — they are not, they are foreign matter thrown on it from outside. The physical mind which they attack has to learn to see and feel them as something foreign and refuse to accept them. Then they will go. For that you will receive my help and the Mother's. Keep yourself inwardly confident and open, all will be done.

*

The mind does not record things as they are, but as they appear to it. It catches parts, omits others; afterwards the memory and imagination mix together and make a quite different representation of it.

Confusion

The mind has to be remoulded and changed, but in a definite way, becoming more and more full of the Light and Truth. In that way it will begin to take on a luminous consistency and become “stronger and stronger till it is dependable”. A mere confused instability is not the right way. When the confusion comes, you should remain quiet, reject it and call in the Mother's light and force.

*

Who does not feel the confusion or ignorance somewhere in himself so long as the full light and the true force have not come? Your mistake is to be always thinking about the confusion and struggling with it, dwelling on it, magnifying it by thinking about it, treating it as if it were the only thing real and true. When you feel the force, turn to the force and let it act — it is that force and not you or your brooding and struggles that can get rid of the confusion and darkness. What is the use of examining whether your faith and confidence are of the “true” kind or not? To feel

the force, be quiet, let it act is all that is needed.

*

If you can stand back from all this [*mental commotion*] and observe calmly and clearly and precisely, this confusion of voices ought to stop.¹ It is only a part of the mind that is like that. But you get absorbed by this part and then it looks as if it were the whole mind that is confused. If you stand back from it and observe it with your *real* mind, then this small part will lose its power to confuse.

Worry

It is simply the habit of the mind when troubles come to worry about them. You must train your mind to remain calm and equal when troubles come—to do the thing that has to be done and rely on the Divine Power.

Hastiness

In the mind there is always a certain haste to seize quickly at what is presented to it as the highest Truth. That is unavoidable, but the more one is still in mind, the less this will distort things.

*

The attempt of the mind and vital to seize on the experience is always one of the chief obstacles.

*

It [*impulsive action*] is not any weakness of the will or the result of passivity, but an overhaste of decision upon a mental impulse. That is the usual movement of the mind—and it is sometimes the fruit of a certain kind of sattwic zeal. But owing to the haste there is not sufficient time taken to see the opposite side, the defects of the decision taken, or the possible objection that

¹ *The correspondent kept hearing the voices of persons who shouted abuses at him.*
—Ed.

might be made. Peace is the basis, but into it must come the action of a certain Light from above which shows each thing in its right proportions as a whole—for the mind at its best is incomplete and usually one-sided in its perceptions without the guidance of such a higher Light.

*

It is necessary to curb the mind's impatience a little. Knowledge is progressive—if it tries to leap up to the top at once, it may make a hasty construction which it will have afterwards to undo. The knowledge and experience must come by degrees and step by step.

Slowness

It is as you say and there is a certain element of inertia in it; the slowness of the mind and the nature to seize something new to it, the non-distinction between what is true and to be held and what is not true and not to be held, is due to a certain absence of quickness of movement in the being. But each human quality has its advantages and disadvantages. A quick mind is often unstable—it catches but does not keep; or it catches but only superficially and thinks it has got everything when it has got only a little and not enough. A slow mind that takes slowly but holds on to what it has got, can be slow but sure in its movement. The disadvantage of it is obstinacy, unwillingness to admit what it should receive, unwillingness to let go what is mistaken. Its advantage is steadiness, a firm hold when it gets the right thing. Therefore you should not mind if it takes long to absorb and hold the new consciousness—as a matter of fact, to hold takes long with everybody. Once you have got it well established, your nature is likely to hold it firmly. As for the lack of discrimination, that is only in the physical and lower vital mind—within you there is something that can discriminate, the psychic. The only thing is to get it out and keep it in front. When you had the psychic state or rather a touch of it from time to time, you saw things very clearly. When the psychic state fixes

itself, that discrimination also will become a part of the nature.

Opposing Points of View

Don't accept and hug and dandle these [*conflicting*] ideas. Every-body has thoughts opposing each other—it is the very nature of mind—one has to draw back from all that and fix on the straight things alone that lead to the Divine. The rest one must treat as external rubbish.

*

Many things are bad only in the way people look at them. Things which you consider all right, other people call bad; what you think to be bad, others find quite natural.

*

As for facts each mind always arranges them in its own way. It is a well-known phenomenon which psychologists constantly emphasise that each mind arranges facts according to its own impressions, predilections, convenience and, while this may be partly done with a conscious twist, conscious omissions and additions, it is quite or as often and more often done without any wilful intentions and by a sort of subconscious selection in the mental hinterland. That is why no three witnesses of an incident can give the same account of it—unless of course they have talked it over together—each tells a different story.

Silliness

People are exceedingly silly—but I suppose they can't help themselves. The more I observe humanity, the more that forces itself upon me—the abysses of silliness of which its mind is capable.

Analysis and Dissection

What the Mother spoke of was not self-analysis nor dissection.

Analysis and dissection are mental things which can deal with the inanimate or make the live dead—they are not spiritual methods. What the Mother spoke of was not analysis, but a seeing of oneself and of all the living movements of the being and the nature, a vivid observation of the personalities and forces that move on the stage of our being, their motives, their impulses, their potentialities—an observation quite as interesting as the seeing and understanding of a drama or a novel—a living vision and perception of how things are done in us which brings also a living mastery over this inner universe. Such things become dry only when one deals with them with the analytic and rationalistic mind, not when one deals with them thus seemingly and intuitively as a movement of life. If you had that observation (from the inner spiritual, not the outer intellectual and ethical viewpoint), then it would be comparatively easy for you to get out of your difficulties; for instance you would find at once where this irrational impulse to flee away came from and it would not have any hold upon you. Of course, all that can only be done to the best effect when you stand back from the play of your nature and become the Witness-Control or the Spectator-Actor-Manager. But that is what happens when you take this kind of self-seeing posture.

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You stick to your intellectual-ethical version of the inner self-vision? Dry? policeman? criminal? Great Lord! If it were that, it would cease to be self-vision at all—for in the true self-vision there is no policemanship and no criminaldom at all. All that belongs to the intellectual-ethical virtue-and-sin dodge which is only a mental construction of practical value for the outward life but not a truth of real inner values. In the true self-vision we see only harmonies and disharmonies and set the wrong notes right and replace them by the true notes. But I say that for the sake of truth, not to persuade you to start the self-vision effort; for if you did with these ideas of it, you would inevitably start it on the policeman basis and get into trouble. Besides, evidently, you prefer in the Yoga to be the piano and not the pianist, which

is all right but involves total self-giving and the intervention of the supreme musician and harmonist. May it be so.

I am glad to know that your vital has been frightened into acquiescence in self-giving — even if only by the imaginary horror of being obliged to become the policeman of yourself. But to explain why these contradictions existed in you one has to have recourse to this very business of harmonies and disharmonies and the inner knowledge. You were in fact a piano played on by several pianists at a time each with his own different musical piece to play! In plain words and without images, every man is full of these contradictions because he is one person, no doubt, but made up of different personalities — the perception of multiple personality is becoming well-known to psychologists now — who very commonly disagree with each other. So long as one does not aim at unity in a single dominant intention, like that of seeking and self-dedication to the Divine, they get on somehow together, alternating or quarrelling or muddling through or else one taking the lead and compelling the others to take a minor part — but once you try to unite them in one aim, then the trouble becomes evident. One element wanted the Divine from the first, another wanted music, literature, poetry, a third wanted life at its best, a fourth wanted life — well, not at its best. Finally there was another element which wanted life not at all, but was rather disgusted with it and wanted either a better (diviner) life or something better than life. It was this element evidently that created the *vairāgya* and in the struggle between that and the life-partisans, a black element stole in (not one of the personalities, but a formation, a dark intrusion from outside), which wanted to turn the whole thing into a drama or tragedy of despair — despair of life but despair of the Divine also. That has to be rejected, the rest changed and harmonised. That is the only true explanation of the whole difficulty in your nature.

The Need of Quietude

There is no possibility of doing this Yoga, if one cannot give himself to the Divine Power and trust to its workings. If one

lives only in the mind and its questioning and ideas, it is not possible. The test of capacity is to be able to quiet the mind, to feel a greater Divine Power at work in one, the Power of the Mother, and to be able to trust to it and aid its workings by the rejection of all that contradicts them in the nature.

*

To quiet your mind means to stop thinking about the things that disturb you and let the peace and power manifest themselves and work. The “living inside” will come of itself in that case—that is to say, you will feel the inner peace and the consciousness that comes with it more and more as yourself and all else as something outer and superficial.

*

How can the mind find out or decide what is the right thing to do for your sadhana? The more it is active in that way, the more confusion there will be. In sadhana the mind has to be quiet, fixed in aspiration towards the Divine—the true experience and change will come in the quietude of the mind from within and from above.

*

It is also a mistake to take quietude for callousness. If you are no longer disturbed by what people say or do, then that is a great progress. If you have no abhiman against the Mother, that also is surely very desirable. Abhiman, disturbance etc. may be signs of life, but of a vital, not of the inner life. They must quiet down and give room for the inner life. At first the result may be a neutral quiet, but one has often to pass through that to arrive at a more positive new consciousness. When the mind thus falls quiet the thoughts of the past, all sorts of repetitive or mechanical thoughts begin to rise up—these come from the physical mind or the subconscious. One has to refuse them and let them pass away, aspiring for the complete mental quietude in which the new consciousness can reveal itself little by little. Remain firm and quiet with the right will in you and let the

Force do its work. That will may not bear recognisable fruit at once, but adhere to it and the fruit will come.

*

You should not belittle the inner quietness by calling it a foolish kind of quietness — quietness in itself, knowing or unknowing, is to be valued, for it means that even in the midst of confusion a basis has still been kept. The understanding is at present covered over by a remnant of the old ignorance and confusion, but if a fundamental quietude is maintained or remains of itself, that will make it easier for this recurrence to pass.

As for the thought of your mother, it is always a symbol in your consciousness of the old nature and the old life — that is why it gets force when the confusion comes.

Remain firm and the cloud will pass and the true consciousness reassert itself with more firmness and vigour.

*

Not to allow the mind to bubble up with all sorts of ideas and feelings etc. but to remain quiet and learn to think and feel only what is true and right.²

² The correspondent asked Sri Aurobindo how to "meet things without any superficial and unnecessary reaction". — Ed.

Chapter Four

The Physical Mind and Sadhana

The Activity of the Physical Mind

Activity of the physical mind is not a new thing that needs to take root. It has been there very well rooted since you began your human evolution in the primaeval forests.

*

What you have now seen and describe in your letter is the ordinary activity of the physical mind which is full of ordinary habitual and constantly recurrent thoughts and is always busy with external objects and activities. What used to trouble you before was the vital mind which is different,—for that is always occupied with emotions, passions, desires, reactions of all kinds to the contacts of life and the behaviour of others. The physical mind also can be responsive to these things but in a different way — its nature is less that of desire than of habitual activity, small common interests, pains and pleasures. If one tries to control or suppress it, it becomes more active.

To deal with this mind two things are necessary, (1) not so much to try to control or fight with or suppress it as to stand back from it: one looks at it and sees what it is but refuses to follow its thoughts or run about among the objects it pursues, remaining at the back of the mind quiet and separate; (2) to practise quietude and concentration in this separateness, until the habit of quiet takes hold of the physical mind and replaces the habit of these small activities. This of course takes time and can only come by practice. What you propose to do is therefore the right thing.

*

The mechanical movements are always more difficult to stop by the mental will, because they do not in the least depend

upon reason or any mental justification but are founded upon association or else a mere mechanical memory and habit.

*

This mechanical putting out of the thoughts happens to everybody at all times and it is especially strong in the physical mind — one has not to be upset by it, but go on quietly drawing the mind in, for if one does that, the obstacle after a time will diminish and one can then remain inside with the greater part of the consciousness, even if there are some wandering thoughts. So long as there is interest in outward things this can only be done for short periods,—but if there is not any strong interest, then the habit becomes purely mechanical and it can be got over in a shorter time. Its entire disappearance comes only when there is a complete silence in the being, but even before complete disappearance, one can arrive at a point when, in spite of it, one can go inside at will and remain there.

*

This going out of the mind and this siege of thoughts is a difficulty which everybody has to meet for a time or often when he wants to concentrate within. You should not allow it to depress you or make you hopeless or lead you to think that there is some special disability in you from which others do not suffer. One has to keep one's poise, recognise it as an inherent difficulty of the nature of mind (physical mind), one which has to be overcome and will be overcome in time. In that way one feels the pressure of these obstacles less and gets over it sooner than if one gets distressed or upset by them or takes them for a sign of incapacity for the Yoga.

*

It is the usual fit and the same round of thoughts mechanically repeated that you always get in these fits. These thoughts have no light in them and no truth, for the physical mind which engenders this routine wheel of suggestions is shut up in surface appearances and knows nothing of deeper truth or the things of

the spirit. There is plenty of “increment”, but with this superficial part of the physical mind it is not likely or possible that you can see it. Your impression of the dwindling light is also an impression of this mind natural to it especially in its periods of darkness; for that matter when the periods of darkness come to any sadhak they always seem darker than before; that is the nature of the darkness, to give that impression always. It is also quite according to the rule of these reactions that it should have come immediately after a considerable progress in bhakti and the will to surrender in the inner being—for it comes from the spirit of darkness which attacks the sadhak whenever it can, and that spirit resents fiercely all progress made and hates the very idea of progress and its whole policy is to convince him by its attacks and suggestions that he has made none or that what progress he has made is after all null and inconclusive.

The laws of this world as it is are the laws of the Ignorance and the Divine in the world maintains them so long as there is the Ignorance—if He did not, the universe would crumble to pieces, *utsideyur ime lokāḥ*, as the Gita puts it. There are also, very naturally, conditions for getting out of the Ignorance into the Light. One of them is that the mind of the sadhak should cooperate with the Truth and that his will should cooperate with the Divine Power which, however slow its action may seem to the vital or to the physical mind, is uplifting the nature towards the Light. When that cooperation is complete, then the progress can be rapid enough; but the sadhak should not grudge the time and labour needed to make that cooperation fully possible to the blindness and weakness of human nature and effective.

All the call for faith, sincerity, surrender is only an invitation to make that cooperation more easily possible. If the physical mind ceases to judge all things including those that it does not know or are beyond it, like the deeper things of the spirit, then it becomes easier for it to receive the Light and know by illumination and experience the things that it does not yet know. If the mental and vital will place themselves in the Divine Hand without reservation, then it is easier for the Power to work and produce “tangible” effects. If there is resistance, then it is natural

that it should take more time and the work should be done from within or as it might appear underground so as to prepare the nature and undermine the resistance. It seems to me that the demand for patience is not so terribly unreasonable.

*

It [*perfection of the physical mind*] can come only by farther development and the activity of another kind of knowledge communicating itself to the physical and taking up gradually the functions of the mind in all its parts.

The Unsteadiness of the Physical Mind

The unsteadiness you speak of is the nature of the human physical mind—almost everybody has it, for the physical mind goes after all sorts of outward things. To fix the consciousness within, to keep it concentrated on the Divine alone is a great difficulty for all, it is what makes sadhana a thing for which long time and a slow development of the consciousness is usually necessary, at first at any rate. So that need not discourage you. In your inner vital there is plenty of strong will and deep down in your psychic there is the true aspiration and love which come up when the psychic is active and will eventually possess the whole nature.

*

It is quite natural that the unsteadiness of the physical mind should interfere with the settling of full and constant quietude and faith—it always does with everybody, but that does not mean that this quietude and faith will not or cannot settle in the nature. All that I meant was that you should try to get a constant will for that quietude, so that when the restlessness or unsteadiness come across, your will to quiet might meet it or soon reappear and dispel the disturbance. That would make the elimination of the restlessness or impatience easier; but in any case the Mother's force is there working behind the variations of the surface consciousness and it will bring you through them.

The experiences you had were renewed glimpses of the

psychic working that is going on all the time even when there is no sign of it on the surface. The golden sword was the sword of Truth which will destroy the difficulties.

*

Of course it is difficult to be withdrawn inwardly, difficult especially for the physical mind and consciousness with which you are now in contact. But that is not peculiar to you,—as in the other things, it is a general difficulty of human nature. The instability of which you speak is also a usual characteristic of the external mind and vital. But you have the capacity to do it as recent experiences have shown; the capacity will grow, for as the psychic develops that develops and the inability or instability of the physical consciousness becomes less pressing.

*

Diabetes or any other physical illness cannot be a cause of absence of concentration. There is always a difficulty in the beginning to concentrate for more than a short time because it is contrary to the habits of the physical mind. Perseverance is necessary. At the same time there should be a call for the help of the Divine Power above the mind; for if one can open to that, the process can be more rapid.

The Obscurity of the Physical Mind

What you felt was the obscurity of the external physical mind and nature (the centre in the throat is the centre of this external mind). So long as that is there the external nature and action remain as they always were and there is no correspondence between it and the inner spiritual consciousness and experience. This cannot disappear by a single experience; a steady will to change is necessary.

*

It means that the outer physical mind has a certain obscurity in it which impedes the knowledge from coming out. This obscurity

is universal in the external physical mind—you feel it more just now because it is in the physical consciousness that the opposition is now centred. It will pass as soon as the Force can descend through the mind and vital and act directly on the physical nature.

*

But that is a common experience—it is extraordinary how long it takes for the simple and right thing to do to dawn on the physical mind.¹

*

It is the nature of the physical mind not to believe or accept anything that is supraphysical unless it is enlightened and compelled by the light to do it. Do not identify yourself with this mind, do not consider it as yourself but only as an obscure functioning of Nature. Call down the light into it until it is compelled to believe.

Other Problems of the Physical Mind

Yes, it [*the physical mind*] is closely connected with the brain functioning. All these things—irritation, grief, fear etc. etc.—can become entirely discharged of thought content and felt simply as a physical sensation in the cells, not accepted by the thought (even in the physical mind), not shared in by the emotional being—a wave brought from outside into the material body consciousness.

*

These small things of the physical mind [*such as being disturbed by the defects of others*] are such as everybody has and they will fall off when the truer wider consciousness comes out. You have the understanding in your mind, but these things persist because they really belong to the smaller vital part and when

¹ *The correspondent wrote that it took him a long time to figure out the best place to put the cot in his room.—Ed.*

that part widens, then they will no longer be able to recur. One can discourage them by keeping certain ideas in mind, such as that the things which vex you belong to the nature and can go only with the change of the nature, that one has to do the work well oneself but not be troubled by the defects of others in their work, that a quiet inner will for their doing right is more effective than getting vexed and disturbed by their lapses. But fundamentally it is by the widened consciousness in your mind and vital and physical that you will be quite freed from these small reactions. You have only to continue with the Mother's Force working in you and these things will smooth themselves out hereafter.

*

These small movements [*such as useless talking*] are the most difficult of all to change owing to their very smallness and the habit of frequent indulgence as natural and trifling everyday movements of life. The best thing to do is to mass the force and light and peace in the mind and higher vital until they can occupy the physical mind even — then through the physical mind, which usually supports more or less these movements, they can be worked on with more success.

*

It [*chasing sparrows out of a garden because they made it dirty*] was I suppose an idea that came through the physical mind, suggesting the following of a physical utility only and ignoring all other perceptions and motives. You must be on your guard against the ideas and suggestions of this physical mind and accept none without discrimination and subjection to a higher light.

*

The confusion and inertia of which you speak must be in the physical mind which has not yet the Light. It does not matter very much if you keep in touch with the consciousness of the Force working upon you; for such periods of inertia in one part or another, especially in the physical consciousness, come to

everybody. If you keep and deepen the quietude and become continuously conscious of the Force, it will itself work these defective states and movements out of the being in time. All depends on that, increasing quietude, increasing consciousness of the Force at work in you.

*

One is either conscious of the power or peace or other force (light, ananda, knowledge, movements of the divine working) or, if not conscious of that, is aware of the results — either of these things is sufficient to show that one is open. To feel the grace descending and yet doubt whether it is not a vital imagination is a folly of the physical mind; a spiritual experience must be accepted as it is; if one questions at every moment whether an experience is an experience or Grace is grace or peace is peace or light is light, one will spend all the time in these useless and fantastic doubts instead of making a quiet and natural progress.

*

It is the physical mind that would like everything made easy.

The Physical Mind and the Lower Vital

Formerly the mental will and the higher vital and the psychic were active, so their consent was sufficient for the lower vital to be kept down or to be influenced. But now it is the physical mind that is active in you and the physical mind gives a value and therefore a power to the lower vital which it did not have before.

*

What you describe, the insistence of the physical mind and the insistence of the small desire vital, are indeed the two things that still obstruct the sadhana. The mind must give up its insistence on its own ideas and the vital the insistence on satisfying its desires for the full quietude to come and for the permanent opening of the inner experience to realise itself. We shall put our

Force persistently for the removal of these two difficulties till it is done.

*

No, there is a limit to the resistance [*of the physical mind and the lower vital*]. At any rate a time comes when the fundamental resistance is broken for good and there is only left a dealing with details which is not troublesome.

The Physical Mind and the Psychic

It [*the psychic*] can have a very great influence [*on the physical mind*] by giving it the right attitude and the right way of looking at things so that it supports the emotional being in its aspiration, love and surrender and itself gets interest, faith and insight in the inner truth of things instead of seeing only their outer aspects and following false inferences and appearances. It also helps it to get rid of the narrowness and doubt which are the chief defects of the physical mind.

*

When the physical mind is disturbed by the vital, it is not easily convinced because its reasoning is supplied to it by the vital which thinks according to its own desires and feelings—unless a great clarity from the psychic or from the thinking mind above comes to the rescue.

It is the psychic consciousness, not perfect but still well developed, that supports some of those whom you mention and makes it easy for them to go on in faith—but it is only after much vital difficulty that it developed in them,—and there is no reason why that should not happen speedily in you also.

*

The psychic if it gets hold of them [*the vital physical and the physical mind*] can change completely their will and outlook and orientation and open them to the true perception of things and right impulse. The mind and higher vital can help much towards that.

The Physical Mind and Peace and Silence

There is always a difficulty in keeping the physical mind within or silent, because it has been its nature to occupy itself with outward things and it finds a difficulty in accustoming itself to a contrary movement. You must not be depressed by that, but persist in the aspiration and will till it is done. The Mother's Force will be there to bring it about as soon as possible.

*

You have only to allow the consciousness to develop — at first there will be mistakes as well as true ideas, but when there is sufficient development and the Mother's force and knowledge directly working in you, things will become more and more right — not only so, but you will have the certitude. At present there is still too much of the old physical mind for perceptions to be always right. As the Peace and Force take direct and complete possession of the physical consciousness, this will change and the consciousness develop more surely and with a greater light.

*

To get rid of the random thoughts of the surface physical mind is not easy. It is sometimes done by a sudden miracle, as in my own case, but that is rare. Some get it done by a slow process of concentration, but that may take a very long time. It is easier to have a quiet mind with things that come in passing on the surface, as people pass in the street, and one is free to attend to them or not — that is to say, there develops a sort of double mind, one inner silent and concentrated when it pleases to be so, a quiet witness when it chooses to see thoughts and things, — the other meant for surface dynamism. It is probable in your case that this will come as soon as these descents of peace, intensity or Ananda get strong enough to occupy the whole system.

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If the peace and silence continue to come down, they usually become so intense as to seize the physical mind also after a time.

Chapter Five

Thought and Knowledge

Thoughts Come from Outside

First of all, these thought-waves, thought-seeds or thought-forms or whatever they are, are of different values and come from different planes of consciousness. Even the same thought-substance can take higher or lower vibrations according to the plane of consciousness through which the thoughts come in (e.g., thinking mind, vital mind, physical mind, subconscious mind) or the power of consciousness which catches them and pushes them into one man or another. Moreover there is a stuff of mind in each man and the incoming thought uses that for shaping itself or translating itself (transcribing we usually call it), but the stuff is finer or coarser, stronger or weaker etc. etc. in one mind than in another. Also there is a mind-energy actual or potential in each which differs and this mind-energy in its recipience of the thought can be luminous or obscure, sattwic, rajasic or tamasic with consequences that vary in each case.

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There is no difficulty about explaining [*how a thought rejected by one person gets picked up by another*]. You are as naive and ignorant as a newborn lamb. That is the way things come, only one does not notice. Thoughts, ideas, happy inventions etc. etc. are always wandering about (in thought waves or otherwise) seeking a mind that may embody them. One mind takes, looks, rejects — another takes, looks, accepts. Two different minds catch the same thought-form or thought-wave, but the mental activities being different make different results out of them. Or it comes to one and he does nothing, then it walks off, crying “O this unready animal!” and goes to another who promptly annexes it and it settles into expression with a joyous bubble of inspiration, illumination or enthusiasm of original discovery or

creation and the recipient cries proudly, "I, I have done this." Ego, sir! ego! You are the recipient, the conditioning medium, if you like — nothing more.

*

That is the silliness of the mind. Why should it be impossible to fill up a vacancy?¹ It is easier for things to come into an empty space than into a full one. The error comes from thinking that your thoughts are your own and that you are their maker and if you don't create thoughts (i.e. think), there will be none. A little observation ought to show that you are not manufacturing your own thoughts, but rather thoughts occur in you. Thoughts are born, not made—like poets, according to the proverb. Of course, there is a sort of labour and effort when you try to produce or else to think on a certain subject, but that is a concentration for making thoughts come up, come in, come down, as the case may be, and fit themselves together. The idea that you are shaping the thoughts or fitting them together is an egoistic delusion. They are doing it themselves, or Nature is doing it for you, only under a certain compulsion; you have to beat her often in order to make her do it, and the beating is not always successful. But the mind or nature or mental energy — whatever you like to call it — does this in a certain way and carries on with a certain order of thoughts, haphazard intelligentialities (excuse the barbarism) or asininites, rigidly ordered or imperfectly ordered intellectualities, logical sequences and logical inconsequences, etc. etc. How the devil is an intuition to get in in the midst of that waltzing and colliding crowd? It does sometimes,—in some minds often intuitions do come in,—but immediately the ordinary thoughts surround it and eat it up alive, and then with some fragment of the murdered intuition shining through their non-intuitive stomachs they look up smiling at you and say, "I am an intuition, sir." But they are only intellect, intelligence or ordinary thought with part of

¹ *The correspondent said that his mind found it hard to believe that a vacancy in the mind could suddenly be filled with an intuition without one's thinking about it.—Ed.*

a dismembered and therefore misleading intuition inside them. Now in a vacant mind, vacant but not inert (that is important), intuitions have a chance of getting in alive and whole. But don't run away with the idea that all that comes into an empty mind, even a clear or luminous empty mind, will be intuitive. Anything, any blessed kind of idea, can come in. One has to be vigilant and examine the credentials of the visitor. In other words, the mental being must be there, silent but vigilant, impartial but discriminating. That is, however, when you are in search of truth. For poetry so much is not necessary. There it is only the poetic quality of the visitor that has to be scrutinised and that can be done after he has left his packet — by results.

*

What you perceive as suggestions or voices, are accepted and felt by people to be thoughts of their own mind. When one practises Yoga and observes the thoughts, one sees that they come from outside, from universal Nature, from the mental, vital or subtle physical worlds etc. The proper thing is then to stand back from these thoughts, voices or suggestions, to reject them or else control them, to make the mind free and quiet and open only to the divine light, force, knowledge and the presence of the Divine. Your mistake has been to allow free play to these thoughts, voices and suggestions instead of rejecting, silencing and controlling them. It is what you must now do. Aspire, get into contact with the Light and the true Force, reassert your will to reject these suggestions and voices. Do not take interest in these voices, keep the mind quiet.

*

All these thoughts and influences come really from outside, from universal Nature — they create formations in us or get habitual responses from the individual being. When they are rejected, they go back into the external universal Nature and if one becomes conscious, one can feel them coming from outside and trying to get a lodging inside again or reawaken the habitual response. One has to reject them persistently till no possibility of response

remains any longer. This is hastened much if a certain inner calm, purity and silence can be established from which these things fall away without being able to touch it.

*

What you say is true. The power to open is there in your mind and vital and psychic being, but this recurrence of the external thoughts and feelings is making a strong obstruction and a persistent rejection is needed in order to get rid of it. There are some difficulties in the nature that fall away rapidly by the repeated touch of the inner Force, but those which are obstinately recurrent, especially in the physical field, need an equal persistence in the rejection before they will consent to fall away from the nature.

Control of One's Thoughts

To reject doubts means control of one's thoughts — very certainly so. But the control of one's thoughts is as necessary as the control of one's vital desires and passions or the control of the movements of one's body — for the Yoga, and not for the Yoga only. One cannot be a fully developed mental being even, if one has not a control of the thoughts, is not their observer, judge, master, — the mental Purusha, *manomaya puruṣa*, *śakṣī*, *anumantā*, *iśvara*. It is no more proper for the mental being to be the tennis ball of unruly and uncontrollable thoughts than to be a rudderless ship in the storm of the desires and passions or a slave of either the inertia or the impulses of the body. I know it is more difficult because man being primarily a creature of mental Prakriti identifies himself with the movements of his mind and cannot at once dissociate himself and stand free from the swirl and eddies of the mind whirlpool. It is comparatively easy for him to put a control on his body, at least a certain part of its movements; it is less easy but still very possible after a struggle to put a mental control on his vital impulsions and desires; but to sit, like the Tantrik Yogi on the river, above the whirlpool of his thoughts is less facile. Nevertheless it can be done; all developed

mental men, those who get beyond the average, have in one way or other or at least at certain times and for certain purposes to separate the two parts of the mind, the active part which is a factory of thoughts and the quiet masterful part which is at once a Witness and a Will, observing them, judging, rejecting, eliminating, accepting, ordering corrections and changes, the Master in the House of Mind, capable of self-empire, *svārājya*.

The Yogi goes still farther; he is not only a master there, but even while in mind in a way, he gets out of it, as it were, and stands above or quite back from it and free. For him the image of the factory of thoughts is no longer quite valid; for he sees that thoughts come from outside, from the universal Mind or universal Nature, sometimes formed and distinct, sometimes unformed and then they are given shape somewhere in us. The principal business of our mind is either a response of acceptance or refusal to these thought-waves (as also vital waves, subtle physical energy waves) or this giving a personal-mental form to thought-stuff (or vital movements) from the environing Nature-Force. It was my great debt to Lele that he showed me this. "Sit in meditation," he said, "but do not think, look only at your mind; you will see thoughts *coming into it*; before they can enter throw them away from you till your mind is capable of entire silence." I had never heard before of thoughts coming visibly into the mind from outside, but I did not think of either questioning the truth or the possibility, I simply sat down and did it. In a moment my mind became silent as a windless air on a high mountain summit and then I saw a thought and then another thought coming in a concrete way from outside; I flung them away before they could enter and take hold of the brain and in three days I was free. From that moment, in principle, the mental being in me became a free Intelligence, a universal Mind, not limited to the narrow circle of personal thought or a labourer in a thought-factory, but a receiver of knowledge from all the hundred realms of being and free too to choose what it willed in this vast sight-empire and thought-empire.

I mention this only to emphasise that the possibilities of the mental being are not limited and that it can be the free Witness

and Master in its own house. It is not to say that everybody can do it in the way I did and with the same rapidity of the decisive movement (for of course the later fullest development of this new untrammelled mental Power took time, many years); but a progressive freedom and mastery over one's mind is perfectly within the possibilities of anyone who has the faith and will to undertake it.

*

Assuredly, rejection means control of one's thoughts, and why should not one be master of one's own mind and thoughts and not only master of one's vital passions and bodily movements? If it is the right thing to control the body and not allow it to make a stupid, wrong or injurious movement, if it is the right thing to reject from the vital an ignorant passion or low desire, it must be equally the right thing to reject from the mind a thought that ought not to be there or that for good reasons one does not want to be there. As for possibility, I suppose when a thought that is manifestly stupid or false presents itself to the mind one can and usually does reject and throw it out and bid it not recur again. If one can do that with a given thought, it follows that one can do it with any thoughts that need for any reason to be excluded. If a scientist goes into his laboratory to work out a problem, he shuts out from his mind for the time being all thoughts of his wife, his family or his financial affairs, and if they come he repels them and says, "This is not your time." If he has resolved to carry out a line of investigation to the end or a method of invention and, if doubts assail him, he will certainly throw them aside and say, "I mean to see this through to the end and till I have reached the end, I have no intention of listening to you." At every step a man of any mental calibre has to exercise some power over his mind, otherwise he would be as much in a state of restless mental confusion or of mechanical incoherence as one who had no control over his impulses and desires.

*

To do anything by mental control is always difficult, when what

is attempted runs contrary to the trend of human nature or of the personal nature. A strong will patiently and perseveringly turned towards its object can effect a change, but usually it takes a long time and the success at the beginning may be only partial and chequered by many failures.

To turn all actions automatically into worship cannot be done by thought control only; there must be a strong aspiration in the heart which will bring about some realisation or feeling of the presence of the One to whom worship is offered. The bhakta does not rely on his own effort alone, but on the grace and power of the Divine whom he adores.

*

What do you mean by control of the mind? Control of the thoughts or control of the passions and the sense impulses? The latter can be controlled by the mind (not abolished), if the will in the mind is strong enough. But this mental control is not Yoga.

Yogic control can come in one of two ways or by their combination. (1) To separate the witness Soul in you from the movements of the mental, vital and physical Prakriti to which these things belong, learn to look upon them and in the end to feel them as not yourself, not a part of the inner or true being but occurring on the surface, and to experience the inner being as the Purusha eternally calm, silent and immovable. This separation once done, learn by *abhyāsa* to give the effective command of the Purusha to the movements of the Prakriti to cease — refusing the sanction to all that you wish to eliminate. The process is long and laborious and the final perfection can only come by resolute and persevering practice. (2) To open yourself to the Divine Power and give up all into its hands, yourself only rejecting and refusing sanction to all that you feel to be false and contrary to truth and purity in you.

This is as an answer to your difficulty, but I cannot direct you or give you any Sadhana, which I give only to those who are called from within to my way of Yoga and not for any limited object like the one you have in view.

*

It is not so easy to do mental work and do sadhana at the same time, for it is with the mind that the sadhana is done. If one gets back from the mind as well as the body and lives in the inner Purusha consciousness, then it is possible.

*

Detach yourself from it [*the habitual movement of the mind*] —make your mind external to you, something that you can observe as you observe things occurring in the street. So long as you do not do that, it is difficult to be the mind's master.

*

The control over the thoughts and the power of seeing the image of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo in the head are a very good beginning. The heat in the head is not fever, but the result of the action of the Force in the mental centres working to overcome the mental resistance which there always is in the human mind —heaviness sometimes comes as a result of the pressure of the Force—it passes away of itself usually when the mind receives freely the Force.

Thoughts and Words

This is a wrong psychology. Thoughts is quite possible without words. Children have thoughts, animals too—thoughts can take another form than words. Thought perceptions come first —language comes to express the perceptions and itself leads to fresh thoughts.

*

They [*ideas in the universal Mind*] take word form in the mind when they enter into it—unless they come from beings, not as mere idea-forces.

The Idea and What Lies Behind It

There is a power in the idea—a force of which the idea is a

shape. Again, behind the idea and force and word there is what is called the spirit,—a consciousness which generates the force.

*

The idea is not enough. It gives only a half-light — you must get to all the Truth that lies behind the idea and the object together. Being, consciousness, force, — that is the triple secret.

Thought and Knowledge

Thought is not the giver of Knowledge but the “mediator” between the Inconscient and the Superconscious. It compels the world born from the Inconscient to reach for a Knowledge other than the instinctive vital or merely empirical, for the Knowledge that itself exceeds thought; it calls for that superconscious Knowledge and prepares the consciousness here to receive it. It rises itself into the higher realms and even in disappearing into the supramental and Ananda levels is transformed into something that will bring down their powers into the silent Self which its cessation leaves behind it.

Knowledge and Ignorance

Knowledge is always better than ignorance. It makes things possible hereafter if not at the moment, while ignorance actively obstructs and misleads.

*

Who comes into the path of Yoga with full knowledge or even any knowledge? All are ignorant, it is only by Yoga itself that they get the knowledge.

*

Neither knowledge nor anything else is constant at first — and even when it is there one cannot expect it to be always active. That comes afterwards.

*

What is to be left out [*in expressing one's ideas*] is the ego. Limitation of knowledge will necessarily be there so long as there is not the fullest wideness from above; that does not matter.

*

Most people who have not knowledge are apt to be opinionated — they have their ideas and don't want them to be changed or their fixity disturbed.

Knowledge and the Divine Consciousness

Mental knowledge is of little use except sometimes as an introduction pointing towards the real knowledge which comes from a direct consciousness of things.

*

All consciousness comes from the one consciousness — knowledge is one aspect of the divine consciousness.

*

One must be conscious of all one's states and movements and the causes and influences that bring them about and conscious too of the Divine — the nearness, presence, power, peace, light, knowledge, love, Ananda of the Divine.

Mental Knowledge and Knowledge from Above

The knowledge of the mind and vital plane is no knowledge. Only from above can the true knowledge come.

*

No, these contacts with the violent vital forces do not bring knowledge — they rather stand in the way of true knowledge growing. The true knowledge comes from above, not from below. The knowledge from above is divine, the knowledge from

below is not divine, it is a confusion full of darkness and disturbance. When the knowledge from above comes, then there is light and you will then be able to see what is the true vital movement and the real harmony of the mind, vital and body. Do not allow these stormy conditions to take hold of you.

*

Is getting knowledge from above and getting it by the mind in its own capacity the same thing? If the mind is capable, then there is no need of knowledge from above, it can do the getting of knowledge by its own greatness.

*

The mind in its higher part is aware of being one with the Divine, in all ways, in all things — having that supreme knowledge, it is not disturbed by its own ignorance and impotence in its lower instrumental parts; it looks on all that with a smile and remains happy and luminous with the light of the supreme knowledge.

The consciousness of union with the Divine is for the spiritual seeker the supreme knowledge.

Knowledge and Mental Questions

To answer your question [*about how the divine consciousness acts in life*] I would have to speak in the terms of a consciousness to which the mind has no key and at the same time try to explain its relations to the lower consciousness in which things are now happening. What is the use of doing this? The mind will either understand nothing or misunderstand or think it has understood when really it has understood nothing.

Or I would have to make up a mental answer to the question which would not be the real thing, but just something to keep the questioning mind quiet.

The true way to enter into these things is to still the mind and open to the consciousness from which things are done. Then you would first have a direct experience of the way the divine consciousness acts on different planes and secondly a light of

knowledge about the experience. This is the only true way—all the rest is only words and sterile mental logic.

*

A thousand questions can be asked about anything whatsoever, but to answer would require a volume, and even then the mind would understand nothing. It is only by a growth in the consciousness itself that you can get some direct perception of these things. But for that the mind must be quiet and a direct feeling and intuition take its place.

*

So long as the outer mind is not quiet, it is impossible for intuition to develop. So if you want to go on asking intellectual questions about what is beyond the intellect until the intuition develops in spite of this activity, you will have to go on for ever.

*

When you get the true intuitive plane, there will be no need for instructions or questions as to how to do sadhana. The sadhana will do itself under the light of the intuition.

*

Your mind is too active. If it were more quiet and less questioning and argumentative and restlessly wanting to find devices it seems to me that there would be more chance of knowledge coming down and of intuitive, non-intellectual consciousness developing within you.

*

Out of one thousand mental questions and answers there are only one or two here and there that are really of any dynamic assistance—while a single inner response or a little growth of consciousness will do what those thousand questions and answers could not do. The Yoga does not proceed by *upadeśa* but by inner influence. To state your condition, experiences etc. and open to the help is far more important than question-

asking — especially the questions about why and how which your physical mind so persistently puts.

*

It is the physical mind that raises all these questions and cannot understand or give the right answer. The real knowledge and understanding can only come if you stop questioning with the small physical mind and allow a deeper and wider consciousness which is there within you to come out and grow. You would then get automatically the true answer and the true guidance. Your mistake is to attach so much importance to the external mind and its ideas and perceptions instead of concentrating on the growth of the inner consciousness.

*

Such [*mental*] questions should not be allowed to stop the flow [*of higher knowledge*]. Afterwards one can consider them and get the answer. The knowledge that comes is not necessarily complete or perfect in expression; but it must be allowed to come freely and amplifications or corrections can be made afterwards.

Understanding and the Higher Light

Get back to the true *feeling* of the Force and Peace — the understanding will grow with the growth of that feeling and experience. For with the Force and Peace comes always something of the Light and it is the Light illuminating the mind that brings the understanding. So long as you try to understand with the unilumined mind, mistakes and non-understanding are inevitable.

*

Yes, that is the point. The ordinary mind governed by the vital desires and its own mental formations cannot understand — it must fall quiet and allow the Peace and Force to work so as to bring another consciousness with the true Light in it. When that is done, these questionings and their reactions will have no place.

*

Yes, it is that [*faith that the Mother will enlighten one's mind*] that is the real necessity. It is not possible for the mind to understand fully and rightly till it is filled with the higher Light; but it can feel and believe in the Divine and that the way of the Divine is sure, and this faith itself will bring the first true understanding.

*

What you say is quite true. No personal effort can get these things done; that is why we tell you always to keep yourself quiet and let the peace and the force work. As for understanding, it is your physical mind that wants to understand, but the physical mind is incapable of understanding these things by itself—for it has no knowledge of them and no means of knowledge. Its standards also are quite different from the standards of the true knowledge. All the physical mind can do is to be quiet and allow the light to come into it, accepting it, not interposing its own ideas—then it will progressively get the knowledge. It can't get it in this way; it must surrender.

*

If one has faith and openness, that is enough [*to get the understanding one needs to practise the Yoga*]. Besides there are two kinds of understanding—understanding by the intellect and understanding in the consciousness. It is good to have the former if it is accurate, but it is not indispensable. Understanding by the consciousness comes if there is faith and openness, though it may come only gradually and through steps of experience. But I have seen people without education or intellectuality understand in this way perfectly well the course of the Yoga in themselves, while intellectual men make big mistakes—e.g. take a neutral mental quietude for the spiritual peace and refuse to come out of it in order to go farther.

Knowledge and the Psychic

It is not a mental knowledge that is necessary, but a psychic perception or a direct perception in the consciousness. A mental

knowledge can always be blinded by the tricks of the vital.

*

The one thing always is to let the Peace and Power work and not allow the mind to seek after things and get disturbed. All the values of the mind are constructions of ignorance—it is only when your psychic being comes forward that you have the true knowledge—for your psychic being knows.

Knowledge and Mental Silence

That [*incessant activity*] is always the difficulty with the mind. It must learn to be silent and let the knowledge come without trying to catch hold of it for its own play.

*

The turmoil of mental (intellectual) activity has also to be silenced like the vital activity of desire in order that the calm and peace may be complete. Knowledge has to come but from above. In this calm the ordinary mental activities like the ordinary vital activities become surface movements with which the silent inner self is not connected. It is the liberation necessary in order that the true knowledge and the true life activity may replace or transform the activities of the Ignorance.

*

The activity of mind is necessary so long as a higher activity cannot be reached; but if the spiritual consciousness becomes active with its direct power of perception, the mind must become more and more content and give place to spiritual perception, psychic intimations and discrimination, intuitions, a deeper knowledge from within, a higher knowledge from above.

*

The thinking mind has to learn how to be entirely silent. It is only then that true knowledge can come.

*

Of course [*a silent mind is the result of Yoga*]; the ordinary mind is never silent.

*

No, certainly not [*thinkers and philosophers do not have a silent mind*]. It is the active mind they have; only, of course, they concentrate, so the common incoherent mentalising stops and the thoughts that rise or enter and shape themselves are coherently restricted to the subject or activity in hand. But that is quite a different matter from the whole mind falling silent.

*

Ordinary human minds, Europeans especially, are accustomed to regard thought as indispensable and as the highest thing — so they are alarmed at silence. X when he was here asked for Yoga. I told him how to make his mind silent and it became silent. He immediately got frightened and said, “I am becoming a fool, I can’t think”, — so I took what I had given away from him. That is how the average mind regards silence.

*

Good; cessation of thought and other vibrations is the climax of the inner silence. When once one has got that, it is easier for the true knowledge to come from above in place of the mental thought.

*

It [*knowledge*] comes through the mind, so the mind can always modify its expression unless it is entirely and absolutely still.

*

When the personal mind is still, whatever mental action is needed is taken up and done by the Force itself which does all the necessary thinking and progressively transforms it by bringing down into it a higher and higher plane of perception and knowledge.

*

It is in the silence of the mind that the strongest and freest action

can come, e.g. the writing of a book, poetry, inspired speech etc. When the mind is active it interferes with the inspiration, puts in its own small ideas which get mixed up with the inspiration or starts something from a lower level or simply stops the inspiration altogether by bubbling up with all sorts of mere mental suggestions. So also intuitions or action etc. can come more easily when the ordinary inferior movement of the mind is not there. It is also in the silence of the mind that it is easiest for knowledge to come from within or above, from the psychic or from the higher consciousness.

Knowledge, Experience and Realisation

Knowledge by thinking process would not be spiritual knowledge. True knowledge comes by spiritual realisation and experience. There are such realisations and experiences.

*

I was speaking of your experiences of the higher consciousness, of your seeing the Mother in all things—these are what are called spiritual realisations, spiritual knowledge. Realisations are the essence of knowledge—thoughts about them, expression of them in words are a lesser knowledge and if the thoughts are merely mental without experience or realisation, they are not regarded as *jñāna* in the spiritual sense at all.

*

It [*knowledge gained in Divine realisation*] is the conscious experience of the Truth, seen, felt, lived within and it is also a spiritual perception (more direct and concrete than the intellectual) of the true significance of things which may express itself in thought and speech, but is independent of them in itself.

*

Yes, it happens like that. A touch of realisation is enough to set the higher mind knowledge or the illumined mind knowledge flowing.

Section Two

Cultivation of the Mind in Yoga

Chapter One

Mental Development and Sadhana

The Development of the Mind

The development of the mind is a useful preliminary for the sadhak; it can also be pursued along with the sadhana on condition that it is not given too big a place and does not interfere with the one important thing, the sadhana itself.

*

To have a developed intellect is always helpful if one can enlighten it from above and turn it to divine use.

*

A well-developed intellect is one which is plastic, wide, free from rigidity and stiffness,—that can be of use.

*

It [*a developed mind*] may or may not [*help the sadhana*]—if it is too intellectually developed on certain rationalistic lines, it may hinder.

*

The tendency to inquire and know is in itself good, but it must be kept under control. What is needed for progress in sadhana is gained best by increase of consciousness and experience and of intuitive knowledge.

*

To be interested in outward things is not wrong in itself—it depends on the way in which one is interested. If it is done as part of the sadhana, looking on them from the true consciousness, then they become a means for the growth of the being. It is that

that matters, to get the true consciousness — and it is this that comes in you when you have the sense of the Peace and the working of the Force in it. There is no real reason for discontent or dissatisfaction with yourself — since progress is being made in spite of the resistance of the lower forces. The pressure which is translated by the heaviness in the stomach has to be got rid of — it is there that there is the chief resistance still. Peace within and a cheerful confidence and gladness without is what is wanted — then this kind of nervous pressure and disorder would cease.

*

It does not help for spiritual knowledge to be ignorant of the things of this world.

Reading and Sadhana

For one who wants to practise sadhana, sadhana must come first — reading and mental development can only be subordinate things.

*

I don't know that it [*mental development*] helps the sadhana and I don't quite understand what is meant by the phrase. What is a fact is that mental like physical work can be made a part of the sadhana, — not as a rival to the sadhana or as another activity with equal rights and less selfish and egoistic than seeking the Divine.

*

I have no objection to mental development. It is the idea that doing sadhana earnestly is egoistic and selfish, and reading is an unselfish noble pursuit that is absurd.

*

Reading can be only a momentary help to prepare the mind. But the real knowledge does not come by reading. Some preparation for the inner knowledge may be helpful — but the mind should

not be too superficially active or seek to know only for curiosity's sake.

*

It [*reading*] does not take one inwards in any real sense — it only takes one from the more physical to the more mental part of the external consciousness.

*

If the power to meditate long is there, a sadhak will naturally do it and care little for reading — unless he has reached the stage when everything is part of the Yogic consciousness because that is permanent. Sadhana is the aim of a sadhak, not mental development. But if he has spare time, those who have the mental turn will naturally spend it in reading or study of some kind.

*

The attitude you describe is just what it should be — there is nothing wrong in it, — nor in your reading or letter-writing etc. There can be no objection to these activities in themselves, for the Yoga; only they must be done with the right attitude and spirit and as part of the sadhana — because the whole life has to become a sadhana, until it is able to become, the whole life, an embodiment of the *siddhi*.

*

If by passivity of the mind you mean laziness and inability to use it, then what Yoga makes that its basis? The mind has to be quieted and transformed, not made indolent and useless. Is there any old Yoga that makes it a rule not to allow those who practise it to study Sanskrit or philosophy? Did that prevent the Yogis from attaining mental quietude? Do you think that the Mother and myself never read anything and have to sit all day inactive in order to make our minds quiet? Are you not aware that the principle of this Yoga is to arrive at an inner silence in which all activities can take place without disturbing the inner silence?

*

When the passion for reading or study seizes hold of the mind, it is like that; one wants to spend all the time doing it. It is a force that wants to satisfy itself — like other forces — and takes hold of the consciousness for its purpose. One has to utilise these forces without letting them take hold; for this there must be the central being always in control of the forces of Nature that come to it, deciding for itself the choice of what it shall accept, how use, how arrange their action. Otherwise each Force catches hold of some part of the personality (the student, the social man, the erotic man, the fighter) and uses and drives the being instead of being controlled and used by it.

*

I do not think you should stop reading so long as the reading itself does not, as a passion, fall away from the mind; that happens when a higher order of consciousness and experiences begin within the being. Nor is it good to force yourself too much to do only the one work of painting. Such compulsion of the mind and vital tends usually either to be unsuccessful and make them more restless or else to create some kind of dullness and inertia.

For the work simply aspire for the Force to use you, put yourself inwardly in relation with the Mother when doing it and make it your aim to be the instrument for the expression of beauty without regard to personal fame or the praise and blame of others.

*

I don't think it would be advisable not to read at all. It is a relaxation of the tension of sadhana which can be at the same time useful to the mind. It is only when there is the spontaneous flow of sadhana all day without strain that reading is no longer needed.

Reading What Is Helpful to the Sadhana

Dhyana and work are both helpful for this Yoga to those who

can do both. Reading also can be made helpful.

*

Dedication to the Divine [*is the right attitude in reading*]. To read what will help the Yoga or what will be useful for the work or what will develop the capacities for the divine purpose. Not to read worthless stuff or for mere entertainment or for a dilettante intellectual curiosity which is of the nature of a mental dram-drinking. When one is established in the highest consciousness, one can read nothing or everything: it makes no difference — but that is still far off.

*

In the beginning of the sadhana you need nothing more than just what you say, “concentration with faith, devotion and sincerity” on a form of the Divine Being — you can add prayer or the name, if you like.

Reading good books can be of help in the early mental stage — they prepare the mind, put it in the right atmosphere — can even if one is very sensitive bring some glimpses of realisation on the mental plane. Afterwards the utility diminishes — you have to find the right knowledge and experience in yourself.

*

This [*inclination to meditate while reading books on spiritual life*] is quite a normal movement. In reading these books you get into touch with the Force behind them and it is this that pushes you into meditation and a corresponding experience.

*

It depends upon the nature of the things read, whether they are helpful to the growth of the being or not. No general rule can be made. It cannot be said that poetry or dramas ought or ought not to be read — it depends on the poem or the play — so with the rest.

*

It is quite permissible to do so [*read light literature at times for*

a change] and may relieve. The one thing necessary is that you should be able to keep the consciousness behind free, as in this case.

*

What you can do is to read not for pastime but with the clear intention of furnishing your mind with knowledge.

*

Yes, reading can be done for the improvement of the mental instrument as part of the sadhana.

Reading and Detachment

You can remember at the beginning and offer your reading to the Divine and at the end again. There is a state of consciousness in which only a part of it is reading or doing the work and behind there is the consciousness of the Divine always.

*

A time must come when the reading as well as any other outward occupation does not interfere with the presence or activity of the higher consciousness.

*

The reading must learn to accommodate itself to the pressure [of *sadhana*] — that is, be done by the outer mind while the inner being remains in concentration.

*

That is good. Reading ought not to absorb the consciousness — there ought to be the larger part behind detached and conscious in a larger way.

*

The only way [*to separate oneself from mental activities such as reading*] is to separate the Prakriti and Purusha. When you feel

something within watching all the mental activities but separate from them, just as you can watch things going on outside in the street, then that is the separation of Purusha from mental Prakriti.

*

That [*inability to understand what is read*] only means that you cannot separate yourself from your mental consciousness in its activity. Naturally, if you take your mental consciousness off the reading, you can't understand what is being read, for it is with the mental consciousness that one understands. You have not to make the mental consciousness separate from the reading, but yourself separate from the mental consciousness. You have to be the Witness watching it reading or writing or talking, just as you watch the body acting or moving.

*

What happens in reading such books [*as a book on zoology*] is that one comes into a very external consciousness which looks outward and not inward. When the reading is over the mind runs for a time in this external groove and then one has to remain quiet and call back or get back into the inward state to which the higher thoughts naturally come. This may take a little time.

*

The only harm in reading these things [*about procreation*] is that the vital makes it an excuse for sexual excitement. Otherwise there is no harm in reading for knowledge — the facts of existence have to be known, and we should learn them with a free and dispassionate mind. But such reading has to be avoided, if there is any vital reaction.

Reading Novels and Newspapers

Reading novels is always distracting if you are deep in sadhana. It is better to avoid it now.

*

If novels touch the lower vital or raise it, they ought not to be read by the sadhak. One can read them only if one can look at them from the literary point of view as a picture of human life and nature which one can observe, as the Yogi looks at life itself, without being involved in it or having any reaction.

*

I don't quite know about the novel. People bring in the relations of man and woman because it has been the habit for centuries to make every novel turn around that — except in the few which deal with history or adventure or similar things. In a novel based on spiritual philosophy should not the man and woman idea go into the background or disappear, the spiritual love not having anything based at all on sex, but on the relation between soul and soul?

*

It is not necessary to be in touch with the outside world in this way [*by reading newspapers*]; it may be useful under certain circumstances and for some purposes. It may act too as a hindrance. All depends upon the consciousness from which it is done.

The reading of books of a light character may act as a relaxation of the mental consciousness. In the early stages it is not always possible to keep the mind to an unbroken spiritual concentration and endeavour and it takes refuge in other occupations, feeling even instinctively drawn to those of a lighter character.

*

Obviously there are many things that apply to all equally and cannot be avoided in that way [*by saying that each one's way is different*]. The dictum that each has his own way is not true; each has his own way of following the common way and the "own way" may often be very defective. Of course it is true that natures are different and the approach whether to the sadhana or to other things. One can say generally that newspaper reading

or novel reading is not helpful to the sadhana and is at best a concession to the vital which is not yet ready to be absorbed in the sadhana — unless and until one is able to read in the right way with a higher consciousness which is not only not “disturbed” by the reading or distracted by it from the concentrated Yoga-consciousness but is able to make the right use of what is read from the point of view of the inner consciousness and the inner life.

*

Merely following external rules cannot of course be sufficient. They are only an aid to the inner effort until the inner consciousness is thoroughly established. Usually much reading of newspapers in the ordinary way keeps one attached to the ordinary view and vision of things and interested in that — when one has the inner consciousness one can see things happening in the world with another eye of knowledge and then reading can be of some use, though even then most of what is published is empty and futile. But the mere not-reading by itself is not effective. Also if one has need of a distraction, reading newspapers serves the purpose.

*

Reasons given [*for reading newspapers*] of course prove nothing — they may be only excuses put forward by the mind for doing what the vital wants. The newspapers obviously carry with them a lowering atmosphere. It is a question of fact whether one can separate oneself sufficiently not to be pulled down by it. At the time of reading there is certainly a lower pitch of the consciousness in the frontal or outward parts. Only, if one has a consciousness behind which is not affected, then one can revert immediately after reading to the normal higher level.

*

It is not against the principle of Yogic life to know what is happening in the world — what is unyogic is to be attached to these things [*such as newspaper reading*] and not able to

do without them or to think of them as a matter of main importance. The all-important thing must be the sadhana, the growth into a new consciousness and a new inner life. The rest must be done with detachment and without getting absorbed in them. The feeling must be such that if the Mother were to tell you never to see a newspaper at all, it would be no deprivation to you and you would not even feel the difference.

*

The inability to read books or papers is often felt when the consciousness is getting the tendency to go inside.

Chapter Two

The Place of Study in Sadhana

Study and Sadhana

Study cannot take the same or a greater importance than sadhana.

*

Study is of importance only if you study in the right way and with the turn for knowledge and mental discipline. What is the use of studying French if you go on always making the same mistakes and having the same inaccurate and slovenly hold of the language?

*

I have already said that you can spend the time in study as the sadhana is not active. If the sadhana were active then study could be done in the spare time, i.e. in times not given to work or meditation.

Study and Mental Development

A well-trained intellect and study are two different things—there are plenty of people who have read much but have not a well-trained intellect. Inertia can come to anybody, even to the most educated people.

*

Reading, learning about things, acquiring complete and accurate information, training oneself in logical thinking, considering dispassionately all sides of a question, rejecting hasty or wrong inferences and conclusions, learning to look at all things clearly and as a whole [*are what is meant by mental training*].

*

By training it to see, observe and understand in the right way [*one can have a well-developed intellect*]. Reading and study are only useful to acquire information and widen one's field of data. But that comes to nothing if one does not know how to discern and discriminate, judge, see what is within and behind things.

*

A man may have read much and yet be mentally undeveloped. It is by thinking, understanding, receiving mental influences from his intellectual superiors that a man's mind develops.

*

There is no such rule.¹ It is better if the mind is strong and developed, but scholarship does not necessarily create a strong and developed mind.

*

Intelligence does not depend on the amount one has read, it is a quality of the mind. Study only gives it material for its work as life also does. There are people who do not know how to read and write well who are more intelligent than many highly educated people and understand life and things better. On the other hand a good intelligence can improve itself by reading because it gets more material to work on and grows by exercise and by having a wider range to move in. But book knowledge by itself is not the real thing; it has to be used as a help to the intelligence, but it is often used only as a help to a loquacious stupidity or ignorance — ignorance because knowledge of facts is a poor thing if one cannot see their true significance.

*

You have either to train the memory by practising to remember — or if you cannot do that, try only to understand, read much and let the memory remember what it can. There are people who

¹ *The correspondent asked whether a scholar would progress rapidly in spiritual life if his mind was "developed, large and enlightened through education". — Ed.*

have a bad memory but they succeed in their studies in spite of it.

School Studies and Yoga

I see no objection to his going on with his studies,—whether they will be of any use to him for a life of sadhana will depend on the spirit in which he does them. The really important thing is to develop a state of consciousness in which one can live in the Divine and act from it on the physical world. A mental training and discipline, knowledge of men and things, culture, capacities of a useful kind are a preparation that the sadhak would be all the better for having,—even though they are not the one thing indispensable. Education in India gives very little of these things; but if one knows how to study without caring much for the form or for mere academic success, the life of the student can be used for the purpose.

*

At this age he is too young to give up study. It would be best for him to attend the school still; it will be worth while leaving it only if other and better arrangements could be made for his studies. Development of the mind is not a useless thing for one who wishes to follow this sadhana and it can very well go along with the Yoga.

*

There is no reason why X should not complete his studies or learn something which will make him useful in life. To be useless is not a qualification for Yoga.

The Study of Languages

Knowing languages is part of the equipment of the mind.

*

There is no harm in learning [*a new language*]—provided it is

kept in its subordinate place and one is not too much lost in it.

*

Your objection was to learning languages and especially French as inimical to peace and silence because it meant activity. The mind, when it is not in meditation or in complete silence, is always active with something or another—with its own ideas or desires or with other people or with things or with talking etc. None of these is any less an activity than learning languages. Now you shift your ground and say it is because owing to their study they have no time for meditation that you object. That is absurd, for if people want to meditate, they will arrange their time of study for that; if they don't want to meditate, the reason must be something else than study and if they do not study they will simply go on thinking about "small things". Want of time is not the cause of their non-meditation and passion for study is not the cause.

*

One does not learn English or French as an aid to the sadhana; it is done for the development of the mind and as part of the activity given to the being. For that purpose learning French is as good as learning English and, if it is properly done, better. Nor is there any reason, if one has the capacity, to limit oneself to one language only.

*

It depends on what you want to do with the language. If it is only to read the literature, then to learn to read, pronounce and understand accurately is sufficient. If it is a complete mastery one wants, then conversation and writing have to be thoroughly learned in that language.

*

To read many books quickly gives freedom and ease and familiarity with the language. The other method [*to read a book carefully more than once*] is necessary for thoroughness and accuracy in detail.

The Study of Philosophy

I don't know that there is anything false in your philosophical reflections. Philosophy is of course a creation of the mind but its defect is not that it is false, but that a philosophical system is only a section of the Truth which the philosopher takes as a whole. If one does not shut oneself up like that but looks at all sides, there is no harm in philosophising.

*

It depends on the nature of the book [*whether it is harmful or useful*]. Philosophy makes the mind subtle in certain directions — or ought to do so. The only harm it can do is if the mind begins clinging to ideas instead of going forward to direct experience.

*

I do not know about this Commentary [*on the Taittiriya Upanishad*], but most commentaries on the Upanishads are written out of the reasoning and speculating intellect. They may be of use to people who are trying to find out intellectually the meaning of the Upanishads—but they can be of no help to you as a sadhak who are seeking experience; it is likely rather to confuse the mind by taking it off the true basis and throwing it out from the road of experience and spiritual receptivity into the tangle of intellectual debate.

*

Yes, that [*to read critically*] is the right way to read these things. These philosophies [*of the early Greeks*] are mostly mental intuitions mixed with much guessing (speculation), but behind, if one knows, one can catch some Truth to which they correspond.

*

Metaphysics deals with the ultimate cause of things and all that lies behind the world of phenomena. As regards mind and consciousness, it asks what they are, how they came into existence, what is their relation to Matter, Life etc. Psychology deals with

mind and consciousness and tries to find out not so much their ultimate nature and relations as their actual workings and the rule and law of these workings.

The Study of Logic

It [*the study of logic*] is a theoretical training; you learn by it some rules of logical thinking. But the application depends on your own intelligence. In any sphere of knowledge or action a man may be a good theorist but a poor executant. A very good military theorist and critic if put in command of an army might very well lose all his battles, not being able to suit the theories rightly to the occasion. So a theoretical logician may bungle the problems of thought by want of insight, of quickness of mind or of plasticity in the use of his capacities. Besides, logic is not the whole of thinking; observation, intuition, sympathy, many-sidedness are more important.

*

I never heard that learning logic was necessary for good expression. So far as I know very few good writers ever bothered about learning that subject.

*

I am not aware that by learning logic one gets freed from physical things. A few intellectuals lead the mental life and are indifferent to physical needs to a great extent, but these are very few.

*

Common sense by the way is not logic (which is the least common-sense-like thing in the world), it is simply looking at things as they are without inflation or deflation — not imagining wild imaginations — or for that matter despairing “I know not why” despairs.

The Study of Science

I think some knowledge of science will be most useful to you — that field is quite a blank for most people here, and yet the greater part of modern thought and knowledge is influenced by it.

*

Yes, the scientific mind does not lead very far [*in spiritual life*]; it only multiplies experiences but brings neither the realisation, nor the knowledge.

Chapter Three

The Power of Expression and Yoga

Verbal Expression

It is the thinking mind that works out ideas, the externalising mental or physical mind that gives them form in words. Probably you have not developed this part sufficiently — the gift of verbal expression is besides comparatively rare. Most people are either clumsy in expression or if they write abundantly, it is without proper arrangement and style. But this is of no essential importance in sadhana — all that is needed is to convey clearly the perceptions and experiences of their sadhana.

*

The power of expression comes by getting into touch with the inner source from which these things come. A calm and silent mind is a great help for the free flow of the power, but it is not indispensable, nor will it of itself bring it.

*

Thought and expression always give one side of things; the thing is to see the whole but one can express only a part unless one writes a long essay. Most thinkers do not even see the whole, only sides and parts — that is why there is always conflict between philosophies and religions.

Expression and Language

The Knowledge from above or whatever comes down can express itself in any language.

*

When the knowledge comes strongly from above, it very often brings its own language and the defects of the instrument are

overcome. There are people who knew very little but when the knowledge began to flow they wrote wonderfully — when it was not flowing, their language became incorrect and ordinary.

*

If you speak of the expression, the deeper things in these experiences cannot be expressed — except by a great spiritual poet and even then only imperfectly — they can only be realised and remembered.

*

What is expressed is always only a part of what is behind — which remains unexpressed and in the language of the manifestation inexpressible.

Spoken and Written Expression

The voice brings a vibration of force which it is more difficult to put in writing which is a more mechanic vehicle — although the written word can have a special power of its own.

Writing and Sadhana

Writing by itself on ordinary subjects has the externalising tendency unless one has got accustomed to write (whatever be the subject) with the inner consciousness detached and free from what the outer is doing.

*

Writing and reading absorb the mind and fill it with images and influences; if the images and influences are not of the right kind, they naturally turn away from the true consciousness. It is only if one has the true consciousness well established already, that one can read or write anything whatever without losing it or without any other harm.

*

The use of your writing is to keep you in touch with the inner

source of inspiration and intuition, so as to wear thin the crude external crust in the consciousness and encourage the growth of the inner being.

Poetry and Sadhana

Of course when you are writing poems or composing you are in contact with your inner being, that is why you feel so different then. The whole art of Yoga is to get that contact and get from it into the inner being itself, for so one can enter directly into and remain in all that is great and luminous and beautiful. Then one can try to establish them in this troublesome and defective outer shell of oneself and in the outer world also.

*

It is obvious that poetry cannot be a substitute for sadhana; it can be an accompaniment only. If there is a feeling (of devotion, surrender etc.), it can express and confirm it; if there is an experience, it can express and strengthen the force of experience. As reading of books like the Upanishads or Gita or singing of devotional songs can help, especially at one stage or another, so this can help also. Also it opens a passage between the exterior consciousness and the inner mind or vital. But if one stops at that, then nothing much is gained. Sadhana must be the main thing and sadhana means the purification of the nature, the consecration of the being, the opening of the psychic and the inner mind and vital, the contact and presence of the Divine, the realisation of the Divine in all things, surrender, devotion, the widening of the consciousness into the cosmic Consciousness, the Self one in all, the psychic and the spiritual transformation of the nature. If these things are neglected and only poetry and mental development and social contacts occupy all the time, then that is not sadhana. Also the poetry must be written in the true spirit, not for fame or self-satisfaction, but as a means of contact with the Divine through aspiration or of the expression of one's own inner being, as it was written formerly by those who left behind them so much devotional and spiritual poetry in India; it

does not help if it is written only in the spirit of the Western artist or *littérateur*. Even works or meditation cannot succeed unless they are done in the right spirit of consecration and spiritual aspiration gathering up the whole being and dominating all else. It is the lack of this gathering up of the whole life and nature and turning it towards the one aim, which is the defect in so many here, that lowers the atmosphere and stands in the way of what is being done by myself and the Mother.

Chapter Four

Speech and Yoga

Outer Speech and the Inner Life

Even those who have a strong inner life, take a long time before they can connect it with the outer speech and action. Outer speech belongs to the externalising mind — that is why it is so difficult to connect it with the inner life.

*

Talk is more external than writing, it depends more on the physical and its condition. Therefore in most cases it is more difficult to get it out of the clutch of the external mind.

*

In talking one has the tendency to come down into a lower and more external consciousness because talking comes from the external mind. But it is impossible to avoid it altogether. What you must do is to learn to get back at once to the inner consciousness — this so long as you are not able to speak always from the inner being or at least with the inner being supporting the action.

*

You have to learn not to allow the speaking to alter your condition or else to recover it as soon as the interruption is over.

*

In speaking there should be always a sort of instinctive defence — except with those who are free from the ordinary vital impulse.

*

To remain aloof from the talk is what you should always do. The detachment is the first necessary condition for being free.

Talking and Dispersion of the Consciousness

Talking cannot be always avoided. I don't think it matters much so long as there is not excessive dispersion of the consciousness.

*

There are some who have the flow of speech by nature and those who are very vital cannot do without it. But the latter case (not being able to do without it) is obviously a disability from the spiritual point of view. There are also certain stages in the sadhana when one has to go inward and silence is at that time very necessary while unnecessary speech becomes a dispersion of the energies or externalises the consciousness. It is especially this chat for chat's sake tendency that has to be overcome.

*

It is one thing to speak simply and easily with others, keeping the inner consciousness, and another to let oneself go in the vital stream of an externalised consciousness — it was that which I said I had told you not to do.

*

It [*a feeling of dispersion*] is of course because the consciousness is thrown out in these things [*light talk and laughter*] and one comes out of the inner poise and has difficulty in going back to it — especially as there is a sort of dispersion of the vital energy. If one attains to a condition in which one can do these things only with the surface of the consciousness, keeping inside and observing what is done on the surface, but not forgetting oneself in it, then the poise is not lost. But it is a little difficult to get at this duplication of oneself — one comes to it however in time especially if the inner peace and calm become very intense and durable.

*

X's talk is certainly not very helpful to his sadhana and I think he knows it—but he has not made any real attempt to control his tongue as yet. Talk—of the usual kind—does very easily disperse or bring down the inner condition because it usually comes out of the lower vital and the physical mind only and expresses that part of the consciousness—it has a tendency to externalise the being. That is of course why so many Yogis take refuge in silence.

Talking and Fatigue

Everyone who lives much inside tends to feel too much talking a fatiguing thing and quite shallow and unnecessary unless it is talk that comes from within. Of course if you make a practice of talking much, that will bring you outside, externalise you and then you will no longer find it fatiguing even if you talk for 18 hours out of the 24.

*

Talking has a very exhausting effect for the inner energies—unless the inner itself controls the talk.

*

That [*feeling of fatigue after talking*] happens very usually. Talking of an unnecessary character tires the inner being because the talk comes from the outer nature while the inner has to supply the energy which it feels squandered away.

*

Chat of that kind [*about others*] has indeed a very tiring effect when one is at all in the stream of true experience, because it dissipates the energy uselessly and makes the mind movement a thing of valueless shreds and patches instead of gathered and poised in itself so as to receive.

*

The headache and the fatigue is always a sign that the consciousness no longer wants this outward-going thought and speech and

is even physically strained by it. But it is the subconscious habit that wants to continue. Mostly human speech and thought go on mechanically in certain grooves that always repeat themselves and it is not really the mind that controls or dictates them. That is why this habit can go on for some time even after the conscious mind has withdrawn its support and consent and resolved to do otherwise. But if one perseveres, this subconscious mechanical habit runs down like all machinery that is not kept wound up to go on again. Then one can form the opposite habit in the subconscious of admitting only what the inner being consents to think or speak.

*

It is the nervous envelope that is weak — it is this that you saw. The fact that you feel weak when talking with people shows that the origin of the whole trouble is a weakened nervous force. It is this that you have to get strong. You should avoid much talking with others — you can also take rest when you feel the symptoms very strong. But faith, quietude and openness to the higher force are the fundamental cure.

Useless, Unnecessary or Light Speech

There should be no useless talking or mere chat, still less anything untrue or prompted by egoism and desire. One can talk, but with silence within and quietude in the speech.

*

On the whole you are right. Useless conversation which lowers the consciousness or brings back something of a past consciousness is better avoided. Talking about sadhana also comes under the category when it is merely mental discussion of a superficial kind.

*

The depression came into you subconsciously because you had the discussion with X. When you discuss like that with people,

you put something in them, but something also comes from them to you. So, as X was not in quite a good condition, though nothing like what he used to be in his depressions, you easily got a touch of it and as soon as the subconscious could find a habitual excuse it sent it up to the mind. You should always be on your guard against these automatic interchanges. A little care is sufficient — and no needless discussion.

*

It is true that to indulge in useless or harmful conversations is not good, but on the other hand it is not good to be too much shut up in oneself. Some company and going out of oneself is also necessary.

*

It is always helpful to limit a little unnecessary talking — it has always a tendency to bring the consciousness down and outwards.

*

You are right — to minimise speech is sure to be helpful both for right action and for inner sadhana.

*

It is something very external that takes pleasure in light talk, and it is only when the quietude and with it a certain spontaneous self-control is established in the lower vital nature that this tendency can be entirely conquered in those who have it — i.e. in most people.

All these things will be worked out in time. What is most important is to get down the quietude into all the being and with it the true force bringing the energy which you describe above.

*

There is always a chance of something light and unbalancing coming in when there is levity indulged in for its own sake.

The consciousness feels a little shaken in its seat, if not pulled out. Once the consciousness is well set inside, then the outward movement gets determined from within and there is no such trouble.

*

Yes; excessive hilarity and unnecessary chat do most undoubtedly dissipate the force. A great moderation is necessary in these things.

Control of Speech

Yes, it would be better to get full control of the speech—it is an important step towards going inward and developing a true inner and Yogic consciousness.

*

Yes. The speech must come from within and be controlled from within.

*

Yes, control of the speech is very necessary for the physical change.

*

To control speech is to stand back from the speech impulse and observe it, not to say whatever the impulse makes you say but only to speak what one really needs to say or chooses to say, not to speak in haste or anger or impatience or lightly, not to talk at random or say what is harmful. It does not necessarily mean to speak very little, though that is often helpful.

*

It [*speech*] can only be controlled if you separate yourself from the part that is speaking and are able to observe it. It is the external mind that speaks—one has to watch it from the inner witnessing mind and put a control.

*

Yes, of course, complete truth of speech is very important for the sadhak and a great help for bringing Truth into the consciousness. It is at the same time difficult to bring the speech under control; for people are accustomed to speak what comes to them and not to supervise and control what they say. There is something mechanical about speech and to bring it to the level of the highest part of the consciousness is never easy. That is one reason why to be sparing in speech is helpful. It helps to a more deliberate control and prevents the tongue from running away with one and doing whatever it likes.

To stand back means to become a witness of one's own mind and speech, to see them as something separate from oneself and not identify oneself with them. Watching them as a witness, separate from them, one gets to know what they are, how they act and then put a control over them, reject what one does not approve and think and speak only what one feels to be true. This cannot, of course, be done all at once. It takes time to establish this attitude of separateness, still more time to establish the control. But it can be done by practice and persistence.

*

It is obvious that things which are a long habit cannot go at once. Especially the speech is a thing which in most people is largely automatic and not under their control. It is the vigilance that establishes the control, so one must be on guard against the danger of which you speak, the slackening of the vigilance. Only the more it can be a quiet and unmixed, not an anxious vigilance, the better.

*

The habits of the physical or the vital-physical nature are always the most difficult to change, because their action is automatic and not governed by the mental will and it is therefore difficult for the mental will to control or transform them. You have to persevere and form the habit of control. If you can succeed in controlling the speech often,—it needs a constant vigilance,—you will finally find that the control extends itself and can in the

long run always intervene. This must be done so long as that movement is not fully opened to the Mother's Light and Force, for if that happens the thing can be done more quickly and sometimes with a great rapidity. There is also the intervention of the psychic—if the psychic being is sufficiently awake and active to intervene each time you are going to speak at random and say "No", then the change becomes more easy.

*

The psychic self-control that is desirable in these surroundings and in the midst of discussion would mean among other things:

- (1) Not to allow the impulse of speech to assert itself too much or say anything without reflection, but to speak always with a conscious control and only what is necessary and helpful.
- (2) To avoid all debate, dispute or too animated discussion and simply say what has to be said and leave it there. There should also be no insistence that you are right and the others wrong, but what is said should only be thrown in as a contribution to the consideration of the truth of the matter. I notice that what you report X as having said in this discussion had its truth and what you said was also true, so that really there should have been no dispute.
- (3) To keep the tone of speech and the wording very quiet and calm and uninsistent.
- (4) Not to mind at all if others are heated and dispute, but remain quiet and undisturbed and yourself speak only what can help things to be smooth again.
- (5) If there is gossip about others and harsh criticism (especially about sadhaks), not to join—for these things are helpful in no way and only lower the consciousness from its higher level.
- (6) To avoid all that would hurt or wound others.

Criticising Others

The habit of criticism—mostly ignorant criticism of others—mixed with all sorts of imaginations, inferences, exaggerations, false interpretations, even gross inventions is one of the universal

illnesses of the Asram. It is a disease of the vital aided by the physical mind which makes itself an instrument of the pleasure taken in this barren and harmful pursuit of the vital. Control of the speech, refusal of this disease and the itch of the vital is very necessary if inner experience has to have any true effect of transformation in the outer life.

*

It is also better to be more strict about not talking of others and criticising them with the ordinary mind—not only in the case of X or Y but all. It is necessary in order to develop a deeper consciousness and outlook on things that understands in silence the movements of Nature in oneself and others and is not moved or disturbed or superficially interested and drawn into an external movement.

Gossip

It [*gossiping*] can be and very often is [*a hindrance to sadhana*]. A gossiping spirit is always an obstacle.

*

The difficulty you experience exists because speech is a function which in the past has worked much more as an expression of the vital in man than of the mental will. Speech breaks out as the expression of the vital and its habits without caring to wait for the control of the mind; the tongue has been spoken of as the unruly member. In your case the difficulty has been increased by the habit of talk about others,—gossip, to which your vital was very partial, so much that it cannot even yet give up the pleasure in it. It is therefore this tendency that must cease in the vital itself. Not to be under the control of the impulse to speech, to be able to do without it as a necessity and to speak only when one sees that it is right to do so and only what one sees to be right to say, is a very necessary part of Yogic self-control.

It is only by perseverance and vigilance and a strong resolution that this can be done, but if the resolution is there, it can

be done in a short time by the aid of the Force behind.

*

Truth is far above this false gossip and scandal. Care only for the Divine's opinion and not for that of men.

Speaking the Truth

It [*truthfulness*] means first truth-speaking, but beyond that to keep the speech in harmony with the deepest truth of which one is conscious.

*

It is very evident from this inward control which you feel enlightening and guiding you and the resolution of truth-speaking that it made you take, that your psychic being is awake within you.

The fault of character of which you speak is common and almost universal in human nature. The impulse to speak what is untrue or at least to exaggerate or understate or twist the truth so as to flatter one's own vanity, preferences, wishes or to get some advantage or secure something desired is very general. But one must learn to speak the truth alone if one is to succeed truly in changing the nature.

To become conscious of what is to be changed in the nature is the first step towards changing it. But one must observe these things without being despondent or thinking "it is hopeless" or "I cannot change". You do right to be confident that the change will come. For nothing is impossible in the nature if the psychic being is awake and leading you with the Mother's consciousness and force behind it and working in you. This is now happening. Be sure that all will be done.

*

Very obviously, you ought not to have said or written what was a lie, and you should avoid doing it in future.

The things that you imagined, would not have happened

and therefore there was not even any use in this untruth — but useless or not, untruth should be avoided.

*

In the first place, there is a great difference between uttering as truth what one believes or knows to be false and uttering as truth what one conscientiously believes to be true, but is not in fact true. The first is obviously going against the spirit of truth, the second does homage to it. The first is deliberate falsehood, the second is only error at worst or ignorance.

This is from the practical point of view of truth-speaking. From the point of view of the higher Truth, it must not be forgotten that each plane of consciousness has its own standard — what is truth to the mind, may be only partial truth to a higher consciousness, but it is through the partial truth that the mind has to go in order to reach the wider more perfect truth beyond. All that is necessary for it is to be open and plastic, to be ready to recognise the higher when it comes, not to cling to the lower because it is its own, not to allow the desires and passions of the vital to blind it to the Light or to twist and pervert things. When once the higher consciousness begins to act, the difficulty diminishes and there is a clear progress from truth to greater truth.

*

If you get the English original¹ from X, you will see that what is written is from the highest standpoint. If you want to be an instrument of the Truth, you must always speak the truth and not falsehood. But this does not mean that you must tell everything to everybody. To conceal the truth by silence or refusal to speak is permissible, because the truth may be misunderstood or misused by those who are not prepared for it or who are opposed to it

¹ Sri Aurobindo is referring to the following statement of the Mother: "If we allow a falsehood, however small, to express itself through our mouth or our pen, how can we hope to become perfect messengers of Truth? A perfect servant of Truth should abstain even from the slightest inexactitude, exaggeration or deformation." Words of the Mother—II (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 2004), Collected Works of the Mother (second edition), vol. 14, p. 202.—Ed.

— it may even be made a starting point for distortion or sheer falsehood. But to speak falsehood is another matter. Even in jest it should be avoided, because it tends to lower the consciousness. As for the last point, it is again from the highest standpoint—the truth as one knows it in the mind is not enough, for the mind's idea may be erroneous or insufficient—it is necessary to have the true knowledge in the true consciousness.

*

Why should it be lying [*to leave something unsaid*]? One is not bound to tell everything to everybody—it might often do more harm than good. One has only to say what is necessary. Of course what is said must be true and not false and there must never be any intention to deceive.

*

“As one likes” is never a formula that leads to truth; it implies enthroning the vital and its desire as the standard or following the mind’s preferences—which even in any mental discipline is regarded as contrary to the very principle of the search for Truth.

*

Because one is dealing with dishonest people, that does not justify one in going down to their own level.

If you think that the prices are too high, or, simply, if you want them to be lower, you can say so and ask for a reduction, but it is not right to support your demand by a false statement.

No one is bound to speak the truth when it would be harmful or to speak whatever is in one’s mind; it is always permissible to keep silence or evade a reply and not to say what one does not wish or think it right to tell. But to tell a lie is superfluous and not justifiable.

It is usually out of weakness (mind and vital) that people lie; those who are strong in nature do not need to lie. A sadhak has to be strong and not weak—straightforward when necessary, silent when necessary, but not a liar. Straightforwardness does not mean of course that one has to babble out everything to

everybody — to keep things to oneself, not to tell what should not be told is very necessary; but falsehood is not the right way to conceal things that have not to be told, the right way is silence.

*

If it [*what one has said to someone*] is true, it should not be withdrawn [*even if the person is troubled by it*]. But the truth need be told only when it helps the person spoken to, otherwise silence is better.

*

It is not the fact that if a man is truthful (in the sense of not lying), all he says happens. For that he must know the Truth — be in touch with the truth of things, not merely speak the truth as his mind knows it.

*

Things said of sadhana — or any kind of real truth — always give more meaning with the growth of consciousness and experience. That is why when one rises in the level of consciousness the truth seen before in the mind becomes a new and vastly deeper thing always.

*

That [*talking about spiritual things when one is full of imperfections*] is not hypocrisy but a conflict between two parts of the nature. Hypocrisy comes in only when one preaches a thing one does not believe or deliberately pretends to be or aim at what one is not and has no intention of trying to become.

Mauna or Keeping Silence

That is not the way. Absolute silence and looseness of talk are two extremes; neither is good. I have seen many people practising *maunavrata*, but afterwards they are just as talkative as before. It is self-mastery you must get.

*

Mauna is seldom of much use. After it is over, the speech starts again as on the old lines. It is in speech itself that the speech must change.

*

It is no use giving up talking altogether — the proper course is to speak usefully to people but not to talk for the sake of talking.

*

There is not much utility in complete outer silence or absolute retirement. Unless one is very strong spiritually, these things often end by creating a moribund condition of the consciousness.

*

To remain in silence as much as possible is good for a time. But entire retirement is seldom found to be helpful — the lower movements may remain quiescent owing to want of stimulus from outside, but do not disappear. For that you must be able to get an inner quietude and a mastery over the outer movements which will resist any atmosphere.

*

The difficulty is that the things in the atmosphere come in even if one does not speak with people. There are always mind waves moving about. It is a mastery that has to be developed, beginning with a power of silence, exclusion, non-response.

*

It is really an inner silence that is needed — a something silent within that looks at outer talk and action but feels it as something superficial, not as itself and is quite indifferent and untouched by it. It can bring forces to support speech and action or it can stop them by withdrawal or it can let them go on and observe without being involved or moved.

*

If one keeps the inner silence even when among the friends, that is the real thing; the outer silence need only be relative until the time comes when speech itself is an expression out of the silence.

*

If the peace is very strong within, talking does not cloud it—because this peace is not mental or vital even when it pervades the mind and vital—or else it is a cloud that quickly passes without touching deeply. Usually however such talk [*about others*] disperses the consciousness and one can lose much. The only disadvantage of not talking is that it isolates too much, if it is absolute, but by not talking these things one loses nothing.

Other Aspects of Speech Control

In all things there must be a control over thought and speech also. But while rajasic violence is excluded, a calmly forceful severity of thought and speech where severity is needed is sometimes indispensable.

*

Yes, obviously, the power to say “No” is indispensable in life and still more so in sadhana. It is the power of rejection put into speech.

*

These [*heated*] discussions are perfectly useless, they only deflect the mind and open the gate to falsehood.

*

Harangues and exhortations touch only the surface of the mind. If the mind is in agreement it is pleased and stimulated, but that is all. If it is not in agreement the mind criticises or becomes impatient and turns aside. If the harangue is very forcible it may touch the vital sometimes and produce a momentary effect.

*

It is no use being moved by the talk of others; one who follows the path, must be strong enough to go on upon it untouched by the opinion of the outside world. And it is best not to speak of these things to the indifferent or the hostile.

*

Hastiness of speech and action — (in excess, because to a certain extent it exists in everybody) — is a matter of temperament. I do not suppose it is more in you than in many others here. Of course it has to be got rid of, but it is one of the lesser, not one of the major imperfections of nature with which the Yogic Force has to deal. It is the externalising mind that has to be disciplined so that it may not leap too soon to conclusions or rush immediately from thought to speech and action.

*

That (thinking over what was talked) is a physical mind habit which should in course of time wear out. The mind should be free to shut off immediately as soon as the talk is done.

Part Two

Sadhana on the Level of the Vital

Section One

The Vital Being and Sadhana

Chapter One

The Nature of the Vital

Living in the Vital

Man is a mental being and cannot come from the vital, although part of him may live on the vital plane or rather in connection with it. Most men in fact live much in the vital and therefore when they practise sadhana it is first on the vital plane that they find themselves, in dreams, experiences etc. When the supramental opens then something will descend from the supramental in each as he becomes ready and forms a supramental Purusha in him. What he is now, cannot limit what he will become.

*

That [*a routine of work and study*] is not living in the vital—these are physical and mental occupations merely. Living in the vital is a psychological condition.

Most people live in their vital. That means that they live in their desires, sensations, emotional feelings, vital imaginations and see and experience and judge everything from that point of view. It is the vital that moves them, the mind being at its service, not its master. In Yoga also many people do sadhana from that plane and their experience is full of vital visions, formations, experiences of all kinds, but there is no mental clarity or order, neither do they rise above the mind. It is only the minority of men who live in the mind or in the psychic or try to live on the spiritual plane.

*

Of course most men live in their physical mind and vital, except a few saints and a rather larger number of intellectuals. That is why, as it is now discovered, humanity has made little progress in the last three thousand years, except in information and material

equipment. A little less cruelty and brutality perhaps, more plasticity of the intellect in the elite, a quicker habit of change in forms, that is all.

*

A vital life, “a little higher than the animals” because of some play of mind, with death as its answer is all that human existence is as it is ordinarily envisaged. And yet there is an aspiration for something more; but the religions take hold of it and canalise it into something pointless for life and things remain as they are. Only a few indeed get beyond this limit.

The “after all” is indeed only an excuse.¹ Nobody can become more than human if he refuses to make a sacrifice of his ego—for “human” means a vital animal ego mentalised by a little outward thought and knowledge. So long as one is satisfied with remaining that, one will remain human “even here” or anywhere.

*

People are living now so much in the vital when they do not live in the intellect, and so unguardedly and without restraint, the old mental conventions and restraints being in a state of deliquescence, that catastrophes are likely to be common. The disappearance of conventions and the urge to a larger life are in themselves good things, but on condition that a greater control and a truer harmony are discovered. At present people are going about it in the wrong way—hence the perilous condition of Europe and of the world. Nor are these convulsed and insecure conditions a very favourable environment for the development of a spiritual life either. But it seems that it is in the midst of difficulties that it is destined to come.

*

The times now are both worse and better than in Wordsworth’s—on one side there is a collapse into the worst parts of human

¹ *The correspondent wrote, “When people say—even here—‘After all we are human, we have not become gods’, it seems to me only an excuse.” —Ed.*

nature and a riot of the vital forces, on the other there is in compensation a greater seeking for something beyond and a seeking with more light and knowledge in it.

The Irrationality of the Vital

The vital started in its evolution with obedience to impulse and not reason — as for strategy, the only strategy it understands is some tactics by which it can compass its desires. It does not like the voice of knowledge and wisdom — but curiously enough by the necessity which has grown up in man of justifying action by reason, the vital mind has developed a strategy of its own which is to get the reason to find out reasons for justifying its own feelings and impulses. When the reason is too clear to lend itself to this game, the vital falls back on its native habit of shutting its ears and going on its course. In these attacks, the plea of unfitness, "Since you are not pleased with my impulses and I can't change them, that shows I am unfit, so I had better go", is the counter-strategy it adopts. But even if one counters that, the impulse itself is sufficient, coming strongly as it does from universal Nature, to restore to the vital for a short time its old blind irrational instinct to obey the push that has come.

*

The doubts of the sadhaks more often rise from the vital than from the true mental — when the vital goes wrong or is in trouble or depression, the doubts rise and repeat themselves in the same form and the same language, no matter how much the mind had been convinced by either patent proofs or intellectual answers. I have noticed that always. The vital is irrational (even when it uses the reason to justify itself) and it believes or disbelieves according to its feeling, not according to reason.

*

The opposition of the vital is never reasonable, even when it puts forward reasons. It acts from its nature and habit of desire, not from reason.

The Deceptiveness of the Vital

The vital always prefers to cover its movements from the Light.

*

The whole significance of your sentences was that you had made all the necessary resolutions, but you could not carry them out because the Force refused to support you. That is the usual trick of the vital mind when it wants to rid itself of the blame for difficulties or want of progress in the sadhana: "I am doing all I can, but the Force is not supporting me." It is no use your quoting other sentences, because you write now one thing, now another, shifting your ground for the sake of your argument. If logic could help you to get rid of this trickery of the vital mind, it would be worth while learning Logic.

*

As to what you ask about anything else being behind than what your mind was conscious of in its surface intention, there is more often than not something behind when the vital meddles in the matter—and it is a part of self-knowledge not to be misled by the mind's surface movements but to detect this something behind. For it is the habit of the vital to make a mask of the mind's arrangements about feelings and actions in order to conceal even from the self-observation of the doer the secret underlying motive or forces behind the speech, act or feelings.

*

It is indeed amazing that you should have lost yourself to an extravagant deception such as X has set on foot. It is simply the spirit of vital falsehood, dramatic and romantic, obscuring the reason and shutting out common sense and simple truth. To clear the vital, you must get out of it all compromise with falsehood—no matter how specious the reason it advances—and get the habit of simple straightforward psychic truth engraved in it so that nothing may have a chance to enter. If this lesson can be imprinted in that part of the vital which is capable

of such compromises, some good will come out of this wrong movement. Put the Mother's notice henceforth at the door of your vital being, "No falsehood hereafter shall ever enter here", and station a sentry there to see that it is put into execution.

*

You have to develop discrimination so that it becomes impossible for the vital to deceive you.

*

If there is this unconsciousness, you have to learn to be conscious in all your actions, so that the vital movements will no longer be able to deceive you or take any cover. You must make a point of being perfectly sincere in looking at these vital movements and seeing them as they are.

If once you can open in the psychic being and keep it open, then from within yourself will come constantly a perception that will show you at each step the actual truth and keep you on your guard against any kind of deception. If you aspire constantly and allow the peace to grow and the Force to work in you, this opening will come.

A Good Instrument But a Bad Master

The human vital is almost always of that nature [*full of desires and fancies*], but that is no reason why one should accept it as an unchangeable fact and allow a restless vital to drive one as it likes. Even apart from Yoga, in ordinary life, only those are considered to have full manhood or are likely to succeed in their life, their ideals or their undertakings who take in hand this restless vital, concentrate and control it and subject it to discipline. It is by the use of the mental will that they discipline it, compelling it to do not what it wants but what the reason or the will sees to be right or desirable. In Yoga one uses the inner will and compels the vital to submit itself to tapasya so that it may become calm, strong, obedient — or else one calls down the calm from above obliging the vital to renounce desire

and become quiet and receptive. The vital is a good instrument but a bad master. If you allow it to follow its likes and dislikes, its fancies, its desires, its bad habits, it becomes your master and peace and happiness are no longer possible. It becomes not your instrument or the instrument of the Divine Shakti, but of any force of the Ignorance or even any hostile force that is able to seize and use it.

*

Yes, that is the nature of the vital. It can make the absolute and enthusiastic surrender as well as cause all the trouble possible. Without the vital there is no life or force of action or manifestation; it is a necessary instrument of the spirit for life.

*

Vitality means life-force—wherever there is life, in plant or animal or man, there is life-force—without the vital there can be no life in matter and no living action. The vital is a necessary force and nothing can be done or created in the bodily existence, if the vital is not there as an instrument. Even sadhana needs that vital force.

But if the vital is unregenerate and enslaved to desire, passion and ego, then it is as harmful as it can otherwise be helpful. Even in ordinary life the vital has to be controlled by the mind and mental will, otherwise it brings disorder or disaster. When people speak of a vital man, they mean one under the domination of vital force not controlled by the mind or the spirit. The vital can be a good instrument, but it is a bad master.

The vital has not to be killed or destroyed, but purified and transformed by the psychic and spiritual control.

*

What has been put into the vital receptacle by life can be got out by reversing it, turning it towards the Divine and not towards yourself. You will then find that the vital is as excellent an instrument as it is a bad master.

*

If your will is strong and stiff, always, the vital however obstinate is bound to yield in the end and become your instrument and not your master.

Purification of the Vital

Purification of the vital is usually considered to be a condition for successful sadhana. One may have some experiences without it, but at least a complete detachment from the vital movements is necessary for a sustained realisation.

Discipline of the Vital

It is true that for the external vital an outer discipline is necessary for the purification, otherwise it remains restless and fanciful and at the mercy of its own impulses — so that no basis can be built there for a quiet and abiding higher consciousness to remain firmly. The attitude you have taken for the work is of course the best one and, applying it steadily, the progress you feel was bound to come and is sure to increase.

*

To live and act under control or according to a standard of what is right — not to allow the vital or the physical to do whatever they like and not to let the mind run about according to its fancy without truth or order [*is the meaning of discipline*]. Also to obey those who ought to be obeyed.

*

An overmastering impulse is not necessarily an inspiration of true guidance; in following always such impulses one is more likely to become a creature of random caprices. Inexhaustible energy is an excellent thing, but not an energy without discipline.

*

The will ought to have the same mastery over impulses as over the thoughts. Many people find it easier to control an impulse

than to prevent a thought.

*

The vital is good when it is properly used—it is a necessary instrument for action. But ordinarily it is in its lower action an instrument of ego and desire—that is why it has not to be indulged, but rather put under strong discipline.

*

The vital has to be controlled and not allowed to do what it likes. It is not the vital that has to control you, it is you who have to control the vital.

*

Be careful about vital movements and formations—when you allow them, you are on a dangerous slope.

*

If you want the Divine and the inner life, the old vital moorings must be cut.

*

It is certainly the abrupt and decisive breaking that is the easiest and best way for these things—vital habits.

*

People are here to change what is wrong in their nature so that they may do an effective sadhana.

*

If you want to change, you must first resolutely get rid of the defects of your vital being, persevering steadily, however difficult it may be or however long it may take, calling in always the divine help and compelling yourself always to be entirely sincere.

As for fitness and unfitness, nobody is entirely fit for this Yoga; one has to become fit by aspiration, by *abhyāsa*, by sincerity and surrender. If you have always desired the spiritual

life, it is the psychic part of you that desired it, but your vital has always come in the way. Establish a sincere will in the vital; do not allow personal desires and demands and selfishness and falsehood to mix in your sadhana; then alone the vital in you will become fit for the sadhana. Lately you seem to have made a more sincere endeavour; if you want it to succeed, the endeavour must become always purer and more steady and persistent. If you practise sincerely, you will get the help needed by you.

If you take the right attitude in your work, that itself will bring the help. The right attitude is to work for the sake of the Divine, as an offering, without demand for any reward, without selfish claims and desires, without self-assertion and arrogance, not quarrelling with your fellow workers, thinking it to be the Mother's work and not your own, and trying to feel her power behind the work. If you can do that, your nature will progress and change.

I write this much in answer to your letter because I find in it a beginning of vital sincerity which was not there before. The rest depends upon you. If you become vitally sincere, the help will be with you.

Surrender of the Vital

There is nothing definite that I can tell you. Mother finds no conscious opposition in your mind or will to surrender and transformation. But probably the difficulty lies in the vital (not mind) of the artist (the poet, painter etc. in you), because the vital of the artist is always accustomed to its independence, to follow its own way, to make and live in its own world and pursue the impulses of its nature. If that element changes, then probably surrender and transformation could be more rapid, but it is not always easy for it to change at once, it usually goes by a gradual and almost unobserved change.

*

It is not at all a fact that your nature is incapable of love and bhakti; on the contrary that is the right way for you. Meditation

is all right, but it will be most profitable for you if it is directed towards the increase of love and devotion; the rest will come of itself afterwards.

Also, it is not true that your nature is incapable of surrender; you made a great progress in that direction. But the complete surrender of all parts, especially of the whole vital, is certainly difficult. It can only come with the development of the consciousness. Meanwhile, that it has not fully come, is no reason for despair or giving up.

You are taking too bleak a view of things, the usual result of your giving way to depression. You used to have this before and you got over it by persistence. Now also by persistence it will go. To make radical decisions under the influence of depression is not good. To brace yourself up and, however persistent the difficulties are, to stick it out, is always the best.

Be faithful and persevering, then, however long the way, you cannot fail to reach the goal.

Conversion of the Vital

It is not easy to compel the vital, though it can be done. It is easier by the constant pressure of the mind to persuade and convert it; but it is true that in this mental way of doing it the vital does often attach itself to the spiritual ideal for some gain of its own. The one effective way is to bring the light down always in the vital, exposing it to itself, so that it is obliged to see what is wrong with itself and in the end to wish sincerely for a change. The light can be brought upon it either from within from the psychic or from above through the mind into the vital nature. To call down this light and force from above the mind is one of the chief methods of the Yoga. But whatever way is used, it is always a work of persistent and patient spiritual labour. The vital *can* be converted suddenly, but even after a sudden conversion the effects of it have to be worked out, applied to every part of the vital until the effect is complete and that takes often a long time. As for the physical consciousness, that can only be converted by long spade work, as it were,—rapid changes in this or that

point can be made; but the whole change means a long and persistent endeavour.

Liberation of the Vital

The liberation you are aspiring for is indeed extremely necessary for the sadhak, but it means the liberation of the whole vital part of the nature—not a thing that can be done easily or at once. The *mūla jalada* is not in you or in anyone, it is in the universal vital Nature. The aspiration must be constant, patient and persistent, in the end it will prevail. To call the higher calm and peace down into the system from above is the main thing—if you feel that coming down, it will be the beginning of the liberation.

*

You were getting the true consciousness down into the vital, but as the old difficulty rose again in the physical, there is again the vital attack. The sign of complete liberation will be when your vital can face this attack always without being upset or crying out, repelling its force by a calm rejecting force from within.

The Higher Vital Movement

The higher vital movement is more refined and large in motion than that of the ordinary vital. It stresses emotion rather than sensation and desire, but it is not free from demand and the desire of possession.

The Emergence of the True Vital

It is through a change in the vital that the deliverance from the blind vital energy must come—by the emergence of the true vital which is strong, wide, at peace, a willing instrument of the Divine and of the Divine alone.

*

The vital is an indispensable instrument — no creation or strong action is possible without it. It is simply a question of mastering it and of converting it into the true vital which is at once strong and calm and capable of great intensity and free from ego.

*

It is the nature of the unregenerated vital part on the surface to do like that [*express dissatisfaction, resist change*]. The true vital is different, calm and strong and a powerful instrument submitted to the Divine. But for that to come forward, it is necessary first to get this fixed poise above in the mind — when the consciousness is there and the mind calm, free and wide, then the true vital can come forward.

*

Why the Apollyon do you suppose that all vital things are impure? The vital has strength, ardour, enthusiasm, self-confidence, generosity, the victor spirit — a host of other very necessary things. The only difficulty is that they get mixed up with others that *are* impure. All the same they are there and much needed.

*

It [*the psychic life-energy*] means the life-energy which comes from within and is in consonance with the psychic being — it is the energy of the true vital being, but in the ordinary ignorant vital it is deformed into desire.

You have to quiet and purify the vital and let the true vital emerge.

Or you have to bring the psychic in front, and the psychic will purify and psychicise the vital and then you will have the true vital energy.

*

Certainly it is better if the vital is brought to the true movement — renouncing its wrong movements and asking only for growth of the self-realisation, psychic love and psychicisation of the nature. But it is possible to get rid from above of the more active

forms of obstruction even with a neutral vital.

Vital Sincerity, Aspiration, Consecration

It [*vital sincerity*] is the one-pointed will in the vital to be transformed.

*

The vital can rise to the head in two ways — one to cloud the mind with the vital impulses, the other to aspire and join with the higher Consciousness. If you noticed the aspiration, it was evidently the latter movement.

*

It [*vital consecration*] is to offer all the vital nature and its movements to the Divine so that it may be purified and only the true movements in consonance with the Divine Will may be there and all egoistic desires and impulses disappear.

*

Consecration means offering and making sacred to the Mother so that the whole vital nature may belong to her and not to the lower nature.²

*

As for the offering of the actions to the Divine and the vital difficulty it raises, it is not possible to avoid the difficulty, — you have to go through and conquer it. For the moment you make this attempt, the vital arises with all its restless imperfections to oppose the change. However, there are three things you can do to alleviate and shorten the difficulty:

1. Detach yourself from this vital-physical — observe it as something not yourself; reject it, refuse your consent to its claims and impulses, but quietly as the witness Purusha whose refusal

² *The correspondent asked the meaning of "vital consecration" and how one may offer the vital to the Mother. — Ed.*

of sanction must ultimately prevail. This ought not to be difficult for you, if you have already learned to live more and more in the impersonal Self.

2. When you are not in this impersonality, still use your mental will and its power of assent or refusal,—not with a painful struggle, but in the same way, quietly, denying the claims of desire, till these claims by loss of sanction and assent lose their force of return and become more and more faint and external.

3. If you become aware of the Divine above you or in your heart, call for help, for light and power from there to change the vital itself, and at the same time insist upon this vital till it itself learns to pray for the change.

Finally, the difficulty will be reduced to its smallest proportions the moment you can by the sincerity of your aspiration to the Divine and your surrender awaken the psychic being in you (the Purusha in the secret heart) so that it will come forward and remain in front and pour its influence on all the movements of the mind, the vital and the physical consciousness. The work of transformation will still have to be done, but from that moment it will no longer be so hard and painful.

Peace and Quiet in the Vital

What you have to aspire for and bring down in you is the peace of the Mother's consciousness. Peace, calm, equanimity in the emotional being and the rest of the vital especially—it is that which will purify the emotions and deliver the vital.

*

If you bring down the peace into your vital, it will be liberated—for even if wrong movements come, it will be able to reject them.

*

A quiet and even basis [*for sadhana*] means a condition of the sadhana in which there is no tossing about between eager bursts of experience and a depressed inert or half inert condition, but

whether in progress or in difficulty there is always a quiet consciousness behind turned in confidence and faith towards the Divine.

*

This quietude is not tamas at all—it is a quiescence of the ordinary rajasic movements of the nature (desire, grief, attachment and other reactions), which is very necessary in order that peace may come. It is what we may call the quiet vital—and it is in the quiet mind and the quiet vital that the true spiritual consciousness can most easily come.

Chapter Two

The Vital and Other Levels of Being

The Spirit and the Vital

The Spirit itself if it wants to manifest in matter must use the vital. It is so that things are arranged.

The Higher Consciousness and the Vital

The two movements whose apparent contradiction confuses your mind, are the two ends of a single consciousness whose motions, now separated from each other, must join if the life-power is to have its more and more perfect action and fulfilment or the transformation for which we hope.

The vital being with the life-force in it is one of these ends; the other is a latent dynamic power of the higher consciousness through which the Divine Truth can act, take hold of the vital and its life-force and use it for a greater purpose here.

The life-force in the vital is the indispensable instrument for all action of the Divine Power on the material world and the physical nature. It is therefore only when this vital is transformed and made a pure and strong instrument of the Divine Shakti, that there can be a divine life. Then only can there be a successful transformation of the physical nature or a free perfected divine action on the external world; for with our present means any such action is impossible. That is why you feel that the vital movement gives all the energy one can need, that all things are possible by this energy and that you can get with it any experience you like, whether good or bad, of the ordinary or of the spiritual life,—and that also is why, when this energy comes, you feel power pervading the body-consciousness and its matter. As for the contact with the Mother in the vital and your sense of the fine, the magnificent experience it was,—that too is natural and right; for the vital, no less than the psychic and

every other part of the being, has to feel the Divine Mother and give itself entirely to her.

But this must always be remembered that the vital being and the life-force in man are separated from the Divine Light and, so separated, they are an instrument for any power that can take hold of them, illumined or obscure, divine or undivine. Ordinarily, the vital energy serves the common obscure or half-conscious movements of the human mind and human life, its normal ideas, interests, passions and desires. But it is possible for the vital energy to increase beyond the ordinary limits and, if so increased, it can attain an impetus, an intensity, an excitation or sublimation of its force by which it can become, is almost bound to become an instrument either of divine powers, the powers of the gods, or of Asuric forces. Or, if there is no settled central control in the nature, its action can be a confused mixture of these opposites, or in an inconsequent oscillation serve now one and now the other. It is not enough then to have a great vital energy acting in you; it must be put in contact with the higher consciousness, it must be surrendered to the true control, it must be placed under the government of the Divine. That is why there is sometimes felt a contempt for the action of the vital force or a condemnation of it, because it has an insufficient light and control and is wedded to an ignorant undivine movement. That also is why there is the necessity of opening to inspiration and power from a higher source. The vital energy by itself leads nowhere, runs in chequered, often painful and ruinous circles, takes even to the precipice, because it has no right guidance; it must be connected with the dynamic power of the higher consciousness and with the Divine Force acting through it for a great and luminous purpose.

There are two movements necessary for this connection to be established. One is upward; the vital rises to join with the higher consciousness and steeps itself in the light and in the impulsion of a higher force: the other is downward; the vital remains silent, tranquillised, pure, empty of the ordinary movements, waiting, till the dynamic power from above descends into it, changes it to its true self and informs its movements

with knowledge as well as power. That is why the sadhak feels sometimes that he is rising up into a happier and nobler consciousness, entering into a brighter domain and purer experience, but sometimes, on the contrary, feels the necessity of going back into the vital, doing sadhana there and bringing down into it the true consciousness. There is no real contradiction between these two movements; they are complementary and necessary to each other, the ascension enabling the divine descent, the descent fulfilling that for which the ascension aspires and which it makes inevitable.

When you rise with the vital from its lower reaches and join it to the psychic, then your vital being fills with the pure aspiration and devotion natural to the psychic; at the same time it gives to the feelings its own abundant energy, it makes them dynamic for the change of the whole nature down to the most physical and for the bringing down of the divine consciousness into earth matter. When it not only touches the psychic but fuses with the higher mind, it is able to come into contact with and obey a greater light and knowledge. Ordinarily, the vital is either moved by the human mind and governed by its more or less ignorant dictates, or takes violent hold of this mind and uses it for the satisfaction of its own passions, impulses or desires. Or it makes a mixture of these two movements; for the ordinary human mind is too ignorant for a better action or a perfect guidance. But when the vital is in contact with the higher mind, it is possible for it to be guided by a greater light and knowledge, by a higher intuition and inspiration, a truer discrimination and some revelations of the divine truth and the divine will. This obedience of the vital to the psychic and the higher mind is the beginning of the outgoing of the Yogic consciousness in its dynamic action upon life.

But this, too, is not sufficient for the divine life. To come into contact with the higher mind consciousness is not enough, it is only an indispensable stage. There must be a descent of the Divine Force from yet loftier and more powerful reaches. A transformation of the higher consciousness into a supramental light and power, a transformation of the vital and its life-force

into a pure, wide, calm, intense and powerful instrument of the Divine Energy, a transformation of the physical itself into a form of divine light, divine action, strength, beauty and joy are impossible without this descending Force from the now invisible summits. That is why in this Yoga the ascent to the Divine which it has in common with other paths of Yoga is not enough; there must be too a descent of the Divine to transform all the energies of the mind, life and body.

*

There is a stage in the transformation when the Power is pressing on the outer being, especially the vital, and bringing down the higher consciousness. But the natural movements of the vital (anger, restlessness and impatience) are frequently breaking out and disturbing the work. Do not be shaken by that but remain as separate as possible from these movements and let the Force work.

*

It [*a confused inner condition*] is because your sadhana has come down into the vital and in the vital there is not the Light or the higher consciousness. You must aspire for the Light and the true Consciousness to come down into the vital.

*

Your analysis [*of certain vital movements*] is perfectly accurate — with this clear knowledge of the mechanism of the whole thing it should be easier to get rid of these ignorant forces. It is true that they care nothing for truth or reason and appeal only to the blind feelings of the vital, but still the light of the true consciousness turned steadily on them ought to so much enlighten your own vital that it will no longer lend itself to the things that seek to disturb it and be ready to take its stand on the calm and happiness of surrender to the Divine.

*

Of course, it is true that the physical enjoyment is not the only

enjoyment — the vital has its own way of enjoyment. The whole thing is to separate oneself from that and identify oneself with the psychic and spiritual being and through them receive the higher consciousness which will change the vital nature.

The Intuition and the Vital

The vital controlled and transformed by the Intuition has the spontaneous right sense of things instead of groping and getting things by the wrong end due to passion, desire etc.

The Psychic and the Vital

Your former sadhana was mostly on the vital plane. The experiences of the vital plane are very interesting to the sadhak but they are mixed, i.e. not all linked with the higher Truth. A greater, purer and firmer basis for the sadhana has to be established — the psychic basis. For that reason all the old experiences are stopped. The heart has to be made the centre and through bhakti and aspiration you have to bring forward the psychic being and enter into close touch with the Divine Shakti. If you can do this, your sadhana will begin again with a better result.

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Obviously when there is that inability to control and over-eagerness, it must be a movement of a vital nature. The vital can take part in a movement but it must not be in control — it must be subordinated to the psychic.

*

They [*the vital and the psychic*] cannot be reconciled except by the submission of the vital to the psychic. Any other combination means either the submergence of the psychic by vital delusions or a confused and misleading mixture or the use of the psychic aspirations by the vital to justify things that are not spiritual.

*

It is the nature of the psychic pressure to change the former tendencies of the mind, vital and physical consciousness, and remove those that were of the nature of imperfections. This weakness in your outer vital and timidity before others and dependence on them and preoccupation with their opinion of you or their attitude towards you was one of the chief obstacles in your vital nature. If it is now going, it is because of the psychic pressure; for under it these things go slowly but surely.

*

The ordinary human emotions, good and bad, are all of them vital movements. It is only the psychic feelings that come from the deeper heart within which are not vital.

*

What he is having now are the true spiritual and psychic experiences—not those of the vital plane which most have at the beginning. The experiences of the vital plane (in which there is much imagination and fantasy) are useful for opening up the consciousness; but it is when they are replaced by the spiritual and psychic consciousness that there is the beginning of the true progress.

*

When the vital being has been touched by the psychic, mere vital pleasure has no longer any interest, and may also be felt as a disturbance and discomfort because of the lowering effect upon the consciousness.

*

The Ananda you describe is evidently that of the inner vital when it is full of the psychic influence and floods with it the external vital also. It is the true Ananda and there is nothing in it of the old vital nature. When the psychic thus uses the vital to express itself, this kind of intense ecstasy is the natural form it takes. This intensity and the old vital excitement are two quite different things and must not be confused together. Where there

is the intensity with a pure and full satisfaction, contentment and gratitude leaving no room for claim, demand or depressing reaction, that is the true vital movement.

*

I think it needful at this stage of your sadhana to repeat my previous warning about not allowing any vital mixture. It is the crudity of the unregenerated vital that prevents the psychic from remaining always at the front. You have now seen clearly the two different consciousnesses,—according to what you have written in one of your letters, the psychic and the vital. To get rid of the old vital nature is now one of the most pressing needs of your sadhana. You are trying to get rid of the vital attachments and to turn entirely to the Mother. At this juncture you must be careful not to allow the movements of the old vital nature to enter into your relations with the Mother. Take this matter of your wish for more physical nearness to her or contact with her.¹ Take care not to allow this to gain on you or become a desire; for if you do, the vital will begin to play, to create demands and desires, to awaken in you jealousy and envy of others and other undesirable movements, and that would push your psychic being into the background and spoil the whole truth of your sadhana. There are some who have suffered much trouble and difficulty in their Yoga by making this mistake, and I think it therefore better to put you on your guard.

*

The vital may get psychised or spiritualised, but the vital does not become the psychic or the spiritual part any more than the hand can become the head or the heart. You can put knowledge into the workings of the hand; so too you can put spirituality into the vital, but as the hand remains a hand even when it does the works of intelligence, so the vital remains the vital even when it becomes a pure instrument of the spirit.

¹ *The correspondent had asked to see the Mother for five minutes a day in order to have a short meditation with her. Sri Aurobindo replied that the Mother did not have time for this and had refused all who had made the same request.—Ed.*

The Mind and the Vital

It is evident that your sadhana has been up till now in the mind — that was why you found it easy to concentrate at the crown of the head because the centre there directly commands the whole mental range. The mind quieted and experiencing the effects of the sadhana quieted the vital disturbance, but did not clear and change the vital nature.

Now the sadhana seems to be descending into the vital to clear and change it. The first result is that the difficulty of the vital has shown itself — the ugly images and alarming dreams come from a hostile vital plane which is opposed to the sadhana. From there also comes the renewal of the agitation, the disinclination and resistance to the sadhana. This is not a going back to the old condition, but the result of a pressure of the Yoga-Force on the vital for change to which there is a resistance.

It is this descent of the sadhana to free the vital being that made you feel the necessity of concentrating in the region of the heart; for in the region of the heart is the psychic centre and below, behind the navel, is the vital centre. If these two can be awakened and occupied by the Yoga-Force, then the psychic or Soul-Power will command the whole vital range and purify the vital nature and tranquillise it and turn it towards the Divine. It will be best if you are able to concentrate at will in the heart-region and at the crown of the head, for that gives a more complete power of sadhana.

The other experiences you have are the beginning of the change in the vital, e.g. peace with yourself and those you thought had injured you, joy and freedom from all worldly cares and desires and ambitions. These came too with a quieted mind, but they can be fixed only when the vital is liberated and tranquillised.

Whatever difficulties or troubles arise, the one thing is to go on quietly with full faith in the Divine Power and the guidance, opening steadily and progressively the whole being to the workings of the sadhana till all becomes conscious and consenting to the needed change.

*

At present your experiences are on the mental plane, but that is the right movement. Many sadhaks are unable to advance because they open the vital plane before the mental and psychic are ready. After some beginning of true spiritual experiences on the mental plane there is a premature descent into the vital and great confusion and disturbance. This has to be guarded against. It is still worse if the vital desire-soul opens to experience before the mind has been touched by the things of the spirit.

Aspire always for the mind and psychic being to be filled with the true consciousness and experience and made ready. You must aspire especially for quietness, peace, a calm faith, an increasing steady wideness, for more and more knowledge, for a deep and intense but quiet devotion.

Do not be troubled by your surroundings and their opposition. These conditions are often imposed at first as a kind of ordeal. If you can remain tranquil and undisturbed and continue your sadhana without allowing yourself to be inwardly troubled under these circumstances, it will help to give you a much needed strength; for the path of Yoga is always beset with inner and outer difficulties and the sadhak must develop a quiet, firm and solid strength to meet them.

*

If you see more clearly any deficiencies of your vital nature and the necessity of a transformation, that itself is a sign of psychic growth. They should not be a cause of discouragement; for these are common defects of the human vital and by an increased psychic opening they will lose their hold and finally disappear.

As for the diminution of mental control over the vital movements, that often happens temporarily in the course of the Yoga. Mental control has to be replaced by a greater control from above and by the calm, purity and strong peace of the vital itself opened to the Divine Force and its government of the whole nature.

Do not allow yourself to be troubled or discouraged by any

difficulties, but quietly and simply open yourself to the Mother's force and allow it to change you.

*

It is not at all true that the Mother takes away the mental control — that is one of the many foolish misinterpretations that certain sadhaks make about the sadhana. What is true — and that is the cause of what you feel — is that when you try to control fully your habitual movements in the vital by the sadhana, instead of sometimes controlling them and sometimes indulging, then they make a violent resistance so that they seem to increase. The sadhak has to stand firm and refuse to be overborne or discouraged by this violence. In dream it is usually the case that even what one has thrown out from the waking state, comes up for a long time — that is because all these things remain still in the subconscious and it is the subconscious that creates a great part of people's dreams. Thus if one no longer has sexual desires in the waking state he can still have sex-dreams — and emissions — with a more or less frequent recurrence; he can still meet people in dreams whom he never sees or hears or thinks of in his waking hours, — and so on. All the more are such dreams likely to come when the waking mind is not free.

*

Once the vital being has come forward and shown its difficulty — there is nobody who has not one crucial difficulty or another there — it must be dealt with and conquered.

It must be dealt with not by the mind but directly by the supramental power.

Not peace and knowledge in the mind, but peace, faith, calm strength in the vital being itself (and especially in this part of it that is defective) is the thing to be established. To open yourself and allow all this to be brought down into it is the proper course.

The deficiency is not in the higher mind or mind proper; there is therefore no use in going back to establish mental peace. The difficulty is in that part of the vital being which is not sufficiently open and confident and not sufficiently strong and

courageous and in the physical mind which lends its support to these things. To get the supramental light and calm and strength and intensity down there is what you need.

You may have all the mental knowledge in the world and yet be impotent to face vital difficulties. Courage, faith, sincerity towards the Light, rejection of opposite suggestions and adverse voices are there the true help. Then only can knowledge itself be at all effective.

Not mental control but some descent of a control from above the mind is the power demanded in the realisation. This control derived eventually from the supermind is a control by the Divine Power.

*

Your difficulty in getting rid of the aboriginal in your nature will remain so long as you try to change your vital part by the sole or main strength of your mind and mental will, calling in at most an indefinite and impersonal divine Power to aid you. It is an old difficulty which has never been radically solved in life itself because it has never been met in the true way. In many ways of Yoga it does not so supremely matter because the aim is not a transformed life but withdrawal from life. When that is the object of an endeavour, it may be sufficient to keep the vital down by a mental and moral compulsion, or else it may be stilled and kept lying in a kind of sleep and quiescence. There are some even who allow it to run and exhaust itself if it can while its possessor professes to be untouched and unconcerned by it; for it is only old Nature running on by a past impetus and will drop off with the fall of the body. When none of these solutions can be attained, the sadhaka sometimes simply leads a double inner life, divided between his spiritual experiences and his vital weaknesses to the end, making the most of his better part, making as little as may be of the outer being. But none of these methods will do for our purpose. If you want a true mastery and transformation of the vital movements, it can be done only on condition you allow your psychic being, the soul in you, to awake fully, to establish its rule and, opening

all to the permanent touch of the divine Shakti, impose its own way of pure devotion, whole-hearted aspiration and complete uncompromising urge to all that is divine on the mind and heart and vital nature. There is no other way and it is no use hankering after a more comfortable path. *Nānyah panthā vidyate'yanāya.*

*

For the mind to be quiet, the vital must be quiet, free of desires etc. or at any rate one must be able to control them so that they shall not interfere with the concentration.

*

What happens usually is that something touches the vital, often without one's knowing it, and brings up the old ordinary or external consciousness in such a way that the inner mind gets covered up and all the old thoughts and feelings return for a time. It is the physical mind that becomes active and gives its assent. If the whole mind remains quiet and detached observing the vital movement, but not giving its assent, then to reject it becomes more easy. This established quietude and detachment of the mind marks always a great step forward made in the sadhana.

*

The vital movements are always more difficult to deal with than the pure mental — but it comes with practice.

The Physical and the Vital

It is a great progress if you can now do that [*patiently go on trying, turned always to the Mother*]. The chief difficulty in the way of living in the light as well as the peace and force is the confused and turbid restlessness of man's vital nature. If that is quieted, the major difficulty is gone. There still remains the obstacle of the physical nature's non-understanding or inertia — but that is less troublesome — it is more of the nature of a quiet though sometimes obstinate obstruction than a disturbance. If

the vital inquietude has been cured then certainly the physical obscurity or non-understanding will go.

*

The separate existence of the vital and physical comes to be known of itself usually in the progress of the Yoga. So long as one lives mainly in the surface consciousness one can only know them by their results — one can see that this or that is or must be a movement of the vital etc.; but the direct concrete experience comes only when one begins to live deeper down in the inner being.

Chapter Three

Wrong Movements of the Vital

The Phrase “Wrong Movements”

The phrase [“*wrong movements*”] covers pretty nearly everything that is hurtful to spiritual progress — movements of doubt, revolt, egoistic desire or ambition, sexual indulgence are the most common, but there are plenty of others.

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It depends on what is meant by a wrong or unnecessary movement [*of the vital*]. Certain things have to fall off before the establishment [*of the higher consciousness*] can be *complete*. Others that are unnecessary have to be put aside if they are incompatible with the full sadhana or the growth of the inner consciousness, but can be continued if the consciousness established is such that doing or not doing makes no difference to it.

Vital Reactions

A vital reaction means a response of the vital to the touch or pressure of an idea, action, event, person or thing.

E.g. if someone speaks something you do not like and you get angry, that is a vital reaction. Or if a woman passes and you feel sexual desire, that is a vital reaction. Or if something unpleasant happens and you get a depression, that is a vital reaction. Most disturbances of the consciousness are due to vital reactions, though the mind may assist by wrong thoughts and judgments and misinterpretations. There can be good vital reactions as well as bad, but the term is usually applied to those that are undesirable and have to be surmounted by the sadhak.

The ideal condition is that of a calm, clear, strong vital free from the reactions of the vital ego and responding with true and

high feelings only that are acceptable to the spiritual will and the psychic being.

Vital Suggestions

It would not be at all right to yield to these suggestions which are obviously those of a force that wants to make use of the unease and disappointment of the vital in order to drive you to break your sadhana. These are the usual suggestions that come to all under the stress of this vital condition: "I am not fit for this sadhana. I must go, I cannot stay here. The Mother does not love me. I have given up everything and got nothing. The struggle makes me too miserable; let me go." As a matter of fact there is no real foundation for these suggestions. Because an acute struggle has come, it would be absurd to conclude that you are unfit for the sadhana and to give it up after going so far. It is because you have asked the physical-vital to give up certain of its cherished attachments and habits that it is in this condition; unable to resist altogether, miserable at being deprived, it accepts these suggestions as an excuse for escape from the pressure you have put upon it. The acuteness of the struggle is due to the vehemence of the attack, but still more to this vital or a part of it responding to the suggestions; otherwise a less disturbing even if a slower movement would be quite possible. The Mother has in no way changed towards you nor is she disappointed with you — that is the suggestion drawn from your own state of mind and putting its wrong sense of disappointment and unfitness on to the Mother. She has no reason to change or be disappointed, as she has always been aware of the vital obstacles in you and still expected and expects you to overcome them. The call to change certain things that seem to be in the grain of character is proving difficult even for the best sadhaks, but the difficulty is no proof of incompetence. It is precisely this impulse to go that you must refuse to admit — for so long as these forces think they can bring it about, they will press as much as they can on this point. You must also open yourself more to the Mother's Force in that part and for that it is necessary to get rid of this suggestion about

the Mother's disappointment or lack of love, for it is this which creates the reaction at the time of Pranam. Our help, support, love are there always as before — keep yourself open to them and with their aid drive out these suggestions.

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The feelings and movements of the past always return at night in sleep. It is only when the consciousness that generated them is changed and cleared in the waking state, that afterwards one can clear them out of the sleep also.

You are listening too much to the suggestions of the outer consciousness, "not being able", etc. etc. Since you did begin to open a little for a time, it shows that you are able. You have to get back to that movement; for that you must persuade this outer vital not to go on repeating, "I am not able, my efforts cannot succeed, I am too crooked etc." — or if it goes on, you must not listen to it. You must affirm and concentrate on the possibility that was shown you and not on the supposed impossibility.

*

But how is it that any part of you gives any value to the suggestions? If no part gives any value then surely they must seem to you too laughable and contemptible to have any effect or power to make you revolt.

If you attach no value to the suggestions, then there may be the inertia still but not this.

*

The fact that your vital "goes out of the poise" and accepts them [*ego, demand and desire*] means that you keep yourself open to them. The sign that these things are no longer admitted is when the inner vital rejects them so that they become suggestions only and nothing else. There may arise a surge of suggestions or waves from the general nature, but they cannot get admission. It is only then that a will can be kept in which one is untouched by the general atmosphere.

*

It is not the mind, but the psychic being that made the suggestion through the mind. There is a part of the mind that is under the influence of the Truth and can be the channel of the psychic being's knowledge or feeling; there is another part that answers to the vital and expresses and supports the difficulties and oppositions in the nature. If the whole mind refuses to respond to the vital or accept or support its suggestions then much of the force of the vital attack disappears and one is more able to put a pressure on the vital and oblige it also to listen to the psychic and change.

What happened in your case was that the whole vital difficulty—the main one of the family—massed itself together and rose. When an attack like that is overcome, there is always a clearance of the inner atmosphere. It must not be allowed to gather force again—and for that the mind must always follow the psychic suggestion and refuse at once to harbour the opposite suggestions and at the same time keep itself open to the Mother, so that the Mother's Force may come down into it and occupy it and work there.

Vital Restlessness

I have no idea why he wants to change [*his work*]. If he wants to make himself some day fit for the spiritual life, the first thing to be avoided is vital restlessness. To do the work one has to do with a quiet mind, making an offering of it to the Divine and trying to get rid of egoism and vital desire, is the best way to prepare oneself.

*

The bitterness you feel is that of a restless and dissatisfied vital which did not get what it desired because it could not desire anything strongly and persistently. Otherwise it could have all the vital desires—marriage, friends, position etc.—but it could stick to nothing owing to a kind of weak restlessness. In the Yoga it has shown the same restless weakness,—otherwise it could by this time have attained something, and besides there was the

sex-impulse which it would neither satisfy nor leave. You must know what you want and want it with your whole will—it is only so that there can be an end of this restlessness and failure.

*

As for the other thing it is the struggle between the mind and psychic which see the right thing to do and the restless vital. It is not something wrong in the head, on the contrary the head is getting more and more to see what is right; it is only that the vital restlessness is not dominated by the mind and wants to follow its own feeling. That happens to everybody so long as the vital is not properly under our control. Even in ordinary circumstances and in ordinary life the vital is always carrying away the being to do what the mind disapproves, but there it is felt to be something normal, especially as the vital very usually persuades the mind to find arguments and justify its mistakes. You have to persist until the understanding mind and psychic in you become normally stronger than this part of the vital that does not want to be quiet and concentrated or see things rightly. Then you will not be so much troubled by this disagreement between two parts of the being.

*

It is mostly when the sadhana condition is interrupted that the vital becomes agitated or impatient and restless. Instead of remaining quiet and waiting or calling down the real push from above, it begins to get vexed and restless and begins to ask questions: "Why this? why that?" These things do not mean that you are going astray—it means only that these defects are still not worked out, that is all. Also the old vital mental egoism rises up and if the answers do not please it, it becomes challenging, disputatious, insistent on its own point of view. These are old defects which are part of the external nature and therefore difficult to root out. You must learn to recognise them and get rid of them by a quiet rejection and disuse.

*

It is not true that you cannot or will never be put right. It is what appears to you when your lower vital is restless or else your physical mind comes uppermost. Only it is true that if you could keep yourself always in that part of you which is in contact, the thing would be done sooner and with much less difficulty and trouble.

*

If you reject the restlessness of the vital always, the whole being will be at peace and being at peace receive the divine Ananda. Only you must not let the Ananda go out in speech or action nor let it turn into outward vital joy. If you keep it silently within, it will work in you for the transformation.

Vital Dryness

The feeling of the desert comes because of the resistance of the vital which wants life to be governed by desire. If that is not allowed, it regards existence as a desert and puts that impression on the mind.

*

It is the resistance of the vital that takes the form of this dryness — a form of passive resistance, just as revolt or an excited activity of desire is its active form of resistance. But you should not be discouraged — these phases are normal and almost everybody has to face them. It is not really a sign of failure or inability, but a trying part of the process of change. Hold fast and aspire always for the love and the opening. The inner heart is there and that will receive an answer to the aspiration and one day quickly open the outer and make it also receive. To call to the Mother always is the main thing and with that to aspire and assent to the light when it comes, to reject and detach oneself from desire and any dark movement. But if one cannot do these other things successfully, then call and still call.

The Mother's force is there with you even when you do not feel it. Trust to it, remain quiet and persevere.

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Yes, dryness comes usually when the vital — here certainly the vital physical — dislikes a movement or condition or the refusal of its desires and starts non-cooperation. But sometimes it is a condition that has to be crossed through, e.g. the neutral or dry quietude which sometimes comes when the ordinary movements have been thrown out but nothing positive has yet come to take their place (e.g. peace, joy, a higher knowledge or force and action).

*

The ordinary freshness, energy, enthusiasm of the nature comes either from the vital, direct when it is satisfying its own instincts and impulses, indirect when it cooperates with or assents to the mental, physical or spiritual activities. If the vital resists, there is revolt and struggle. If the vital no longer insists on its own impulses and instincts but does not cooperate, there is either dryness or a neutral state. Dryness comes in when the vital is quiescent but passively unwilling, not interested, the neutral state when it neither assents nor is unwilling, — simply quiescent, passive. This however, the neutral state, can deepen into positive calm and peace by a greater influx from above which keeps the vital not only quiescent but at least passively acquiescent. With the active interest and consent of the vital the peace becomes a glad or joyful peace or a strong peace supporting and entering into action or active experience.

*

The dryness is usually only a passage of neutral quiet, — the vital withdrawing its stimulus gives to the neutrality a colour of dryness. To live in the peace is the natural condition of the Self and therefore the basis of the Yogic consciousness — it is possible when the peace has so deepened and generalised itself that even a vital attack cannot cover it up or penetrate it.

*

The slight dryness must have been the reaction caused in the physical vital by the “uninterest” in external things — because the physical vital depends very much on this external interest.

When it gets more accustomed to the silence, then the dryness disappears.

*

The feeling of loneliness, *udāśīnatā*, dryness and lack of *rasa* come very usually when the vital part is disappointed in its desires or tries to give them up but has not yet attained a quiet indifference towards them. It is necessary to replace this condition by the true quietude which will allow the psychic being to become again active and reopen the doors of inner experience, and we shall try to get this done.

*

I do not know that sadness has the power to cure [*dryness in the vital*]. I have myself followed the Gita's path of equanimity—but for some the psychic sadness may be necessary. But I think it is more an indication of a mistake than a cure.

Vital Resistance

The resistance and the contrary suggestions come from the vital nature which is in all men obscure and attached to ordinary ideas and aims and easily listens to such ideas and suggestions as those you mention. Faith and devotion come from the soul and it is only when the vital has entirely submitted to the soul that one can truly lead the spiritual life.

*

It is normal that when a special pressure is put on a vital movement, a resistance whether in the vital itself (here vital-physical) or in the subconscious should manifest itself. It is sometimes a real resistance, sometimes it is only the *pravṛtti* presenting itself for purification.

*

Why should you suppose it [*the effort of sadhana*] is vain? The purification of the vital takes a long time because until all the parts are free, none is quite free and because they use a multitude

of movements which have to be changed or enlightened,—and moreover there is a great habit of persistence and resistance in the habitual movements of the nature. One therefore easily thinks that one has made no progress,—but all sincere and sustained effort of purification has its result and after a time the progress made will become evident.

*

You should not allow yourself to be invaded by this suggestion of not being fit or able to go through. The vital is the most difficult part of the being to change or control and even sadhaks who have advanced far have to struggle with it at times. But its more fundamental resistances can be overcome more quickly, and you have only to persevere in aspiration and opening to the Mother and this kind of denial will after a time come no more.

*

It is this idea that you are helpless because the vital consents to the wrong movement that comes in the way. You have to put your inner will and the Mother's light on the vital so that it shall change, not leave it to do what it likes. If one is to be "helpless" and ruled by any part of the instrumental being, how is change possible? The Mother's force or the psychic can act, but on condition that the assent of the being is there. If the vital is left to do what it likes, it will always go after its old habits; it has to be made to feel that it must change.

*

I suppose it is the nature of the vital which, when a thing is forbidden to it whether by the mind or by circumstances, runs after it more. But I suppose if you remain firm, this will pass.

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When the vital takes hold of a thing it is often like that — it fixes it continually on the mind till it is either satisfied or the hold thrown off.

*

The one thing you have to avoid is losing patience; for that only prolongs the vital trouble. There is no reason for it. When the vital is to be changed (fundamentally) it always gives constant trouble like this until one can seat oneself fixedly in the calm of the inner consciousness and keep the vital movements quite on the surface.

*

It is always better to have peace. As for the vital, there is always something in it that resists and tries to retard, but if the inner being opens sufficiently and you can live in the inner being, peace can descend and establish itself there in such a way that the vital movements of the surface may be there but will not be able to break the inner peace.

Vital Dissatisfaction and Non-Cooperation

It is because the vital was very much under the grip of its desires and so, now that it is separately active, not controlled by mental will, it kicks and cries whenever its desires are not satisfied. That is an ordinary movement of the human vital when not dominated and kept in its place by the mental will.

*

It is an oscillation due to something in the resistant part (not the whole of it) being still dissatisfied at the call to change. When any vital element is disappointed, dissatisfied, called or compelled to change but not yet willing, it has the tendency to create non-response or non-cooperation of the vital, leaving the physical dull or insensible without the vital push. With the psychic pressure this remnant of resistance will pass.

*

There are two conditions in which it [*the vital*] becomes like that [*non-cooperative*]: (1) when its ordinary (ego) actions or motives of action are not allowed to it, (2) when one goes very much down into the physical, the vital sometimes or for a time

becomes inert unless or until there is the Force from above.

*

The nervous being is under the influence of the vital forces; when they are denied or pushed out, it becomes depressed and wants to call them back—for it is accustomed to get the pleasure and strength of life from the vital movements and not from the spiritual or divine Force above.

*

The vital can be all right when things are going on swimmingly, but when difficulties become strong, it sinks and lies supine. Also if a bait is held out to the vital ego, then it can become enthusiastic and active.

*

It seems to be some tamas or inertia coming down on the system. It is sometimes like that when the vital gets dissatisfied with the conditions or with what has been attained and initiates a sort of non-cooperation or passive resistance, saying, “As I am not satisfied, I won’t take interest in anything or help you to do anything.”

It may be because I asked you to stop meditating and to wait. The vital does not like waiting. But I had to tell you that because of the burning of the centres, the disturbance of sleep and the rest—these must go before you can meditate in the right way and with success. If you meditate at all now, it should be only in calm and peace with a very quiet aspiration for the divine calm and peace to descend into you.

It is also perhaps due to your penchant for Nirvana. For the desire of Nirvana easily brings this kind of collapse of the energies. Nirvana is not the aim of my Yoga—but whether for Nirvana or for this Yoga, calm and peace in the whole being are the necessary foundation of all siddhi.

*

For the dissatisfaction of the vital, the only remedy is rejection

and refusal to identify yourself with it. For the inertia the remedy is not to absorb yourself in thoughts about it, but to turn upwards and call the Light and Force to come into it.

Vital Disturbance and Revolt

The exacerbation of certain vital movements is a perfectly well-known phenomenon in Yoga and does not mean that one has degenerated, but only that one has come to close grips instead of to a pleasant nodding acquaintance with the basic instincts of the earthly vital nature. I have had myself the experience of this rising to a height, during a certain stage of the spiritual development, of things that before hardly existed and seemed quite absent in the pre-Yogic life. These things rise up like that because they are fighting for their existence — they are not really personal to you and the vehemence of their attack is not due to any "badness" in the personal nature. I dare say seven sadhaks out of ten have a similar experience. Afterwards when they cannot effect their object which is to drive the sadhak out of his sadhana, the whole thing sinks and there is no longer any vehement trouble. I repeat that the only serious thing about it is the depression created in you and the idea of inability in the Yoga that they take care to impress on the brain when they are at their work. If you can get rid of that, the violence of the vital attacks is only the phenomenon of a stage and does not in the end matter.

*

What you have noticed about the disturbances is true. There are now two consciousnesses in you, the new one that is growing and what is left of the old. The old has something in it which is a habit of the human vital, — the tendency to keep any touch of grief, anger, vexation etc. or any kind of emotional, vital or mental disturbance, to make much of it, to prolong it, not to wish to let it go, to return to it even when the cause of disturbance is past and could be forgotten, always to remember it and bring it up when it can. This is a common trait of human nature and a quite customary movement. The new consciousness on the contrary

does not want these things and when they happen throws them off as quickly as possible. When the new consciousness is fully grown and established, then the disturbances will be altogether rejected. Even if the causes of them happen, there will be no response of grief, anger, vexation etc. in the nature.

*

The one thing necessary is to arrive at a fixed and definite choice in the mind which one can always oppose to the vital disturbance. Disturbance in the vital will always come so long as the full peace has not descended there, but with a fixed resolution in the mind kept always to the front the acuteness of the disturbance can disappear and the road become shorter.

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Usually the vital tries to resist the call to change. That is what is meant by revolt or opposition. If the inner will insists and forbids revolt or opposition, the vital unwillingness may often take the form of depression and dejection accompanied by a resistance in the physical mind which supports the repetition of old ideas, habits, movements or actions which the body consciousness suffers from an apprehension or fear of the called for change, a drawing back from it or a dullness which does not receive the call.

It is these things you have to get rid of. But a sorrowful or despondent mood is not the proper condition for doing that. You have to stand back from the feeling of suffering, anguish and apprehension, reject it and look quietly at the resistance, affirming always to yourself your will to change and insisting that it shall be done and cannot fail to be done now or later with the divine help, because the divine help is there. It is then that the strength can come to you that will overcome the difficulties.

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It was the dissatisfaction of the soul with the superficial vital life that brought you away from the outer world and it is the same dissatisfaction a hundred times increased and accompanied with

an intense psychic sorrow that would come on you if you went away from the Yoga.

Your vital mind (which is the one which revolts and doubts) has strange misconceptions about the spiritual state. There is no grimness in being an instrument of the divine Will—it is the happiest and most joyous condition possible—it brings not only peace but an intense Ananda. Anyhow, the hold of the Yoga-force is increasing in spite of everything and you have only to go on for it to solve the struggle between the outer man and the inner Spirit.

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This part of the vital [*which wants to revolt*] has no precise reasons to support itself with—it takes hold of any mood of disappointment or strong sense of difficulty. It is a factor in all human natures,—restless, desiring, eager, despondent, unstable. Stand back from it and do not allow it to govern or move you. There is a right part of the vital which must be used—ardent, sensitive to the higher things, capable of great love and devotion. Strengthen that and support it on the psychic and on the peace and wideness that comes from above.

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Tell the vital that complaining and revolting only hampers you from getting what it wants—it is only when it is calm and confident that things can be done.

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The outward revolt is the refusal of discipline and obedience—the inward revolt is of many kinds, it may take many forms, e.g. a revolt of the vital against the Mother, a revolt of the mind against the Truth, a rejection of the spiritual life, a demand to enthrone the ego as the Divine or to serve something that flatters the vital ego and supports its demands and call that the Divine, a response to vital suggestions of distrust, despair, self-destruction or departure—and many others.

*

The difficulty must have come from distrust and disobedience. For distrust and disobedience are like falsehood (they are themselves a falsity, based on false ideas and impulses), they interfere in the action of the Power, prevent it from being felt or from working fully and diminish the force of the Protection. Not only in your inward concentration, but in your outward acts and movements you must take the right attitude. If you do that and put everything under the Mother's guidance, you will find that difficulties begin to diminish or are much more easily got over and things become steadily smoother.

In your work and acts you must do the same as in your concentration. Open to the Mother, put them under her guidance, call in the peace, the supporting Power, the protection and, in order that they may work, reject all wrong influences that might come in their way by creating wrong, careless or unconscious movements.

Follow this principle and your whole being will become one, under one rule, in the peace and sheltering Power and Light.

Rejection of Wrong Vital Movements

It is quite true that rising into a higher consciousness than the ordinary human consciousness is the right way towards transformation. Merely to remain in the ordinary lower consciousness and try to reject from there the wrong movements can produce no permanent or complete result. But there are several points here which you must note or this perception may be accompanied by an error.

(1) As you have yourself subsequently seen, all the parts and personalities that constitute the being must share in the higher consciousness, otherwise the old movements under various pretexts will continue.

(2) You speak of rejecting the lower vital, but it is only the unregenerated lower vital movements that can be got rid of; you cannot get rid of the lower vital itself, for it is a necessary part of the manifested nature, like the higher vital or the mind. It has

to be changed in the power of the higher consciousness, not left to itself or dropped from you.

(3) If you do not so change it, if you simply remain content by living in the psychic or other higher consciousness internally then you raise the risk of doing like those who are satisfied to have experiences and some inner quietude or Ananda, but leave the external nature and surface active movements unchanged, either thinking them of no importance or justifying them under the plea that there is the psychic or spiritual consciousness behind them.

I asked you to look for the cause of the abatement of energy or zeal (*utsāha*), because it is evident that there must be some resistance somewhere, otherwise there would not be these constant headaches and this less intense condition. If the physical consciousness is open the headaches should disappear or at least diminish in frequency and force, and if the lower vital is all right, the intensity ought to continue.

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But what do you want to do with all these obscure and useless vital movements that torment you, these wrong thoughts, suggestions, confusions, inabilities etc.? You seem to write as if you thought they must be kept and changed? But why kept and how changed? What would be the use? But precisely what you have got to do is to “shut them out”, to reject, refuse to keep them, refuse to have them. It is precisely to see in another way, to see in the true way, that the Force is pressing on you. It would indeed be a great blessing if you could forget these other wrong things altogether. Again, why do you want to keep and change the “wrong things” as you yourself call them? If you have an illness, do you want to keep and change the pains, the sickness and all the rest of it? It is to throw out the illness that you want, for the body to forget it, not to keep any impression of it, to lose even the possibility of having it again, to live and feel in quite another way, the way of health. It is just the same here.

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These wrong movements [*doubt, depression, sadness, hostility towards the Mother*] belong to the universal vital Nature, but the vital of man also shares in them, makes itself a centre and field of the play of these wrong forces: in that sense they are in you. But by constant rejection they are pushed out; you feel them no longer rising in you but coming from outside. The vital still admits them because it is not yet pure of the old habit of response. You have to persist till they are entirely foreign to your nature and no longer get admittance.

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Keep your resolution firm in your mind. It is the vital that is invaded by something foreign from the outside (universal) Nature; it is not your own feeling. If you keep your resolution firm, the vital also will begin to throw out this foreign matter.

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After each crisis there is something gained, if there has been a victory and rejection. The gain is to externalise the vital disturbance, so that even if it returns it will be felt so much an outside force that the observing consciousness (mental, higher vital) cannot be disturbed. If you keep that, it will be an immense advance.

Return of Vital Movements after Rejection

It was evidently not the action of something that is rooted still within, but an old movement returning from outside (from the universal Nature) to which something in the vital still responds by force of habit, force of accustomed recurrence. This is shown by the fact that you felt nothing at the time — only afterwards; also by the alternations of quiet and unrest after calling the Force, as if of something losing its hold and then trying to get it back and hold on still. Things thrown out always come back like that relying on the old habit of response in the stuff of the nature, — the old vibration. By throwing it out whenever it comes, in the end the part which responds begins to understand that it

must not and is gradually or quickly liberated from the habit.

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What comes back like that is the old vital movements which you used to have and which you have been throwing out. The vital gets disturbed and filled with these thoughts whenever something happens that hurts or displeases it strongly. To get rid of it one must have always a sense of complete reliance on the Mother, of surrender; that brings a calm which refuses to be moved by any outward happening or by what people do or say, a happiness which is not disturbed by any occurrence.

*

It must be that on that occasion the consciousness got lowered and some vital wave came in from the atmosphere resuscitating the old vibrations of the restless vital which had quieted down. You must separate yourself from them and get the poise of quietude again. They have no longer any real basis in mind or heart, they rely only on the force of repetition that comes up from the subconscious and once started try to keep these old ideas and feelings repeating themselves so as to prevent the consciousness from settling down into quietude. But the poise once obtained is there and has only been covered up and has got to be uncovered again from these cloudings. You must get the habit of keeping quiet somewhere in yourself when these attacks come, of keeping something within that refuses to say ditto to these suggestions or accept them as its own proper thoughts and feelings.

Anyhow the Force will be put to help you; receive it and all that will go.

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It is very often when one thinks a particular resistance is finished and is no longer in the vital that it surges up again.

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The only way to get rid of these vital movements is to do

persistently what he describes himself as doing with the invading forces — i.e. he must be always vigilant, try always at every moment to be conscious, always reject these things, refusing to take pleasure in them, call on the Mother, bring down the descent of the Light. If they return persistently he must not be discouraged; it is not possible to change the nature at once, it takes a long time. If, however, he can keep the psychic consciousness in the front, then it will be much easier and there will be much less difficulty and trouble in the change. That can be done by constant aspiration and *abhyāsa*.

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The difficulty you have in your vital is not peculiar to you, but is in some degree and in one form or another a fairly general malady. Its constant return, the mechanical irrational return even when all the rest of the nature has rejected it, is due to the obstinacy of the material consciousness always repeating the old movement in the old groove at the least touch from the old habitual forces. It is a question of faith, patience and persistence. One must be more obstinate than the obstinate material nature and persevere until the light and truth can take permanent hold of the parts which are still responsive to the old movements. There can be no doubt that with this perseverance the Truth will in the end conquer.

It would make it easier if you could get rid of certain fixed ideas and of the habitual reaction of depression or despair when these recurrences come. For instance, you ought to throw away once for all this idea of X's malediction; it is a thing of the past and it is only the physical mind's memory of it that gives it some appearance of survival. The difficulties we are now meeting have nothing to do with X; they are part only of the necessity of conquest over the habits of the physical consciousness and he has nothing to do there and no influence of any kind whatever. Also dismiss any question about the "possibility" of conversion of your vital being; you should see rather that it is certain and not merely possible. This idea of identification with the dark Shakti is also another old notion which you ought to root out

without cherishing any least trace of it. It has no meaning on the plane of the physical and vital physical consciousness where the whole work is now going on and to nourish any such ideas can only hamper your progress. Finally, when there are these recurrences, do not allow yourself to be depressed by them, but simply observe and stand back and call in the higher force with the full confidence that these are mechanical recurrences and in substance nothing more — however strong they may seem in appearance. The principle of mechanical repetition is very strong in the material nature, so strong that it makes one easily think that it is incurable. That however is only a trick of the forces of this material inconscience; it is by creating this impression that they try to endure. If, on the contrary, you remain firm, refuse to be depressed or discouraged and, even in the moment of attack, affirm the certainty of eventual victory, the victory itself will come much more easily and sooner.

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All these things are there in human nature, habitual movements, which show their true nature only when the light of the higher consciousness is turned on them. Even after they have been rejected the possibility of a response to such suggestions from outside remains in the grain of the lower vital or vital physical or the subconscious till there is the full supramental enlightenment there.

Alternation of Good and Bad Vital Conditions

When one tries to change something in the vital, then, due to the nature's habit of persisting in a movement to which it has been accustomed, there is usually an alternation like this; the new condition persists for some days, then the old forces its way for some time to the surface. If one persists, the old movement begins to lose its force and die out and the new permanently replaces it.

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At present I will only say that the alternations you feel are there between your psychic being and the mental and vital parts already submitted to it and the revolted vital parts full of the outcry of the vital ego stressing and increasing by brooding in them its own grievances and sufferings. That is a struggle which every sadhak has to go through with more or less acuteness; but the only way to escape from the suffering and struggle is for the mind to put itself wholly on the side of the soul and bring over the whole vital to the true attitude. It is absurd to think that we know nothing of these things; we know them very well but we know also that the solution lies not in the satisfaction of the revolted vital but in its submission and surrender to the soul within and to the Divine.

Chapter Four

The Lower Vital Being

The Decisive Ordeal of This Yoga

The cardinal defect, that which has been always standing in the way and is now isolated in an extreme prominence, is seated or at least is at present concentrated in the lower vital being. I mean that part of the vital-physical nature with its petty and obstinate egoism which actuates the external human personality,—that which supports its surface thoughts and dominates its habitual ways of feeling, character and action. I am not concerned here with the other parts of the being and I do not speak of anything in the higher mind, the psychic self or the higher and larger vital nature; for when the lower vital rises, these are pushed into the background, if not covered over for the time, by this lower vital being and this external personality. Whatever there may be in these higher parts, aspiration to the Truth, devotion or will to conquer the obstacles and the hostile forces, it cannot become integral, it cannot remain unmixed or unspoilt or continue to be effective so long as the lower vital and the external personality have not accepted the Light and consented to change.

It was inevitable that in the course of the sadhana these inferior parts of the nature should be brought forward in order that like the rest of the being they may make the crucial choice and either accept or refuse transformation. My whole work depends upon this movement; it is the decisive ordeal of this Yoga. For the physical consciousness and the material life cannot change if this does not change. Nothing that may have been done before, no inner illumination, experience, power or Ananda, is of any eventual value if this is not done. If the little external personality is to persist in retaining its obscure and limited, its petty and ignoble, its selfish and false and stupid human consciousness, this amounts to a flat negation of the work and the Sadhana. I have no intention of giving my sanction to a new edition of the

old fiasco, a partial and transient spiritual opening within with no true and radical change in the law of the external nature. If, then, any sadhaka refuses in practice to admit this change, or if he refuses even to admit the necessity for any change of his lower vital being and his habitual external personality, I am entitled to conclude that, whatever his professions, he has not accepted either myself or my Yoga.

I am well aware that this change is not easy; the dynamic will towards it does not come at once and is difficult to fix and, even afterwards, the sadhaka often feels helpless against the force of habit. Knowing this, the Mother and myself have shown and are still showing sufficient patience in giving time for the true spirit to come up and form and act effectively in the external being of those around us. But if in anyone this part not only becomes obstinate, self-assertive or aggressive, but is supported and justified by the mind and will and tries to spread itself in the atmosphere, then it is a different and very serious matter.

The difficulty in the lower vital being is that it is still wedded to its old self and in revolt against the Light; it has not only not surrendered either to a greater Truth or to myself and the Mother, but it has up to now no such will and hardly any idea even of what true surrender is. When the lower vital assumes this attitude, it takes its stand upon a constant affirmation of the old personality and the past forms of the lower nature. Every time they are discouraged, it supports and brings them back and asserts its right to freedom—the freedom to affirm and follow its own crude and egoistic ideas, desires, fancies, impulses or convenience whenever it chooses. It claims, secretly or in so many words, the right to follow its nature,—its average unregenerate human nature, the right to be itself,—its natural, original, unchanged self with all the falsehood, ignorance and incoherence proper to this part of the being. And it claims or, if it does not claim in theory, it asserts in practice the right to express all this impure and inferior stuff in speech and act and behaviour. It defends, glosses over, paints in specious colours and tries to prolong indefinitely the past habitual ways of thinking, speaking and feeling and to eternise what is distorted and

misformed in the character. This it does sometimes by open self-assertion and revolt, branding all that is done or said against it as error or oppression or injustice, sometimes behind a cover of self-deception or a mask of dissimulation, professing one thing and practising another. Often it tries to persuade itself and to convince others that these things are the only right reason and right way of acting for itself or for all or even that they are part of the true movement of the Yoga.

When this lower vital being is allowed to influence the action, as happens when the sadhaka in any way endorses its suggestions, its attitude, whether masked to himself or coming to the surface, dictates a considerable part of his speech and action and against it he makes no serious resistance. If he is frank with himself and straightforward to the Mother, he will begin to recognise the source and nature of the obstacle and will soon be on the direct road to correct and change it. But this, when under the adverse influence, he persistently refuses to be; he prefers to hide up these movements under any kind of concealment, denial, justification or excuse or other shelter.

In the nature the resistance takes certain characteristic forms which add to the confusion and to the difficulty of transformation. It is necessary to outline some of these forms because they are sufficiently common, in some in a less, in others in a greater degree, to demand a clear and strong exposure.

1. A certain vanity and arrogance and self-assertive rajasic vehemence which in this smaller vital being are, for those who have a pronounced strength in these parts, the deformation of the vital force and habit of leading and domination that certain qualities in the higher vital gave them. This is accompanied by an excessive *amour-propre* which creates the necessity of making a figure, maintaining by any means position and prestige, even of posturing before others, influencing, controlling or "helping" them, claiming the part of a superior sadhaka, one with greater knowledge and with occult powers. The larger vital being itself has to give up its powers and capacities to the Divine Shakti from whom they come and must use them only as the Mother's instrument and according to her directions; if it intervenes with

the claim of its ego and puts itself between her and the work or between her and other sadhakas, then whatever its natural power, it deviates from the true way, spoils the work, brings in adverse forces and wrong movements and does harm to those whom it imagines it is helping. When these things are transferred to the smallness of the lower vital nature and the external personality and take lower and pettier forms, they become still more false to the Truth, incongruous, grotesque, and at the same time can be viciously harmful, though in a smaller groove. There is no better way of calling in hostile forces into the general work or of vitiating and exposing to their influence one's own sadhana. On a smaller scale these defects of vanity, arrogance and rajasic violence are present in most human natures. They take other forms, but are then also a great obstacle to any true spiritual change.

2. Disobedience and indiscipline. This lower part of the being is always random, wayward, self-assertive and unwilling to accept the imposition on it of any order and discipline other than its own idea or impulse. Its defects even from the beginning stand in the way of the efforts of the higher vital to impose on the nature a truly regenerating tapasya. This habit of disobedience and disregard of discipline is so strong that it does not always need to be deliberate; the response to it seems to be immediate, irresistible and instinctive. Thus obedience to the Mother is repeatedly promised or professed, but the action done or the course followed is frequently the very opposite of the profession or promise. This constant indiscipline is a radical obstacle to the sadhana and the worst possible example to others.

3. Dissimulation and falsity of speech. This is an exceedingly injurious habit of the lower nature. Those who are not straightforward cannot profit by the Mother's help, for they themselves turn it away. Unless they change, they cannot hope for the descent of the supramental Light and Truth into the lower vital and physical nature; they remain stuck in their own self-created mud and cannot progress. Often it is not mere exaggeration or a false use of the imagination embroidering on the actual truth that is marked in the sadhaka, but also a positive denial and distortion as well as a falsifying concealment of facts. This

he does sometimes to cover up his disobedience or wrong or doubtful course of action, sometimes to keep up his position, at others to get his own way or indulge his preferred habits and desires. Very often, when one has this kind of vital habit, he clouds his own consciousness and does not altogether realise the falsity of what he is saying or doing; but in much that he says and does, it is quite impossible to extend to him even this inadequate excuse.

4. A dangerous habit of constant self-justification. When this becomes strong in the sadhaka, it is impossible to turn him in this part of his being to the right consciousness and action because at each step his whole preoccupation is to justify himself. His mind rushes at once to maintain his own idea, his own position or his own course of action. This he is ready to do by any kind of argument, sometimes the most clumsy and foolish or inconsistent with what he has been protesting the moment before, by any kind of misstatement or any kind of device. This is a common misuse, but none the less a misuse of the thinking mind; but it takes in him exaggerated proportions and so long as he keeps to it, it will be impossible for him to see or live the Truth.

Whatever the difficulties of the nature, however long and painful the process of dealing with them, they cannot stand to the end against the Truth, if there is or if there comes in these parts the true spirit, attitude and endeavour. But if a sadhaka continues out of self-esteem and self-will or out of tamasic inertia to shut his eyes or harden his heart against the Light, so long as he does that, no one can help him. The consent of all the being is necessary for the divine change, and it is the completeness and fullness of the consent that constitutes the integral surrender. But the consent of the lower vital must not be only a mental profession or a passing emotional adhesion; it must translate itself into an abiding attitude and a persistent and consistent action.

This Yoga can only be done to the end by those who are in total earnest about it and ready to abolish their little human ego and its demands in order to find themselves in the Divine. It cannot be done in a spirit of levity or laxity; the work is too

high and difficult, the adverse powers in the lower Nature too ready to take advantage of the least sanction or the smallest opening, the aspiration and tapasya needed too constant and intense. It cannot be done if there is a petulant self-assertion of the ideas of the human mind or wilful indulgence of the demands and instincts and pretensions of the lowest part of the being, commonly justified under the name of human nature. It cannot be done if you insist on identifying these lowest things of the Ignorance with the divine Truth or even the lesser truth permissible on the way. It cannot be done if you cling to your past self and its old mental, vital and physical formations and habits; one has continually to leave behind his past selves and to see, act and live from an always higher and higher conscious level. It cannot be done if you insist on "freedom" for your human mind and vital ego. All the parts of the human being are entitled to express and satisfy themselves in their own way at their own risk and peril, if he so chooses, as long as he leads the ordinary life. But to enter into a path of Yoga whose whole object is to substitute for these human things the law and power of a greater Truth and the whole heart of whose method is surrender to the Divine Shakti, and yet to go on claiming this so-called freedom which is no more than a subjection to certain ignorant cosmic Forces, is to indulge in a blind contradiction and to claim the right to lead a double life.

Least of all can this Yoga be done if those who profess to be its sadhakas continue always to make themselves centres, instruments or spokesmen of the forces of the Ignorance which oppose, deny and ridicule its very principle and object. On one side there is the supramental realisation, the overshadowing and descending power of the supramental Divine, the light and force of a far greater Truth than any yet realised on the earth, something therefore beyond what the little human mind and its logic regard as the only permanent realities, something whose nature and way and process of development here it cannot conceive or perceive by its own inadequate instruments or judge by its puerile standards; in spite of all opposition this is pressing down for manifestation in the physical consciousness and the material

life. On the other side is this lower vital nature with all its pretentious arrogance, ignorance, obscurity, dullness or incompetent turbulence, standing for its own prolongation, standing against the descent, refusing to believe in any real reality or real possibility of a supramental or suprahuman consciousness and creation or, still more absurd, demanding, if it exists at all, that it should conform to its own little standards, seizing greedily upon everything that seems to disprove it, denying the presence of the Divine — for it knows that without that presence the work is impossible, — affirming loudly its own thoughts, judgments, desires, instincts, and, if these are contradicted, avenging itself by casting abroad doubt, denial, disparaging criticism, revolt and disorder. These are the two things now in presence between which every one will have to choose.

For this opposition, this sterile obstruction and blockade against the descent of the divine Truth cannot last for ever. Every one must come down finally on one side or the other, on the side of the Truth or against it. The supramental realisation cannot coexist with the persistence of the lower Ignorance; it is incompatible with continued satisfaction in a double nature.

The Lower Vital Not Reasonable

The lower vital is not a part that listens to reason. There is no *why* to its action; it acts in a particular way because it has long been accustomed to act in that way, and it goes on even if the doing brings a painful reaction.

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The lower vital is very slow in listening to reason — at least when reason is on the side of Truth; although it is very pleased to listen to the mind when the mind justifies the lower vital's wrong movements. In fact the lower vital moves on its own lines, not according to Truth or reason. It is only the insistence of a stronger Light that can enlighten it by changing it in its own substance of consciousness.

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It is the lower vital energy that rushes to the brain and either confuses it and prevents mental self-control or else makes the mind its slave and uses reason to justify the passions.

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It is the lower (physical) vital that acts like that [*expresses wrong thoughts and feelings*]. This part of Nature does not act according to reason, it has no understanding of things. It acts only according to desire, impulse and habit. The mind and the heart and the higher vital have understood and put themselves on the side of the Peace and Force that are acting to transform the nature. But this still responds to the old forces when they touch it. It is a question of getting down the Peace and Force and Light into this part, so that whenever the outside forces of the lower Nature touch they will find that force there and not the old response. It is a little difficult because of the long past habit, but it will come more and more as the Force descends into the body and pervades it in its descent.

The Resistance of the Lower Vital

In all it is the lower vital that is most full of ignorance and desire and therefore of falsehood.

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There is very commonly a gulf between the higher parts and the lower vital even in ordinary life — in Yoga it is apt to get emphasised until the lower vital changes, but if we can judge from the majority of people here, that change is most extraordinarily difficult.

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The struggle is always hard with the lower vital nature — because it has been indulged through so many lives and it is not easily made willing to change.

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There is certainly a sincere will to change. This resistance of the lower vital is usual in everybody—it is the main difficulty in Yoga. If it were not there, the change would be easy. But once the steady mental will is there, it is a question of time and steady sadhana. With that the change is sure.

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The resistance of the nerves persists because there is always a restlessness in the lower vital due to past errors and what they have left in the being until this part can be entirely opened to the peace and light and the presence of the Mother. It is towards this that your sadhana must be directed and you should not be discouraged if there is some resistance or even a strong resistance. That always happens; if the resistance is quietly and steadily rejected, then it can be overcome.

Rejecting Wrong Movements of the Lower Vital

The lower vital in most human beings is full of grave defects and of movements that respond to hostile forces. A constant psychic opening, a persistent rejection of these influences, a separation of oneself from all hostile suggestions and the inflow of the calm, light, peace, purity of the Mother's power would eventually free the system from the siege.

What is needed is to be quiet and more and more quiet, to look on these influences as something not yourself which has intruded, to separate yourself from it and deny it and to abide in a quiet confidence in the Divine Power. If your psychic being asks for the Divine and your mind is sincere and calls for liberation from the lower nature and from all hostile forces and if you can call the Mother's power into your heart and rely upon it more than on your own strength, this siege will in the end be driven away from you and strength and peace take its place.

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It [*a troubled state of mind*] is because you entered on a wrong movement, taking the lower vital experiences for truth. You now

find it difficult to get rid of them because of the hold you gave them. The two lines of forces are the line of these lower vital forces and the line of the true movement of forces resting on the psychic consciousness and opening the true mind, the true vital, the true physical consciousness to the action of the Higher Force. If you persist in rejecting the former and aspiring for the latter, the struggle will diminish after a time and the true path become more and more clear. Fidelity always and at every moment is what is required of you.

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The condition [*for the change of the lower vital*] is that you must bring the sadhana into your physical consciousness and live for the sadhana and the Divine only. You must give up positively the bad habits that still persist and never resume those that have ceased or been interrupted. Inner experiences are helpful to the mind and higher vital for change, but for the lower vital and the outer being a sadhana of self-discipline is indispensable. The external actions and the spirit in them must change — your external thoughts and actions must be for the Divine only. There must be self-restraint, entire truthfulness, a constant thought of the Divine in all you do. This is the way for the change of the lower vital. By your constant self-dedication and self-discipline the Force will be brought down into the external being and the change made.

At present you have to go back, but this can very well be done outside. When it is done, then you will be truly ready for the complete spiritual life.

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There can be only one “solution” of this kind of struggle,— to recognise these feelings for what they are, unregenerated movements of the old vital nature, and to reject these vital suggestions as suggestions of adverse forces that want to push you out of the straight path. If the mind of the sadhak supports these vital movements, if any part of his nature accepts and cherishes them, then, so long as he allows them to do so, he cannot get rid of the struggle.

All these suggestions are very familiar, and they are always the same both in expression and substance. The reactions too are always the same and their very nature is sufficient to show the source from which they come,—disappointment of unsatisfied desire, despondency, discontent, unhappiness, the sense of grievance and injustice, revolt, a fall to tamas and inertia (because the vital being refuses participation in the spiritual effort unless its egoistic demands are conceded), dryness, dullness, cessation of the sadhana. The same phrases even are repeated,—“no life in this existence”, “suffocation”, “limitation”, “air-tight compartments”; and all this simply means that the lower vital nature—or some part of it—is in revolt and wants something else than the divine Truth and the tapasya that leads to the supramental change. It refuses to give up ego and desire and claim and demand or to accept a true self-giving and surrender, while yet it feels the pressure on it to transform itself into an instrument of the divine life. It is this pressure that it calls suffocation. The refusal to let it expand its desires and make a big place for itself it calls limitation of the being. The calm, purity, collected silence which are the basis of the tapasya for the supramental change,—this is what it stigmatises as “no life”. Right rule and insistence on self-denial and self-mastery and restraint from claim and demand are what it calls air-tight compartments. And the worst suggestions and most dangerous deception come when this spirit of demand and desire is dissimulated in a spiritual garb and takes a form which makes it seem to the sadhak a part of the Yoga.

There is only one way of escape from this siege of the lower vital nature. It is the entire rejection of all egoistic vital demand, claim and desire and the replacement of the dissatisfied vital urge by the purity of psychic aspiration. Not the satisfaction of these vital clamours nor, either, an ascetic retirement is the true solution, but the surrender of the vital being to the Divine and a single-minded consecration to the supreme Truth into which desire and demand cannot enter. For the nature of the supreme Truth is Light and Ananda, and where desire and demand are there can be no Ananda.

It is not the vital demand but the psychic urge that alone can

bring the nature towards the supramental transformation; for it alone can change the mental and vital and show them their own true movement. But constantly the vital demand is being taken for the psychic aspiration; and yet the difference is clear. In the psychic aspiration there are none of these reactions; there is no revolt, no justification of revolt: for the psychic aspires through inner union with the Divine and surrender. It does not question and challenge, but seeks to understand through unity with the Divine Will. It does not ask for small personal satisfactions, but finds its satisfaction in the growth of the Truth within the being; what it seeks and finds is not any indulgence of a vital and physical claim, but the true nearness which consists in the constant presence of the Divine in the heart and the rule of the Divine in all the nature. The cry of the psychic is always, "Let the Truth prevail, let Thy will be done and not mine." But the clamour of the vital is the very opposite: it calls to the Divine, "Let my will be Thine; obey my insistences, satisfy my desires, then only will I seek and accept Thee, for then only will I consent to see the Divine in Thee." It is hardly necessary to say which is the way to the Truth or which the right solution of any struggle in the nature.

The only creation for which there is any place here is the supramental, the bringing of the divine Truth down on the earth, not only into the mind and vital but into the body and into Matter. Our object is not to remove all "limitations" on the expansion of the ego or to give a free field and make unlimited room for the fulfilment of the ideas of the human mind or the desires of the ego-centred life-force. None of us are here to "do as we like", or to create a world in which we shall at last be able to do as we like; we are here to do what the Divine wills and to create a world in which the Divine Will can manifest its truth no longer deformed by human ignorance or perverted and mistranslated by vital desire. The work which the sadhak of the supramental Yoga has to do is not his own work for which he can lay down his own conditions, but the work of the Divine which he has to do according to the conditions laid down by the Divine. Our Yoga is not for our own sake but for

the sake of the Divine. It is not our own personal manifestation that we are to seek, the manifestation of the individual ego freed from all bounds and from all bonds, but the manifestation of the Divine. Of that manifestation our own spiritual liberation, perfection, fullness is to be a result and a part, but not in any egoistic sense or for any ego-centred or self-seeking purpose. This liberation, perfection, fullness too must not be pursued for our own sake, but for the sake of the Divine. I emphasise this character of the creation because a constant forgetfulness of this simple and central truth, a conscious, half-conscious or wholly ignorant confusion about it has been at the root of most of the vital revolts that have spoiled many an individual sadhana here and disturbed the progress of the general inner work and the spiritual atmosphere.

The supramental creation, since it is to be a creation upon earth, must be not only an inner change but a physical and external manifestation also. And it is precisely for this part of the work, the most difficult of all, that surrender is most needful; for this reason, that it is the actual descent of the supramental Divine into Matter and the working of the Divine Presence and Power there that can alone make the physical and external change possible. Even the most powerful self-assertion of human will and endeavour is impotent to bring it about; as for egoistic insistence and vital revolt, they are, so long as they last, insuperable obstacles to the descent. Only a calm, pure and surrendered physical consciousness, full of the psychic aspiration, can be its field; this alone can make an effective opening of the material being to the Light and Power and the supramental change a thing actual and practicable. It is for this that we are here in the body, and it is for this that you and other sadhaks are in the Asram near us. But it is not by insistence on petty demands and satisfactions in the external field or on an outer nearness pleasing to the vital nature and its pride or desire that you can get the true relation with the Divine in this province. If you want the realisation there, it is the true nearness that you must seek, the descent and presence of the Mother in your physical consciousness, her constant inner touch in the physical being

and its activities, her will and knowledge behind all its work and thought and movement and the ever present Ananda of that presence expelling all vital and physical separateness, craving and desire. If you have that, then you have all the nearness you can ask for and the rest you will gladly leave to the Mother's knowledge and will to decide. For with this in you there can be no feeling of being kept away, no sense of "gulf" and "distance", no complaint of a unity that is lacking or an empty dryness and denial of nearness.

A time comes when after a long preparation of the mind and vital being, it becomes necessary to open also the physical nature. But when that happens, very often the vital exaltation which can be very great when the experience is on its own plane, falls away and the obscure, obstructive physical and material consciousness appears in its unrelieved inertia. Inertia, tamas, stupidity, narrowness and limitation, an inability to progress, doubt, dullness, dryness, a constant forgetfulness of the spiritual experiences received are the characteristics of the unregenerated physical nature, when that is not pushed by the vital and is not supported either by the higher mental will and intelligence. This seems to be in part what has temporarily happened to you, but the way out is not to excite the physical by any vital revolt and outcry or to blame for your condition either circumstances or the Mother,—for that will only make things worse and increase the tamas, dryness, dullness, inertia,—but to recognise that there is here an element of the universal Nature reflected in yours which you must eliminate. And this can only be done by more and more surrender and aspiration and by so bringing in from beyond the vital and the mind the divine peace, light, power and presence. This is the only way towards the transformation and fulfilment of the physical nature.

I do not think after what I have written, I need add anything about the specific complaints that you make in your letter. Two things perhaps need to be made clear. First, the arrangements actually in existence about the work, about external demands, about correspondence and "seeing" people are the only feasible ones in the present circumstances if the heavy work the Mother

has to do is to be at all physically possible. Next, it is precisely by action in silence that we can best do our work much more than by speech or writing, which can only be subordinate and secondary. For in this Yoga those will succeed best who know how to obey and follow the written and spoken word, but can also bear the silence and feel in it and receive (without listening to other voices or mistaking mental and vital suggestions and impulsions for the divine Truth and the divine Will) help, support and guidance.

Avoiding Premature Engagement with the Lower Vital

You cannot escape from these lower vital forces by being curious about them. This kind of curiosity only encourages and invites them and keeps them recurring. Their whole force is in their power of mechanical recurrence and, if you allow that, you will never get rid of them. Incoherence and confusion are the very nature of these forces and, if you encourage them, your whole nature will become a field of confusion and incoherence. The only way to know them and get rid of them is to be always above, in your true consciousness, in contact with the Mother's light and force. The light and force will then descend upon them, at once showing what they are and dissolving and eliminating them and changing that part of the nature. But first you must learn to keep always in contact with the Mother, always in the true consciousness, only then can these things be dealt with safely.

Do not go down into these lower unredeemed parts without the Mother's force with you. If you feel yourself down, remain quiet, call on the Mother and her force, but do not try to deal with it by your mind. But as far as possible resist the downward movement so long as the true consciousness is not settled in you.

*

It is certainly possible to draw forces from below. It may be the hidden divine forces from below that rise at your pull, and then this motion upward completes the motion and effort of the divine force from above, helping especially to bring it into the

body. Or it may be the obscure forces from below that respond to the summons, and then this kind of drawing brings either tamas or disturbance — sometimes great masses of inertia or a formidable upheaval and disturbance.

The lower vital is a very obscure plane and it can be fully opened with advantage only when the other planes above it have been thrown wide to light and knowledge. One who concentrates on the lower vital without that higher preparation and without knowledge is likely to fall into many confusions. This does not mean that experiences of this plane may not come earlier or even at the beginning; they do come of themselves, but they must not be given too large a place.

*

In the lower vital all is a working of general forces which try to seize upon the individual and use him for their satisfaction; they are not his forces at all. In the mind or the higher vital it is much easier to establish some kind of control over the forces. That is the very reason why one should never put oneself into the control of these forces or make oneself a free crossways for their passage. It is only by opening to the Mother's force alone that a control can be established over these lower workings.

Ananda and the Lower Vital

It is indeed in the lower vital that there is the main difficulty for the spiritual change of human nature. If that were not there, the rest could be more easily dealt with and there would be no long resistance. The vital pleasure is not a true Ananda, but only a pleasant excitement which cannot abide — that pleasure and grief and pain are always near to each other and the consciousness passes easily from one to the other. One has to establish peace and quietude there, so that the true psychic and spiritual joy can take the place. It is the touch of the psychic that gives the soothing effect of which you speak.

*

Evidently, the condition into which you have fallen is due to an upsurging of suppressed elements in the lower vital nature. It has been compelled by the mind and the higher vital part in you to give up the little “joys and pleasures” to which it was habituated, but it—or at any rate the subconscious part of it which is often the most powerful—did that without entire conviction and probably with “reservations” and “safeguards” and in exchange for a promise of compensations, other and greater joys and pleasures to replace all it was losing. This is evident from what you write; your description of the nature of the depression, the return of what you call impure thoughts which are merely indices of the subconscious lower vital desire-complex, the doubt thrown upon the generosity of the Divine, the demand for compensation for losses, something like striking a bargain with the Divine, a *quid pro quo* pact, are all unmistakable. Latterly, there has been a combination of circumstances (X's turning inwards, Y's emigration etc.) which have rather suddenly increased the deprivation of its former outlets; this attack is its way of non-cooperation or protest. There is only one way to deal with it,—to cast the whole thing away—depression, demands, doubts, sex-thoughts, the whole undesirable baggage,—and have in its place the one true movement, the call for the true consciousness and the presence of the Divine.

It may be that behind this persistence of the lower vital demand for satisfaction there was something not quite clear—in the obscurer part of the physical mind—in your mental attitude towards the Yoga. You seem to regard this demand for the replacement of the old lower vital satisfactions by other joys and pleasures as something quite legitimate; but joys and pleasures are not the object of Yoga and a bargain or demand for a replacement of this kind can be no legitimate or healthy element in the sadhana. If it is there, it will surely impede the flow of spiritual experience. Ananda, yes; but Ananda and the spiritual happiness which precedes it (*adhyātma-sukham*) are something quite different from joys and pleasures. And even Ananda one cannot demand or make it a condition for pursuing the sadhana—it comes as a crown, a natural outcome and

its precondition is the growth of the true consciousness, peace, calm, light, strength, the equanimity which resists all shocks and persists through success and failure. It is these things which must be the first objects of the sadhana, not any hedonistic experience even of the highest kind; for that must come of itself as a result of the Divine Presence.

I would rather like you to tell me what, *precisely*, you do in your hours of meditation, how you do it and what happens within you.

Meanwhile the first thing you must do is to throw out this perilous stuff of despondency and its accompaniments and recover a quiet and clear balance. A quiet mind and a quiet vital are the first conditions for success in sadhana.

*

To live within does not mean to give up reading and writing or other external activities; I shall try to explain to you what I meant. I had in fact started to do so when you had your last fit of despondency, but stopped when you recovered, thinking it was not after all necessary and supposing besides that the essential in what I was about to write must already be known to you. Now, however, that the despondency has returned and you put the question, I will this time try to explain the whole matter.

It is evident that you still cherish some misunderstanding about peace and joy and Ananda. (Peace by the way is not joy—for peace can be there even when joy is quiescent.) It is not a fact that one ought not to pray or aspire for peace or spiritual joy. Peace is the very basis of all the siddhi in the Yoga, and why should not one pray or aspire for foundation in the Yoga? Spiritual joy or a deep inner happiness (not disturbed even when there come superficial storms or perturbations) is a constant concomitant of contact or union with the Divine, and why should it be forbidden to pray or aspire for contact with the Divine and the joy that attends it? As for Ananda, I have already explained that I mean by Ananda something greater than peace or joy, something that, like Truth and Light, is the very nature of the supramental Divine. It can come by frequent inrushes or

descents, partially or for a time even now, but it cannot remain in the system so long as the system has not been prepared for it. Meanwhile, peace and joy can be there permanently, but the condition of this permanence is that one should have the constant contact or indwelling of the Divine, and this comes naturally not to the outer mind or vital but to the inner soul or psychic being. Therefore one who wants his Yoga to be a path of peace or joy, must be prepared to dwell in his soul rather than in his outer mental and emotional nature.

I objected in a former letter not to aspiration but to a demand, to making peace, joy or Ananda a condition for following the Yoga. And it is undesirable because if you do so, then the vital, not the psychic, takes the lead. When the vital takes the lead, then unrest, despondency, unhappiness can always come, since these things are the very nature of the vital—the vital can never remain constantly in joy and peace, for it needs their opposites in order to have the sense of the drama of life. And yet when unrest and unhappiness come, the vital at once cries, “I am not given my due, what is the use of my doing this Yoga?” Or else it makes a gospel of its unhappiness and says, as you say in your letter, that the path to fulfilment must be a tragic road through the desert. And yet it is precisely this predominance of the vital in us that makes the necessity of passing through the desert. If the psychic were always there in front, the desert would be no longer a desert and the wilderness would blossom with the rose.

Apropos, if your despondency has lasted so long this time, is it not because something in the vital has been clinging to it, justifying it on one ground or another? That at least is what I have felt, every time we have tried to remove it.

Aspiration and Offering in the Lower Vital

Sometimes the aspiration is felt at the navel, but that is part of the larger vital. The lower vital is below. The lower vital aspires by offering all its small movements in the fire of purification, by calling for the light and power to descend into it and rid it

of its little greeds, jealousies, resistances and revolts over small matters, angers, vanities, sexualities etc. to be replaced by the right movements governed by selflessness, purity, obedience to the urge of the Divine Force in all things.

*

It is evident that the lower vital has received the Divine Consciousness when even in the small movements of life there is an aspiration to the Divine, a reference as it were to the Divine Light for guidance or some feeling of offering to the Divine or guidance by the Divine. The lower vital commands the little details of emotion, impulse, sensation, action—it is these that, when converted, it offers to the Divine control for transformation.

Peace and Calm in the Lower Vital

The peacefulness in the lower abdomen is very good, for it means that the true consciousness is settling down in the lower vital—if the lower vital is liberated and peaceful, there is little ground for any perturbations to come.

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It is what I meant when I spoke of something remaining calm even behind the surface disturbances. What happens is that some part of the being becomes quieted, enlightened and strong—say the mind or the mind and the higher vital. But perhaps the lower vital and the physical may be only temporarily influenced and quieted—in time the work begins on them to change permanently, and owing to some outer touch or the pressure of the hostile forces or the lower nature their possibilities of egoism or unrest rise up and have to be dealt with. The advantage is, as you have seen, that a part of the nature is there in which you can stand and deal with the still recalcitrant parts. One has to remain firm and persistently bring what has been gained down into the lower parts, till there is a permanent peace and freedom assured in the whole nature.

Section Two

Vital Temperament

Chapter One

Cheerfulness and Happiness

Cheerfulness

Cheerfulness is the salt of sadhana. It is a thousand times better than gloominess.

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Be more cheerful and confident. Sex and Doubt and Co. are there, no doubt, but the Divine is there also inside you. Open your eyes and look and look till the veil is rent and you see Him — or Her.

*

The change noted by X evidently indicates a great progress in the vital and physical being. There is nothing spiritually wrong in being glad and cheerful, on the contrary it is the right thing. As for struggles and aspiration, struggles are really not indispensable to progress and there are many people who get so habituated to the struggling attitude that they have all the time struggles and very little else. That is not desirable. There is a sunlit path as well as a gloomy one and it is the better of the two — a path in which one goes forward in absolute reliance on the Mother, fearing nothing, sorrowing over nothing. Aspiration is needed but there can be a sunlit aspiration full of light and faith and confidence and joy. If difficulty comes, even that can be faced with a smile.

*

It is that cheerfulness that we want to be always there in you. It is the happiness of the psychic that has found its way and, whatever difficulties come, is sure that it will be led forward and reach the goal. When a sadhak has that constantly, we know that he has got over the worst difficulty and that he is now firmly on the safe path.

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The cheerfulness [*of joking and hilarity*] is vital. I do not say that it should not be there, but there is a deeper cheerfulness, an inner *sukhahāsyā* which is the spiritual condition of cheerfulness.

*

It is an inner joy and cheerfulness that helps, but this [*light joking*] is merely a vital bubbling on the surface. It is all right in ordinary life, but in Yoga it merely expends the vital force for nothing.

Humour and Seriousness

Sense of humour? It is the salt of existence. Without it the world would have got utterly out of balance — it is unbalanced enough already — and rushed to blazes long ago.

*

I am not aware that highly evolved personalities have no sense of humour or how the person can be said to be integrated when this sense is lacking; “looseness” applies only to a frivolous levity without any substance behind it. There is no law that wisdom should be something rigidly solemn and without a smile.

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Whatever seriousness is necessary must come of itself from within. To be serious outwardly by rule is not needed.

*

Why on earth should people not be serious if they want? Life may be a joke, — though all do not find it so — but one can't be laughing at it all the time. The idea seems to be that one can't be serious unless one is either (1) in a rage, (2) discontented, (3) sad and miserable. But surely one can be serious when one is thinking or when one is looking at serious things or simply and purely when one is not laughing. And one can't be laughing 24 hours without stopping, — the muscles of the stomach would

not stand it and even the American record makers might shy at such a test.

*

What you write about X is quite correct. It is not necessary to be always serious of face or silent in doing the Yoga, but it is necessary to take the Yoga seriously and silence and inward concentration have a large place. One can't be all the time throwing oneself outward if to go inside and meet the Divine there is one's aim. But that does not mean that one has to be grave and gloomy all the time or gloomy a big part of the time, and I don't suppose the sadhaks here are like that. It is X's rhetorical way of putting his difficulty — the difficulty of a vital that wants to throw itself always outward in action and emotion while another part is dissatisfied with the result and feels that its own movement is frustrated. There are two people in him, one wanting a life of vital expansion, the other an inner life. The first gets restless because the inner life is not a life of outward expansion; the other becomes miserable because its aim is not realised. Neither personality need be thrown away in this Yoga; but the outer vital one must allow the inner to establish itself, give it the first place and consent to be only an instrument of the soul and to obey the law of the inner life. This is what X's mind still refuses to understand; he thinks one must be either all gloomy and cold and grave or else bring the vital bubble and effervescence into the inner life. A quiet, happy and glad control of the vital by the inner being is a thing he is not able as yet to conceive.

Happiness and Contentment

Happiness in the ordinary sense is a sunlit state of the vital with or without cause. Contentment is less than happiness — joy of peace or being free from difficulty is rather a state of joyful *sānti*. Happiness ought not to be a state of self-satisfaction or inertia, and need not be, for one can combine happiness and aspiration. Of course there can be a state of happy inertia, but most people don't remain satisfied with that long, they begin to

want something else. There are Yogins who are satisfied with a happy calm immobility, but that is because the happiness is a form of Ananda and in the immobility they feel the Self and its eternal calm and want nothing more.

Chapter Two

Sorrow and Suffering

Joy and Sorrow

Joy is a vital feeling, like its opposite, sorrow.

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There is no real reason why delight should necessarily be followed by sorrow—except that it is the habit of the vital. But that habit can be overcome.

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It is dangerous to have a heart insisting on its own vital emotions. Not to be the slave of vital joy or sorrow is a condition one has to pass through in order to arrive at true Anandam. If people are right [*that a heart indifferent to joy and sorrow is not desirable*] then there can never be any equality and we have even to say that equality is a bad thing. If so, then the whole of the Gita is a mass of nonsense.

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There are vital joys that are innocent and need not be seriously put down—such as joy in art, poetry, literature. They have to be not put down, but put aside only when they interfere with sadhana.

Sorrow and Pain and Suffering

Sorrow and pain and suffering? The curious thing is that my Yoga does not approve of sorrow and suffering or of taking stumbles and difficulties too seriously, as the Tapaswis do or of viraha pangs as the Vaishnavas do or of vairagya as the Mayavadis do, yet the old ideas and forces bring these things into the Asram through the minds of the sadhaks and there they are. Well, well!

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The thing in you which enjoys the suffering and wants it is part of the human vital—it is these things that we describe as the insincerity and perverse twist of the vital; it cries out against sorrow and trouble and accuses the Divine and life and everybody else of torturing it, but for the most part the sorrow and the trouble come and remain because the perverse something in the vital wants them! That element in the vital has to be got rid of altogether.

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Yes, it is so [*that people themselves indirectly choose pain and misery by not turning to the Divine*]. Even there is something in the vital consciousness that would not feel at home if there were no suffering in life. It is the physical that fears and abhors suffering, but the vital takes it as part of the play of life.

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It is the vital that enjoys the drama of life and takes a pleasure even in sorrow and suffering—it [*a movement of depression*] is not a revolt but an acceptance. Of course there are moods of revolt also in the vital in which it takes a pleasure. The part that does not like suffering and would be glad to get rid of it is the physical consciousness, but the vital pushes it always and so it cannot escape.

It is the rajaso-tamasic vital ego that is responsible both for revolt and for the acceptance of depression. Rajas predominating there is revolt, tamas predominating there is depression.

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It is not the soul but the vital or rather something in it that takes pleasure in groaning and weeping and in fact in sorrow and suffering of all kinds.

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The surface nature does not enjoy [*groaning and weeping*]—but something within enjoys the *līlā* of “laughter and tears”, joy and grief, pleasure and pain, in a word the play of the ignorance.

In some people this comes up to a certain extent on the surface. Many, if you propose to them the removal of suffering from life, look askance at you and feel that it would be terribly boring to have nothing but joy and Ananda and peace — many even have said it.

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The gloom and other difficulties come from a resistance of inertia in the lower vital and physical consciousness. What you have to do is to prepare the consciousness by getting rid of the inertia. A sattwic gladness and calm and confidence is the proper temperament for this Yoga; gloom, depression and weeping should not be indulged in, as they stand in the way of the opening, unless the tears are the psychic weeping of release or adoration or a moved love and bhakti. The progress made in controlling the sex and other rajasic movements of the lower vital is a good preparation, but not enough; by itself it is only the negative side, though indispensable. Aspire for a positive sattwic opening for strength, for light, for peace and do not worry or repine if the progress is slow at first, nor grudge the time and labour of preparation necessary before there can be a rapid advance in the Yoga.

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You should not indulge this sense of grief — remain calm, confident, turned to the one Will in all circumstances; that is the way to secure that each step will be taken in the right measure and produce its best possible consequences. Regard henceforth the question of X and your relation with X as a minor and subordinate thing on the outer side of your sadhana. If you take it as a problem of the first importance it will become that and stand in your way again. Look at it as a question from the past that has been firmly settled and put in its place and turn to the central aim of your sadhana.

For the rest, apart from this circumstance, you need change nothing in the inward aim and concentration of your will and endeavour on the one thing to be done — the entire self-giving and self-dedication of your inner and outer being to the Divine

alone. If you can adopt firmly the right inward attitude, it may even be easier than by an outward rule for your main guidance.

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I hope you will be able to reject this *duḥkha*; it must be an attempt of something of the old consciousness to come back,—for a psychic sorrow would not burn. These things come from the subconscious, so for such a grief no particular reason would be necessary. It is the force of sorrow in itself that rises like that and lays a claim on the nature.

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Tamasic indifference is one thing and the absence of sorrow is another. One has to observe what is wrong and do all that one can to set it right. Sadness in itself has no power to cure what is wrong; a firm quiet persistent will has the power.

*

It is clear that the force and peace are descending and working more and more to fix themselves in you.

The other feelings, the wanting to be sad, the fear of being happy, the suggestion of incapacity or unfitness are the usual movements of the vital formation which is not yourself and they come up to try and prevent the change in you. You have only to refuse to accept these suggestions and put yourself persistently on the side of the Truth in you which will make you free and happy, and all will be well.

Melancholy

It seems to me from what you have written that it is the old vital restlessness and indulgence in melancholy that has taken hold of you. It has no special cause, but takes hold of everything to feed itself; in itself it is only a habitual nervous weakness. The more one broods on it, the more it increases. There are three ways of combating it. One is to take interest and busy yourself in something else not yourself and to think of your condition as

little as possible. Another is to separate yourself from this vital restlessness and melancholia as much as possible and face it, as you were doing, with an energetic and resolute refusal to accept it. The third is to habituate yourself to turn your mind upwards in a call for the Mother's peace. It is there above you waiting to come down if you make yourself open to it; if it came down, it would rid you permanently of all this suffering and trouble.

Chapter Three

Depression and Despondency

Discouragement

Not to get discouraged when there is no immediate result is very important — for then the force within sinks and when the force within sinks there is the *tapo-bhanga* of which the old Rishis were always complaining, for each time the tapas broke they had to start afresh till it was reconstructed.

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Tell him that discouragement is the one thing that the sadhak should never indulge. One should go on steadily whether the pace is slow or hampered or swift and easy — one will always get to the goal in time. Difficulties and periods of darkness cannot be avoided — they have to be gone through with quietness and courage.

*

There is no reason to be discouraged. Three years is not too much for the preparation of the nature and it is usually through fluctuations that it gradually grows nearer to the point where a continuous progress becomes possible. One has to cleave firmly to the faith in the Mother's working behind all appearances and you will find that that will carry you through.

*

I do not quite know what is the drift of your questions. It sounds as if you had been allowing yourself to be influenced by a vague and confused atmosphere of discouragement and barren questioning which has caught many in the Asram. Otherwise there is no ground for any such feelings. Where you are? In the Mother's presence here and close to me. Where you are going? Towards union with the Divine through dedication and service. What

you are doing here? Service and self-giving to the Divine. The rest depends, as the Mother writes to you, on the simplicity and fullness with which you give yourself and serve. If there is anything more special in your thoughts that has disturbed you, it is better to say clearly what it is. But do not listen to the thoughts spoken or silently suggested that are moving about the Asram and of which I have spoken, for these are a poison that will only bring discontent and depression.

Depression

The outer being does not care for the sadhana unless it gets something by it which is to it pleasant or gratifying or satisfying — depression therefore comes easy to it.

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That is how the depression works in everybody. It takes hold of this or that excuse but really it comes for its own satisfaction and not for any particular reason.

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All depression is bad as it lowers the consciousness, spends the energy, opens to adverse forces.

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After you went from here it seems that the vital difficulties which you were emerging from here came back with your return to the atmosphere and that was the cause of the violent depression and ill-health that fell upon you. The depression again was the cause why everything went wrong and the arrangements made fell through or took a wrong turn. For depression prevents the Force from flowing through and calls in the adverse forces and gives them a chance to destroy the helpful formations that are made. All the trouble and difficulty you have had will disappear or be minimised if you shake off this tendency to depression altogether.

*

The vital may understand, but that is not enough, it must wholeheartedly call for the peace and transformation. There must be a large part of it unable to change its position and give up its moods or its way of receiving things; otherwise these depressions could not be so acute. There is no reason why you should not get the peace, but this must change.

*

One should certainly not overestimate one's progress, but not underestimate it either. I don't know whether dwelling on the defects and weaknesses is very wholesome. To know that they are there is one thing, to keep them always before the eye may be depressing and retard the progress.

*

There was nothing wrong in helping with the cooking. But if there were a wrong movement in that, it is not to be met by getting depression — for depression itself is a wrong or mistaken movement; and how can one mistake be corrected by another? The proper way to deal with a wrong movement is to look quietly at it and put the consciousness right at that point.

*

It [*vital joy*] is much better than vital depression at any rate. What is wanted is an inner peace and upon that a constant cheerfulness and gladness.

*

I am glad the cloud is lifting and hope to find it lifted altogether soon. It is the usual experience that if the humility and resignation are firmly founded in the heart, other things like trust come naturally afterwards. If once the psychic light and happiness which is born of these things is founded, it is not easy for other forces to cloud that state and not possible for them to destroy it. That is the common experience.

Depression Often Comes from Outside

Often waves of depression come from the general Nature — the mind finds out inner or external reasons for them when there are none. That may be the reason why the reasons are not clear. On the other hand it may be due to some part of the being getting discouraged or fatigued or unwilling to follow the movement either of work or of sadhana. If it is something in the vital being, it may hide itself so as not to be exposed or cleared; if a part of the physical, it may be simply dumb and obscure, unable to express itself. Finally, it may come up from the subconscious. These are various cases in which there is what seems a causeless depression. One has to see for oneself which it is.

*

Yes. The depression comes from without, not from within. But some part of the vital is too habituated to respond or at least passively accept or reflect and to take it as its own. If it were not for this, there would be little or no difficulty in throwing off the depression when it tries to come.

*

You seem to rely very much on X and his experiences and ideas about them. X's experience proves nothing because he is quite ignorant. His depression comes from outside and has its causes, only his vital mind does not record or understand the causes, but there is a response to them all the same. Because the vital mind has in the past always associated depression with these causes and that impression remains in the vital stuff, so it responds to the touch with the usual reaction taught to it by the vital mind. An ignorant and untrained mind like X's cannot be expected to realise the secret machinery of the movements of his own consciousness.

*

The vital mind is part of the mind. If mind (mental mind, vital mind, physical mind, subconscious mind) does not respond to

outer things, depression is impossible. The self at one end, the stone at the other never get into depression. In between them, the true mind, true vital, true physical consciousness never get depression because they do not give the responses to things that create depression.

*

Naturally the deep depression and low vitality [*in another person*] try to get into you, or if the person pulls your vital force to restore hers or you yourself part with it for that purpose, you feel exhausted and empty afterwards. That is the natural result. One person may produce more of this result than another. Or if you are strong enough to resist in the mind and vital, the influence gets into the physical and produces some result there. According to the nature of the person approached, the result may be violent or intense or of a minor character. Also certain effects may not manifest at the time but only afterwards.

*

These cloudings are not rare and not personal to yourself — all get them, — very often they are formations thrown *from outside*. The important thing is not to get upset or distressed or take them to yourself or as your own, and to remain quiet till they pass.

*

Do not allow these depressing thoughts to find credit with you. If they come, look at them as not yours, as suggestions from outside. Remain as quiet as you can and let the Mother's Force work in you.

*

However or from wheresoever it came, the only thing to do with a depression is to throw it out.

Dealing With Depression

Naturally, if the vital is quiet and allows the mind to see things

rightly, there will not be this depression.

*

Small desires and defects have not to be magnified or made a cause of worry or depression, but they have to be noted and quietly got rid of.

*

Be careful to reject always movements (like vexation, discontent etc.) that bring back confusion or depression. One cannot always help these movements coming, but one can reject them when they come; the more they are rejected, the more difficult it becomes for them to recur—or, if they recur, they hold only for a moment and then drop away. To entertain them means to give them a chance to cover the true consciousness once more.

*

It [*depression*] comes back if you give it a chance. Do not give it a chance. Do not give it a room to live in if it comes.

*

Depression should not be indulged, for all who do the Yoga have difficulties with their ego; but the higher consciousness will always prevail with a true aspiration.

*

Do not allow yourself to admit any movement of vital depression, still less a depressed condition. As for the external being, it is always, not only in you but in everyone, a difficult animal to handle. It has to be dealt with by patience and a quiet and cheerful perseverance; never get depressed by its resistance, for that only makes it sensitive and aggrieved and difficult, or else discouraged. Give it rather the encouragement of sunlight and a quiet pressure, and one day you will find it opening entirely to the Grace.

*

It is indeed good that the psychic intervened and prevented the mind taking the wrong direction. It is not possible that there should not be occasional stumbles, failures etc. in the work of self-purification and change; but to feel upset or remorseful over them is harmful rather than helpful; it easily brings depression and depression brings clouding of the mind and weakness. To observe calmly the wrong movement and its nature (here it was the tongue that was at fault and the tongue is always an easily erring member) and to set it right inwardly is always the best way. Calm, especially when the true spiritual calm of the self is there, is the thing that must always be preserved; for with that everything else can be done in time and with the least trouble.

*

Anutāp—remorse, repentance, is the natural movement of the vital mind when it sees it has done a mistake. It is certainly better than indifference. Its disadvantage is that it disturbs the vital stuff and sometimes leads to depression or discouragement. For that reason what is usually recommended to the sadhak is a quiet recognition of the mistake with a sincere aspiration and will that it should not be repeated or at least that the habit of making such mistakes should soon be eliminated. At a higher stage of development when the inner calm is established, one simply observes the defects of the nature as defects of a machinery that one has to put right and calls down the Light and Force for its rectification. In the beginning however the movement of repentance even helps provided it does not bring discouragement or depression.

*

This kind of dejection [*feeling that life is meaningless*] must be cast aside. Life always has a meaning whether in success or in difficulty so long as it is turned towards the Divine. Protection will be given, but depression must be put aside so that you may be able to receive and use the help and the force.

Depression and the Gospel of Sorrow¹

I think the best thing I can write to you in the circumstances is to recommend to you X's aphorism, "Depression need not be depressing; rather it should be made a jumping-board for the leap to a higher and happier poise."

The rule in Yoga is not to let the depression depress you, to stand back from it, observe its cause and remove the cause; for the cause is always in oneself, perhaps a vital defect somewhere, a wrong movement indulged or a petty desire causing a recoil, sometimes by its satisfaction, sometimes by its disappointment. In Yoga a desire satisfied, a false movement given its head produces very often a worse recoil than disappointed desire.

What is needed for you is to live more deeply within, less in the outer vital and mental which is exposed to these touches. The inmost psychic being is not oppressed by them; it stands in its own closeness to the Divine and sees the small surface movements as surface things foreign to the true being.

*

It is regrettable that this attack [*of depression*] should recur. Perhaps it was a little my fault—you were or seemed to me going on so well that I was not on my guard against its possible recurrence. During the last two or three days the suggestion did come to me that there might be a turn of that kind, but I was so much in the joy of your music that I did not give it credence.

It is certainly not the answering of questions that will remove the underlying cause of this recurrence. Even if the answers satisfy, it could only be for a time. The same questionings would arise either in a mechanical reiteration—for it is not truly the reason from which they arise, it is a certain part of the vital consciousness affected by the surrounding atmosphere—or else presented from a shifted ground or a somewhat changed angle of vision. The difficulty can only disappear if you remain resolute

¹ All the letters in this group were written to the same correspondent, a disciple who suffered from bouts of depression.

that it shall disappear,—if you refuse to attach any value to the justifications which the mind is *made* to put forward for your “sadness” under this atmospheric influence and, as you did in certain other matters, stick fast to the resolution to make the Yogic change, to awake the psychic fully, not to follow the voices of the mind but to do rather what the Mother asks of you, persisting *however difficult it may be* or seem to be. It is so that the psychic can fully awaken and establish its influence—not on your higher vital where it is already awake and growing through your poetry and music and certain experiences so that whenever your higher vital is active you are in good condition, full of delight and creativeness and open to experience; but it is the influence on the lower vital, for it is there as I have already told you that your difficulties are and that this vital depression recurs.

*

It is quite unwarranted to say that you have been going in the wrong direction—going west when you thought you were going east. You were going towards the east, all right, but you were going as if with a chain on your ankles and the chain was a certain tension and stiffness in your endeavour. This is what was found to have been wrong in your way of meditation. Therefore there is no need to lament that you have been going in the wrong direction all the time—for that is not the case; what is needed is to profit by the discovery and get rid of the impediment.

The light which you saw seems to have got clouded by your indulging your vital more and more in the bitter pastime of sadness. That was quite natural, for that is the result sadness always does bring. It is the reason why I object to the gospel of sorrow and to any sadhana which makes sorrow one of its main planks (*abhimān*, revolt, *viraha*). For sorrow is not, as Spinoza pointed out, a passage to a greater perfection, a way to siddhi; it cannot be, for it confuses and weakens and distracts the mind, depresses the vital force, darkens the spirit. A relapse from joy and vital elasticity and Ananda to sorrow, self-distrust, despondency and weakness is a recoil from a greater to a lesser consciousness;—

the habit of these moods shows a clinging of something in the vital to the smaller, obscurer, dark and distressed movement out of which it is the very aim of Yoga to rise.

It is incorrect to say that the wrong key with which you were trying to open the faery palace has been taken away from you and you are left with none at all. The true key has been given to you in the right kind or condition of meditation—a state of inner rest, not of straining, of quiet opening, not of eager or desperate pulling, a harmonious giving of oneself to the Divine Force for its working, and in that quietude a sense of the Force working and a restful confidence allowing it to act without any unquiet interference. Now that condition is the beginning of the psychic opening; there is of course much more that afterwards comes to complete it but this is the fundamental condition into which all the rest can most easily come. In this condition there may and will be call, prayer, aspiration. Intensity, concentration will come of themselves, not by a hard effort or tense strain on the nature. Rejection of wrong movements, frank confession of defects are not only not incompatible, but helpful to it; but this attitude makes the rejection, the confession easy, spontaneous, entirely complete and sincere and effective. That is the experience of all who have consented to take this attitude.

Now as to the tension and stiffness. I may say in passing that consciousness and receptivity are not the same thing; one may be receptive, yet externally unaware of how things are being done and of what is being done. But for such an external unconsciousness there must be a reason,—and in you it was the stiffness created by a tension and a straining which made the consciousness thus rigid and closed it up. Not that it closed you to the Force or that it took away the inner receptivity, but it did close you to the surface consciousness of what is being done. When that happens, the Force works, as I have repeatedly written, behind the veil; the results remain packed behind and come out afterwards, often slowly, little by little, until there is so much pressure that it breaks through somehow and forces open the external nature. There lies the difference between a mental and vital straining and pulling and a spontaneous psychic

openness, and it is not at all the first time that we have spoken of the difference. It is not really a question of the right or the wrong key, but of putting the key in the lock in the right or the wrong way, whether because of some difficulty you try to force the lock turning the key this way and that with violence or confidently and quietly give it the right turn—and the door opens.

It is not that this pulling and straining and tension can do nothing; in the end they prevail for some result or another, but with difficulty, delay, struggle, strong upheavals of the Force breaking through in spite of all. Ramakrishna himself began by pulling and straining and got his result but at the cost of a tremendous and perilous upsetting; afterwards he took the quiet psychic way whenever he wanted a result and got it with ease and in a minimum time. You say that this way is too difficult for you but it is on the contrary the easiest and simplest and most direct way and anyone can do it, if he makes his mind and vital quiet. It is the other way of tension and strain and hard endeavour that is difficult and needs a great force of Tapasya. Take the psychic attitude; follow the straight sunlit path, with the Divine openly or secretly upbearing you—if secretly, he will yet show himself in good time,—do not insist on the hard, hampered, roundabout and difficult journey.

All this has been pointed out before: but you were not inclined to regard it as feasible or at least not ready to apply it in the field of meditation because your consciousness by tradition, owing to past lives and for other reasons, was clinging to former contrary conceptions. Something in you was harking back to one kind of Vaishnava sadhana, and that tended to bring in it its pain-giving feeling-elements of *abhimāna*, revolt, suffering, the Divine hiding himself (“always I seek, but never does he show himself”—the rarity of the unfolding and the *milana*). Something else in you was inclined to see as the only alternative some harsh, grim ascetic ideal, the blank featureless Brahman (and imagined that the supramental was that), something in the vital looked on the conquest of wrong movements as a hard desperate tapasya, not as a passage into the purity and joy of the Divine—even now some element in you seems to insist

on regarding the psychic attitude as something extraordinary, difficult, inhuman and impossible! There were these and other old lingerings of the mind and the vital; you have to clear them out and look at the simplicity of the Truth with a straight and simple gaze.

The remedy we propose, the key we offer to you ought not to be so difficult to apply as you imagine. After all, it is only applying in "meditation" the way that has been so successful with you in your creative work. There is a way of creation by strain and tension, by beating of the brain, by hard and painful labour — often the passage clogged and nothing coming or else coming only in return for a sort of intellectual tapasya. There is the other way in which one remains quiet and opens oneself to a power that is there behind and waits for inspiration; the force pours in and with it the inspiration, the illumination, the Ananda, — all is done by an inner Power. The flood passes, but one remains quiet for the next flood and at its time surely it comes. Here too all is not perfect at once; but progress comes by ever new waves of the same Power. Not then a strain of mental activity, but a restful opening to the Force that is there all the time above and around you, so that it may flow freely and do its work in peace and illumination and Ananda. The way has been shown to you, you yourself have had from time to time the true condition; only you must learn how to continue in it or recover it and you must allow the Force to do its work in its own way. It may take some time to take entire hold of it, get the other habit out and make this normal; but you must not start by deciding that it is impossible! It is eminently possible and it is the door of definitive entrance. The difficulty, the struggle were only the period of preparation necessary to get rid of or to exhaust the obstruction in the consciousness which was a thorn-hedge round the faery palace.

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I find it rather surprising that you should regard what the Mother said to you or what I wrote as a recommendation to relax aspiration or postpone the idea of any kind of siddhi till the Greek

Kalends! It was not so intended in the least—nor do I think either of us said or wrote anything which could justly bear such an interpretation. I said expressly that in the way of meditating of which we spoke, aspiration, prayer, concentration, intensity were a natural part of it; this way was put before you because our experience has been that those who take it go quicker and develop their sadhana, once they get fixed in it, much more easily as well as smoothly than by a distressed, doubtful and anxious straining with revulsions of despondency and turning away from hope and endeavour. We spoke of a steady opening to the Divine with a flow of the force doing its work in the adhar, a poised opening with a quiet mind and heart full of trust and the sunlight of confidence; where do you find that we said a helpless waiting must be your programme?

As for light-heartedness and insouciance, the Mother never spoke of insouciance—a light don't-care attitude is the last thing she would recommend to anybody. She spoke of cheerfulness, and if she used the word light-hearted it was not in the sense of anything lightly or frivolously gay and careless—although a deeper and finer gaiety can have its place as one element of the Yogic character. What she meant was a glad equanimity even in the face of difficulties and there is nothing in that contrary to Yogic teaching or to her own practice. The vital nature on the surface (the depths of the true vital are different) is attached on the one side to a superficial mirth and enjoyment, on the other to sorrow and despair and gloom and tragedy,—for these are for it the cherished lights and shades of life; but a bright or wide and free peace or an *ānandamaya* intensity or, best, a fusing of both in one is the true poise of both the soul and the mind—and of the true vital also—in Yoga. It is perfectly possible for a quite human sadhak to get to such a poise, it is not necessary to be divine before one can attain it. All this is nothing new and original; I have been saying it ever since I began speaking at all about Yoga and I cannot see anything in it resembling a gospel of helpless waiting or of light careless insouciance or anything contrary to our own practice. I do not think that we have either of us become relentlessly grim and solemn or lacking in humour

or that the Mother has lost her smile! I am afraid you are looking at her and things as through a glass darkly and seeing them in too sombre colours. As for instance what you say about the music,—she came up straight to me from it and spoke at once about your music and the presence of Krishna there, and she was in a very different mood from what you describe.

*

Do not allow yourself to be overborne by the dejection; it can only be an incident in the ups and downs of the sadhana, and, as an incident, it should be made as short as possible. Remember that you have chosen a method of proceeding in the sadhana in which dejection ought to have no place. If you have a growing faith that all that is happening has somehow to happen and that God knows what is best for you,—that is already a great thing; if you add to it the will to keep your face always turned towards the goal and the confidence that you are being led towards it even through difficulties and apparent denials, there could be no better mental foundation for sadhana. And if not only the mind, but the vital and physical consciousness can be imbued with this faith, dejection will become either impossible or so evidently an outer thing thrown from outside and not belonging to the consciousness that it will not be able to keep its hold at all. A faith of that kind is a very helpful first step towards the reversal of consciousness which makes one see the inner truth of things rather than their outward phenomenal appearance.

As for the causes of the dejection, there were causes, partly general in the shape of a resistance to a great descending force which was not personal to you at all, and, so far as there was a response to it in you, it was not from your conscious being, otherwise you would not have had it in this way, but from the part in us which keeps things for a long time that have been suppressed or rejected by the conscious will. It is the conscious will that matters, for it is that that prevails in the end, the will of the Purusha and not the more blind and obstinate parts of Prakriti. Keep the conscious will all right and it will carry on to the goal,—just as the resistance in universal Nature will yield

in the end before the Divine Descent.

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The depression of the vital you feel is a continuation of the old feeling in the struggle, but you must reject it and make of it a diminishing movement. The past in Yoga is no guide to the future. For what happened in the past was due to temporary and not permanent causes and to eliminate them is the very purpose of the sadhana.

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There is no doubt about the beauty of the poems you have written but if sometimes—not by any means always—our sweetest songs spring from saddest feelings, there is a quite different rule both for life and for Yoga. For the life in its progress, for the soul in its ascendance, grief and suffering should be only an incident on the way and the vision look always and steadily to a joy and a glory beyond it—let the gloom pass and look beyond it towards Light.

*

The difficulty you feel or any sadhak feels about sadhana is not really a question of meditation versus bhakti versus works, it is a difficulty of the attitude to be taken, the approach or whatever you like to call it. Yours seems to be characterised on one side by a tremendous effort in the mind, on the other by a gloomy certitude in the vital which seems to watch and mutter under its breath if not aloud, “Yes, yes, go ahead, my fine fellow, but—*কিছুই কখনও হয়নি, কিছুই হচ্ছেনা, কিছুই হবেনা*”,² and at the end of the meditation, “What did I tell you, *কিছুই হলনা*”.³ A vital so ready to despair that even after a “glorious” flood of poetry, it uses the occasion to preach the gospel of despair. I have passed through most of the difficulties of the sadhak, but I cannot recollect to have looked on delight of poetical creation or concentration in

² *Nothing has ever happened, nothing is happening, nothing will happen.—Ed.*

³ *Nothing happened.—Ed.*

it as something undivine and a cause for despair. This seems to me excessive.

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I have always told you that you ought not to stop your poetry and similar activities. It is a mistake to do so out of asceticism or with the idea of tapasya. One can stop these things when they drop of themselves, because one is in full experience and so interested in one's inner life that one has no energy to spare for the rest. Even then, there is no rule for giving up; for there is no reason why the poetry etc. should not be a part of sadhana. The love of applause, of fame, the ego feeling have to be given up, but that can be done without giving up the activity itself. Your vital needs some activity, most vitals do, and to deprive it of its outlet, an outlet that can be helpful and is not harmful, makes it sulking, indifferent and despondent or else inclined to revolt at any moment and throw up the sponge. Without the assent of the vital it is difficult to do sadhana — it non-cooperates, or it watches with a grim even if silent dissatisfaction ready to express at any moment doubt and denial; or it makes a furious effort and then falls back saying, "I have got nothing." The mind by itself cannot do much; it must have support from the vital; for that the vital must be in a cheerful and acquiescent state. It has the joy of creation and there is nothing spiritually wrong in creative action. Why deny your vital this joy of outflow?

I had already hinted to you that to be able to wait for the Divine Grace (not in a tamasic spirit, but with a sattvic reliance) was the best course for you. Prayer, yes—but not prayer insisting on immediate fulfilment—but prayer that is itself a communion of the mind and the heart with the Divine and can have the joy and satisfaction of itself, trusting for fulfilment by the Divine in His own time. Meditation? Yes, but your meditation has got into a wrong Asana, that of an eager and vehement wrestling followed by a bitter despair. It is no use getting on with it like that; it is better to drop it till you get a new Asana. (I am referring to the old Rishis who established an Asana, a place and a fixed position, where they would sit till

they got siddhi — but if the Asana got successfully disturbed by wrong forces (Asuras, Apsaras etc.), they left it and sought for a new one.) Moreover, your meditation is lacking in quietude, you meditate with a striving mind — but it is in the quiet mind that the experience comes, as all Yogis agree — the still water that reflects rightly the sun. Your vital besides is afraid of quietude and emptiness, and that is because, probably, the strife and effort in you make what comes of them something neutral or desert, while they should be a restful quietude and an emptiness giving the sense of peace, purity or release, the cup made empty so that the soma-rasa of the spirit may be poured in it. That is why I would like you to desist from these too strenuous efforts and go on quietly, praying and meditating if you like but tranquilly without strain and too vehement striving, letting the prayer and meditation (not too much of the latter) prepare the mind and heart till things begin to flow into them in a spontaneous current when all is ready.

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Accustomed as I am to the misunderstanding or misreporting of the Mother's statements, I found that this about her having said that transformation is easy carries the habit to the extreme limit. Needless to say, she did not and could not say anything of the kind and it is astonishing that you should believe she could say anything so absurd and false. I must remind you that I have always insisted on the difficulty of the sadhana. I have never said that to overcome doubt is easy; I have said on the contrary that it was difficult because it was the nature of something in the human physical mind to cling to doubt for its own sake. I have never said that to overcome grief, depression, gloom and suffering was easy; I have said that it was difficult because something in the human vital clings to it and almost needs it as part of the drama of life. So also I have never said that sex, anger, jealousy etc. were easy to overcome; I have said it was difficult because they were ingrained in the human vital, and even if thrown out were always being brought back into it either by its own habit or by the invasion of the general Nature

and the resurgence of its own old response. These things I have repeated hundreds of times. Your idea that my difficulties were different from those of human nature is a mental construction or inference without any real basis. If I am ignorant of human difficulties and therefore intolerant of them, how is it that I am so patient with them as you cannot deny that I am? Why for years and years do I go on patiently arguing about your doubts, spending so much of my time, always trying to throw light on your difficulties, to show how things stand, to give reasons for a knowledge gained by living and *indisputable* experience? Am I writing these letters every night because I have no understanding and no sympathy with you in your doubts and difficulties? Why do I wait patiently for years for sadhaks to get over their sex difficulties? Why do I tolerate and help and write soothing and encouraging letters to these women who break out and hunger-strike and threaten suicide once a fortnight? Why do we bear all this trouble and *tracas* and *fracas* and resistance and obloquy and harsh criticism from the sadhaks, why were we so patient with men like X and Y and others, if we had no understanding and no sympathy with the difficulties of human nature? It is because I press always on faith and discourage doubt as a means of approach to the spiritual realisation. What spiritual guide with a respect for truth can do otherwise? And if I encourage and support doubt, the only result will be that doubt will last for ever and no assured realisation be possible — just as if I encourage and support sex or any other contrary movement, it will last for ever — even without that they last quite long enough by their own force and motion. All that I can do for them is to tolerate and be patient and give time enough for their transformation or removal. Surely when you look at all this fairly, you will see that you have made a very incorrect inference.

As to the statement about drama and something liking to suffer, nobody doubts that your external consciousness dislikes its suffering. The physical mind and consciousness of man hates its own suffering and if left to itself dislikes also to see others suffer. But if you will try to fathom the significance of your

own admission of liking drama or of the turn towards drama — from which very few human beings escape — and if you go deep enough, you will find that there is something in the vital which likes suffering and clings to it for the sake of the drama; it is something below the surface, not on the surface, but it is strong, almost universal in human nature and difficult to eradicate unless one recognises it and gets inwardly away from it. The mind and the physical of man do not like suffering for if they did it would not be suffering any longer, but this thing in the vital wants it in order to give a spice to life. It is the reason why constant depressions can go on returning and returning even though the mind longs to get rid of them, because this in the vital responds, goes on repeating the same movement like a gramophone as soon as it is set going and insists on turning the whole round of the often repeated record. It does not really depend on the reasons which the vital gives for starting off the round, these are often of the most trivial character and wholly insufficient to justify it. It is only by a strong will to detach oneself, not to justify, to reject root and branch that one can in the end get rid of this most troublesome and dangerous streak in human nature. When therefore we speak of the vital comedy, the vital drama, we are speaking from a psychological knowledge which does not end with the surface of things and looks at these hidden movements. It is impossible to deal with things for the purposes of Yoga if we confine ourselves to the surface consciousness only.

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I cannot candidly say that the Mother and I approve of the idea of your going to Calcutta for a fortnight for relief from your sufferings: if we ever sanction such a movement, it is against our own seeing of things because no choice is left to us owing to circumstances or the state of mind of the sadhak. We have never found that such absences do any spiritual good: they usually relax or lower the consciousness or renew old movements that must go. It is much better to face the difficulty however sticky it is till the conquest is there.

It is a pity that this movement of depression has come back with its painful and irrational circle. It must be thrown away for good: these movements go round in a circular repetitionary way characteristic of these things. It is lent force by the reasonings of the physical mind which are specious but of no value. It is not true of spiritual things that experience must come within a certain number of years or not at all. There are some who begin to succeed after a few years, some who take longer, succeeding only in work but not in meditation or activity of the inner consciousness, but finally the veiled inner preparation of so many years has prevailed and they begin to get the psychic change, the inner opening of head and heart, the descents, the growth through frequent though not uninterrupted experience. This has happened even to those who are troubled by these circular movements and have been again and again on the point of rushing away in despair. There is nothing more futile than to despair in the spiritual path and throw up the game: it is to break a working which would have led one to the realisation asked for if one had persevered.

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Thirst for the Divine is one thing and depression is quite another, nor is depression a necessary consequence of the thirst being unsatisfied; that may lead to a more ardent thirst or to a fixed resolution and persistent effort or to a more and more yearning call or to a psychic sorrow which is not at all identical with depression and despair. Depression is a clouded grey state in its nature and it is more difficult for light to come through clouds and greyness than through a clear atmosphere. That depression obstructs the inner light is a matter of general experience. The Gita says expressly, "Yoga should be practised persistently with a heart free from depression" — *anirvinṇacetasā*. Bunyan in *The Pilgrim's Progress* symbolises it as the Slough of Despond, one of the perils of the way that has to be overcome. It is no doubt impossible to escape from attacks of depression, almost all sadhaks go through these attacks, but the principle is that one should react against them and not allow them by any kind

of mental encouragement or acceptance of their suggestions to persist or grow chronic.

It is hardly a fact that sorrow is *necessary* in order to make the soul seek the Divine. It is the call of the soul within for the Divine that makes it turn, and that may come under any circumstances—in full prosperity and enjoyment, at the height of outward conquest and victory without any sorrow or disappointment but by a sudden or growing enlightenment, by a flash of light in the midst of sensuous passion as in Bilwamangal, by the perception that there is something greater and truer than this outward life lived in ego and ignorance. None of these turns need be accompanied by sorrow and depression. Often one turns saying, "Life is all very well and interesting enough as a game, but it is only a game, the spiritual reality is greater than the life of the mind and senses." In whatever way it comes, it is the call of the Divine or the soul's call to the Divine that matters, the attraction of it as something far greater than the things that usually hold the nature. Certainly if one is satisfied with life, entranced by it so that it shuts out the sense of the soul within or hampers the attraction to the Divine, then a period of vairagya, sorrow, depression, a painful breaking of the vital ties may be necessary and many go through that. But once the turn made, it should be to the one direction and a perpetual vairagya is not needed. Nor when we speak of cheerfulness as the best condition, do we mean a cheerful following of the vital life, but a cheerful following of the path to the Divine which is not impossible if the mind and heart take the right view and posture. At any rate if positive cheerfulness is not possible in one's case, still one should not acquiesce in or mentally support a constant depression and sadness. That is not at all indispensable for keeping turned to the Divine.

In speaking of the Buddhist and his nine years of the wall and other instances the Mother was only disproving the view that not having succeeded in seven or eight years meant unfitness and debarred all hope for the future. The man of the wall stands among the greatest names in Japanese Buddhism and his long sterility did not mean incapacity or spiritual unfitness. But apart

from that there are many who have gone on persisting for long periods and finally prevailed. It is a common, not an uncommon experience.

*

This movement [*of restlessness, sadness, gloom*] is one that always tries to come when you have a birthday or a darshan and is obviously a suggestion of forces that want to disturb you and give you a bad birthday or bad darshan. You must get rid of the idea that it is in any way helpful for sadhana, e.g. makes you remember the Divine etc.—if it does it makes you remember the Divine in the wrong way and in addition brings up the weakness, also depression, self-distrust etc. etc. *À quoi bon* cheerfulness? It puts you in the right condition for the psychic to work and without knowing it you grow in just the right perceptions and right feelings for the spiritual attitude. This growth I have been observing in you for a fairly long time now and it is in the cheerful states that it is the most active. Japa, thinking of the Divine is all right, but it must be on this basis and in company with work and mental activity, for then the instrument is in a healthy condition. But if you become restlessly eager to do nothing but japa and think of nothing but the Divine and of the “progress” you have or have not made (Ramana Maharshi says you should never think of “progress”, it is according to him a movement of the ego), then all the fat is in the fire—because the system is not yet ready for a Herculean effort and it begins to get upset and think it is unfit and will never be fit. So be a good cheerful worker and offer your bhakti to the Divine in all ways you can but rely on him to work out things in you.

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I don't remember saying anything on this subject [*of pain and suffering*],⁴ except that disappointed vital desire must bring

⁴ The correspondent suggested that pain and suffering are sometimes necessary in spiritual life and may even enrich it. After the “deep suffering” experienced in the process of mental doubt and questioning, he had felt a sense of gain. “Through deep pain,” he wrote, “one often feels a sense of fulfilment.” —Ed.

about suffering. Pain and suffering are necessary results of the Ignorance in which we live; men grow by all kinds of experience, pain and suffering as well as their opposites, joy and happiness and ecstasy. One can get strength from them if one meets them in the right way. Many take a joy in pain and suffering when associated with struggle or endeavour or adventure, but that is more because of the exhilaration and excitement of the struggle than because of suffering for its own sake. There is, however, something in the vital which takes joy in the whole of life, its dark as well as its bright sides. There is also something perverse in the vital which takes a kind of dramatic pleasure in its own misery and tragedy, even in degradation or in illness. I don't think mere doubt can bring any gain; mental questioning can bring gains if it is in pursuit of truth, but questioning just for the sake of sceptical questioning or in a pure spirit of contradiction can only bring, when it is directed against the truths of the spirit, either error or a lasting incertitude. If I am always questioning the Light when it comes and refusing its offer of truth, the Light cannot stay in me, cannot settle; eventually, finding no welcome and no foundation in the mind, it will retire. One has to push forward into the Light, not be always falling back into the darkness and hugging the darkness in the delusion that that is the real light. Whatever fulfilment one may feel in pain or in doubt belongs to the Ignorance; the real fulfilment is in the divine joy and the divine Truth and its certitude and it is that for which the Yogin strives. In the strife he may have to pass through doubt, not by his own choice or will, but because there is still imperfection in his knowledge.

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If you accept Krishnaprem's insistence that this and no other must be your path, it is this that you have to attain and realise; any exclusive other-worldliness cannot be your way. I believe that you are quite capable of attaining this and realising the Divine and I have never been able to share your constantly recurring doubts about your capacity or the despair that arises

in you so violently when there are these attacks, nor is their persistent recurrence a valid ground for believing that they can never be overcome. Such a persistent recurrence has been a feature in the sadhana of many who have finally emerged and reached the goal; even the sadhana of very great Yogis has not been exempt from such violent and constant recurrences; they have sometimes been special objects of such persistent assaults, as I have indeed indicated in *Savitri* in more places than one—and that was indeed founded on my own experience. In the nature of these recurrences there is usually a constant return of the same adverse experiences, the same adverse resistance, thoughts destructive of all belief and faith and confidence in the future of the sadhana, frustrating doubts of what one has known as the truth, voices of despondency and despair, urgings to abandonment of the Yoga or to suicide or else other disastrous counsels of *déchéance*. The course taken by the attacks is not indeed the same for all, but still they have strong family resemblance. One can eventually overcome if one begins to realise the nature and source of these assaults and acquires the faculty of observing them, bearing, without being involved or absorbed into their gulf, finally becoming the witness of their phenomena and understanding them and refusing the mind's sanction even when the vital is still tossed in the whirl or the most outward physical mind still reflects the adverse suggestions. In the end these attacks lose their power and fall away from the nature; the recurrence becomes feeble or has no power to last: even, if the detachment is strong enough, they can be cut out very soon or at once. The strongest attitude to take is to regard these things as what they really are, incursions of dark forces from outside taking advantage of certain openings in the physical mind or the vital part, but not a real part of oneself or spontaneous creation in one's own nature. To create a confusion and darkness in the physical mind and throw into it or awake in it mistaken ideas, dark thoughts, false impressions is a favourite method of these assailants, and if they can get the support of this mind from over-confidence in its own correctness or the natural rightness of its impressions and inferences, then they can have

a field day until the true mind reasserts itself and blows the clouds away. Another device of theirs is to awake some hurt or rankling sense of grievance in the lower vital parts and keep them hurt or rankling as long as possible. In that case one has to discover these openings in one's nature and learn to close them permanently to such attacks or else to throw out intruders at once or as soon as possible. The recurrence is no proof of a fundamental incapacity; if one takes the right inner attitude, it can and will be overcome. The idea of suicide ought never to be accepted; there is no real ground for it and in any case it cannot be a remedy or a real escape: at most it can only be postponement of difficulties and the necessity for their solution under no better circumstances in another life. One must have faith in the Master of our life and works, even if for a long time he conceals himself, and then in his own right time he will reveal his Presence.

I have tried to dispel all the misconceptions, explain things as they are and meet all the points at issue. It is not that you really cannot make progress or have not made any progress; on the contrary, you yourself have admitted that you have made a good advance in many directions and there is no reason why, if you persevere, the rest should not come. You have always believed in the Guruvada: I would ask you then to put your faith in the Guru and the guidance and rely on the Ishwara for the fulfilment, to have faith in my abiding love and affection, in the affection and divine goodwill and loving kindness of the Mother, stand firm against all attacks and go forward perseveringly towards the spiritual goal and the all-fulfilling and all-satisfying touch of the All-Blissful, the Ishwara.

Despair and Despondency

Despair and despondency are always wrong. If you make a mistake, quietly observe it and correct the tendency next time. Even if the mistake recurs often, you have only to persevere quietly — remembering that nature cannot be changed in a day.

*

These feelings of despair and exaggerated sense of self-depreciation and helplessness are suggestions of a hostile Force and should never be admitted. The defects of which you speak are common to all human nature and the external being of every sadhak is full of them; to become aware of them is necessary for the transformation, but it must be done with a quiet mind and with the faith and surrender to the Divine and assured aspiration to the higher consciousness which are proper to the psychic being. The transformation of the external being is the most difficult part of the Yoga and it demands faith, patience, quietude and firm determination. It is in that spirit that you have to throw these depressions aside and go steadily on with the Yoga.

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You are "alternately getting" these things [*the impulse to aspire and then to despair*], because you allow the vital despondency to lay hold on you. If you consistently rejected it, it would not be able to recur like this. When the difficulties come, you should call back the faith; that is the use of faith, to carry you through the difficulties and help to dissipate them.

*

Why allow yourself to be overpowered like that? These fits of despair are quite irrational — there is no true reason why you should feel so despondent. Our solicitude and help are there always — in spite of these attacks your spiritual capacity is constantly increasing — only remain firm, the victory of the Truth in you is then inevitable. I will do all to change your consciousness — only open yourself. Keep yourself open as much as you can in quietude — that is the *only* condition I ask of you.

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I did not receive any letter from you so recently as a fortnight or three weeks ago. If you feel in a pitiable condition, it is certainly not because you have incurred our displeasure. I have said that we are always with you and it is true, but to feel it you must

draw back from your vital and be able to concentrate in your inner being. If you do that faithfully and sincerely, after a time you will feel the connection and the support.

The meaning of the phrase you speak of is this, that usually the vital tries to resist the call to change. That is what is meant by revolt or opposition. If the inner will insists and forbids revolt or opposition, the vital unwillingness may often take the form of depression and dejection, accompanied by a resistance in the physical mind which supports the repetition of old ideas, habits, movements or actions while the body consciousness suffers from an apprehension or fear of the called-for change, a drawing back from it or a dullness which does not receive the call.

It is these things you have to get rid of. But a sorrowful or despondent mood is not the proper condition for doing that. You have to stand back from the feeling of suffering, anguish and apprehension, reject it and look quietly at the resistance, affirming always to yourself your will to change and insisting that it shall be done and cannot fail to be done now or later with the divine help, because the divine help is there. It is then that the strength can come to you that will overcome the difficulties.

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The weakness in yourself of which you speak is there, as the persistency of these movements [*of despondency*] shows, but it is not in the heart—your heart is all right—but in the lower vital nature. All your weaknesses are there; the rest of your being is quite strong enough for the spiritual life. But this inadequacy of the lower vital is not peculiar to you, it is present in almost every human being. This tendency to irrational sadness and despondency and these imaginations, fears and perverse reasonings—always repeating, if you will take careful notice, the same movements, ideas and feelings and even the same language and phrases like a machine—is a characteristic working of the lower vital nature. The only way to get rid of it is to meet it with a fixed resolution of the higher vital and the mind and psychic being to combat, reject and master it. As you were determined to master the sex impulse and the desire of the palate, so you

must determine to master this “irrational knot” of despondency in the lower vital nature. If you indulge it and regard it as a natural part of yourself with good causes for existence or if you busy yourself finding this or that justification for it when it comes, there is no reason why it should let go its unpleasant grip upon you. Be firm and courageous here, as you have learnt to be with other movements of your lower vital; you will then, I think, find less difficulty in your meditation and your general sadhana.

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It is surely better to seek to right yourself than to let yourself float in the stream of vital despondency and weakness. What do you expect the Mother to answer to such prayers [*for death*]? It is not the soul's demand or need, but an outcry of vital weakness. X did not pray for death, but for light and progress out of his lower consciousness towards the Truth. Ramana Maharshi, whatever his objections to birth in this world, did not pray or seek for death, but for elevation to a height of consciousness for which there is neither birth nor death: he is certainly not so ignorant as to believe that the mere death of the body brings by itself a release; if he were, he would not have taken the trouble to go through so prolonged and intense a tapasya. If a way out is wanted, that is the only way out and there is no other.

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The outer reasons [*for despondency*] are created by the mind and it is the mind that responds or does not respond to them. Nothing outward can affect unless the mind (vital mind usually) represents them to itself in a particular way and makes its own response.

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If the mind does not respond to any suggested reasons for despondency, that is indeed a great liberation.

Chapter Four

Sentimentalism, Sensitiveness, Instability, Laxity

Sentimentalism

It is not a question of feeling sorrow or joy or any other emotion, everybody does that who has not overcome the ordinary Nature. That is not sentimental but emotional. Sentimentalism comes in when you take a pleasure either in indulging or in displaying the feelings or when you have them for no reason or without sufficient reason.

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It is a sentimental part of the vital nature that quarrels with people and refuses to speak to them and it is the same part in a reaction against that mood that wants to speak and get the pleasure of the relation. So long as there is either of these movements, the other also is possible. It is only when you get rid of this sentimentalism and turn all your purified feelings towards the Divine, that these fluctuations disappear and a calm goodwill to all takes their place.

Sensitiveness

It [*sensitiveness*] is a matter of temperament. Some are psychologically and vitally sensitive and responsive to all that comes from anywhere; others are solid of nerve and walled against invasion. It is not at all a question of strength or weakness. The first have a greater sense of life and answer to life; they suffer more from life and get more from it. It is the difference between the Greek and the Roman. Even without egoism the difference remains because it is of the temperament. In Yoga the first type are more able to feel everything directly and know everything in detail by

close experience; it is their great advantage. The others have to use the mind to know and their grasp is less intimate.

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It [*vital sensitiveness*] is neither good nor bad. It comes like that in the course of the development. Some are incapable of consciously or visibly opening to others because they are insensitive. On the other hand to be too open is troublesome.

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There can be no transformation of the being in an insensitive consciousness.

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Most sensitiveness is the result or sign of ego.

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It was indeed a microscopically small cause for so strong an upsetting, but really it is the whole difficulty of this raw and unreasonable sensitiveness which cropped up with this very infinitesimally small excuse—and that sensitiveness is one of the most persistent obstacles of many sadhaks here. There are two remedies for it—the psychic's confidence in the Mother and the surrender that goes with it, i.e. “whatever she wills is best for me”, and the vastness which you feel now,—it is the wideness of the true self, of the true mental, vital, physical being also, from which such things fall off like dust, for they are of no importance to it whatever.

It is the one thing to do, to get permanently into the wideness, peace and silence and let the ego dissolve in it and the attachments fall away.

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The portion below the navel is the lower vital,—in your case it has become very sensitive to the condition of the same part in others or perhaps even to their general condition—so that it gives a sort of reflection or an appropriate reaction to that. It is a

phase in the development that must be overpassed, because the lower vital must get a perfect peace in it and even if it feels the condition of others do it as an act of perception or knowledge without any reaction or reflection.

*

One has not to cure oneself of one's sensitiveness, but only acquire the power to rise to a higher consciousness taking such disenchantments as a sort of jumping-board. One way is not to expect even square dealings from others, no matter who the others are. And besides, it is good to have such experiences of the real nature of some people to which a generous nature is often blind, for that helps the growth of one's consciousness. The blow you wince at seems to you so hard because it is a blow the world of your mental formation has sustained. Such a world often becomes a part of our being. The result is that a blow dealt to it gives almost physical pain. The great compensation is that it makes you live more and more in the real world in contradistinction to the world of your imagination which is what you would like the real world to be. But the real world is not all that could be desired, you know, and that is why it has to be acted upon and transformed by the Divine Consciousness. But for that, knowledge of the reality, however unpalatable, is almost the first requisite. This knowledge often enough is best brought home to us through blows and bleedings. True, idealistic people, sensitive people, refined natures smart under such disillusionments more than do others who are somewhat thick-skinned, but that is no reason why fine feelings should be deprecated and the keen edge of fine susceptibilities be blunted. The thing is to learn to detach oneself from any such experience and learn to look at such perversions of others from a higher altitude from where one can regard these manifestations in the proper perspective —the impersonal one. Then our difficulties really and literally become opportunities. For knowledge, when it goes to the root of our troubles, has in itself a marvellous healing-power as it were. As soon as you touch the quick of the trouble, as soon as you, diving down and down, get at what really ails you, the

pain disappears as though by a miracle. Unflinching courage to reach true Knowledge is therefore of the very essence of Yoga. No lasting superstructure can be erected except on a solid basis of true Knowledge. The feet must be sure of their ground before the head can hope to kiss the skies.

Shyness

As for shyness, there are two kinds: one is egoistic, being ashamed of expressing the Truth or showing allegiance to it in ways which would not be understood by others—the other is a certain reserve, an unwillingness to expose one's deeper feelings to the gaze of others, the wish to keep sacred and secret the relations of love with the Divine—that is a psychic feeling.

Indecision and Instability

The first [*case*] is vital indecision—the other is vital instability.¹ Those who can't choose, have the vital indecision and it is usually due to a too active physical mind, seeing too many things or too many sides at a time. The other rises from a lack of control and too much impulse.

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It [*failure in whatever one tries to do*] usually comes from a certain instability in the lower vital which does not give a consistent support to the Will, but is restless and fluctuates from one interest to another. It does not mean an incapacity for success—usually one who has that could succeed in many directions, but the fluctuation prevents sustained success in any. It is a defect that has to be got over and can be got over.

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The failure [*in studies and in sadhana*] is due not to want of capacity but to want of steadiness—a restlessness in the vital

¹ The correspondent wrote: "There are people who cannot come to a definite decision when the situation demands it. There are others who are constantly changing their decisions. Are both of these cases of vital indecision?" —Ed.

and a sort of ardent hastiness that lacks in care of detail and in perseverance. What you need is the inner silence and the solid strength and force that can act through this inner silence, making the vital its instrument but not allowing it to condition the action by its defects.

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There are some who are solid and tenacious in their vital, it is they who can be steady — others are more mercurial and easily moved by impulses, it is these who are sometimes enthusiastic, sometimes drop into fatigue. It is a matter of temperament. On the other hand the mercurial people are often capable of a quicker ardour, so that they can progress fast if they want in their own way. In any case the remedy for all that is to find one's true self above mind and vital and so not bound by temperament.

Laxity

The rigidity was in the obstinacy with which your mind and vital clung to their own ideas and vital habits and did not want to change. But the result was rather laxity, a general looseness which did not want to tune the nature to the spiritual endeavour, but let all sorts of things wander over its strings at their pleasure. Plasticity of the consciousness is necessary, but plasticity to the true touch of the Power, not to any ordinary touch of the forces in Nature. To tune all to the Higher should be your aim — then there will be the full poetry of the spirit not in writing only but in life.

Section Three

Vital Defects

Chapter One

Ego and Its Forms

Ego and Egoism

I suppose the ego came there [*into human activity*] first as a means of the outer consciousness individualising itself in the flux of Nature and, secondly, as an incentive for tamasic animal man to act and get something done. Otherwise he might merely have contented himself with food and sleep and done nothing else. With that incentive of ego (possession, vanity, ambition, eagerness for power etc. etc.) he began doing all sorts of things he might never otherwise have done. But now that he has to go higher, this ego comes badly in the way.

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Yes, ego is the reason of the difficulty in everybody.

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But that [*pride of the ego*] is the case with all human beings. All the action is shot through with ego, acts, feelings, thoughts, everything, big or small, good or bad. Even humility and what is called altruism is with most people only a form of ego. It does not depend on having something to be proud of.

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It is so with everybody. Human nature is shot through in all its stuff with the threads of the ego. Even when one tries to get away from it, it is in front or walks behind all the thoughts and actions like one's shadow. To see that is the first step — to discern the falsity and absurdity of the ego movements is the second — to discourage and refuse it at every step is the third — but it goes entirely only when one sees, experiences and lives

the One in everything and equally everywhere.

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The human being is naturally egoistic and ego-centred — all he does, thinks, feels has the stamp of the ego on it and it cannot be otherwise until he learns to make not the ego but the Divine the centre of his existence and thinks, acts, feels only for the Divine — or until he enters into the higher or divine consciousness or the divine consciousness into him — for in the divine consciousness there is no ego.

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All human beings are full of ego. If you want to change, you must be very quiet and always aspire for a higher consciousness to come down into you in which there is not the ego. When it comes down, the real change will come. But you must be quiet within, not worried and restless — you must open confidently to the Mother's Force and let it work in you.

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The human consciousness is permeated in all its past ideas with this substance of egoism. It is only by a constant quiet vigilance and increasing consciousness that it can be got out — for if it is not allowed to play openly, it conceals itself and takes subtle and disguised forms.

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It is the ego that is showing itself in its true character. Formerly, it was associating with the sadhana because it either got something of what it desired or had great expectations. Now that these things are held back and the demand for the true attitude is made on it, it resists or non-cooperates, saying, "No value in such a sadhana." In all the sadhaks here, the ego (in its physical or vital physical roots) is proving to be the stumbling block. No transformation is possible unless it changes.

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Obviously, unless the object is Nirvana, the small ego has to be attended to — not indulged, but transformed out of existence.

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Yes, that is right — to remember constantly and live in the peace and calmness so that the Force may work and the Light may come. The small things of daily life must go on in the surface consciousness, not filling too large a place in it, until the Force and Light have taken possession and can lay direct hold of these also. It is the ego that gives them too big a place — the ego must be discouraged. “Not for myself, but for the Divine” should grow to be the law of the whole consciousness and thought and action. It cannot be done thoroughly all at once, but that must become the insistent note in the mind as soon as possible.

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I meant [*by “thinking of the Divine”*] the giving up of the preoccupation with your ego and its rights and claims and ideas of unfair treatment and all the rest and to think more of the Divine and the seeking for the Divine for which you came here and make that your chief preoccupation. It is not in meditation alone, but in life and thought and act and feeling that that has to be done.

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Human nature has always been egoistic in its basis and so it brings in the ego motive into the work for the Divine also. That can only be overcome slowly, for what is ingrained in the human vital nature and has been active through hundreds of lives cannot disappear at once. To be conscious and to have the steady will to change and make the inner motive of bhakti and self-giving prevail over the outer motives is the one thing necessary.

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If you are becoming so conscious of the ego and the animal which fill so large a place in every human being, it is really a progress, because to be conscious is the first step. But along with

it you must have an aspiration and a confident faith in the Divine Power and Grace and in the divine element within you, psychic and spiritual, that through these the nature will be transformed and the ego replaced by the true person and the animal by the true vital and physical being become fit instruments of the Divine Mother.

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Yes, these experiences [*of the smallness of the egoistic person*] always come when one is opening into the wideness of the cosmic consciousness and your conclusions are correct. The self-importance of the ego has to dissolve—the importance of life or the progress of the being can come only from its being a vehicle of the Divine's play, evolution, realisation and that is independent of the vastness of Space and Time.

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The right attitude is to see that as a separate being, as an ego, one has no importance whatever and the insistence on one's own desires, pride, position etc. is an ignorance, but one matters only as a spirit, as a portion of the Divine, not more than others, but as all souls matter to the Soul of all.

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Impersonality in itself is not the Divine. All these mistakes can be and are made by many who claim to be in an impersonalised consciousness. A force may be impersonal but may be also a wrong force. Many think they are impersonal and free from ego because they are obeying a force or something bigger than their own personality—but that force or that something may be quite other than the Divine and it may hold them by something in their personality and ego.

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It [*the degree of sensitivity*] depends on the nature of the ego. Some egoists are hard-skinned and not sensitive at all; others are hyper-sensitive.

Ego in Different Parts of the Being

It [*the ego*] rises because it is its nature to do so; it wants to keep hold of the being which it considers its property and field of expression.

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Your ego does come up from time to time without your seeing that it is the ego. It comes up not in your higher parts but in your physical mind and consciousness and you think that because your higher parts are clear this also is clear.

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Ego, whatever its basis, can reproduce itself in different parts of the being, e.g. a vital ego, a mental ego, but fundamentally it is one.

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The mind and the vital are much more full of ego than the body —in the body the ego is obscure and instinctive only. There is no reason why ego should not be conquered in the end — although it is difficult — even in the external nature.

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The fight with the ego is part of the fight with the physical nature, for it is the superficial ego in the physical consciousness, irrational and instinctive, that refuses to go.

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No, it need not.¹ It is so thought because the old Yogas did not care about the liberation of the body and other instruments, and thought only of the separation of the soul from the Prakriti. If you do not liberate the Prakriti, ego and other forms of bondage will naturally remain so long as there is any action of Prakriti.

¹ *The correspondent asked whether egoism remains, at least in the physical being, as long as the body remains. — Ed.*

The Vital Ego

The earth-consciousness does not want to change, so it rejects what comes down to it from above—it has always done so. It is only if those who have taken this Yoga open themselves and are willing to change their lower nature that this unwillingness can disappear.

What stands in the way of course is always the vital ego with its ignorance and the pride of its ignorance and the physical consciousness with its inertia which resents and resists any call to change and its indolence which does not like to take the trouble—it finds it more comfortable to go on its own way repeating always the same old movements and, at best, expecting everything to be done for it in some way at some time.

The first thing is to have the right inner attitude—you have that; the rest is the will to transform oneself and the vigilance to perceive and reject all that belongs to the ego and the tamasic persistence of the lower nature. Finally, to keep oneself always open to the Mother in every part of the being so that the process of transformation may find no hindrance.

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Yes, even in ordinary life there must be a control over the vital and the ego—otherwise life would be impossible. Even many animals, those who live in groups, have their strict rules imposing a control on the play of the ego and those who disobey will have a bad time of it. The Europeans especially understand this and even though they are full of ego, yet when there is a question of team work or group life, they are adepts at keeping it in leash, even if it growls inside; it is the secret of their success. But in Yoga life of course it is a question not of controlling ego but of getting rid of it and rising to a higher principle, so demand is much more strongly and insistently discouraged.

*

It is much better to tell [*any feelings of dissatisfaction*]. But you

are not alone in these feelings — two-thirds of the Asram have them in more or less vehemence — it is the unregenerate vital ego which is just the thing that stands most in the way of the transformation — other things are comparatively mild obstacles compared with this part of the being. It is much better that the Mother refused consideration to this part of you — consideration would have been a much more dangerous test than refusal.

*

Yes, it [*a false sense of importance*] is a thing which comes to many; exaggerated and made a principal part of the vital attitude, it has been the cause of failure and departure of several who consider themselves great sadhaks — they made it an excuse for indulging and magnifying the vital ego. Since you see that it is ridiculous, you should have no difficulty in getting rid of it. The only truth in it is that each one who opens himself in such a way that the Force can get through to his material so as to change it, will by that be contributing to the victory of the Force — but it applies to everybody, not to any one individual.

*

Yes, the talk about “advanced” sadhaks is a thing I have always discouraged — but people go on because that appeals to the vital ego.

*

I have already told you the nature of the difficulty that has arisen in you, that it is nothing but the revolt of your vital mind and vital ego and I have pointed out to you the only way in which it can be overcome. You had by an effort supported by a special concentration from us arrived at a first psychic opening in your mind and heart which enabled you even to throw out for a time the sexual obsession from your vital consciousness. But, as often happens, soon after all that is obscure, egoistic, self-centred in the vital being rose up in revolt and created a confused farrago of desires, demands, disappointments, grievances, misapprehen-

sions,² false reasonings and especially a wrong attitude of claim and demand which was the entire contradiction of the psychic and spiritual attitude and wholly inconsistent with the right conditions of sadhana. It is this of which your recent letters were full. The forces that use this kind of vital condition for the breaking of a sadhak's spiritual chances became active and turned all into a drive to go away. Your only chance is to refuse to listen to all these ideas and suggestions and adopt resolutely an attitude of complete self-giving and the refusal of all feelings of desire, claim and ego and all justifications of these feelings by the vital mind which is full of a false view of things and therefore cannot be trusted even when its reasonings seem to be plausible.

Others before you have entered into this whirl of the vital mind and ego and have gone on justifying it and indulging it. The only result was a constant repetition of vital crises sometimes ending in departure and the failure of the sadhana; others by a repeated reaction of their psychic being finally succeeded in emerging out of the chaos. But we have found that to comply with the claims, demands, clamours, ultimatums of the vital mind in this condition is the worst way to meet the difficulty. It only increases the demands, revolts, outbursts of ego and makes the recurrence or continuance of the vital crises endless. You must get out of your head the idea that you have a right to demand this or that from the Mother because she is accepted by you as the Divine and that she is bound to satisfy you and any refusal is an offence and an outrage. The Mother acts and decides in all freedom according to her vision and judgment and she cannot be expected to act according to the desires, opinions or demands of the sadhaks nor can they judge by their minds her reasons or motives, for these do not belong to the ordinary consciousness in which the mind moves. For her to obey the dictates of the sadhaks or their claims and desires would be to make her work meaningless and a failure. Apart from that, the

² Your present attitude to your poetry and painting is one of these misapprehensions of the vital mind and ego and is a mistake calculated to injure your sadhana.

basis of this Yoga is self-giving and surrender of the sadhak to the Divine, his acceptance of guidance by a higher consciousness than his own. A reversal of the position, an imposition of the will of the lower consciousness on the Divine or the Guru is not admissible; yet the position you have taken in your letters of demand amounts to that and nothing else. This attitude must cease if you want to get out of your difficulty.

I have tried to make the position clear to you. It is for you to accept or not to accept what I have said; but it is the only way possible for the sadhana.

*

Once the universality [*of the consciousness*] is established, there is no longer a secure fortress in the nature for the vital egoism — the walls of it having been broken down. They [*vital forces*] may still attack from outside, but it now lies in the power of the sadhak to prevent their making a settled formation in him any longer.

Rajasic and Tamasic Ego (Ahankara)

What you speak of as your nature, the distrust etc., is not the nature but only a particular turn or habit that has got into it like a crease in a dress. It can be smoothed out of the nature. Of course it has to be smoothed out, for just as the rajasic ahankara which exalts itself unduly is not good for the sadhana, creating pride, vanity and delusion, so this opposite thing, called often tamasic ahankara, is not good, for it creates diffidence, despondency and in some people inertia.

*

The tamasic ego is that which accepts and supports despondency, weakness, inertia, self-depreciation, unwillingness to act, unwillingness to know or be open, fatigue, indolence, do-nothingness. Contrary to the rajasic it says, "I am so weak, so obscure, so miserable, so oppressed and ill-used — there is no hope for me, no success, I am denied everything, I am unsupported — how

can I do this, how can I do that, I have no power for it, no capacity, I am helpless; let me die; let me lie still and moan," etc. etc. Of course not all that at once or in every case; but I am giving the general character of the thing.

*

All that [*self-depreciation and depression*] is the usual play of the vital and the ego. It is the vital that can find satisfaction neither in talking with others nor in solitude—it has lost the old satisfaction in talks, but it cannot reconcile itself either to giving up the old attachment—it still feels a tie to it and so cannot get the joy of solitude.

It is the ego that is self-important and makes much of itself, but depression, self-depreciation and the feeling that others do not like or appreciate your company is also a working of the ego. The first is rajasic ego, the second tamasic ego. To be occupied always with oneself and the action of others on oneself is ego. One who is free from ego does not trouble about these things. In Yoga one must be unattached and indifferent to these things, concerned only with Sadhana and the Divine and towards others the attitude must be one of quiet goodwill without any demand or expectation. If one can't arrive at this yet, one must always endeavour to arrive at that and not feed the lower vital movement by brooding on these other things.

To depend on letters from me for getting free from depression will only create a habit of depression, demand for a tonic in the shape of a letter, then again depression, tonic and revival and the circle will go on. It is only by a resolute will to get rid of the vital and the ego through their reactions that you can keep yourself open to the Mother. Success may take time, but the steady will and aspiration must be there.

*

In spite of the outbreak of temper and violence with regard to the boy I do not think it can be said that you have not changed at all or made any progress. There are three obstacles that one has to overcome in the vital and they are very difficult to

overcome, lust (sexual desire), wrath and rajasic ego. I think you have progressed much in all three. Even in regard to anger, the outbreaks are surely less common, less overpowering and long-continued than they were before. It has been so much in your vital nature that you have to be on your guard against fits like these coming back; you have also to overcome excitement and violence of speech; but if you persevere without being discouraged, the freedom will come. Rajasic ego is the ground of the others. I think your idea about X is good for this purpose. If you can accustom yourself to do as scrupulously work not attractive to you as you do what attracts you and to do it in accordance with the ideas and standards of another, not insisting on your own, that should be an excellent discipline for the rajasic ego and bring into the vital a greater power of self-giving and peace.

*

Do you mean to say that you never had any rajasic element in you? There is not a human being who has not got it in him so long as he is not divinised in his vital. What were all the vital suggestions coming to you so insistently always except appeals to the rajasic ego? When you threw out sex, jealousy, vanity, etc. what were you throwing out but the rajasic ego? What was the demand at the pranam or the disturbance caused there but a movement of the rajasic ego? Some of these things you threw out successfully — others still kept a response.

*

So long as you had fully the attitude of surrender, the rajasic ego could only take the form of suggestions from outside, uprisings from the subconscious. It was suppressed in the vital. When the inertia rose and the energy of will receded, it began to try to come in again.

*

These [*feelings of hopelessness*] are the feelings of the tamasic ego — the reaction to a disappointment in the rajasic ego. Mingled with the true attitude and experience or running

concurrently along with it was a demand of the vital, “What I am having now, I must always have, otherwise I can’t do sadhana; if I ever lose that, I shall die”—whereas the proper attitude is, “Even if I lose it for a time, it will be because something in me has to be changed in order that the Mother’s consciousness may be fulfilled in me not only in the self but in every part.” The lower forces attacked at this weak point, made demands through the vital and brought about a state of inertia in which what you had clung to seemed to be lost, went back behind the veil. So came the tamasic reaction of the ego, “What is the use of living, I prefer to die.” Obviously it is not the whole of you that says it, it is a part in the disappointed vital and tamasic physical. It is not enough that the active demands should be broken and removed; for this also is a passive way of demand, “I can’t have my demands; very well, I abdicate, don’t want to exist.” That must disappear.

*

Tamas and tamasic ego are implied in each other. When one yields to tama, one indulges the tamasic ego.

Ego-centrity

The ego-centric man feels and values things as they affect him. “Does this please me or displease, give me gladness or pain, flatter my pride, vanity, ambition or hurt it, satisfy my desires or thwart them?” etc. The unegoistic man does not look at things like that. He looks to see what things are in themselves and would be even if he were not there, what is their meaning, how they fit into the scheme of things—or else he feels calm and equal, refers everything to the Divine, or if he is a man of action how they will serve the work that has to be done or the life of the world or the cause he serves etc. etc. There can be many points of view which are not ego-centric.

*

It is true about living and doing all for oneself, but that is the

nature of man, he is centred in his ego, ego-centric, and does all for his ego; even his love and liking is mostly based on ego. All that has to be changed and all has to be centred in the Divine, done for the Divine Mother. It is the work of the sadhana to get that done. The silence, the growth of the psychic and all else is meant to bring about that—but it cannot be done all at once. When the consciousness is ready, then the psychic love, the impulse for self-giving begins to open out in the heart and the change is made—more and more till there is the complete self-giving.

*

But in what way do they [*internal and external things*] belong to the Divine, so long as the ego appropriates and uses them for its own purposes? Self-giving in fact means a change from ego-centricity to God-centricity; also such a giving as would lead to a change of the whole base of the consciousness.

*

Your nature like that of almost everybody has been largely ego-centric and the first stages of the sadhana are with almost everybody ego-centric. The main idea in it is always one's own sadhana, one's own endeavour, one's own development, perfection, siddhi. It is inevitable for most, for without that personal endeavour there would not be sufficient will or push to bring about the first necessary changes. But none of these things—development, perfection or siddhi—can really come in any degree of completeness or unmixed finality until this ego-centric attitude changes into the God-centric, until it becomes the development, perfection, siddhi of the Divine Consciousness, its will and its instrumentation in this body—and that can only be when these things become secondary, and bhakti for the Divine, love for the Divine, oneness with the Divine in consciousness, will, heart and body, become the sole aim—the rest is then only the fulfilment of the Divine Will by the Divine Power. This attitude is never difficult for the psychic, it is its natural position and feeling, and whenever your psychic was in front, you had

it in your central consciousness. But there were the outer mind, vital and physical that brought in their mixture of desire and ego and there could be no effective liberation in life and action till these were liberated. The thinking mind and higher vital can accept without too much difficulty, but the difficulty is with the lower vital and physical and especially with the most external parts of them; for these are entirely creatures of habit, recurring movement, an obstinate repetition of the same movement always. This habit is so blind and obstinate and persistent as to seem almost invincible, especially when it is used at a juncture like this by the Forces of Ignorance as their last refuge or point of attack. But the apparent invincibility is not true. The most ego-centric can change and do change by the psychic principle becoming established in the external nature. That it can be done only by the Divine Grace and Power is true (that is true of all spiritual change)—but with the full consent of the being. As it was done in the inner being, so it can be done in the outer; give the adhesion of your full will and faith and, whatever the difficulty, it will be done.

*

Obviously one must not get egoistic about it [*one's sadhana*], but withdrawal from the outer or lower consciousness into the inner is not in itself an egoistic movement. If it were so, all sadhana would be egoism and to be always social and on the surface would be the only thing!

The Egoism of the Instrument and the Magnified Ego

The form of ego has to be dissolved,³ it has not to be replaced by a bigger ego or another kind of ego. It has to be replaced by the true being which feels itself, even though individual, yet one with all and one with the Divine.

*

³ *The correspondent asked whether the ego has to be transformed or dissolved.—Ed.*

The egoism of the instrument can be as dangerous or more dangerous to spiritual progress than the egoism of the doer. The ego-sense is contrary to spiritual realisation, so how can any kind of ego be a thing to be encouraged? As for the magnified ego, it is one of the most perilous obstacles to release and perfection. There should be no big I, not even a small one.

What is meant by the magnified ego is that when the limits of the ordinary mind and vital are broken, one feels a far vaster and more powerful consciousness and unlimited possibilities, but if one ties all that to the tail of one's own ego, then one becomes a thousand times more egoistic than the ordinary man. The greatness of the Divine becomes an excuse and a support for one's own greatness and the big I swells itself to fill not only the earth but the heavens. That magnification of the ego is a thing to be guarded against with a watchful care.

*

What you say about the ahankara of the instrument is true — it is one of the most sticky of the ego's self-deceptions and there are few who can detect it soon or get easily clear of it. I think I can congratulate you on your becoming aware of it at so early a stage. There are some who do not discover it even after ten or twenty years of sadhana.

*

Yes — these [*pride, a sense of superiority, the desire to show one's worth*] are small signs or little forms of the ego of the instrument — not very serious, but often rather sticky. There is a bigger kind of egoism which is not so common which can rise into a kind of megalomania: "I, I am *the* instrument — how great an instrument I am — through me all will be done", — there are three or four who have had that in a distressingly acute form, secretly or openly; often it ends by their going away to do great things outside — great things which somehow do not get done.

*

The Divine is there in all men, so the Divine and the ego do

live together. But the Divine is veiled by the ego and manifests in proportion as the ego *first submits itself*, then recedes and disappears. There can be no complete possession by the Divine without disappearance of the ego. Any man can be an instrument of the Divine—the thing is to be a perfectly conscious instrument.

*

Well, it can hardly be that you alone are a chosen instrument. All who arrive at the realisation in this Yoga will be instruments — it is part of the realisation that the sadhak should turn himself into an instrument of the Divine Mother.

Getting Rid of the Ego and of Egoism

What you say [*about the need to purify oneself of ego*] is perfectly correct—I am glad you are becoming so lucid and clear-sighted, the result surely of a psychic change. Ego is a very curious thing and in nothing more than in its way of hiding itself and pretending it is not the ego. It can always hide even behind an aspiration to serve the Mother. The only way of getting rid of it is to chase it out of all its veils and corners.

You are right also in thinking that this is really the most important part of your Yoga. The Rajayogis are right in putting purification in front of everything and a preliminary to successful meditation—as I was also right in putting it in front along with concentration in the *Synthesis*. You have only to look around you to see that experiences and even realisations cannot bring one to the goal if this is not done—at any moment they can fall owing to the vital still being impure and full of ego.

*

Yes, that [*the elimination of egoism*] is the first requisite of a true foundation in the sadhana. It is because people do not realise this and are satisfied with experiences, keeping the vital ego, not insisting on an egoless higher consciousness, that there is so much difficulty.

*

Obviously all that must go—it is the old vital egoism of the human being always preoccupied with itself, so that the being cannot give itself simply and unquestioningly to the adoration of the Divine.

*

Yes—it is from looking at things from the ego point of view that there comes all the confusion and trouble and ignorance. One has to think of the Divine, be still and let the divine consciousness come in and replace the egoistic human—then all that disappears.

*

All attachment and ego must disappear. No temptation of power, for power is given only to do the Divine's work and the power itself is the Divine's. No attachment to work, for the work is not the ego's, but the Divine's. No attachment or insistence on the fruits, for that too belongs to the Divine and will come when mind and circumstances are ready. It is the same with sadhana. Only one thing is to be the aim, to be in union and contact with the Divine through love and surrender,—the rest will come out of that, whatever is needed for the manifestation.

*

If the ego is gone and the full surrender is there, then there should be no obstacles [*to following the sunlit path of sadhana*]. If however the rajas of the vital is only quiescent, then its quiescence may bring up the tamas in its place, and that would be the obstacle.

*

Only calm in the vital is hardly sufficient [*to have psychic experiences*]. There must be something throwing out the ego from the vital.

*

Of course, they [*the ego and the vital*] always resist a pressure

to get rid of them—and if one fixes a given time, they are all the more resistant in the hope of creating disappointment and discouragement by the failure to do it in the given time.

*

You cannot expect to drive the ego out of the movements in a short time. What is necessary is to see it quietly without being discouraged by its presence, and by a steady persistent action work it out of the system.

*

It is not possible to get rid of the ego-movements all at once. They have to be worked out of the nature by a constant consciousness and rejection. Even when the central ego has gone, the habitual movements stick for a long time.

*

These things [*little expressions of egoism*] either fade slowly out by constant rejection or else they drop off when the higher consciousness gets steadily down into the lower vital and, as it were, swallows it up. A sudden extinction is perhaps possible—at least there are reported cases of it—but usually they linger and go slowly, losing gradually force as if worn out.

*

For the ego, however insistent it may be, one has to keep one's eye on it and say no to all its suggestions so that each position it takes up proves to be a fruitless move. Treated in that way, it becomes ready for the moment when the psychic has only to give a slight push for it to fall away in each field of its activity from its loosened roots. Persevere steadily in the present movement and it cannot fail to be effective.

*

Ego is not so easy to get rid of. It remains not only in spite of work, but in spite of knowledge or bhakti. The disappearance of ego means complete *mukti*. But even the Yogi who feels

his separate being swallowed up in cosmic consciousness or some kind of transcendental consciousness, yet when it comes to outward action and reaction finds the superficial ego still there. That is why the ascetic has a horror of action and says that without ego it can't be done. It can, but fully only when even these outermost things are finally taken up by the higher Consciousness entirely.

*

If you think there is no ego or desire in you, only pure devotion, that shows a great unconsciousness. To be free from ego and desire is a condition which needs a high siddhi in Yoga—even many Yogis of a great spiritual attainment are not free from it. For a sadhak at your stage of development to think he is free from ego and desire is to blind himself and prevent the clear perception of one's own nature movements which is necessary for progress towards spiritual perfection.

The Mother does not need to have your writings before her in order to see what is in you.

If your writings show ego and desire, and they certainly do, it is because they are there without your perceiving it and express themselves without your intending it. What the surface mind thinks and intends is one thing and what is behind the thoughts and actions is another thing. A man's surface mind shapes its own idea of oneself and one's nature in an entire self-ignorance. The first thing one has to do to get rid of this ignorance is to draw back from the surface mind and get into contact with the psychic which does not allow such delusions and shows one clearly the truth about one's movements.

*

Even if there is no consciousness of ego in the higher parts where oneness of all things has been realised, it does not follow that in the lower parts ego has been abolished. It can on the contrary become very strong and the actions can be very egoistic even while the mind is thinking "I have no ego."

*

Of course, such suggestions [*that one can be an instrument to help someone else on the path of Yoga*] are meant to wake the ego. I suppose they persist because they still have a hope of waking the ego. Even when one is quite free, all kinds of suggestions can come. One either takes no notice of them or else gives a glance to see whether there is any fragment of ego still lurking somewhere.

Getting Rid of the Ego Altogether

But what is this ego of which you speak? Everybody has the ego and it is impossible to get rid of it altogether except by two things — the opening of the psychic within and the descent of a wider ego-free consciousness from above. The psychic being opening does not get rid of the ego at once but purifies it and offers it and all the movements to the Divine, so that one becomes unegoistic through self-giving and surrender. At the same time the nature opens above and the wider ego-free consciousness comes down and ego disappears and by the power of the psychic you know your own true being which is a portion of the Mother. This is what has to happen, but it cannot happen in so short a time. Do not be always thinking of the vital movements and the ego — you have seen them and know that they are, it is enough. Concentrate rather in the heart on the opening there; concentrate persistently and aspire persistently and do not mind if it takes time. Call in any way, even if you cannot call yet deeply — then the deeper call will come.

*

It is possible [*to diminish the ego by the action of the Force*] if your consciousness associates itself with the action; then at least one can get rid of its major action and leave only minor traces. To get rid of the ego altogether however comes usually only by the descent of Consciousness from above and its occupation of the whole being aided of course by the rule of the psychic in the nature.

*

I think you still give an exaggerated importance and attention to the ego and other elements that are interwoven in the nature of humanity and cannot be entirely got rid of except by the coming of a new consciousness which replaces them by higher movements. If one rejects centrally and with all sincerity the ego and rajas, their roots get loosened and sattwa can prevail in the nature, but the expulsion of all ego and rajas cannot be done by the will and its effort. After a certain stage of preparation therefore one must stress more on the positive side of the sadhana than on the negative side of rejection,—though this of course must remain to help the other. Still what is important is to develop the psychic within and bring down the higher consciousness from above. The psychic as it grows and manifests detects immediately all wrong movements or elements and at the same time supplies almost automatically the true element or movement which will replace them—this psychic process is much easier and more effective than that of a severe tapasya of purification. The higher consciousness in descending brings peace and purity into all the inner parts; the inner being separates itself from the imperfect outer consciousness and at the same time the peace that comes carries in it a power which can throw out what contradicts the peace and purity. Ego can then slowly or swiftly but surely disappear—rajas and tamas change into their divine substitutes.

*

It is rather a wider than a higher consciousness that is necessary for the liberation from the ego. Going high is necessary of course, but by itself it is not sufficient.

*

Without persistent rejection it [*liberation from movements of the ego*] cannot be done. Going up into the self liberates the higher parts but the ego remains in the lower parts. The most effective force for this liberation is the psychic control along with steady rejection.

*

The sense of ego can disappear into that of the Self or the Purusha but that of itself does not bring about the disappearance of the old ego reactions in the Prakriti. The Purusha has to get rid of these by a process of constant rejection and remoulding. The remoulding consists in throwing everything into a consecration to the Mother and doing all for her without regard to oneself, one's desires, opinions, vital reactions as if they were the things to be fulfilled. This is most easily done if the psychic being becomes quite awake.

*

Without the liberation of the psychic and the realisation of the true Self the ego cannot go, both are necessary. If there is no consciousness of the Self how can the ego disappear? The psychic can be liberated by love and devotion, but I was speaking of a case in which it is not so liberated, and the realisation of the Self seems more easy — a case like yours.

Selfishness

To go away and suffer the consequences is not a solution. As for the rest, the selfishness of the ego is not a reason for not calling down the higher (divine) consciousness of which the peace and the force are as it were the front or the basis. How can you get rid of the selfish ego unless you call down that higher consciousness to which the ego is not a necessity?

In the evolution of the lower consciousness here ego and selfishness were a necessity. So long as the higher consciousness above ordinary mind does not descend, ego remains a necessity even in aspiring towards the Divine or towards Mukti, even if it becomes a sattwic ego. It is only in the higher consciousness that ego can dissolve, either by ascending there or by its descent into the consciousness below.

*

Why is it selfishness [*to be concentrated on the Divine*]? Selfishness is to live for oneself and not for something greater than the

self. To be concentrated on the Divine at all times is to get out of the personal self and its aims into something greater and serve the aims of that greater Existence. It is no more selfishness than to live for others always would be selfishness.

*

As to egoism and selfishness, one can be generous and yet egoistic — one can be generous with vanity, pride etc. in the generosity; one can even be egoistic in self-sacrifice.

Ambition

Ambition is always a force of the vital.

*

A kind of siddhi or siddhis can come [*even if there is ambition in the nature*]—siddhis of power etc. There are Yogins who have great powers and also a big ego. Of course there can be no liberation without overcoming ambition and ego.

*

Suggestions of ambition etc. are always born in the vital mind or, as it might be called, the mind of the vital and from there they rush up to the thinking mind and claim its assent and the sanction of the mental will. When the thinking mind gets clouded by the uprush, it gets carried away and gives its assent. The thinking mind (reason) has always to remain unmoved above and judge what is right without being caught and carried away by the vital.

*

Ambition and vanity are things so natural to the human consciousness—they have even their use in ordinary life—that it is quite natural that at first they should enter into the sadhana also and linger even when they are rejected. But they have to be pushed out, before one is far on the path—otherwise they are very dangerous attendants and can pervert both aspiration and siddhi.

Vanity

It [*vanity*] is one of the things most difficult to get rid of. Even when the mind is unmoved, something in the vital or physical or perhaps even some little bit on the surface at once starts vibrating.

*

It is possible that X has experiences for he has probably some mental force and through that can build up mental realisations of what he reads, but he lives in the vital and whatever he experiences or receives the vital takes it and makes it a hundred times bigger in its construction than it really is. His claims *are* preposterous. It is evident that, like most people, he has no idea what the supramental is or he would never talk like that. People who live in the vital and have much vanity (there have been several examples here too) easily get the idea that they have attained everything, are without ego, all they receive is from the Divine (even when a magnified ego is driving them) etc. etc., for the vital ego is eager to arrive, to be big, to be siddha, and it persuades itself very easily that it is all these things. Let him however go on his own way; it is no use disturbing his self-content, as probably it is the only kind of self-expression he can do.

*

When vanity is there on a big scale, it usually works like that. The man feels the energy in all he does and mistakes the energy for high accomplishment. It is a common error. The high accomplishment is in only one or two fields.

*

It is vanity, but it is not humbug,⁴ unless he does not believe in it. If he does not believe in it, it is humbug, but it is not vanity.

⁴ A doctor went about claiming that he could cure people because the Mother's Force worked through him. The correspondent asked, "Is not all this humbug?" — Ed.

Pride and Self-Esteem

Pride is only one form of ego — there are ten thousand others. Every action of man is full of ego — the good ones as well as the bad, his humility as much as his pride, his virtues as much as his vices.

To get the ego out of the human nature is not so simple as that. If one is free from ego, does nothing with reference to himself or for his own sake but only for the Divine and all his thoughts and feelings are for the Divine, then he is Jivanmukta and a Siddha Yogi.

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For many sadhaks there is a first stage governed by the mind or higher vital in which they go on very well, because in the mind and higher vital there are elements that are strong enough to control the rest while the first experiences or first progress is made. But a time comes when the sadhak has to deal with the lower parts of the being, *then* all the vital difficulties arise. If the early progress or experiences have engendered pride or ego or if there is a serious flaw somewhere, then they are unable to deal with these so long as the ego is not removed or broken or the flaw mended. X developed a pride of self-righteousness that stood in his way altogether; he has also the flaw of a narrow obstinate mind that sticks to its own ideas as if they alone were right — the instances you give of his conduct are illustrations of this defect. That is why here he quarrels with everyone thinking that he is right and they are very bad and mischievous, cannot see his own faults and mistakes and when he is not heard by the Mother or myself feels hurt and offended because we do not support his saintliness and righteousness against the wicked who oppress him. He is a good and clever worker but he cannot progress in sadhana so long as he keeps this stiffness and ego.

*

But that [*inability to recognise one's defects*] is a very common human weakness, although it ought not to exist in a sadhak

whose progress depends largely on his recognising what has to be changed in him. Not that the recognition by itself is sufficient, but it is a necessary element. It is of course a kind of pride or vanity which considers this necessary for strength and standing. Not only will they not recognise it before others but they hide their defects from themselves or even if obliged to look at it with one eye look away from it with the other. Or they weave a veil of words and excuses and justifications trying to make it something other than it really is. X's saying [*"I would die if I had to admit my faults."*] is very characteristic of him—that has been his main stumbling block in the path of Yoga.

*

It is little use our trying to convey to you *our* will (in words), because what your vital seeks after is a sanction for your own will and its way of action,— and it is little use our trying to give you light, because your mind follows always its own light. Any attempt to correct from us you have always rejected as our error, our misunderstanding of you, an attempt to give you kicks, as you express it. In such a case we can only be silent, try to help your sadhana silently as much as you will allow and for the rest leave you to learn by experience as far as you may become willing to do so. You have capacities and Yogic stuff, but along with them goes a very strong self-esteem and a self-righteous spirit which stand in the way of perfection and constitute a very serious obstacle. So long as a sadhak has that, the attempt of the Truth to manifest in him will always be baffled by his changing it into mental and vital constructions which distort it, turn it into ineffective half-truth or even make truth itself a source of error.

I would not have written even so much if you had not pressed so persistently for an answer. I hope you will not take it as misunderstanding or merely another "kick". If you do not want criticism or correction from us, you should at least develop better the power of self-criticism and self-correction in yourself without which no perfection is possible.

*

The egoism in yourself of which you speak belongs to the relation of one human being with another and is common to almost all men and women; it is extremely difficult to get rid of, but if one sees it clearly and determines not to have it, then it can first be brought under control and then dismissed from the nature. But the egoism which made people go away from here through pride in their sadhana and attachment to the supposed greatness of their experiences is another kind and far more dangerous spiritually. You do not have it and I do not think you are in danger of ever having it.

Self-Respect, Amour-Propre, Superiority

Self-respect and a sense of superiority are two very different things. Self-respect is not necessarily a sign of egoism any more than its absence is a sign of liberation from egoism. Self-respect means observing a certain standard of conduct which is proper to the level of manhood to which I belong — e.g. I cannot make a false statement out of self-respect though it would be advantageous to do it and most people under the circumstances would make it. Amour-propre is different and belongs to the sattwic type of ego. When one is not free from ego, then amour-propre (as well as self-respect — for that can be with ego or without ego) is a necessary support for the maintenance of the personality at its proper level.

*

Amour-propre does not mean conceit. It means at its best the feeling not to make mistakes and to do as well as possible — at its worst it means to try to appear well and without mistakes or faults to others and not to like faults being pointed out.

*

Ideas of superiority and inferiority are not of much use or validity. Each one is himself with his own possibilities to which there need be no limit except that of will and development and time. Each nature has its own lines and own things that are more

developed or less developed, but the standard should be set by what he in himself aims to be. Comparison with others brings in a wrong standard of values.

Jealousy and Abhiman

This is a very common disease with the sadhaks — making comparisons with feelings of jealousy and envy — in some it leads to revolt and self-assertion, in others to self-depreciation and depression. Naturally, these feelings are quite out of place and the judgments created are out of focus. Each sadhak has his own movement, his own relation with the Divine, his own place in the work or the general sadhana and to compare with others immediately brings in a wrong standard. It is on the truth of his own inner movement that he has to take his base — swadharma.

*

Jealousy should not be there if there is no ground for it, for then it is absurd and meaningless — but also when there is reason for it according to common standards, it should not be there, for it is a sentiment lacking in nobility and quite unyogic.

As for getting rid of *lobha*, certainly the Mother's full help will be with you.

*

It is jealousy of course.⁵ Fame and success always create a great amount of jealousy and ill-will anywhere but most in countries where there has been a suppressed public life and solidarity does not exist.

*

This jealousy (which is a very common affliction of the vital) will go like the rest. If you have the aspiration to get rid of it, it

⁵ An Indian philosopher was invited to Europe to deliver several lectures and was received well everywhere. When he returned to India, he found that the number of his critics had greatly increased. He wrote to ask Sri Aurobindo the reason. — Ed.

can only come by force of habit, and with the psychic growing in you and the Mother's force acting, the power of the habit is sure to diminish and fade away. Do not be discouraged by its occasional return, but reject it so that it may be unable to stay long and will be obliged to retire. Very soon then it will cease to come at all.

*

All that [*vanity, jealousy, the sense of not being loved*] of course is not love, but self-love. Jealousy is only an ugly form of self-love. That is what people do not understand — they even think that demands and jealousy and wounded vanity are signs of love or at least natural attendants of it.

*

The sooner you get rid of that [*abhiman*] the better. Anyone who indulges abhiman puts himself under the influence of the hostile forces. Abhiman has nothing to do with true love; it is like jealousy a part of the vital egoism.

*

The feeling of jealousy and abhiman was of course a survival from the past movements of the nature. It is so that these things go out if they are rejected; they lose their force, can stay less and less, can affect less and less the consciousness, — finally, they are able to touch no longer and so come no longer.

*

It is of course the old reaction — jealousy is certainly there, or you would not feel this violent sorrow. That it subsists still in the recesses and rises with such vehemence shows how deeply rooted this movement was in your physical consciousness. You have not been able to root it out, because when it comes you associate yourself entirely with it and abandon yourself to its outcries and violence. You must have the strength to stand back from it in that part of your nature which is free — only then will you be able to push it away from you; and it is only if it is

pushed away from you each time it rises that it will consent to disappear and return no more. As for our support and help it is there, but you must remain conscious of it—and you must not allow any wrong ideas like those of this morning to diminish the sense of unity and contact with the Mother.

*

I do not see why you make such a big difference between the quarrels and jealousy over other women and quarrels and jealousy over other attractions not of a sexual character. They both spring from the same primary impulse, the possessive instinct which is at the base of ordinary vital love. In the latter case, as often sexual jealousy is not possible, the mind supports itself on other motives which seem to it quite reasonable and justifiable—it may not be conscious that it is being pushed by the vital, but the quarrels and the vivacity of the disagreement are there all the same. Whether you had or had not both forms of it, is not very material and does not make things better or worse. It is the getting rid of the instinct itself that matters, whether from the psychological point of view or from that of a spiritual change.

The one thing that is of any importance is the fact that the old personality which you were throwing out has reasserted itself for the moment, as you yourself see. It has confused your mind, otherwise you would not ask the question whether it is there still and how that agrees with my description of your aspiration and glimpse of turning entirely to the Mother as true and real. Of course, they were true and real and sincere and they are still there even if for a moment clouded over. You know well enough by this time that the whole being is not one block so that if one part changes, all changes miraculously at the same time. Something of the old things may be there submerged and rise up again if the pressure and fixed resolution to get rid of them slackens. I do not know to what you refer when you speak of the statement that "Light and Darkness, truth and falsehood cannot dwell together", but certainly it can only mean that in the spiritual endeavour one cannot allow them to dwell together,—the Light, the Truth must be kept, the Darkness, the falsehood

or error pushed out altogether. It certainly did not mean that in the human being there can be either only all light or only all darkness and whoever has any weakness in him has no light and no sincere aspiration and no truth in his nature. If that were so, Yoga would be impossible. All the sadhaks in this Asram would be convicted of insincerity and of having no true sadhana — for who is there in whom there is no obscurity and no movement of ignorance?

If you have fallen down from the consciousness you had, it is because instead of dismissing the dispute with X as a moment's movement, you begin to brood on it and prolong the wrong turn it gave. It is no use persisting in the feelings that it created in you. You have only to do what I have been trying to tell you. Draw back from them and, having seen what was lingering in the nature, dismiss them quietly and turn back again to the true consciousness, opening yourself to receive once more the Truth that is creating you anew and let it come down into all your nature.

Wounded Feeling

Your letter of the morning came entirely from the disturbed and wounded vital; that was why I was in no hurry to answer. I do not know why you are so ready to believe that myself or the Mother act from ordinary movements of anger, vexation or displeasure; there was nothing of the kind in what I wrote. You had been repeatedly falling from your attained level of a higher consciousness and, in spite of our suggestions to you to see what was pulling you down, your only reply was that you could see nothing. We knew perfectly well that it was part of the vital which did not want to change and, not wanting to change, was hiding itself from the mind and the mind itself did not seem very willing to see,—so we thought it necessary when you gave us a chance by what you wrote — first about X and secondly about the thoughts of the past — to indicate plainly and strongly the nature of the obstacle — on one side your old sentiment persisting in the *viparīta* form of anger, resentment and wounded feeling, on the other the vital's habit of self-esteem,

censorious judgment of others, a sense of superiority in sadhana or in other respects, a wish to appear well before others and before yourself also. This especially has a blinding influence and prevents the clear examination of oneself and the perception of the obstacles that are interfering with the spiritual progress. Even if the mind aspires to know and change, a habit of that kind acting concealed in the vital is quite enough to stand in the way and prevent both the knowledge and the change. I was therefore careful to speak plainly of vanity and self-righteousness — so that this part of the vital might not try not to see. The Mother speaks or writes much more pointedly and sharply to those whom she wishes to push rapidly on the way because they are capable of it and they do not resent or suffer but are glad of the pressure and the plainness because they know by experience that it helps them to see their obstacles and change. If you wish to progress rapidly, you must get rid of this vital reaction of *abhimāna*, suffering, wounded feeling, seeking for arguments of self-justification, outcry against the touch that is intended to liberate, — for so long as you have these, it is difficult for us to deal openly and firmly with the obstacles created by the vital nature.

In regard to the difference between you and X, the Mother's warning to you against the undesirability of too much talk, loose chat and gossip, social self-dispersion was entirely meant and stands; when you indulge in these things, you throw yourself out into a very small and ignorant consciousness in which your vital defects get free play and this is likely to bring you out of what you have developed in your inner consciousness. That was why we said that if you felt a reaction against these things when you went to X's, it was a sign of (psychic) sensitiveness coming into you — into your vital and nervous being — and we meant that it was all for the good. But in dealing with others, in withdrawing from these things you should not allow any sense of superiority to creep in or force on them by your manner or spirit a sense of disapproval or condemnation or pressure on them to change. It is for your personal inward need that you draw back from these things, that is all. As for them what they

do in these matters, right or wrong, is their affair — and ours; we will deal with them according to what we see as necessary and possible for them at the moment and for that purpose we can not only deal quite differently with different people, allowing for one what we forbid for another, but we may deal differently with the same person at different times, allowing or even encouraging today what we shall forbid tomorrow. X's case is quite different from yours, for there is no resemblance in your natures. I told you that or something like it long ago and I emphasised in my letter to X that what might be the rule for myself or Y was not to be applied or going to be applied to his case. To deal otherwise would be to create difficulties in his sadhana and not to make it easier for him or swifter. I have also told him quite clearly in my letter that the attempt at meeting and mixing with others — which in the ordinary human life is attempted by sociability and other contacts — has to be realised in Yoga on another plane of consciousness and without the lower mixture — for a higher unity with all on a spiritual and psychic basis. But the way, the time, the order of movements by which this is done, need not be the same for everybody. If he attempted to force himself it would lead to gloom, despondency and an artificial movement which would not be the true way to success. A human soul and nature cannot be dealt with by a set of mental rules applicable to everybody in the same way; if it were so, there would be no need of a Guru, each could set his chart of Yogic rules before him like the rules of Sandow's exercise and follow them till he became the perfect siddha!

I have said so much in order to let you understand why we do not deal in the same way with X as with you or another. The tendency to take what I lay down for one and apply it without discrimination to another is responsible for much misunderstanding. A general statement too, true in itself, cannot be applied to everyone alike or applied now and immediately without consideration of condition or circumstance or person or time. I may say generally that to bring down the supermind is my aim in the Yoga or that to do that one has first to rise out of mind into overmind, but if on the strength of that, anybody and

everybody began trying to pull down the supermind or force his way immediately out of mind into overmind, the result would be disaster.

Therefore concern yourself with your own progress and follow there the lead the Mother gives you. Leave X or others to do the same; the Mother is there to guide and help them according to their need and their nature. It does not in the least matter if the way she follows with him seems different or the opposite of that which she takes with you. That is the right one for him as this is the right one for you.

You have now begun to see the difficulties that are still there in your vital; keep to that clear perception, let it grow clearer and more precise. Concentrate on what you have to do and do not let yourself be distracted this way and that by irrelevant preoccupations or any other influence.

Ingratitude

Your surprise at your cousin X's behaviour shows that you do not yet know what kind of thing is the average human nature. Did you never hear of the answer of Vidyasagar when he was told that a certain man was abusing him: "Why does he abuse me? I never did him a good turn (*upakāra*)."¹ The unregenerate vital is not grateful for a benefit, it resents being under an obligation. So long as the benefit continues, it is effusive and says sweet things, as soon as it expects nothing more it turns round and bites the hand that fed it. Sometimes it does that even before, when it thinks it can do it without the benefactor knowing the origin of the slander, fault-finding or abuse. In all these dealings of your uncles and cousins with you there is nothing unusual, nothing, as you think, peculiar to you. Most have this kind of experience, few escape it altogether. Of course, people with a developed psychic element are by nature grateful and do not behave in this way.

Chapter Two

Desire

The Nature of Desire

Most men are, like animals, driven by the forces of Nature: whatever desires come, they fulfil them, whatever emotions come they allow them to play, whatever physical wants they have, they try to satisfy. We say then that the activities and feelings of men are controlled by their Prakriti, and mostly by the vital and physical nature. The body is the instrument of the Prakriti or Nature — it obeys its own nature or it obeys the vital forces of desire, passion, etc.

But man has also a mind and, as he develops, he learns to control his vital and physical nature by his reason and by his will. This control is very partial: for the reason is often deluded by vital desires and the ignorance of the physical and it puts itself on their side and tries to justify by its ideas, reasonings or arguments their mistakes and wrong movements. Even if the reason keeps free and tells the vital or the body, "Do not do this", yet the vital and the body often follow their own movement in spite of the prohibition — man's mental will is not strong enough to compel them.

When people do sadhana, there is a higher Nature that works within, the psychic and spiritual, and they have to put their nature under the influence of the psychic being and the higher spiritual self or of the Divine. Not only the vital and the body but the mind also has to learn the Divine Truth and obey the divine rule. But because of the lower nature and its continued hold on them, they are unable at first and for a long time to prevent their nature from following the old ways — even when they know or are told from within what to do or what not to do. It is only by persistent sadhana, by getting into the higher spiritual consciousness and spiritual nature that this difficulty

can be overcome; but even for the strongest and best sadhaks it takes a long time.

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All the ordinary vital movements are foreign to the true being and come from outside; they do not belong to the soul nor do they originate in it but are waves from the general Nature, Prakriti.

The desires come from outside, enter the subconscious vital and rise to the surface. It is only when they rise to the surface and the mind becomes aware of them, that we become conscious of the desire. It seems to us to be our own because we feel it thus rising from the vital into the mind and do not know that it came from outside. What belongs to the vital, to the being, what makes it responsible is not the desire itself, but the habit of responding to the waves or the currents of suggestion that come into it from the universal Prakriti.

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It should be quite clear to you what the two opposite things are, the two things with which every sadhak is faced. One is the vehemence of earthly egoistic desire which brings only confusion and suffering and the other is the peace, force, joy, light of understanding which is the divine in you and which we are striving to establish in you. When you put yourself on the right side, things become easy; when you hesitate and are divided, there is a double state; when something in you receives and clings to the desires, then all goes wrong. You *must* learn to put always the weight of your choice on the right side. Certainly I shall do all to get the wrong will changed and the right one put in its place — whatever is the resistance or difficulty, that I shall do always.

*

It is again the old vain imagination prompted by an uprising of the dissatisfied desires of the vital nature. Evidently the old wrong attitude of desire must have been waiting for its opportunity and it gave the opportunity also for the old vital to

rise and indulge in its accustomed movements. It is also evident that it was the pressure of the desire coming up from below that removed the Ananda. The psychic Ananda and the desires of the complaining and clamouring vital cannot go together; if desire comes up, the Ananda is obliged to draw back — unless you reject the desire in time and refuse to make any compromise with it. Especially when the Mother was giving you wideness and peace and intense Ananda, it was irrational in the extreme to give room to an external desire and sacrifice all that for its sake.

*

Saturate your mind and vital with the Truth and remain calm and still. It is from unsatisfied desire that all suffering arises; take your stand on a calm free from desire. When that has come, all else of the Divine Truth, Love and Ananda can come and stand securely upon it.

*

All belongs to the Divine — there must be no ego or desire — only the Divine and its Light, Knowledge, Power, Ananda, action. But all this must come from above — not from the mixed lower cosmic forces.

*

It is the vital which (in everybody and not in you only) is restless, full of desires, always falling into dejection and disappointment and sorrow. The only way to escape from it is to get rid of desires — to have no will or desire other than the will of the Divine.

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That is the nature of the vital and its desires¹ — vital desire and its enjoyment and dissatisfactions and uneasinesses almost always go together.

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¹ *The correspondent wrote that when he had tried to fulfil a vital desire, it led to a condition of unquietness and misery. — Ed.*

If you are anxious for them [*material possessions*], that means that you have desire and are bound. Ananda is one thing and vital enjoyment is another. One can have the *rasa* of a beautiful thing, for instance a picture, without wanting or needing to possess it or turn it to one's own purpose. Where that want comes in, there is vital desire. The sign of freedom from attachment is that one has no craving and can do without things without feeling anything for that or disappointment at their loss or absence or hankering or wish to have them. If one has, one takes the *rasa* in a free unattached way—if one does not get or loses them, it makes not the slightest difference. The true Ananda is the Ananda of the Divine and when one has the Yogic consciousness, it is the Divine one sees everywhere and has the Ananda of that, but there is no attachment to objects as objects.

It is not necessary to be a Sannyasi to have this inner freedom; it is only necessary to be sincere. There are many who say, "I have no attachment", but it is a self-deception. Therefore one must examine oneself very closely and strictly and see what is left of desire or attachment and reject it. This is difficult for the ordinary consciousness and never wholly achieved by it, even if things are outwardly given up; it is easy if the higher consciousness is there in all the parts of the being, provided one opens all one's movements to its Light.

*

About the attachment to things, the physical rejection of them is not the best way to get rid of it. Accept what is given you, ask for what is needed and think no more of it—attaching no importance, using them when you have, not troubled if you have not. That is the best way of getting rid of the attachment.

*

Kāmanā bāsanā have no part in Yoga, they cannot be its help (*sahāya*), they can only be hindrances. So long as desire and ego remain, there can be no surrender to the Divine, no fulfilment in the Yoga. They are movements of the vital and cannot be anything else.

Egoless strength is strength which does not act for selfish motives or for the desires of the vital or to carry out the ideas of one's own mind, but exists only for the service of the Divine and as an instrument of the Divine.

*

The seat of desire is not so much in the emotional as in the lower vital — but the desires rise up from there into the emotional part and even into the thinking mind.

*

It is always the habit of the vital being to find out things by which it persuades the mind and justifies its desires; and circumstances usually shape themselves to justify it still farther. For what we have within us creates the circumstances outside us. What matters is that you should take inwardly a different position in the future.

*

When you clutch at anything and try to make it your own with an egoistic sense of possession, then however beautiful and wonderful it may be, it loses its value and becomes ordinary.

*

It is often the experience that when one gives up the insistence of desire for a thing, then the thing itself comes. The right attitude is to wait on the Divine Will and seek that only — desire always creates perturbation and even its fulfilment does not satisfy. Aspiration is a different thing. The oscillation between the two conditions you speak of, is the sign of a struggle in the physical consciousness — it must end by the Peace and Power fixing itself there, then the other will disappear.

*

The desire for the Divine or bhakti for the Divine is the one desire which can free one from all the others — at the core it is not a desire, but an aspiration, a soul need, the breath of

existence of the inmost being, and as such it cannot be counted among desires.

The Small Desires of the Vital Physical

It is the vital physical that receives these suggestions and obeys these desires. What you have to do is to get the consciousness down into the whole of the vital proper—so that not only the mind but the vital itself will reject these desires. In that case the vital-physical desires will lose half their force.

*

If the peace and power that were acting on the head and in the chest have come down into the stomach and below, that would indicate that they are no longer acting on the mind and emotional being only, but fully on the vital also—that is a great progress.

The desires you refer to are those of the vital-physical in the subtle physical consciousness—impulse to talk, essential hunger, thirst, etc. Peace and quietude full in the vital-physical and subtle physical and down even in the lowest levels are necessary for the whole change to be made. The heat of which you speak is that of this subtle principle of vital-physical desire which exists for its own sake, not for the real needs of the body—that is why physical satisfaction does not diminish it.

*

These habits of the physical vital are almost automatic in their action and it takes either a very strong will or a persistent effort of self-discipline to get out this automatic, almost reflex action. You should not therefore be discouraged by the difficulty, but go on with the necessary perseverance of the will to press it out of existence.

*

It is the small habits of the lower vital being which gather all their strength to resist eviction and try to occupy the con-

sciousness. When they come you must learn to detach your inner consciousness from them entirely so that even when they strongly come they will not be able to occupy the consciousness or get any assent.

*

The vital in the physical easily slips back to its old small habits if it gets a chance. It is there that they stick. They go entirely only when that part gets equanimity and a simple natural freedom from all desires.

*

You have done rightly about the things. These small desires obstruct greatly the change in the outer consciousness and the being must be free from them if the transformation is not to be hampered there.

Desire and Need

It would certainly be very easy if all that one had to do were to follow one's desires; but to be governed by one's desires is not Yoga.

Need and want are not the same thing. The fact that they [*the sadhaks*] could go on without it [*a lemon each day*] for so long shows that it was not a need.

*

Desire is a psychological movement, and it can attach itself to a "true need" as well as to things that are not true needs. One must approach even true needs without desire. If one does not get them, one must feel nothing.

*

The *necessities* of a sadhak should be as few as possible; for there are only a very few things that are real necessities in life. The rest are either utilities or things decorative to life or luxuries. These a Yogi has a right to possess or enjoy only on one of two conditions —

(1) if he uses them during his sadhana solely to train himself in possessing things without attachment or desire and learn to use them rightly, in harmony with the Divine Will, with a proper handling, a just organisation, arrangement and measure—or,

(2) if he has already attained a true freedom from desire and attachment and is not in the least moved or affected in any way by loss or withholding or deprival. If he has any greed, desire, demand, claim for possession or enjoyment, any anxiety, grief, anger or vexation when denied or deprived, he is not free in spirit and his use of the things he possesses is contrary to the spirit of sadhana. Even if he is free in spirit, he will not be fit for possession if he has not learned to use things not for himself, but for the Divine Will, as an instrument, with the right knowledge and action in the use for the proper equipment of a life lived not for oneself but for and in the Divine.

*

It should not be difficult for the man devoted to the spiritual aim [*to depend on the Divine for material things*]—for he is always expected to rely on the Divine even in his ordinary life in the world—such dependence being part of his mental atmosphere and the constitution of his vital nature.

Demand and Desire

If to you X says that her suffering and ill-health are due to your behaviour, to Y she has said it is all due to the bad room she has got! In fact it is due to her vital cherishing desires and getting disappointed because they are not fulfilled. If one cherishes desires, there is bound to be disappointment and suffering, especially if at the same time one does Yoga and takes up the spiritual life. For such desires, demand for vital affection and love from men and demand for physical comforts are not consistent with the spirit of Yoga in which one must turn one's heart to the Divine and be vitally pure and in physical things must be content with what one gets and equal-minded in all conditions. You were quite right in telling her that these outer

demands should be given up altogether.

*

To yield to depression when things go wrong is the worst way of meeting the difficulty. There must be some desire or demand within you, conscious or subconscious, that gets excited and revolts against its not being satisfied. The best way is to be conscious of it, face it calmly and steadily throw it out.

If the lower vital (not the mind only) could permanently make up its mind that all desire and demand are contrary to the Truth and no longer call for them, these things would lose very soon their force of return.

*

It is not a demand to ask for things that one finds helpful, but it becomes a demand if there enters into it a feeling of claim, resentment when it is not conceded or other vital reactions. Be on your guard against any invasion by these reactions; the vital can only be conquered and changed and the physical opened up on a basis of faith and surrender and the psychic response overpowering all others.

*

Demand and desire are only two different aspects of the same thing—nor is it necessary that a feeling should be agitated or restless to be a desire; it can be, on the contrary, quietly fixed and persistent or persistently recurrent. Demand or desire comes from the mental or the vital and a psychic or spiritual need is a different thing. The psychic does not demand or desire; it aspires; it does not make conditions for its surrender or withdraw if its aspiration is not immediately satisfied—for the psychic has complete trust in the Divine or in the guru and can wait for the right time or the hour of the divine grace. The psychic has an insistence of its own, but it puts its pressure not on the Divine, but on the nature, placing a finger of light on all the defects there that stand in the way of the realisation, sifting out all that is mixed, ignorant or imperfect in the experience or in

the movements of the Yoga and never satisfied with itself or with the nature till it has got it perfectly open to the Divine, free from all forms of ego, surrendered, simple and right in the attitude and all the movements. This is what has to be established entirely in the mind and vital and in the physical consciousness before supramentalisation of the whole nature is possible. Otherwise what one gets is more or less brilliant, half luminous, half cloudy illuminations and experiences on the mental and vital and physical planes, half truth, half error or at the best true only for those planes and inspired either from some larger mind or larger vital or at the best from the mental reaches above the human that intervene between the intellect and the Overmind. These can be very stimulating and satisfying up to a certain point and are good for those who want some spiritual realisation on these planes; but the supramental realisation is something much more difficult and exacting in its conditions and the most difficult of all is to bring it down on to the physical level.

Getting Rid of Desire

The satisfaction of the vital desires is a normal feature of the ordinary life, only it must be controlled and regulated by the mental will, so that one may not be enslaved to the desires. It is only if one turns to the spiritual life that one has to get rid of vital desires.

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It is not Yoga to give free play to the natural instincts and desires. Yoga demands mastery over the nature, not subjection to the nature.

*

Is there any time in the “straight path” for satisfying desires? If desire is not mastered, how can there be any straight walking on the straight path?

*

You do not seem to have a correct idea of the nature of vital

desire. Vital desire grows by being indulged, it does not become satisfied. If your desire were indulged, it would begin to grow more and more and ask for more and more. That has been our constant experience with the sadhaks and it confirms what has always been known about desire. Desire and envy have to be thrown out of the consciousness — there is no other way to deal with them.

*

That [*indulging desire*] is a mistake many have made because the vital wanted to make it.² Whether ascetic or non-ascetic, the Yogi, the sadhak must become free from vital desire and spiritually master of the movements of his nature — and for that he must be free from ego and desire and duality. I have always made that quite clear — that indulgence of desire is no more part of this Yoga than it is of Sannyasa. One must be able to use and handle physical things and physical life, but from the spiritual consciousness, not from the level of the vital ego.

*

It is the old vital nature that feels its human worldly desires will not be satisfied and feels like this. All that has not to be indulged but rejected and swept aside. In its place must come the wideness in which there is a self-existent peace and satisfaction and into that peace and wideness must come the Mother's greater peace, force, light, knowledge, Ananda.

*

The vital always wants the things of ordinary life, sex, rich food, enjoyments of all kinds; it does not get full satisfaction out of them, but it feels dissatisfied without them. The only way to get rid of it is to reject desire of these things from the vital itself and to have only the aspiration for the Divine in all parts of the being.

*

² The correspondent observed that because Sri Aurobindo had condemned asceticism, many took it as a sanction to continue fulfilling their desires. — Ed.

Everything which it hankers after is desirable to the vital—but the desire has to be rejected. “I won’t desire” is quite the right thing to say, even if “I don’t desire” cannot yet be said by the vital. Still there is something in the being that can even say “I don’t desire” and refuse to recognise the vital desire as part of the true being. It is that consciousness which the peace and power bring that has to be recognised as the true “I” and made permanent in front.

*

It is difficult to get rid of desires *altogether* all at once—if the right ones have the upper hand, that already makes the ultimate victory sure. Therefore don’t allow that to trouble you. A progressive change is the way these things work out—and if the progress has begun, then there can be a fundamental sense of certitude about the outcome of the sadhana and a quiet view upon what has to be done because it is sure to be done.

*

Desire always takes a long time to get rid of entirely. But, if you can once get it out of the nature and realise it as a force coming from outside and putting its claws into the vital and physical, it will be easier to get rid of the invader. You are too accustomed to feel it as part of yourself or planted in you—that makes it more difficult for you to deal with its movements and dismiss its ancient control over you.

You should not rely on anything else alone, however helpful it may seem, but chiefly, primarily, fundamentally on the Mother’s Force. The Sun and the Light may be a help, and will be if it is the true Light and the true Sun, but cannot take the place of the Mother’s Force.

*

It is good. No one can easily get rid of desires. What has first to be done is to exteriorise them, to push them out on the surface and get the inner parts quiet and clear. Afterwards they can be

thrown out and replaced by the true thing, a happy and luminous will one with the Divine's.

*

It is because both your mind and vital have become sincere that the attack is strong and seems to you abnormal. Before as you were yielding from time to time, the part that wants was not acutely insistent and, when it pressed, it was not so acutely felt by the rest of the vital nature. It is your mental, psychic and higher vital beings that now stand completely apart from it. It is your physical vital that still keeps the desire and is pushed from time to time by opposite forces to make the desire active. It was also this desire that created the physical disturbance from which you suffered a few days ago. You must get rid of this desire of the lower vital altogether.

*

The fear is again that of the physical consciousness or of the vital element in it—it is afraid if it gives up desire that it will lose everything—or everything *it* wants—and gain nothing in exchange or at least nothing *it* wants. It does not realise that it will get something far greater and more powerful and happy in place of this troubled desire and its doubtful and precarious fruits—for it has been accustomed to think of desire as the only possible motive of life. It does not know that the divine Force is there waiting to descend with its light and peace and joy bringing much greater things and a happier life. When this part can be enlightened and persuaded to want wholeheartedly the change, then a great difficulty, indeed the central difficulty will have gone.

*

There was and is the opening before you of a new stage in your spiritual development. For it to realise itself you must progress first in two directions. The first we have already pressed on you—the surmounting of these vital temptations and desires which linked you to the lower movements and invited the pressure of a

hostile Force on your lower vital and your body and the complete surrender of life and body to the One alone. The other is the descent of a full calm and strength and equanimity into these parts so that you may conquer life and its difficulties and do your work for the Divine. This calm and strength had often descended into your mind and higher vital, but these other parts were still open to much weakness and attachment and a self-indulgent movement. That must go if one wants to become a hero and master of spiritual action. In your life at Bogra these things were too much sheltered and allowed to remain; at Shillong you have a chance to be by yourself with the Divine Force and look life in the face from the soul's inner strength and become master of circumstances. Outer difficulties or inconveniences you should not allow to alarm or depress you. Inner difficulties should also be met with detachment, calm equality, the unshakable will to conquer.

For the rest, you have rightly said, "I must preserve my equanimity and have faith in Divine Guidance when falsehood"—or any trouble or difficulty—"confronts me." The defect that opened the way to the bodily and other troubles was the faltering in your resolution to conquer the vital and follow the straight and high path and the consequent violent despair and depression it brought in its wake. Let those disappear altogether and do not allow them to rise in that way again. The path of spiritual calm and strength and the consecration of all your forces to the Divine is the one safe way for you and that you must now consistently follow.

Desire and Suppression (Nigraha)

The rejection of desire is essentially the rejection of the element of craving, putting that out from the consciousness itself as a foreign element not belonging to the true self and the inner nature. But refusal to indulge the suggestions of desire is also a part of the rejection; to abstain from the action suggested, if it is not the right action, must be included in the Yogic discipline. It is only when this is done in the wrong way, by a mental ascetic principle or a hard moral rule, that it can be called suppression.

The difference between suppression and an inward essential rejection is the difference between mental or moral control and a spiritual purification.

When one lives in the true consciousness one feels the desires outside oneself, entering from outside, from the universal lower Prakriti, into the mind and the vital parts. In the ordinary human condition this is not felt; men become aware of the desire only when it is there, when it has come inside and found a lodging or a habitual harbourage and so they think it is their own and a part of themselves. The first condition for getting rid of desire is, therefore, to become conscious with the true consciousness; for then it becomes much easier to dismiss it than when one has to struggle with it as if it were a constituent part of oneself to be thrown out from the being. It is easier to cast off an accretion than to excise what is felt as a parcel of our substance.

When the psychic being is in front, then also to get rid of desire becomes easy; for the psychic being has in itself no desires, it has only aspirations and a seeking and love for the Divine and all things that are or tend towards the Divine. The constant prominence of the psychic being tends of itself to bring out the true consciousness and set right almost automatically the movements of the nature.

*

It is true that the mere suppression or holding down of desire is not enough, not by itself truly effective, but that does not mean that desires are to be indulged; it means that desires have not merely to be suppressed, but to be rejected from the nature. In place of desire there must be a single-minded aspiration towards the Divine.

As for love, the love must be turned singly towards the Divine. What men call by that name is a vital interchange for mutual satisfaction of desire, vital impulse or physical pleasure. There must be nothing of this interchange between sadhaks; for to seek for it or indulge this kind of impulse only leads away from the sadhana.

*

Your theory is a mistaken one. The free expression of a passion may relieve the vital for a time, but at the same time it gives it a right to return always. It is not reduced at all. Suppression with inner indulgence in subtle forms is not a cure, but expression in outer indulgence is still less a cure. It is perfectly possible to go on without manifestation if one is resolute to arrive at a complete control, the control being not a mere suppression but an inner and outer rejection.

*

Not necessarily suppression [*is indicated by the refusal to feed a desire*], if the refusal of food is accompanied by detachment in the major part of the being. The difference between suppression (*nigraha*) and self-control (*samyama*) is that one says, “I cannot help desiring but I will not satisfy my desire”, while the other says, “I refuse the desire as well as the satisfaction of the desire”.

*

Nigraha means holding down the movement, but a movement merely held down is only suspended—it is better to reject and dismiss, detaching yourself from it.

Chapter Three

Anger and Violence

The Nature of Anger

Yes, anger is a harmful and wasteful force, harmful both to the person himself and to the one on whom it is thrown. You are right in saying that it must be got rid of. Anger immediately opens the door to hostile forces; it is as if you were calling them.

*

It [*a violent outburst of anger*] is obviously a surprise attack that took you off your guard. But you must throw off the tendency to anger with yourself also as well as the other tendency to sudden anger with others — for all anger only disturbs the consciousness and makes it difficult to keep the quiet poise. The whole thing has to be thrown out and the consciousness has to recover and be as if it had not happened.

*

These things, hard forms of speech, anger etc., are habits formed by the vital-physical consciousness and, as they are supported by the subconscious, very difficult to change. If one can conquer or change them by force of will or mental or spiritual control, so much the better. But if one cannot do this at once, one must not be upset or think oneself unfit. It is easier for most to realise the Divine or enter into the psychic consciousness than to change this part of the nature; but once the psychic consciousness governs or the higher consciousness descends then it is much easier for these to go. You must not therefore be discouraged by these recurrences or persistences, but try always to stand back in an inner quietude and if they come let them pass away like a cloud across the light. In time these things will be finally dealt with by the Force.

*

It [*an outburst of anger*] is really simply the recurrence of an old habit of the nature. Look at it and see how trifling is the occasion of the rising of this anger and its outburst — it becomes more and more causeless and the absurdity of such movements reveals itself. It would not really be difficult to get rid of it if when it comes you looked at it calmly — for it is perfectly possible to stand back in one part of the being observing in a detached equanimity even while the anger rises on the surface, as if it were someone else in your being who had the anger. The difficulty is that you get alarmed, grieved and upset and that makes it easier for the thing to get hold of your mind which it should not do.

Help we are giving you — stand back so as to be able to feel it and not the obsession of these surface movements.

*

When you have such thoughts, it makes a formation of force which falls on the man against whom you are angry. If he is not on his guard or if he is sensitive in any way, it may become effective upon him. That is why such thoughts should be avoided altogether.

*

The reason why quietness is not yet fixed and anger returns is that you allow your physical mind to become active. In regard to the sadhana it begins to think there is this defect in you and that defect and therefore the sadhana does not become immediately effective and perfect. This makes the vital nervous or despondent and in the despondency a state of irritation arises. At the same time this mind becomes active as it has now with regard to X or begins to judge and criticise and this too leads to nervousness and irritation. These things belong to the old mind you are trying to leave and therefore stand in the way of concentration and quietude. They should be stopped at their root by rejecting the suggestions of the physical mind as soon as they begin. A new consciousness is coming based upon inner silence and quietude. You must wait quietly for that to develop. True knowledge,

true perceptions of people and things will come in that new silent consciousness. The mind's view of people and things must necessarily be either limited and defective or erroneous — to go on judging by it is now a waste of time. Wait for the new consciousness to develop and show you all in a new and true light. Then the tendency to anger which arises from this mind and is a violent impatience directed against things the mind and vital do not like, would have no ground to rise at all — or if it rose without cause could be more easily rejected. Rely for the sadhana on the Mother's grace and her Force, yourself remembering always to keep only two things, quietude and confidence. For things and people, leave them to the Mother also; as you have difficulties in your nature, so they have too; but to deal with them needs insight, sympathy, patience.

*

It is indeed a very good sign that the anger when it comes is brief and subdued and no longer expressed in the outward — for that is one very marked stage always of the rejection of something not wanted by the nature. It comes still but it has no longer the old force, duration, intensity, completeness. The externalised condition is often used to show or test the progress made in the outer nature itself, for when one is entirely within these outward movements remain quiescent, so the extent to which they are changed cannot be so easily measured. But of course it is the going inward that most helps to deliver the nature.

*

If the anger did not come, it must be because the vital force of the attack is diminishing and it must be more in the physical mind and the external (physical) vital that it acts. You have a great strength for action; as for the inner growth and action of the sadhana you have a strength there too of the psychic and the vital, — it is only the external being that finds these difficulties in its way and is momentarily overcome or affected by them. Things always come in the way when one wants to progress in the sadhana, but in the end if one is sincere in one's aspiration

these troubles help to prepare the victory of the soul over all that opposes.

The inner will prevails sometimes, sometimes it does not prevail for the time being. That is quite normal. It depends on certain conditions which the physical mind does not see. As one grows in knowledge, one becomes aware of these unseen conditions and understands better what happens.

The fire is always the fire of purification—it is very red when it is acting on the vital; when the vital no longer covers the psychic, then the rose colour of the psychic comes out more and more.

The house you saw is the new building of the nature, especially in the vital, which is being prepared by the sadhana.

*

Because anger etc. once used to come, it does not follow that they cannot die down in a short time, so his incredulity is not justifiable. This is just the way that these things do go. They come vehemently and resist the force used to eject them, but if they are still rejected or if there is a change in the consciousness, they lose their force and the consciousness quietly rejects them when they come.

*

It is rather perilous to think of anything like that—"Now it [anger] is finished"—it is better to wait some time and see. The hostiles have a habit of trying their strength when they hear anything like that; they want to show you that it is not so.

*

But is it true that even anger which is of the lower vital and therefore close to the body, invariably produces these effects?¹ Of course the psychologist can't know that another man is angry

¹ Physical effects such as flushing of the face, flaring of the nostrils, clenched teeth and "ebullition" in the chest. The correspondent had read a book on psychology in which the author suggested that one cannot "fancy" the state of rage without such visible signs of anger.—Ed.

unless he shows physical signs of it, but also he can't know what a man is thinking unless the man speaks or writes — does it follow that the state of thought cannot be "fancied" without its sign in speaking or writing? A Japanese who is accustomed to control all his "emotions" and give no sign (if he is angry the first sign you will have of it is a knife in your stomach from a calm or smiling assailant) will have none of these things when he is angry — not even the "ebullition" in the chest, — in its place there will be a settled fire that will burn till his anger achieves itself in action.

*

It is your angers that have resulted in these pains. Get rid of the bad temper and the stomach will be more at ease.

*

For some sex is more difficult [*to conquer than anger*], for some greed.

*

It [*the equivalent of anger in the higher nature*] is a *rudra* power of severity and indignation (in the deepest sense of the word) against what should not be — the warrior force of Mahakali in combating the Asura.

*

Yes, certainly. Infinite peace, universal love can remove anger — if they are complete and stable.

Anger Comes from Outside

The fact that the anger comes with such force is itself enough to show that it is not in you that it is, but that it comes from outside. It is a rush of force from the universal Nature that tries to take possession of the individual being and make that being act according to the will of this outside force and not according to the will of the soul within. These things come in the course

of the sadhana because the sadhak is liberating himself from the lower nature and trying to turn towards the Mother and live in her divine consciousness and the higher nature. The forces of the lower nature do not want that and so they make these rushes in order to recover their rule. It is necessary when that comes to remain quiet within remembering the Mother or calling her and reject the anger or whatever else comes, whenever it comes or however often it comes. If that is done, then these forces begin to lose their power to invade. It is easier if one clearly feels them to be outside forces and foreign to oneself; but even if you cannot feel that yet when they enter, still the mind must keep that idea and refuse to accept them as any longer a part of the nature. The idea of the Mother being severe was of course a suggestion that came with the invading force so as to help it to enter. Such suggestions come to many sadhaks (though not so many as before) at Pranam and is the cause to them of much disturbance. Such suggestions must be firmly rejected at once.

*

I think you have always had an idea that to give expression to an impulse or a movement is the best way or even the only way to get rid of it. But that is a mistaken idea. If you give expression to anger, you prolong or confirm the habit of the recurrence of anger; you do not diminish or get rid of the habit. The very first step towards weakening the power of anger in the nature and afterwards getting rid of it altogether, is to refuse all expression to it in act or speech. Afterwards one can go on with more likelihood of success to throw it out from the thought and feeling also. And so with all other wrong movements.

All these movements come from outside, from the universal lower nature, or are suggested or thrown upon you by adverse forces — adverse to your spiritual progress. Your method of taking them as your own is again a wrong method; for by doing that you increase their power to recur and take hold of you. If you take them as your own, that gives them a kind of right to be there. If you feel them as *not* your own, then they have no right, and the will can develop more power to send them away. What

you must always have and feel as yours, is this will, the power to refuse assent, to refuse admission to a wrong movement. Or if it comes in, the power to send it away, without expressing it.

If you find it difficult to reject in the sense of throwing away, what you have to do is to refuse assent. As for instance, as regards voices or suggestions, not to listen to them, not to believe what they want you to believe, not to do what they want or push you to do.

Of course the best way will be if you can keep the contact more with the Mother and her Light and Force and receive and accept and follow only what comes from that higher force. Secondly, to keep the mind quiet, not to allow it to be too active, going from one thing to another. That brings the confusion.

*

Anger comes from the vital nature or if it has been driven out from there rises back into it from the subconscious or from the environmental Nature.

*

It [*rejection*] is the way to get rid of these things [*anger and sex desire*]—when rejected they either sink into the subconscious or pass out into the surrounding (environmental) consciousness through which one is connected with the universal forces. They may try to rise up from the subconscious or come in again from outside; but if one always rejects them, calling in the aid of the Mother and does not allow them to take hold, their force of recurrence dies away and finally they come no more. Sometimes a very decisive rejection gets rid of them at a stroke once for all.

*

These things [*anger, desire etc.*] can only be got rid of if you do not accept them. When they come, you must stand back from them in your mind, look at them and say, "I don't want this." If it comes in spite of your not wanting and refusing them, then it shows it is not your own movement, but something thrown upon you by the outside Nature. If you can once see that and

feel them as not yours, then by degrees you can get free of anger, desire and other things that trouble you.

*

In fact all these ignorant vital movements originate from outside in the ignorant universal Nature; the human being forms in his superficial parts of being, mental, vital, physical, a habit of certain responses to these waves from outside. It is these responses that he takes as his own character (anger, desire, sex etc.) and thinks he cannot be otherwise. But that is not so; he can change. There is another consciousness deeper within him, his true inner being, which is his real self, but is covered over by the superficial nature. This the ordinary man does not know, but the Yogi becomes aware of it as he progresses in his sadhana. As the consciousness of this inner being increases by sadhana, the surface nature and its responses are pushed out and can be got rid of altogether. But the ignorant universal Nature does not want to let go and throws the old movements on the sadhak and tries to get them inside him again; owing to a habit the superficial nature gives the old responses. If one can get the firm knowledge that these things are from outside and not a real part of oneself, then it is easier for the sadhak to repel such returns, or if they lay hold, he can get rid of them sooner. That is why I say repeatedly that these things rise not in yourself, but from outside.

Anger and the Psychic

If the will is strong enough, it [*anger*] can be held in check—but usually it is only if the psychic being becomes entirely awake and governs the vital that the tendency to anger can entirely disappear.

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When it is the psychic that rules all the movements of the being, then it [*anger*] completely disappears and when the equanimity of the higher consciousness takes complete possession of the

lower vital. Till then one can establish a control, diminish and reduce it to a touch that has no outward effect or a wave that passes without self-expression.

*

That [*inner detachment*] is the right thing that must happen always when anger or anything else rises. The psychic reply must become habitual pointing out that anger is neither right nor helpful and then the being must draw back from these outward things and take its stand in its inner self, detach from all these things and people. It is this detachment that is the first thing that must be gained by the sadhak — he must cease to live in these outward things and live in his inner being. The more that is done the more there is a release and peacefulness. Afterwards when one is secure in this inner being, the right thing to do, the right way to deal with men and things will begin to come.

*

It is true that anger and strife are in the nature of the human vital and do not go easily; but what is important is to have the will to change and the clear perception that these things must go. If that will and perception are there, then in the end they will go. The most important help to it is, here also, for the psychic being to grow within — for that brings a certain kindness, patience, charity towards all and one no longer regards everything from the point of view of one's own ego and its pain or pleasure, likings and dislikings. The second help is the growth of the inner peace which outward things cannot trouble. With the peace comes a calm wideness in which one perceives all as one self, all beings as the children of the Mother and the Mother dwelling in oneself and in all. It is that towards which your sadhana will move, for these are the things which come with the growth of the psychic and spiritual consciousness. Then these troubled reactions to outward things will no longer come.

*

It is indeed when the quietude comes down from above or comes

out from the psychic that the vital becomes full of peace or of kindness and goodwill. It is therefore that the inner psychic quietude first and afterwards the peace from above must occupy the whole being. Otherwise such things as anger in the vital can be controlled but it is difficult to get rid of them altogether without this occupation by the inner quietude and higher peace. That you should depend on the Mother for the sadhana is the best attitude, for it is indeed her Force that does the sadhana in you.

*

It is not at all unnatural that the anger brought back peace and harmony:² for this anger was a form of loyalty to the Divine and that put you into touch with your psychic consciousness again. Sri Ramakrishna was quite right about anger. The hostile powers are proof against gentleness and sweetness and non-resistance and soul-force, but a current of righteous anger often sends them flying.

Vindictiveness and Cruelty

Vindictiveness, with or without a real cause for it, is even worse than anger because it is more cold and deliberate in its action and less of an impulse. One should be generous in nature and free from all rancour.

*

You must get rid of it [*cruelty*]. Cruelty and falsehood are the two things that separate most from the Divine.

Violence

An inner psychic or spiritual change is not brought about by violence. It is not a change of conduct that has to be done in the

² *The correspondent wrote that he grew angry when he read some false statements about Sri Aurobindo made by a journalist and that his anger relieved him of a slight depression. He was reminded of a remark made by Sri Ramakrishna: "The ripus (passions) too can help in the spiritual life provided you know the secret of the game: for instance, anger may help you if you turn it against all who are hostile to the Divine." —Ed.*

sadhak, but a change of soul and spirit governing the mind and vital and body instead of the mind and vital governing. Violence is the drastic contradiction of that; it makes mental egoism and vital passion and fury or else cruelty the rulers. Violence in ordinary Nature does not justify violence in a spiritual work.

*

The *Essays on the Gita* explain the ordinary karmayoga as developed in the Gita, in which the work done is the ordinary work of human life with only an inward change. There too the violence to be used is not a personal violence done from egoistic motives, but part of the ordered system of social life. Nothing can spiritually justify individual violence done in anger or passion or from any vital motive. In our Yoga our object is to rise higher than the ordinary life of man and in it violence has to be left aside altogether.

*

All vital violence in speech or action is rajasic and unyogic. One must be master of oneself and controlled in speech and act.

*

You must not accept everything; you should reject all suggestions of uncontrolled desire or anger. *You must not allow any wrong force to get hold of your body and use it.* It is not safe to accept these things and you should be very careful to reject them always.

It is necessary that there should be control and organisation, and these cannot come and get fixed if you accept *uncontrolled desires, violent anger, confusion or extreme restlessness of mind*, for all these are things that disorganise and destroy control.

Chapter Four

Fear

Fear and Yoga

If you want to do Yoga, you must get rid of fear. Yoga and fear do not go together.

*

There is no fear in the higher Nature. Fear is a creation of the vital plane, an instinct of the ignorance, a sense of danger with a violent vital reaction that replaces and usually prevents or distorts the intelligence of things. It might almost be considered as an invention of the hostile forces.

*

Yes, fear creates imaginary terrors — even if there is real danger, fear does not help; it clouds the intelligence, takes away presence of mind and prevents one seeing the right thing to do.

Let the Force at work increase, till it clears out the mixed consciousness altogether.

*

It is true that what one fears has the tendency to come until one is able to look it in the face and overcome one's shrinking. One must learn to take one's foundation on the Divine and overcome the fear, relying on the help to carry one through all things even unpleasant and adverse. There is a Force that works even through them for the seeker and carries him towards his goal.

*

You can write to her that to get rid of fear is the first necessity. Yoga can only be done on a basis of faith and confidence in the Divine.

At the same time one must be on guard against undesirable

movements or phenomena in the sadhana. The motion of her head is not a result of the descent of Force, or a sign that it is too much for her, but a wrong movement of the body which she must check and get rid of altogether.

The colours are only a sign that the inner vision is open; if it develops things of a more definite kind will appear.

*

Write to her again that if she wants to do sadhana, she must get rid of fear altogether; fear opens the door to the adverse forces. She should not listen to people who try to put fear in her. If ugly forms or sounds are seen and heard, one has not to fear but reject them and call in the Mother's protection. If she feels calmness in the meditation, that is the necessary basis — with that basis one can safely practise the Yoga. It is not indispensable that the mind should be entirely *blank* — it is sufficient that it is quiet with a fundamental silence which is not disturbed even if thoughts pass across it.

*

You should throw away fear as well as anger and go quietly on your way putting your confidence in the Mother.

*

It is a mistake to think that by fearing or being unhappy you can progress. Fear is always a feeling to be rejected, because what you fear is just the thing that is likely to come to you: fear attracts the object of fear. Unhappiness weakens the strength and lays one more open to the causes of unhappiness.

One can be quiet, happy, cheerful without being all that in a light or shallow way — and the happiness need not bring any vital reaction. All that you need to do is to be observant and vigilant, — watchful so that you may not give assent to wrong movements or the return of the old feelings, darkness, confusion etc. Not fear, but vigilance. If you remain vigilant, then with the increase of the Force upholding you, a power of self-control will come, a power to see and reject the wrong turn or the wrong

reaction when it comes. Fear and unhappiness will not give you that. It is only by this vigilance accompanied by an opening to the supporting and guiding Force that it will come. What you describe as a capacity to choose the right and the feeling of strength or power that can stop the wrong movement and take the right one as soon as it recognises them, is just this control and vigilance. It is by this control and vigilance supported by the Force that you can prevent the love and devotion too from being mixed with or replaced by selfish desires and impurities. The more you open, the more this power will increase in you.

Certainly, if talking about old things or excessive speaking brings the wrong reactions at night, it is better to abstain from such talk or speech. Here also control is the thing you have to develop.

*

By bringing down strength and calm into the lower vital (region below the navel) [*fear can be eliminated*]. Also by will and imposing calm on the system when the fear arises. It can be done in either way or both together.

*

Fear is of course a vital and physical thing. Many people who have shown great courage, were not physically or even vitally brave; yet by force of mind they pushed themselves into all sorts of battle and danger. Henry IV of France, a great fighter and victor, was an example. Just because his body consciousness was in a panic, he forced it to go where the danger was thickest.

Section Four

Human Relations in Yoga

Chapter One

Human Relations and the Spiritual Life

Relations with Others in Yoga

The true unity with others, in the sadhana, is founded in the unity in the Divine Consciousness, not in the vital movement.

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It is not because of your nature or evil destiny that the vital cannot find the satisfaction it expected from relations with others. These relations can never give a full or permanent satisfaction; if they did, there would be no reason why the human being would ever seek the Divine. He would remain satisfied in the ordinary earth life. It is only when the Divine is found and the consciousness lifted up into the true consciousness that the true relations with others can come.

*

Relations which are part of the ordinary vital nature in human life are of no value in the spiritual life—they rather interfere with the progress; for the mind and vital also should be wholly turned towards the Divine. Moreover, the purpose of sadhana is to enter into a spiritual consciousness and base everything on a new spiritual basis which can only be done when one has entered into complete unity with the Divine. Meanwhile one has to have a calm goodwill for all, but relations of a vital kind do not help—for they keep the consciousness down on a vital basis and prevent its rising to a higher level.

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Until the vital has been purified, illumined and wholly offered to the Divine, there is always a vital mixture in these relations

— a mixture of the movements of the lower nature.

*

These movements [*of egoism*] are part of man's ignorant vital nature. The love which human beings feel for one another is also usually an egoistic vital love and these other movements, claim, demand, jealousy, abhiman, anger etc., are its common accompaniments. There is no place for them in Yoga — nor in true love, psychic or divine. In Yoga all love should be turned towards the Divine and to human or other beings only as vessels of the Divine — abhiman and the rest should have no place in it.

*

I have always said that the vital is indispensable for the divine or spiritual action — without it there can be no complete expression, no realisation in life — hardly even any realisation in sadhana. When I speak of the vital mixture or of the obstructions, revolts etc. of the vital, it is the unregenerated outer vital full of desire and ego and the lower passions of which I speak. I could say the same against the mind and the physical when they obstruct or oppose, but precisely because the vital is so powerful and indispensable, its obstruction, opposition or refusal of cooperation is more strikingly effective and its wrong mixtures are more dangerous to the sadhana. That is why I have always insisted on the dangers of the unregenerated vital and the necessity of mastery and purification there. It is not because I hold, like the Sannyasis, the vital and its life power to be a thing to be condemned and rejected in its very nature.

Affection, love, tenderness are in their nature psychic, — the vital has them because the psychic is trying to express itself through the vital. It is through the emotional being that the psychic most easily expresses, for it stands just behind it in the heart centre. But it wants these things to be pure. Not that it rejects the outward expression through the vital and the physical, but as the psychic being is the form of the soul, it naturally feels the attraction of soul to soul, the nearness of soul to soul the

union of soul with soul are the things that are to it most abiding and concrete. Mind, vital, body are means of expression and very precious means of expression, but the inner life is for the soul the first thing, the deepest reality, and these have to be subordinated to it and conditioned by it, its expression, its instruments and channel. I do not think that in my emphasis on the inner things, on the psychic and spiritual, I am saying anything new, strange or unintelligible. These things have always been stressed from the beginning and the more the human being is evolved, the more they take on importance. I do not see how Yoga can be possible without this premier stress on the inner life, on the soul and the spirit. The emphasis on the mastery of the vital, its subordination and subjection to the spiritual and the psychic is also nothing new, strange or exorbitant. It has been insisted on always for any kind of spiritual life; even the Yogas which seek most to use the vital, like certain forms of Vaishnavism, yet insist on the purification and the total offering of it to the Divine — and the relations with the Divine are an inner realisation, the soul offering itself through the emotional being. The soul or psychic being is not something unheard of or incomprehensible.

*

Absence of love and fellow-feeling is not necessary for nearness to the Divine; on the contrary, a sense of closeness and oneness with others is a part of the divine consciousness into which the sadhak enters by nearness to the Divine and the feeling of oneness with the Divine. An entire rejection of all relations is indeed the final aim of the Mayavadin, and in the ascetic Yoga an entire loss of all relations of friendship and affection and attachment to the world and its living beings would be regarded as a promising sign of advance towards liberation, Moksha; but even there, I think, a feeling of oneness and unattached spiritual sympathy for all is at least a penultimate stage, like the compassion of the Buddhist, before the turning to Moksha or Nirvana. In this Yoga the feeling of unity with others, love, universal joy and Ananda are an essential part of the liberation and perfection which are the aim of the sadhana.

On the other hand, human society, human friendship, love, affection, fellow-feeling are mostly and usually—not entirely or in all cases—founded on a vital basis and are ego-held at their centre. It is because of the pleasure of being loved, the pleasure of enlarging the ego by contact, mutual penetration of spirit, with another, the exhilaration of the vital interchange which feeds their personality that men usually love—and there are also other and still more selfish motives that mix with this essential movement. There are of course higher spiritual, psychic, mental, vital elements that come in or can come in; but the whole thing is very mixed, even at its best. This is the reason why at a certain stage with or without apparent reason the world and life and human society and relations and philanthropy (which is as ego-ridden as the rest) begin to pall. There is sometimes an ostensible reason—a disappointment of the surface vital, the withdrawal of affection by others, the perception that those loved or men generally are not what one thought them to be and a host of other causes; but often the cause is a secret disappointment of some part of the inner being, not translated or not well translated into the mind, because it expected from these things something which they cannot give. It is the case with many who turn or are pushed to the spiritual life. For some it takes the form of a *vairāgya* which drives them towards ascetic indifference and gives the urge towards Moksha. For us, what we hold to be necessary is that the mixture should disappear and that the consciousness should be established on a purer level (not only spiritual and psychic but a purer and higher mental, vital, physical consciousness) in which there is not this mixture. There one would feel the true Ananda of oneness and love and sympathy and fellowship, spiritual and self-existent in its basis but expressing itself through the other parts of the nature. If that is to happen, there must obviously be a change; the old form of these movements must drop off and leave room for a new and higher self to disclose its own way of expression and realisation of itself and of the Divine through these things—that is the inner truth of the matter.

I take it therefore that the condition you describe is a period

of transition and change, negative in its beginning, as these movements often are at first, so as to create a vacant space for the new positive to appear and live in it and fill it. But the vital, not having a long continued or at all sufficient or complete experience of what is to fill the vacancy, feels only the loss and regrets it even while another part of the being, another part even of the vital, is ready to let go what is disappearing and does not yearn to keep it. If it were not for this movement of the vital (which in your case has been very strong and large and avid of life), the disappearance of these things would, at least after the first sense of void, bring only a feeling of peace, relief and a still expectation of greater things. What is intended in the first place to fill the void was indicated in the peace and joy which came to you as the touch of Shiva — naturally, this would not be all but a beginning, a basis for a new self, a new consciousness, an activity of a greater nature; as I told you, it is a deep spiritual calm and peace that is the only stable foundation for a lasting Bhakti and Ananda. In that new consciousness there would be a new basis for relations with others; for an ascetic dryness or isolated loneliness cannot be your spiritual destiny since it is not consonant with your Swabhava which is made for joy, largeness, expansion, a comprehensive movement of the life-force. Therefore do not be discouraged; wait upon the purifying movement of Shiva.

*

There is no taboo in the Yoga on any feeling that is true and pure, but all the feelings undergo the stress of a pressure from the spiritual consciousness and whatever there is that is mixed, impure, egoistic or the feeling itself if it is fundamentally self-regarding, either disappears or, if it remains, becomes an obstacle to the progress. In the ascetic Yoga all human feelings are regarded as illusory and have to disappear — “the knots of the heart are cut” — so as to leave only the one supreme aspiration. In this Yoga the emotional being has not to be got rid of, but to undergo a transformation; the shortest way of transformation is to turn all the being to the Divine. But when that is done, then

it is found that what is pure and true in any human relation survives, but with a rich and subtle change, or else new relations are established that come straight from the Divine. If, however, something resists the change, then it is quite possible that there may be an oscillation between blank indifference or vairagya and the indulgence of the untransformed feeling—the human vital on one side, the disillusioned Vairagi on the other side. Some even have to pass through this vairagya in order to reach the possibility of a divinised emotional nature, but that is not the normal movement of this Yoga.

As for being self-centred, it is obviously not the right thing for Yoga to be centred in the ego and revolving round it; one has to be centred in the Divine with all the movements turning round that centre—until they can all be in the Divine. One has naturally to think much of one's own nature and its change, but that is inevitable for the sadhana—to prevent its turning into a self-centred condition, the aspiration to the Divine, vision of the Divine everywhere, the surrender to the Divine have to be made the main objective of the sadhana.

*

The idea that all sadhaks must be aloof from each other and at daggers drawn is itself a preconceived idea that must be abandoned. Harmony and not strife is the law of Yogic living. This preconceived idea arises perhaps from the old notion of Nirvana as the aim; but Nirvana is not the aim here. The aim here is fulfilment of the Divine in life and for that union and solidarity are indispensable. I find it difficult to see in the mind's eye X developing an aversion for you and it would not be easy for you to develop an aversion for X; so these nightmares of the vital imagination ought not to emerge. Aversion and quarrelling are unyogic, not Yogic tendencies; the fact that this Asram is full of quarrels only shows that it is still an Asram of very imperfect sadhaks, not yet an Asram of Yogis—it does not at all mean that aversion and quarrelling are the dharma of the spiritual seeker.

The ideal of the Yoga is that all should be centred in and around the Divine and the life of the sadhaks must be founded

on that firm foundation, their personal relations also should have the Divine for their centre. Moreover, all relations should pass from the vital to the spiritual basis with the vital only as a form and instrument of the spiritual; — this means that from whatever relations they have with each other all jealousy, strife, hatred, aversion, rancour and other evil vital feelings should be abandoned, for they can be no part of the spiritual life. So also all egoistic love and attachment will have to disappear — the love that loves only for the ego's sake and as soon as the ego is hurt and dissatisfied ceases to love or even cherishes rancour and hate. There must be a real living and lasting unity behind the love. It is understood of course that such things as sexual impurity must disappear also.

That is the ideal, but as for the way of attainment, it may differ for different people. One way is that in which one leaves everything else to follow the Divine alone. This does not mean an aversion for anybody any more than it means aversion for the world and life. It only means absorption in one's central aim, with the idea that once that is attained it will be easy to found all relations on the true basis, to become truly united with others in the heart and the spirit and the life, united in the spiritual truth and in the Divine. The other way is to go forward from where one is, seeking the Divine centrally and subordinating all else to that, but not putting everything else aside, rather seeking to transform gradually and progressively whatever is capable of such transformation. All the things that are not wanted in the relation, — impurity, jealousy, anger, egoistic demand, — drop away as the inner being grows purer and is replaced by the unity of soul with soul and the binding together of the social life in the hoop of the Divine. Your eagerness to bring your friends into the Yoga was perhaps in reality due to a recognition somewhere in the being that this was the safest way to preserve the relation, to found it on the common search for the Divine. If quarrels intervene and there is strife, it is because the old ego-basis stuck still and brought in old reactions not of a Yogic character; but for that the Yoga is not to blame.

It is not that one cannot have relations with people outside

the circle of the sadhaks, but there too if the spiritual life grows within, it must necessarily affect the relation and spiritualise it on the sadhak's side. And there must be no such attachment as would make the relation an obstacle or a rival to the Divine. Attachment to family etc. often is like that and, if so, it falls away from the sadhana. That is an exigence which, I think, should not be considered excessive. All that however can be progressively done; a severing of existing relations is necessary for some; it is not so for all. A transformation, however gradual, is indispensable,—severance where severance is the right thing to do.

P.S. I must repeat also that each case differs — one rule for all is not practical or practicable. What is needed by each for his spiritual progress is the one consideration to be held in view.

Love for Others and Love for the Divine

The love of the sadhak should be for the Divine. It is only when he has that fully that he can love others in the right way.

*

Yes. First, one should enter into union with the Divine, and learn to live in the true light, true consciousness, true force. Yogic relations with others should come only when one lives in the Divine — then it will be safe and then there can be no influence [*from others*], for the only influence will be that of the Divine.

*

It cannot be said that it [*one's affinity for certain persons*] is either bad or good in a general way. It depends on the person, the effects and many other things. As a general rule, all these affinities have to be surrendered to the Divine along with the rest of the old nature — so that only what is in harmony with the Divine Truth can be kept and transformed for its work in you. All relations with others must be relations in the Divine and not of the old personal nature.

*

It is not necessary to have love for everybody just now. If you have a general goodwill, that is enough.

*

It is as the love of the Divine grows that the other things cease to trouble the mind.

*

There is a love in which the emotion is turned towards the Divine in an increasing receptivity and growing union. What it receives from the Divine it pours out on others, but freely without demanding a return. If you are capable of that, then that is the highest and most satisfying way to love.¹

Family Ties and Duties

What you write about the family ties is perfectly correct. It creates an unnecessary interchange and comes in the way of a complete turning to the Divine. Relations after taking up Yoga should be less and less based on a physical origin or the habits of the physical consciousness and more and more on the basis of sadhana — of sadhak with sadhaks, of others as souls travelling the same path or children of the Mother than in the ordinary way or with the old viewpoint.

*

When one enters the spiritual life, the family ties which belong to the ordinary nature fall away — one becomes indifferent to the old things. This indifference is a release. There need be no harshness in it at all. To remain tied to the old physical affections would mean to remain tied to the ordinary nature and that would prevent the spiritual progress.

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¹ *The next day the correspondent asked, "What must one do to have this love?" Sri Aurobindo replied, "First you must want it in a continuous way." — Ed.*

Human physical relations are necessarily temporary — the soul has to go away and prepare itself for other lives through which it will move eventually nearer to the Divine. Regard it so and open yourself to the peace from above; turn yourself towards that which is Eternal and Divine.

*

You ought to be able to see, after receiving today's telegram, that the cause of the unrest is in yourself and not in the outward circumstances. It is your vital attachment to family ties and the ordinary social ideas and feelings that has risen in you and creates the difficulty. If you want to practise Yoga, you must be able to live in the world, so long as you are there, with a mind set upon the Divine and not bound by the environment. One who does this, can help those around him a hundred times more than one who is bound and attached to the world.

*

The question about the family duties can be answered in this way — the family duties exist so long as one is in the ordinary consciousness of the grahasthan; if the call to a spiritual life comes, whether one keeps to them or not depends partly upon the way of Yoga one follows, partly on one's own spiritual necessity. There are many who pursue inwardly the spiritual life and keep the family duties, not as social duties but as a field for the practice of karmayoga, others abandon everything to follow the spiritual call or line and they are justified if that is necessary for the Yoga they practise or if that is the imperative demand of the soul within them.

*

There is no harm in devoting yourself to occupations which will help the sadhana. The earning of money and family affairs have only to be looked after if the circumstances are such as to compel it. They should then be done in a spirit of entire detachment, dealing with them so as to develop in oneself the consciousness described in the Gita.

Relations between Parents and Children

There are many kinds of truth and in the Shastra you will find all kinds, some seeming in conflict with others. Service to parents is part of family and social duty. It has nothing to do in itself with Yoga. Yoga is truth not of family or society, but of spiritual life, and in spiritual life the seeking for the Divine takes precedence of everything.

If we ask you to remain still with your father and mother, it is not from the point of view of Truth, but of charity. Four of their children have already left them to come to the Asram; it would be too hard a blow if you also left them now. As you have remained with them so long, you might remain a little longer. Even while in the family, you can prepare yourself for the spiritual life, by remembering the Divine in all you do and by doing it as a sacrifice for the sake of the Divine.

*

It [*a child's debt to his parents*] is a law of human society, not a law of Karma. The child did not ask the father to bring him into the world—and if the father has done it for his own pleasure, it is the least he can do to bring up the child. All these are social relations (and it is not at all a one-sided debt of the child to the father, either), but whatever they are, they cease once one takes to the spiritual life. For the spiritual life does not at all rest on the external physical relations; it is the Divine alone with whom one has then to do.

*

The attachment to parents belongs to the ordinary physical nature—it has nothing to do with Divine Love.

Old Relations

We are sorry to hear that she is suffering from such serious difficulties and certainly we are prepared to give her what inner help we can. It is not, however, any force from us that has worked to

separate her from her old supporters and friends. It is, evidently, one result of some change and progress in her consciousness which has disturbed the old relation between her internal nature and her external surroundings and power of action upon them. To try to go back to the old relation does not usually succeed; the only safe course is to progress still farther and arrive at a new consciousness and new power which will enable her to establish a fresh relation with her external environment. If one keeps courage and always looks forward, relying on the Force behind which supports, there are no troubles, no difficulties, no apparent disasters even which cannot be passed through safely and eventually overcome.

*

Yes. The inner being turned to the Divine naturally draws away from old vital relations and outer movements and contacts till it can bring a new consciousness into the external being.

*

The movement [*of rejection*] of which you speak is not psychic but emotive. It is a vital emotive force that you put out and waste. It is also harmful because, while on the one side you try to reject a past vital relation or tie with these people, you by this movement re-establish in another way a vital relation with them. If there was anything wrong in your first movement, this is quite a false way of remedying the defect.

Certainly, it would be better to reject without any violent feeling against any person, because the violence is a sign of a certain weakness in the vital which must be corrected — not for any other reason. The rejection should be quiet, firm, self-assured, decisive; it will then be more radical and effective.

Friendship and Affection

All are not indifferent in this Asram to each other, nor is friendship or affection excluded from the Yoga. Friendship with the Divine is a recognised relation in the sadhana. Friendships be-

tween the sadhaks exist and are encouraged by the Mother. Only we seek to found them on a surer basis than that on which the bulk of human friendships are insecurely founded. It is precisely because we hold friendship, brotherhood, love to be sacred things that we want this change — because we do not want to see them broken at every moment by the movements of the ego, soiled and spoiled and destroyed by the passions, jealousies, treacheries to which the vital is prone — it is to make them truly sacred and secure that we want them rooted in the soul, founded on the rock of the Divine. Our Yoga is not an ascetic Yoga: it aims at purity, but not at a cold austerity. Friendship and love are indispensable notes in the harmony to which we aspire. It is not a vain dream, for we have seen that even in imperfect conditions when a little of the indispensable element is there at the very root the thing is possible. It is difficult and the old obstacles still cling obstinately. But no victory can be won without a fixed fidelity to the aim and a long effort. There is no other way than to persevere.

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In Yoga friendship can remain, but attachment has to fall away or any such engrossing affection as would keep one tied to the ordinary life and consciousness — human relations must take quite a small and secondary place and not interfere with the turn to the Divine.

*

As to the question about affections etc. I answered X long ago that in Yoga all attachments have to be given up so that there may be no rival to the Divine, but love and affection can be there — only as a new basis of consciousness has to be reached love and affection have to be rebased on that deeper and higher consciousness, not allowed to remain in their old form or on their old level — all the life must be centred round the Divine. It is so in this Yoga at least. There are others in which a man must become aloof from all things, but that is when one is bound towards Nirvana.

*

Human affection is obviously unreliable because it is so much bound up with selfishness and desire; it is a flame of the ego sometimes turbid and misty, sometimes more clear and brightly coloured—sometimes tamasic based on instinct and habit, sometimes rajasic and fed by passion or the cry for vital interchange, sometimes more sattwic and trying to be or look to itself disinterested. But fundamentally it depends on a personal need or a return of some kind inward or outward and when the need is not satisfied or the return ceases or is not given, it most often diminishes or dies or exists only as a tepid or troubled remnant of habit from the past or else turns for satisfaction elsewhere. The more intense it is, the more it is apt to be troubled by tumults, clashes, quarrels, egoistic disturbances of all kinds, selfishness, exactions, lapses even to rage and hatred, ruptures. It is not that these affections cannot last—tamasic instinctive affections last because of habit in spite of everything dividing the persons, e.g. certain family affections; rajasic affections can last sometimes in spite of all disturbances and incompatibilities and furious ruptures because one has a vital need of the other and clings because of that or because both have that need and are constantly separating to return and returning to separate, or proceeding from quarrel to reconciliation and from reconciliation to quarrel; sattwic affections last very often from duty to the ideal or with some other support though they may lose their keenness or intensity or brightness. But the true reliability is there only when the psychic element in human affection becomes strong enough to colour or dominate the rest. For that reason friendship is or rather can oftenest be the most durable of the human affections because there there is less interference of the vital and even though a flame of the ego it can be a quiet and pure fire giving always its warmth and light. Nevertheless reliable friendship is almost always with a very few; to have a horde of loving, unselfishly faithful friends is a phenomenon so rare that it can be safely taken as an illusion. In any case human affection whatever its value has its place, because through it the psychic being gets the emotional experiences it needs until it is ready to prefer the true

to the apparent, the perfect to the imperfect, the divine to the human. As the consciousness has to rise to a higher level, so the activities of the heart also have to rise to that higher level and change their basis and character. Yoga is the founding of all the life and consciousness in the Divine, so also love and affection must be rooted in the Divine and a spiritual and psychic oneness in the Divine must be their foundation — to reach the Divine first leaving other things aside or to seek the Divine alone is the straight road towards that change. That means no attachment — it need not mean turning affection into disaffection or chill indifference. But X seems to want to take his vital emotions just as they are — *tels quels* — into the Divine — let him try and don't bother him with criticisms and lectures; if it can't be done, he will have to find it out himself. Or perhaps he wants to clap on the Divine to the rest as a crowning ornament, shikhara, of his pyramid of love and affections.

*

It [*ordinary affection*] is the vital seeking to pour itself out with the implicit idea of getting a return, an interchange. The consciousness of oneness is something behind all life and all forms of affection come no doubt from it, but not consciously, and they get changed, mixed, perverted when the vital takes up the action of the force of Love of whose true or divine nature it is unconscious.

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But that is the nature of human vital affection, it is all selfishness disguised as love. Sometimes when there is a strong vital passion, need or tie, then the person is ready to do anything to retain the affection of the other. But it is only when the psychic is able to get into the movement that there is real unselfish affection or at least some element of it.

*

It is meant [*by not retaining vital relations*] that you should have the relation of sadhaks with each other, one of goodwill and friendly feeling, but not any special relation of a vital character.

If there is anyone you cannot meet without such a vital relation coming up, then only it is not advisable to meet him or her.

*

What you write is quite correct—each sadhak must have the direct inner contact with the Mother and rely on her for the spiritual help and progress. But there may be psychic or spiritual friendships which may be helpful in another way and especially in certain difficult stages before the inner contact with the Mother is consciously established.

Vital Love

It is not helpful to make so much of the past and give it such a primary value. Whatever may be the glamour of a vital love, once it falls away and one gets to a higher level, it should be seen to have been not the great thing one imagined. To keep the exaggerated estimate of it is to hold the consciousness back from the full *essor* towards the greater thing with which that cannot for a moment compare. If one keeps a fervour like that for an inferior past, it must make it more difficult to develop the entire person for a higher future. It is indeed not the Mother's wish that X or you either should look back in a spirit of enthusiastic appreciation to the old vital love. It was indeed "so little" in any true estimate of things. It is not at all a question of comparison or of exalting the vital passion of one at the expense of that of the other. It is the whole thing that must dwindle in its proportions and recede into the shadowy constructions of the past which have no longer any importance.

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It is the ordinary nature of vital love not to last or, if it tries to last, not to satisfy, because it is a passion which Nature has thrown in in order to serve a temporary purpose; it is good enough therefore for a temporary purpose and its normal tendency is to wane when it has sufficiently served Nature's purpose. In mankind, as man is a more complex being, she calls in the aid of imagination

and idealism to help her push, gives a sense of ardour, of beauty and fire and glory, but all that wanes after a time. It cannot last, because it is all a borrowed light and power, borrowed in the sense of being a reflection caught from something beyond and not native to the reflecting vital medium which imagination uses for the purpose. Moreover nothing lasts in the mind and vital, all is in a flux there. The one thing that endures is the soul, the spirit. Therefore love can last or satisfy only if it bases itself on the soul and spirit, if it has its roots there. But that means living no longer in the vital but in the soul and spirit.

The difficulty of the vital giving up is because the vital is not governed by reason or knowledge, but by instinct and impulse and the desire of pleasure. It draws back because it is disappointed, because it realises that the disappointment will always repeat itself, but it does not realise that the whole thing is in itself a glamour or, if it does, it repines that it should be so. Where the vairagya is sattwic, born not of disappointment but of the sense of greater and truer things to be attained, this difficulty does not arise. However the vital can learn by experience, can learn so much as to turn away from its regret of the beauty of the will-o'-the-wisp. Its vairagya can become sattwic and decisive.

*

There is nothing unusual in your feelings towards X. It is the way that vital love usually takes when there is no strong psychic force to correct and uphold it. After the first vital glow is over, the incompatibility of the two egos begins to show itself and there is more and more strain in the relations — for one or both the demands of the other become intolerable to the vital part, there is constant irritation and the claim is felt as a burden and a yoke. Naturally in a life of sadhana there is no room for vital relations — they are a stumbling block preventing the wholesale turning of the nature towards the Divine.

*

The phenomenon of which you speak is normal to human nature. People are drawn together or one is drawn to another

by a certain feeling of affinity, of agreement or of attraction between some part of one's own nature and some part of the other's nature. At first this only is felt; one sees all that is good or pleasant to one in the other's nature and even attributes, perhaps, qualities to him that are not there or not so much there as one thinks. But with closer acquaintance other parts of the nature are felt with which one is not in affinity — perhaps there is a clash of ideas or opposition of feelings or conflict of two egos. If there is a strong love or friendship of a lasting character, then one may overcome these difficulties of contact and arrive at a harmonising or accommodation; but very often this is not there or the disagreement is so acute as to counteract the tendency of accommodation or else the ego gets so hurt as to recoil. Then it is quite possible for one to begin to see too much and exaggerate the faults of the other or to attribute things to him of a bad or unpleasant character that are not there. The whole view can change, the good feeling change into ill-feeling, alienation, even enmity or antipathy. This is always happening in human life. The opposite also happens, but less easily — i.e. the change from ill-feeling to good feeling, from opposition to harmony. But of course ill-opinion or ill-feeling towards a person need not arise from this cause alone. It happens from many causes, instinctive dislike, jealousy, conflicting interests, etc.

One must try to look calmly on others, not overstress either virtues or defects, without ill-feeling or misunderstanding or injustice, with a calm mind and vision.

*

There is the selfishness which is always a part if not the whole of human love — and it is the reaction of the demand and desire it brings that creates the opposite feeling. It is when this selfish element is rejected that one can feel the true psychic or divine love.

*

Love does not consist in demands and desires — demand and desire spring from ego. Love exists for its own sake and does

not offer itself on conditions. These feelings do not spring from the psychic and it is only by the psychic prevailing in you that the true consciousness can become free and full in the nature and all these repinings and unhappinesses disappear.

*

The love in the vital or other parts is the true thing, good for the spiritual life, only when in the vital love is changed into a form of the psychic love and becomes an instrument for the transformation of the soul's love, no longer for the desires of the ego which men call love.

Vital Love and Psychic Love

Ordinary human love is vital, emotional and physical and always egoistic — a form of self-love. The psychic element is very small except in a few.

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Human love is mainly vital, when it is not vital and physical together. It is also sometimes psychic + vital. But the Love with a dominant psychic element is rare.

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It is difficult to define its [*psychic love's*] limits or to recognise it. For even when there is the psychic love for another person, it gets in the human being so mixed up with the vital that it is the commonest thing to justify a vital love by claiming for it a psychic character. One could say that psychic love is distinguished by an essential purity and selflessness — but the vital can put on a very brilliant imitation of that character, when it likes.

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It depends on what you mean by psychic "love". One can have a psychic feeling for all beings; it does not depend on sex nor has it anything sexual in it.

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There is a fundamental psychic feeling which is the same for all; but there can also be a special psychic feeling for one or another.

*

It [*psychic love*] is sometimes turned to the human person, but it never gets its true satisfaction till it turns to the Divine.

*

Men are necessarily separated by the individualisation of their nature and can only establish contacts there. In the psychic being one gets the sense of oneness by psychic sympathy, but not any unification, for the psychic is the individual soul and must unify itself with the Divine before it can through the Divine unify with others. In spiritual realisation there are two quite opposite forms — one in which one withdraws from all outer things including all material beings in the world to merge in the Divine and one in which one feels the Self or the Divine in all and through that realisation attains to a universal oneness.

*

Certainly, as the psychic attitude develops it is bound to have an effect not only on oneself but on the relations with others.

Personal Relations in Yoga

Personal relation is not a part of the Yoga. When one has the union with the Divine, then only can there be a true spiritual relation with others.

*

A personal relation is formed when there is an exclusive mutual looking to each other. The rule about personal relations in this Yoga is this: (1) All personal relations to disappear in the single relation between the sadhaka and the Divine; (2) All personal (psychic-spiritual) relations to proceed from the Divine Mother, determined by her, and to be part of the single relation with the Divine Mother. In so far as it keeps to this double rule and

admits no physical indulgence or vital deformation or mixture, a personal relation can be there. But since as yet the Supramental has not taken possession but is only descending and there is still struggle in the vital and physical levels, there must be a great carefulness such as would not be necessary if the supramental transformation were already there. Both have to be in direct relation with the Mother and in a total dependence on her and to see that that remains and that nothing diminishes its totality or cuts across it in the least degree.

*

I don't think it is much use writing about personal relations in the true spiritual life (which does not yet exist here). None would understand it except as a form of words. Only three points —

(1) Its very base would have to be spiritual and psychic and *not* vital. The vital would be there but as an instrument only.

(2) It would be a relation flowing from the higher Truth, not continued from the lower Ignorance.

(3) It would not be impersonal in the sense of being colourless, but whatever colours were there would not be the egoistic and muddy colours of the present relations.

*

The Yoga cannot be done if equality is not established. Personal relations must be founded on the relation with the Divine in himself and the Divine in all and they must not be "ties" to pull one down and keep bound to the lower nature but part of the higher unity.

*

The natural feeling of one sadhak to another should be kindness and good feeling to all and the friendliness which is natural or ought to be so between all who follow the same spiritual aim, but personal attachment is supposed to be overcome, as all attachments of the vital must be. Personal relations *can* exist if they are founded on the spiritual consciousness or help towards it, but nothing that holds one back or turns one away from

the Divine. I have not opposed any sadhak having a friendly relation with another. But if it is based on ego, on vital desires and impulses or, if these come strongly in, then obviously there is something there that makes it undesirable. In this case, you have written very frankly that your intimacy with X would be of that character on your side. So I could not but acquiesce in your feeling that it would be better not to go to his room or resume the old close contact.

P.S. In what I have written of the relation of sadhaks, I mean of course the relation on the way. I leave aside the spiritual or psychic love for all which can come afterwards and be the radiation of the union with the Divine.

*

Our experience is that it is only when both are in the true consciousness centred round the Divine that there is some chance of a true meeting in the Divine. Otherwise, with the personal relation that forms there comes in either disappointment and alienation or else reactions that are not pure.

Universal Love and Personal Relations

One can talk to all, unless one has a reason for not doing so. The oneness with all is an internal realisation, but it does not necessarily impose the same dealing with all. It is the old story of *hāthi brahman* and *māhout brahman*. There is the fundamental realisation and there are the disparities of the Lila — both have to be taken into account.

*

No, that by itself [*expressing one's affection to all*] is not the wideness needed — the spiritual wideness brings the sense of being one being with all, of containing all in oneself, as it were, and with that comes a kind of universal love which is spiritual, free and pure, but which one is not moved to show to everybody by outward signs, but which has its effect. The personal relation can be only with some, not with all.

*

That was exactly what X tried to do—to express the love in connection with this or that person. But universal love is not personal—it has to be held within as a condition of the consciousness which will have its effects according to the Divine Will or be used by that Will if necessary, but to run about expressing it for one's personal satisfaction or the satisfaction of others is only to spoil and lose it.

*

The *dynamic* Love cannot go out equally to all—that would create a chaotic disturbance because of the unpreparedness of the majority. It is only the static immutable universal Love that can apply equally to all—that which comes in a still wideness of the heart which corresponds with the still wideness of the mind in which there is the equanimity and infinite peace.

*

So long as the whole consciousness is not clear of doubtful stuff and the realisation of oneness confirmed in the supreme purity, the expression of the all-love is not advisable. It is by holding it in oneself that it becomes a real part of the nature, established and purified by joining with it the other realisations still to come. At present it is only a first touch and to dissipate it by expression would be very imprudent. The sex and vital might easily become active—I have known cases of very good Yogis in whom the *viśvaprema* became the *viśvakāma*, all-love becoming all-lust. This has happened with many both in Europe and the East. Even apart from that it is always best to solidify and to confirm rather than to throw out and disperse. When the sadhana has progressed and the knowledge from above comes to enlighten and guide the love, then it will be another matter. My insistence on rejection of all untransformed vital movements is based on experience, mine and others' and that of past Yogas like the Vaishnava movement of Chaitanya (not to speak of the old Buddhist Sahaja dharma) which ended in much corruption. A wide movement such as that of all-love can only take place when the ground of Nature has been solidly prepared for

it. I have no objection to your mixing with others, but only under a continual guard and control by a vigilant mind and will.

Relations between Men and Women in Yoga

As for turning all to the Divine, that is a counsel of perfection for those who don't care to carry any luggage. But otherwise friendship between man and man or man and woman or woman and woman is not forbidden provided it is the true thing and sex does not come in and also provided it does not turn one away from the goal. If the central aim is strong, that is sufficient. When I spoke of personal relation I certainly did not mean pure indifference, for indifference does not create a relation: it tends to non-relation altogether. Emotional friendship need not be an obstacle.

*

The only relation permissible between a sadhak and sadhika here is the same as between a sadhak and sadhak or between a sadhika and sadhika — a friendly relation between followers of the same path of Yoga and children of the Mother.

*

In a general way the only method for succeeding in having between a man and a woman the free and natural Yogic relations that should exist between a sadhak and a sadhika in this Yoga is to be able to meet each other without thinking at all that one is a man and another a woman — both are simply human beings, both sadhaks, both striving to serve the Divine and seeking the Divine alone and none else. Have that fully in yourself and no difficulty is likely to come.

*

Even in the world there have been relations between man and woman in which sex could not intervene — purely psychic relations. The consciousness of sex difference would be there no

doubt, but without coming in as a source of desire or disturbance into the relation. But naturally it needs a certain psychic development before that is possible.

*

It is certainly easier to have friendship between man and man or between woman and woman than between man and woman, because there the sexual intrusion is normally absent. In a friendship between man and woman the sexual turn can at any moment come in in a subtle or a direct way and produce perturbations. But there is no impossibility of friendship between man and woman pure of this element; such friendships can exist and have always existed. All that is needed is that the lower vital should not look in at the back door or be permitted to enter. There is often a harmony between a masculine and a feminine nature, an attraction or an affinity which rests on something other than any open or covert lower vital (sexual) basis—it depends sometimes predominantly on the mental or on the psychic or on the higher vital, sometimes on a mixture of these for its substance. In such cases friendship is natural and there is little chance of other elements coming in to pull it downwards or break it.

It is also a mistake to think that the vital alone has warmth and the psychic is something frigid without any flame in it. A clear limpid goodwill is a very good and desirable thing—one has only to consider what a changed place the Asram would be if all had it for each other. But that is not what is meant by psychic love. Love is love and not merely goodwill. Psychic love can have a warmth and a flame as intense and more intense than the vital, only it is a pure fire, not dependent on the satisfaction of ego-desire or on the eating up of the fuel it embraces. It is a white flame, not a red one; but white heat is not inferior to the red variety in its ardour. It is true that the psychic love does not usually get its full play in human relations and human nature, it finds the fullness of its fire and ecstasy more easily when it is lifted towards the Divine. In the human relation the psychic love gets mixed up with other elements which seek at

once to use it and overshadow it. It gets an outlet for its own full intensities only at rare moments. Otherwise it comes in only as an element, but even so it contributes all the higher things in a love that is predominantly vital—all the finer sweetness, tenderness, fidelity, self-giving, self-sacrifice, reachings of soul to soul, idealising sublimations that lift up human love beyond itself come from the psychic. If it could dominate and govern and transmute the other elements, mental, vital, physical, of human love, then love could be on the earth some reflection or preparation of the real thing, an integral union of the soul and its instruments in a dual life. But even some imperfect appearance of that is rare.

Here we do not talk of psychic love between sadhaks, for the reason that that comes usually to be employed as a cover and excuse for things that are not at all psychic and have no place in the spiritual life. Our view is that the normal thing is in Yoga for the entire flame of the nature to turn towards the Divine and the rest must wait for the true basis; to build higher things on the sand and mire of the ordinary consciousness is not safe. That does not necessarily exclude friendships or comradeships, but these must be subordinate altogether to the central fire. If anyone makes meanwhile the relation with the Divine his one absorbing aim, that is quite natural and gives the full force to the sadhana. Psychic love finds itself wholly when it is the radiation of the diviner consciousness for which we are seeking; till then it is difficult for it to put out its undimmed integral self and figure.

P.S. Mind, vital, physical are properly instruments for the soul and spirit; when they work for themselves then they produce ignorant and imperfect things—if they can be made into conscious instruments of the psychic and the spirit, then they get their own diviner fulfilment; that is the idea contained in what we call transformation in this Yoga.

*

To avoid X is not the way to get rid of these feelings [*of possessiveness and jealousy*]. The Mother allowed the relation between you because you had need of help and there was a need also of

psychic and spiritual comradeship in the work, a support to each other among its difficulties. That something vital got into the relationship and caused the disturbances of jealousy, sense of possession etc. is true; but the remedy is not to break off but to let it grow into the true thing. It is difficult to get rid of the vital mixture all at once, because these movements had created in you a habit of recurrence supported by forces that wanted to break your sadhana. These forces have now lost a great deal of their power,—but the movement itself still recurs and from force of habit your nature responds and gets troubled. Do not be discouraged by this recurrence; it happens with everyone. Keep your psychic perception and quietly stand back from the jealousy and sense of possession when it occurs, not accepting it as a thing right or natural, but not desponding either because of its recurrence. In time the growth of the psychic in you will help you to turn the relation into the true thing altogether.

*

The first thing you have to do is to make up your mind what you want. If you want to have a free mind and vital to pursue your sadhana, you must get rid of the attachment for X left from the past; if you once do so entirely, you can either mix with him or not meet him without any reaction or inconvenience. Till then both the impulse or need of seeing him and the recoil from it carry too much of the savour of the old relation to be effective.

*

For a sadhak the suitable partner does not exist—and any “partner” would create a barrier between him and the Divine. A companion, not of the same sex, is a different matter.

*

It [*mixing with women*] is not so harmful for a woman as mixing freely with men under the vital impulse—but all mixing on the vital plane has its dangers. What you should do in mixing with women is not to give yourself vitally, to remain within yourself,

but to mix with them outwardly in a quiet way — forming no vital relation with any.

*

The first [*question*] was about a complementary soul and marriage. The answer is easy to give; the way of the spiritual life lies for you in one direction and marriage lies in quite another and opposite. All talk about a complementary soul is a camouflage with which the mind tries to cover the sentimental, sensational and physical wants of the lower vital nature. It is that vital nature in you which puts the question and would like an answer reconciling its desires and demands with the call of the true soul in you. But it must not expect a sanction for any such incongruous reconciliation from here. The way of the supramental Yoga is clear; it lies not through any concession to these things, — not, in your case, through the satisfaction, under a spiritual cover if possible, of its craving for the comforts and gratifications of a domestic and conjugal life and the enjoyment of the ordinary emotional desires and physical passions, but through the purification and transformation of the forces which these movements pervert and misuse. Not these human and animal demands, but the divine Ananda which is above and beyond them and which the indulgence of these degraded forms would prevent from descending, is the great thing that the aspiration of the vital being must demand in the sadhaka.

*

If that [*contempt*] is your feeling about women the sooner you get rid of it the better — for it is very silly. As for shyness etc., it should be got rid of, but do not replace it by familiarity or overintimacy.

Loneliness

The inner loneliness can only be cured by the inner experience of union with the Divine; no human association can fill the void. In the same way, for the spiritual life the harmony with others

must be founded not on mental and vital affinities, but on the divine consciousness and the union with the Divine. When one finds the Divine and finds others in the Divine, then the real harmony comes. Meanwhile what there can be is the goodwill and unity founded on the feeling of a common divine goal and the sense of being all children of the Mother. Real harmony can come only on a psychic or a spiritual basis.

*

To be alone with the Divine is the highest of all privileged states for the sadhak, for it is that in which inwardly he comes nearest to the Divine and can make all existence a communion in the chamber of the heart as well as in the temple of the universe. Moreover that is the beginning and base of the real oneness with all, for it establishes that oneness in its true base, on the Divine, for it is in the Divine that he meets and unites with all and no longer in a precarious interchange of the mental and vital ego. So do not fear loneliness but put your trust in the Mother and go forward on the Path in her strength and Grace.

Chapter Two

Interactions with Others and the Practice of Yoga

Cultivating Equality and Goodwill

The inequality of feelings towards others, liking and disliking, is ingrained in the nature of the human vital. This is because some harmonise with one's own vital temperament, others do not; also there is the vital ego which gets displeased when it is hurt or when things do not go or people do not act according to its preferences or its idea of what they should do. In the self above there is a spiritual calm and equality, a goodwill to all or at a certain stage a quiet indifference to all except the Divine; in the psychic there is an equal kindness or love to all fundamentally, but there may be special relations with one—but the vital is always unequal and full of likes and dislikes. By the sadhana the vital must be quieted down; it must receive from the self above its quiet goodwill and equality to all things and from the psychic its general kindness or love. This will come, but it may take time to come. You must get rid of all inner as well as all outer movements of anger, impatience or dislike. If things go wrong or are done wrongly, you will simply say, "The Mother knows" and go on quietly doing or getting things done as well as you can without friction. At a later period we will show you how to use the Mother's force so that things may go better, but first you must get your inner poise in a quiet vital, for only so can the Force be used with its full possible success.

*

There are two attitudes that a sadhak can have—either a quiet equality to all regardless of their friendliness or hostility or a general goodwill.

*

I would ask you not to let resentment or anything else rise or dictate your conduct. Put these things aside and see that peace within and the seeking of the Divine are the one thing important — these clashes being only spurts of the ego. Turn yourself in the one direction, but for the rest keep a quiet goodwill to all.

*

You must certainly give up all personal feelings of that kind [*resentment, ill will*]. Also you must not think if people differ from you and express their difference of opinion freely that that arises from personal hostility. In all things keep *samatā* and, if there are differences, try to see the other's point of view as well as yours.

*

As for the inconveniences, you should take them as a training in samata. To be able to bear inconveniences is one of the most elementary necessities if one wants to enter into the true spirit of Yoga.

*

The proper thing is to see all with an unmoved calm, both the “good” and “bad”, but as a movement of Nature on the surface. But to do this truly without error or egoism or wrong reactions needs a consciousness and knowledge that is not personal and limited.

*

If you want to have knowledge or see all as brothers or have peace, you must think less of yourself, your desires, feelings, people's treatment of you, and think more of the Divine — living for the Divine, not for yourself.

Indifference to What Others Think or Say

It is not what others think of you that matters, but what you are yourself.

*

When you are doing sadhana, you have not to care what others want or think or say, but only for what is right and what the Divine wants of you.

*

It is no use listening to what people say or to suggestions. Both are things by which one must learn not to be affected. A certain samata in these matters is needed in order to get the true poise. The one thing that matters is realisation of the Divine.

*

So long as you go on listening to what people say or listening to your own wrong imaginations or insisting on your desires, how do you hope to get peace? Nobody ever got peace in that way.

*

To become entirely indifferent to the good and bad opinion of others, especially those who are or were near, and stand on the Truth alone is very difficult; some reaction of the old nature can easily come across; but if one remains calm and firm within, these surface reactions quickly disappear and their rejection helps the remnants of the old nature to disappear.

*

If you look closely, you will see that all these things — the rudeness of one, the anger of another — are exceedingly slight things which should be received with indifference. Do not allow them to trouble you so much. The one thing of supreme importance is your sadhana and your spiritual growth. Let nothing touch or disturb that.

*

It is not good to allow yourself to be upset so much by what others say or do — whether it be X or anybody else. There is a quietude and happiness which you can find by living in yourself in contact with the Divine which you will never get from outside.

*

I cannot quite say how far X is responsible — it is certainly always possible to get a lowering of consciousness from someone who is always gossiping or talking of her fears and difficulties. As for being kind, there is nothing harmful in kindness itself, but there is no reason why you should allow another to invade you with things you don't want to feel or hear. There is a measure in all things — and besides one should keep oneself inwardly free and not admit that the vital movements of others should be a cause of difficulties — one has enough to do combating one's own.

*

Such reproaches (the stone etc.) are quite usual from those who do not understand against the sadhak when he remains firm in his path against the ordinary human vital demands upon him. But that should not perturb you. It is better to be a stone on the road to the Divine than soft and weak clay in the muddy paths of the ordinary vital human nature.

Overcoming Dependence

What you say about your dependence on others is true, because this dependence is accompanied by a demand on those others, the desire that they should always be occupied with you alone, think, feel and act according to your own ideas, feelings and desires. This is not possible and so this dependence brings disappointment and, if the feelings are excessive, despair.

But for this demand the remedy for this dependence, which is the character of many especially among women, would be to depend not on others but on the Divine. But here too the demand comes and spoils the dependence. A dependence without demand is what is needed, then the Divine Power comes in and at every moment guides, helps and sustains the being. When the sadhana was going on in you, you had periods when you had this right attitude and could get glimpses of the true happiness and dedication. But the physical mind became active and with it there began the period of obscuration and trouble. The physical

mind must become quiet and the heart open and the psychic become again active. It is for this you should aspire always and in time it will come.

It was not the Mother's intention in putting you with X that you should depend on him alone, but that with his help you should come to depend on the Mother. Owing to your weakness and his, it turned out otherwise.

*

If you wish to be free from people's expectations and the sense of obligation, it is indeed best not to take from anybody; for the sense of claim will otherwise be there. Not that it will be entirely absent even if you take nothing, but you will not be bound any longer.

Overcoming Attachment

All attachment is a hindrance to sadhana. Goodwill you should have for all, psychic kindness for all, but no vital attachment.

*

Yes, certainly, there should be no attachment [*to another person*]. The emotional feeling is safe only when it is governed by the psychic—for the psychic love is essentially a permanent soul-sympathy which is not attached but self-existent and self-content pouring itself out but asking for nothing.

The safest course in sadhana is to turn all to the Divine and to leave any other relation till all relations can be founded in the Divine; but that is not easy for everybody—only a few seem able to do it.

*

Yes, that is the bother of these attachments—the reason why the Yogis were so down on them—the Vedantists especially with their insistence on the breaking of the heart-knots. They must have known from their own difficulties in the matter.

*

If you expect a return for your kindness, you are bound to be disappointed. It is only those who give love or kindness for its own sake without expecting a return who escape from this experience. A relation also can be established on a sure basis only when it is free from attachment or when it is predominantly psychic on both sides.

*

When one deals with people there can be always a projection of consciousness to them or a reception of them into the consciousness, but that does not amount to an attachment — something more is needed, a grip of the vital on the person or a grip of the person on one's vital etc.

Helping Others

To concentrate most on one's own spiritual growth and experience is the first necessity of the sadhak — to be too eager to help others draws away from the inner work. There is also likely to be an overzeal and haste which clouds the discrimination and makes what help is given less effective than it should be. To grow in the spirit is the greatest help one can give to others, for then something flows out naturally to those around that helps them.

*

It [*trying to help someone through words*] is a relative and partial help, of course, but it is sometimes useful. A radical help can only come from within through the action of the Divine Force and the assent of the being. It must be said of course that it is not everyone that thinks he is helping who is really doing it; also if the help is accompanied with the exercising of an “influence”, that influence may be of a mixed character and harm as well as help if the instrument is not pure.

*

Yes, it is always so with human conduct — men want to help

each other with a motive behind or a feeling which proceeds from the ego.

*

The idea of helping others is a subtle form of the ego. It is only the Divine Force that can help. One can be its instrument, but you should first learn to be a fit and egoless instrument.

*

The idea of helping others is a delusion of the ego. It is only when the Mother commissions and gives the force that one can help and even then only within limits.

*

The attempt to help people and clear things for others was an ego impulse. It magnified the ego and brought boasting, imagination, vital flattery. To clear yourself was the first necessity—afterwards to work not by one's own initiative, but in obedience to the will of the Mother, without ego.

*

As for helping [*others*], you can only be sure of that if you yourself have an assured basis, with the psychic being always prominent, full of faith and joy and strength,—then others can gather strength and faith and joy from such a one by speech or contact. But to arrive at that you must, as I have been telling you, open yourself to the Light and Force that come from myself and the Mother and *to no other influence*.

*

This “helping others” is a perilous business—it brings the “guru” ego or else you very uncertainly rid others of their difficulties and very certainly get them yourself. “Why do you have all these disciples?” said a sage to some Maratha saint (I have forgotten the names); “to have disciples means to add all their difficulties to your own.” “Helping others” has the same disadvantage.

*

Of course it is the disadvantage of helping others that one comes into contact with their consciousness and their difficulties and also gets more externalised.

*

In “helping” one often gets part of the other’s inconvenience and many Yogis refuse to take disciples because they will have to assume others’ burdens as well as their own. There are also other dangers — growth of ego etc.

*

The bearing of others’ difficulties would, I fear, be a heavy burden for anybody and I doubt the efficacy of the method. What one can do much more usefully is, if one has strength to give out of one’s strength to the other, if one has peace to shed the peace on the other etc. This one can do without losing one’s strength or peace — if it is done in the right way.

*

There are two possible attitudes in the matter [*of helping others*] and each has something to be said for it. There is much to be said for X’s attitude [*of reserve*] — first, because until one’s own siddhi is complete, the help one gives is always a little doubtful and imperfect and, secondly, there is the danger so often emphasised by experienced Yogis of taking on oneself the difficulties of those one helps. But all the same to wait for perfection is not always possible.

*

These things [*mixing with outsiders etc.*] (most of them, to take a walk or write a letter home are different) can be described as not safe. If one has the strong spiritual condition secure in its basis one can do them without invasion from outside or a stumble; if one has the divine protection and can remain in it wherever he goes because the psychic being is in front and the vital obedient, then also one will not suffer. But otherwise in so acting one is opened to the influences that hang around

these outside people, one enters by sympathy with them into the movement of other forces than those of the spiritual life—and then it is quite possible that there may be untoward results as with X and Y and others too, in the physical, or in the vital, wherever there is most weakness.

*

To give oneself to an outsider is to go out from the atmosphere of sadhana and give oneself to the outer world forces.

One can have a psychic feeling of love for someone, a universal love for all creatures, but one has to give oneself only to the Divine.

*

To want unwaveringly the welfare of another both in the head and the heart, is the best help one can give.

*

It [*a sense of harmony and delight and love*] is in you and when it is like that it spreads out in the atmosphere—but naturally only those can share who are open and sensitive to the influence. Still everyone who has peace or love in him becomes an added influence for its increase in the atmosphere.

Receiving Help from Others

All change must come from within with the felt or the secret support of the Divine Power; it is only by one's own inner opening to that that one can receive help, not by mental, vital or physical contact with others.

Concern for Others

Whatever or whomever you have handed over to the Divine, you should not be any longer attached or anxious about him or it but leave all to the Divine to do for the best.

*

If your husband is in a perilous period of his life and suffering from ill-health and you feel for him, the best thing for him is still that you should tranquillise yourself and call the Divine to his help to pass through. Even in the ordinary life disquietude and depression create an unhelpful atmosphere for one who is ill or in difficulties. Once you are a sadhak, then whether for yourself or to help others for whom you still feel, the true spiritual attitude of reliance on the Divine Will and call for the help from above is always the best and most effective course.

*

It is very good that the condition you speak of has settled itself—that is a great progress. As for the prayers, the fact of praying and the attitude it brings, especially unselfish prayer for others, itself opens you to the higher Power, even if there is no corresponding result in the person prayed for. Nothing can be positively said about that, for the result must necessarily depend on the persons, whether they are open or receptive or something in them can respond to any Force the prayer brings down.

Sympathy for Others

By the sympathy you get into contact and receive what is in the other—or also you may give or let go or have drawn from you part of your force which goes to the other. It is the vital sympathy which has this effect; a calm spiritual or psychic goodwill does not bring these reactions.

*

Yes, it is dangerous [*to sympathise with someone who has gone wrong*], because it puts one in touch with the adverse Force that upset him and that Force at once tries to touch you and make its suggestions and contaminate by a sort of contagion or infection.

Mothering Others

You need not trouble yourself much about X's ideas or attach

importance to them. The only truth about it is that a vital mixture does very easily get into the movements even of the sadhana, if one is not careful. The one safeguard against that is to turn all towards the Divine and draw all from the Divine, getting rid of attachment, ego and desire. In one's relations with other sadhaks there should be neither stiffness and hardness nor attachment and sentimental leanings.

As for the motherly feeling—it has to be transformed like everything else. The danger of all these relations when they are untransformed is that they may minister in a subtle way to the ego. To avoid that, one has to make oneself an instrument merely, but without even the ego of the instrument, and to be conscious of the source, not insisting on the action or any relation, but simply allowing it to be useful whenever one can clearly feel that it is intended. Also one must be careful that no force comes through one except the right forces, those which are in harmony with the higher consciousness and help. If one does always in that spirit and with that care, then even if mistakes are made, it does not matter—the growing consciousness will set them right and progress towards a more perfect working.

*

The real failing of the motherlike ambition—at least as it manifests in many—is that it conceals an ego movement, the desire to play a big part, to have people depending on one, to have the motherly reputation etc. etc. Most human altruism has really this ego basis. If one gets rid of that, then the will to help can take its true place as a movement of pure sympathy and psychic feeling.

Working with Others

Work is always best done in silence except so far as it is necessary to speak for the work itself. Conversation is best kept for leisure hours. So nobody should object to your silence during work.

For the rest what you should do is to keep your right attitude towards the others and not allow yourself to be upset, irritated

or displeased by anything they may say or do—in other words keep the *samatā* and universal goodwill proper to a sadhak of Yoga. If you do that and still others get upset or displeased, you must not mind as you will not be responsible for their wrong reaction.

*

I have read your letter and I understand now what it is that you find trying—but they do not seem to us such serious things as to be rightly felt as a cause of disturbance. They are the kind of inconveniences that one always has when people live and work together. It arises from a misunderstanding between two minds or two wills, each pulling his own way and feeling hurt or vexed if the other does not follow. This can only be cured by a change of consciousness—for when one goes into a deeper consciousness, first, one sees the cause of these things and is not troubled; one acquires an understanding, patience and tolerance that makes one free from vexation and other reactions. If both or all grow in consciousness, then there arises a mutual understanding of each other's view-points which makes it easier to bring in harmony and smooth working. It is this that should be sought by the change within—to create the same harmony from outside by exterior means is not so easy, as the human mind is stiff in its perceptions and the human vital insistent on its own way of action. Let this be your main will—to grow yourself within and let the clearer and deeper consciousness come and have a good will for the same change to come in others so that clarity and harmony may come in the place of friction and misunderstanding.

Dispersion through Contact with Others

Dispersion and sadhana are two things that cannot go together. In sadhana one has to have a control over the mind and all its actions; in dispersion one is on the contrary controlled and run away with by the mind and unable to keep it to its subject. If the mind is to be always dispersed, then you can't concentrate

on reading either or any other occupation, you will be fit for nothing except perhaps talking, mixing, flirting with women and similar occupations.

*

You are mistaken in thinking that the sadhana of X, Y and Z does not suffer by the dispersion of their minds in all directions. They would have been far farther on the path if they did a concentrated Yoga—even Y who has an enormous receptivity and is eager for progress might have gone thrice as far as he has done. Moreover, your nature is intense in all it does and it was therefore quite its natural path to take the straight way. Naturally, when once the higher consciousness is settled and both the vital and physical sufficiently ready for the sadhana to go on of itself, strict tapasya will no longer be necessary. But till then we consider it very useful and helpful and in many cases indispensable. But we do not insist on it when the nature is not willing. I see too that those who get into the direct line (there are not as yet very many), get of themselves the tendency to give up these mind-dispersing interests and occupations and throw themselves fully into the sadhana.

*

Yes, certainly, dispersion is an inner fact. But certain outer things help the dispersion of the consciousness and if anybody like X says that he is not dispersed when he is wandering about with a companion like Y, I would say he is either not telling the truth or he is deceiving himself. If one is always in the inner consciousness, then one can be not dispersed even when doing outward things—or if one is conscious of the Divine at all times and in all one does, then also can one read newspapers or do much correspondence without dispersion. But even then though there is not dispersion, yet there is less intensity of consciousness when reading a newspaper or writing a letter than when one is not putting part of oneself into quite external things. It is only when the consciousness is quite *siddha* that there is not even this difference. That does not mean one should not do external

things at all, for then one gets no training in joining the two consciousnesses. But one must recognise that certain things do disperse the consciousness or lower it or externalise it more than others. Especially one should not deceive or pretend to oneself that one is not dispersed by them when one is. As for the people who want to draw others to the Yoga, I should say that if they draw themselves nearer to the inner goal that would be a much more fruitful activity. And in the end it would "draw" much more people and in a better way than the writing of many letters.

*

To be too sensitive and upset by any contact is excessive; but to have too many contacts and be always dispersing oneself prevents the sadhana from growing and solidifying in the inner being, since one is always being pulled out into the ordinary outer consciousness.

Mixing with Others

It is true that mixing with others too closely tends to lower the condition, if they are not themselves in the right attitude and live very much in the vital. In all contacts what you have to do is to remain within, keep a detached attitude and not allow yourself to be troubled by the difficulties that arise in work or the movements of people, but keep yourself the true movement. Do not be caught by the desire to "help" others — do and speak yourself the right thing from the inner poise and leave the help to come to them from the Divine. Nobody can really help — only the Divine Grace.

*

It might not be prudent to mix freely and too often. Enough to relieve any tension of the sadhana, but not so much as to dissipate its intensity.

*

Aloofness is very necessary at certain stages of the sadhana, —

but it cannot be maintained all through. One must be able to mix with others and act on them.

*

It is right to mix a little with the others — it helps to keep the balance.

*

You are quite right. Not to mix with others deprives of the test which contact with them imposes on the consciousness and the chance to progress in these respects. Mixing is unprofitable from the spiritual point of view when it is only to indulge the vital, chat, interchange vital movements etc.; but abstention from all mixing and contact is also not desirable. It is only when the consciousness truly needs a full retirement that such retirement can be made and even then it may be full, but not absolute. For in the absolute retirement one lives a purely subjective life and the opportunity for extending the spiritual progress to the outer life and testing it thoroughly is not there.

It is good that you got quickly the right attitude to what had happened; that indicates a good progress in the consciousness.

*

To be able to remain back [*while conversing with others*], entering only superficially without being involved is really the first step towards the secret of mixing with others without lowering the inner consciousness.

Vital Expansiveness

That [*mixing with people, laughing and joking with them*] is a kind of vital expansiveness, it is not vital strength — this expansiveness is also expensive. For when there is this mixing, the vitally strong get strength from it but the vitally weak expend what strength they have and become weaker.

*

I think no rule can be laid down applicable to all. There are some who have the expansive tendency of the vital, others who have the concentrative. The latter are absorbed in their own intensity of endeavour and certainly they gather from that a great force for progress and are saved the expense and loss of energy which frequently comes to the more communicative and also make themselves less open to reactions from others (though this cannot be altogether avoided). The others need to communicate what is in them and cannot wait for the full fullness before they use what they have. Even they may need to give out as well as to take in in order to progress. The only thing is that they must balance the two tendencies, concentrating to receive from above as much or more than they open sideways to distribute.

*

X has a very strong and expansive vital, so it is quite natural that if he likes anybody he can produce this kind of effect on him by meeting. But I do not know that he is conscious of what he gives or receives; it is more likely a spontaneous action. He is not accustomed to give only though, for a strong expansive vital as opposed to a strong self-contained one needs to receive as well as to give.

*

As for living a free outer life it cannot be said that that is good for everybody at every stage any more than living a retired life is good for everybody or at every stage. The disadvantage of a free jolly outward social life without restrictions is that one becomes entirely or mostly externalised and that all sorts of vital interchanges are part of it which can hamper the inner growth or the total self-consecration to the Divine. The disadvantage of too complete a retirement is that it makes the person one-sided and shut up in himself, subjective, without the stabilising contact with earth and consequently with the danger of morbidity and self-delusion. A middle path with the rule of living more and more within, standing back from outward things but not throwing them aside, looking at them with a new consciousness,

a new view and acting on them from this inner consciousness is the best way. But there is need for some at some stages to minimise outward contacts without abolishing them during part of the process of this shifting of the consciousness. No absolute rule can be laid down in this matter.

Vital Interchange

Whenever one mixes with others, things are passing from one to the other. If I talk with a number of people, I bring away with me in my atmosphere many forces that were around them; they may affect me or not, but they remain for a time at least. If in that time I speak with another man, he may receive them from me. It is like a man carrying germs with him from a person he has visited; he may not fall ill himself (or he may), but, even if he does not, he can pass them on to another man he visits afterwards—who falls ill. It is the same thing here in the supraphysical parts.

*

There is always an interchange of vital forces going on between people. If you sit near one who is weak and depressed and needs vital force, you may have your forces pulled from you by his or her need and yourself feel depressed or weak or empty.

*

Small energies of that kind [*vital influences*] are always coming out from people and, if there is a connection, they can flow into another person sitting near. One has to live in one's own consciousness and reject all such interchanges, accepting only what comes from the Mother.

*

If someone throws something on you, you should throw it away and not keep it. It is like mud thrown on the body—immediately one washes it off.

*

You have to find that out [*which people are bad influences*] for yourself. There are people you mix with who have doubts, suggestions, depressions, jealousies, dissatisfactions with the Mother's action. They can easily throw that on you without intending it. These influences are all around in the atmosphere. It is not sufficient to avoid this or that person. You have to learn to be on your guard and self-contained.

*

When one is with another for some time, talking etc., there is always some vital interchange unless one rejects what comes from the other, instinctively or deliberately. If one is impressionable, there may be a strong influence or impression from the other. Then if one goes to another person, it is possible to pass it on to that other; that is a thing which is constantly happening. But these things happen automatically — without the knowledge of the transmitter. When one is conscious, one can prevent it happening.

*

No, people are not conscious of these things, only a few are.¹ The vital exchange is there, but they are not aware of it — because they live in the external mind (physical) and these things go on behind. Even if they feel more energetic after an interchange or depressed or tired, they would not attribute it to the talk or contact, because the interchange is unconscious, their external mind in which they live not being aware of it.

*

I don't suppose people are at all aware of this occult commerce [*of vital energies*]. Some like Daudet may observe the expenditure or throwing out of forces, but not the pulling or the effect on others. The idea of mental interchange is familiar though only of the superficial kind, not the silent action of mind on

¹ *The correspondent wrote that while talking with others he was often conscious of an exchange of vital energies. Sometimes he felt that energy was emptying out of him, sometimes that it was entering in. — Ed.*

mind which is always going on, but the vital impacts are known only to a few occultists. If one becomes very conscious one can become aware of the forces acting in and from all around, e.g. forces of joy or depression or anger.

*

The utility [of knowing the effects of a vital interchange with someone] depends upon the development of an inner power based upon peace which will act upon these things and prevent them. So long as one is unconscious, one undergoes the action in the Ignorance and there is no possibility of going out of the circle because there is no knowledge. The consciousness comes with a growing inner development in the being which makes the peace, the liberation a necessity—with that one opens to a higher Force of a new consciousness which puts an end to the vital interchange and creates a new poise for the vital as well as the mental life. If one stops with the increased sensitivity and does not go farther, then of course there is no proper use of it. There are some people like X and Y who got so absorbed in the “occult” knowledge that they stopped there going round and round in it and making all sorts of blunders because the spiritual light was not there. One has not to stop there, but go on and beyond to the spiritual consciousness and the greater light, strength and poise it brings.

*

The consciousness of these things [*such as the forces one feels coming from others*] is intended for knowledge—a psycho-occult knowledge, necessary for the fullness of consciousness and experience. It is not intended that what is felt should be allowed to become an influence, whether a good one or a bad one.

*

There must necessarily be a difference between the vital energy of a cultured and well-educated man and of one who is rough and ignorant. If nothing else, a greater refinement and subtlety in the vital substance and therefore in the energy is there. Drinking

if excessive affects the substance and quality of the energy — but probably a moderate drinking and smoking would have a less perceptible effect. I don't think people in ordinary life notice clearly, but they have often a general impression which they cannot explain or particularise.

*

It is mainly an inner guard that you must keep. At the same time, if you feel unease in crowds it is better to avoid them — except in case of music if you feel secure there. A crowd of people engaged in purely social interchange is necessarily on a lower level of consciousness in which undesirable forces may move, if there is anyone there open to them, and one who is in a stage of consciousness opening to higher things but not yet fixed in steady and self-supporting calm is safer away from it.

In sadhana one is supposed to keep outward forces at a distance or at least not to allow them to invade one. If one faces a difficulty in the right spirit and overcomes it, naturally one progresses, but that is a different thing from letting alien forces or influences enter into the conscious being. No one need invite that, — they are only too ready to do it without being invited. One can look at and become conscious of all forces, even the worst, darkest and most hostile, provided one remains on guard and refuses all credence or support to their suggestions and rejects all claim of theirs to a place in the consciousness and nature. But all cannot do that in the earlier stages.

*

It is not necessary to be so careful as all that.² Ordinary vital interchanges are of a slight character. Nobody can take away another's vital, for the very good reason that if that happened, the person from whom it was taken would die. It is possible of course for one person to drain another's vital forces so as to leave him limp or weak or dry, but it is only the vampire kind

² *The correspondent had been warned about someone who could "take away one's vital when he talks". If that is possible, he said, then one must be very careful in one's exchange with others. — Ed.*

that do that. It is possible also for one to give out too much of one's vital forces so as to weaken oneself or exhaust of energy, a thing which should not be done,— it is only those who know how to draw or can draw freely from the universal vital Force and replenish their life energies that can give out freely. All of course draw to some extent, otherwise they would not remain alive, for expenditure of vital energy is always going on and one has to replace it; but for most the capacity for drawing is limited and the capacity for giving without exhaustion is also limited.

But the ordinary movements of interchange are harmless provided they are kept within moderate limits. What creates a difficulty in the sadhana is that one may easily draw in undesirable influences or pass them on to others. It is the reason why at certain stages a limitation of talk, intercourse etc. is often advisable. But the true remedy is to become inwardly conscious, to know and be able to repel any undesirable incursion or influence, to be able when speaking, mixing etc. to keep a defence round one and allow to pass in only what one can accept and nothing else. Also to measure what one can give out safely and what one cannot. When one has the consciousness and the practice, this working becomes almost automatic.

*

As for what you say about the stimulus of vital interchange, it is true of the vital life. Men are constantly spending their vital energy and need to renew it; one way to do it is by pulling from others in a vital interchange. This however is not necessary if one knows how to draw from the universal Nature or from the Divine, i.e. from above. Moreover when the psychic is active—there is always more lost than gained by the vital interchange.

*

I suppose it depends upon the person [*whether contact with him is harmful*] and upon your reactions to him. If he gives sex vibrations or is an appropriator of vital energy, then opening to him may not be good. But in the ordinary superficial interchange

one need not lose anything or what is lost is so little and so automatically repaired that it does not matter.

*

It is not that you have to speak to no one—that is not possible. But you must keep your body free and pure and reject all vital interchanges with men—do not speak too much or freely; do not allow yourself too much freedom or laughter, be simple and quiet and straight in all your actions and behaviour. Touch no sadhak and let none touch you. Above all, turn to the Divine only and form no relations or attachments with others.

*

It [*intimate vital contact with another person*] gives a temporary pleasure, but that does not last and it is certainly not profitable. After a time the vital interchange can no longer satisfy and the vital itself gets tired of it and turns away elsewhere. Of course for the spiritual aim it is a great interference.

*

A human vital interchange cannot be a true support for the sadhana and is, on the contrary, sure to impair and distort it, leading to self-deception in the consciousness and a wrong turn of the emotional being and vital nature.

Talking, Letter-Writing and Vital Interchange

It is quite possible for one person to get depressed by talking with another. Talking means a vital interchange, so that can always happen. Whether they have observed rightly in a particular case is another matter.

*

The disturbance in talking to people comes of course because they throw their own vibrations upon you and revive your old movements. Once the true consciousness is well fixed in your

physical being, that effect need no longer happen.

*

To discuss with others, especially when they are in a bad state, is always a mistake. It is very easy for the disturbance in them to fall upon you while you speak even without your noticing it; it is afterwards that you feel it. That is why I told you to ignore X and what he says when he is in a bad state.

*

Every letter means an interchange with the person who writes it—for something is there behind the words, something of his person or of the forces he has put out or had around him while writing. Our thoughts and feelings are also forces and can have effects upon others. One has to grow conscious of the movement of these forces and then one can control one's own mental and vital formations and cease to be affected by those of others.

Talking or Thinking about Others

Talking about somebody may very well have an effect on him; it often does, for it can be an effective formulation of a thought or feeling which, so embodied, will reach him. But I don't suppose mere mechanical thoughts or ill-formed imaginations would do that—at any rate it must be rare and need exceptional conditions or a play of forces in which a trifl counts.

*

Yes, one's bad thoughts and good thoughts can have a bad or a good effect on others, though they have not always because they are not strong enough—but still that is the tendency. It is therefore always said by those who have this knowledge that we should abstain from bad thoughts of others for this reason. It is true that both kinds of thought come equally to the mind in its ordinary state; but if the mind and mental will are well developed, one can establish a control over one's thoughts as well as over one's acts and prevent the bad ones from having

their play. But this mental control is not enough for the sadhak. He must attain to a quiet mind and in the silence of the mind receive only the Divine thought-forces or other divine Forces and be their field and instrument.

To silence the mind it is not enough to throw back each thought as it comes, that can only be a subordinate movement. One must get back from all thought and be separate from it, a silent consciousness observing the thoughts if they come, but not oneself thinking or identified with the thoughts. Thoughts must be felt as outside things altogether. It is then easier to reject thoughts or let them pass without their disturbing the quietude of the mind.

Not to be disturbed by either joy or grief, pleasure or displeasure by what people say or do or by any outward things is called in Yoga a state of *samatā*, equality to all things. It is of immense importance in sadhana to be able to reach this state. It helps the mental quietude and silence as well as the vital to come. It means indeed that the vital itself and the vital mind are already falling silent and becoming quiet. The thinking mind is sure to follow.

The Drawing of Vital Forces by Others

When people mix together there is generally some interchange of vital forces which is quite involuntary. X himself suffers from physical weakness and he complains of his vital forces being drawn out of him without knowing why it happens. Vampirising is a special phenomenon — a person who lives upon the vital of others and flourishes vitally at their expense.

*

The tired feeling which the people felt after seeing this X is a sign of vampirism, but very often there is no such feeling but there is an after-effect on the whole. The nerves get gradually wrong — what is called the nervous envelope becomes weak or in one way or another the vitality becomes weak or gets into an abnormal condition — excitable and unstable. There are many

such ways in which the effect shows itself. Sex-vampirism is a different matter — in sex interchange the normal thing is to give and take, but the sex-vampire eats up the other's vital and gives nothing or very little.

*

There is always a drawing of vital forces from one to another in all human social mixture; it takes place automatically. Love-making is one of the most powerful ways of each drawing up the other's vital force,—or of one drawing the other's, which also often happens in a one-sided way to the great detriment of the "other". In the passage come many things good and bad, elation, feelings of strength, fullness, support or weakness and depletion, infiltration of good and bad qualities, interchange of psychological moods, states and movements, ideas helpful and harmful, depression, exhaustion — the whole gamut. In the ordinary consciousness one is not aware of these things; the effects come into the surface being, but the cause and process remain unknown and unnoticed because the interchange is subtle and covert, it takes place through what is called the subconscious, but is rather a behind-consciousness covered by the surface waking mind. When one gets into a certain Yogic consciousness, one becomes very much aware of this covert movement, very sensitive to all this interchange and action and reaction; but one has this advantage that one can consciously build a wall against them, reject, refuse, accept what helps, throw out or throw back what injures or hinders. Illnesses can also pass in this way from one to another, even those which are not medically regarded as contagious or infectious; one can even by will draw another's illness into oneself as did Antigonus of Macedon accepting death in this way in order to save his son Demetrius. This fact of vital interchange, which seems strange and unfamiliar to you, becomes quite intelligible if one realises that ideas, feelings etc. are not abstract things but in their way quite concrete, not confining their movements to the individual's mind or body but moving out very much like the "waves" of science and communicating themselves to anyone who can serve as a receiver. Just as people

are not conscious of the material waves, so it is and still more with these mental or vital waves; but if the subtle mind and senses become active on the surface—and that is what takes place in Yoga—then the consciousness becomes aware in its reception of them and records accurately and automatically their vibrations.

*

It is quite possible that X pulls [*vital energy*] unconsciously, as he is vitally weak and people who are vitally weak do unconsciously and automatically pull on others.

Limiting Contacts with Others

It is certainly a great help to be able to limit one's contacts provided it is not carried too far. I must note however that even with limited contacts undesirable waves can get in—it is a measure of precaution but does not make you absolutely safe. On the other hand complete withdrawal carries one to another extreme and has its own dangers. The complete safety from "stuff" distracting, disturbing, externalising etc., can only come from a growth of the consciousness within. In the interim absorption and limitation of contacts like that can be a helpful measure if used in a judicious way.

*

One has to go inside into the inner being and one can minimise contacts, *if necessary*, not as an absolute rule—provided there is a real living in the inner being and sufficient contact with outside things not to lose one's hold of practical realities. But if there is an isolation which brings depression, inertia, unhappiness, gloom or else morbidity of any kind, then it is evident that the retirement is not wholesome.

*

The avoiding of contacts does not by itself bring the fundamental immunity, it is only a change of that part of the consciousness

that can do it. But it may be advisable to minimise the contacts that strongly bring the trouble so long as the change is not there. It is not certain that a long retirement brings about the change of the subconscious,— the long retirement of the Sannyasin is part preparation of a retirement from life altogether — it is different in our Yoga which wants to change, but not reject life.

*

It is true that one has to try to keep the inner condition under all circumstances, even the most adverse; but that does not mean that one has to accept, unnecessarily, unfavourable conditions when there is no good reason for their being allowed to go on. Especially, the nervous system and the physical cannot bear an excessive strain as well as the mind and higher vital; your fatigue came from the strain of living in one consciousness and at the same time exposing yourself too much to prolonged contacts from the ordinary consciousness. A certain amount of self-defence is necessary — so that the consciousness may not be pulled down or out constantly into the ordinary atmosphere or the physical strained by being forced into activities that have become foreign to you. Those who practise Yoga often seek refuge in solitude from these difficulties; that is unnecessary here, but all the same you need not submit to being put under this kind of useless strain always.

Inner Detachment Preferable to Outer Withdrawal

Inner withdrawal is always much better than physical withdrawal.

*

I say that all that [*no vital relations with anyone*] is magnificent, if you can do it. But can't you see that it is the inward change that is wanted — the inward plunge? These dramatic outward breaks lead only to new joinings. Neither you nor she can keep it up. If there comes a strong ingoing movement, then it is another matter. That of itself would make it possible to readjust the

relations or to withdraw if necessary. But splashings about on the surface — will it lead to anything? It does not look like it.

*

It is not a physical retirement that is needed, but an inner detachment from the mental formations and vital desires. To find the real self above and within and live in that, not in the mind's conceptions or the vital's reactions. These must be observed and looked at not as one's own but as movements of a surface ignorant nature.

Qualified Utility of Retirement for Sadhana

You can see whether such a retirement suits you or not. It is not the same for all. Most cannot stand retirement.

There is no harm in that kind of seclusion [*to find a deeper contact with the Mother*] and it can help provided you maintain the inner peace and a simple quietude turned towards the Mother.

*

We have no objection to your doing this [*withdrawing from social contacts*] for a week, as you propose; I understand that it is not a retirement, but a cessation of social visits. My objection to retirement is that so many have "gone morbid" by it or gone astray into zones of false vital experiences; secondly, that absolute retirement is not necessary for the spiritual life. It is different however for people like X who are to the manner born or at least perfectly trained. A "restriction of publicity" is quite another matter. Also to be capable of solitude and to have the Ananda of solitude can always be helpful to sadhana, and a power of inner solitude is natural to the Yogi.

We will give our help and hope you will succeed — at least, you will have established a precedent for withdrawing whenever you want in the future.

*

Retirement is not necessary for passing from one plane to another. It is needed only in rare cases and with certain temperaments for a time.

*

The impulse to retire comes from some push to concentrate within—but the cause of the push varies in different cases. There are certain cases in which there was a desire to isolate oneself from the Mother's influence (Pranam, meditation etc.) and follow one's own fancies, e.g. X, Y, also perhaps with a sense of superiority = “no need of these things for so great a Yogi as I”. In other cases there was a marked desire for isolation, but that was where the brain was already upset (Z) or a wrong influence at work (A). But others have simply desired concentration or wished not to spend themselves in externalisation (B, C in their periods of retirement). So all cannot come under one sentence.

*

How are you going to find the right external relations by withdrawing altogether from external relations? And how do you propose to be *thoroughly* transformed and unified by living only in the internal life, without any test of the transformation and unity by external contact and the ordeals of the external work and life? Thoroughness includes external work and relations and not a retired inner life only.

It is only by the vital ego giving up its demands and claims and the reactions these produce when not satisfied, that the transformation and unification can come, and there is no other way.

*

You must make up your mind what you want. There is no harm in drawing back from all vital and physical relations and wanting only the true relation—that is in fact what happens to everybody who wants the true relation—the only thing kept is the universal goodwill (not vital affection) to all. But if you swing about from one mood to another—then of course they

will not understand and have some ground to say that they are perplexed by your variations. This matter of touching and caressing is one on which you ought to take a firm and unvarying stand. If you don't want it, you should repel it always with the utmost firmness, otherwise there will necessarily be clash and disturbance. All depends upon your inner will and establishing a unity of will in yourself turned exclusively towards the Divine.

I think I have told you that an *entire* physical retirement is seldom healthy, although a comparative retirement is often helpful. But the main thing is the *inner* detachment and complete turning to the Divine.

Dangers of Complete Retirement

To live in the self is of course the proper object of withdrawal and to live in the self brings the higher experiences which must obviously be helpful and not harmful. What I wrote was only to explain what I meant by the danger of too complete retirement and why it turned out to be harmful to X, Y and others. There are some like Z who derived unmixed profit from it. It altogether depends on one's temperament and on one's attitude and aim and inner poise during the silence.

*

Retirement in the sense of all meditation without work is not suitable to this sadhana — it is one-sided and those who resort to it, unless they are very strong, often lose their balance.

*

To have no contact with people and shut oneself entirely is not healthy. But one can for a time diminish outward contacts so as to concentrate.

*

I doubt whether an entire retirement is very healthy except for certain people who have a contemplative nature coupled with a very sound and solid nervous system and firm balance of the

mind—but a restriction of intercourse so as to go more in oneself and limit or select the contacts often has a good effect.

*

Yes, it is better [*not to talk with others except when necessary*] if you want to do sadhana seriously—but if your vital cannot do without these things, it is no use forcing it. Entire retirement is not good—it makes people morbid and they plunge into a world of imaginations without any check from life and actuality. But to avoid useless talk and unhelpful social interchange is good, if the vital can be made to acquiesce in an applied and serious sadhana.

*

Not speaking or contacting when one is in the intensity of the peace is one thing—that can be done. Remaining isolated at other times as a rule of life does not seem to me necessary—it is safe only for those who can live entirely within without losing their hold on outer reality. If one has always a solid poise of peace one can do that or a clear mind balanced and discriminating along with constant experiences which it is able to put in the right place. But some get absorbed in inner experiences which they get lost in and get passionately attached to and this inner life becomes for them the sole reality without the outer to poise it and keep it under check and test—there lies a danger. Again if one remains isolated without the support of a settled inner poise and constant experience over which one has a discriminating control, then in periods of emptiness the vital can arise bringing struggles, difficulties, unrest, suggestions of all kinds, a troubled and turbid state—rather than spend the time in that, as some do, it is better to mix with others or do some work or otherwise externalise oneself in a healthy way.

*

People will certainly regard it [*maintaining absolute silence*] as unnatural and there will be a lot of hubbub for a time. As to the dangers, the one real danger in these retirements (apart from

the pride) is the becoming a prey of subjective influences and imaginations and losing the hold of reality which work and contact with others help to keep up. Of course one can lose that even while keeping contact as happened to X and others. But I suppose you have a sufficiently cool and critical head to avoid that danger.

*

And if some find that retirement is the best way of giving oneself to the Higher, to the Divine by avoiding as much as possible occasions for the bubbling up of the lower, why not? The aim they have come for is that and why blame or look with distrust and suspicion on the means they find best or daub it with disparaging adjectives to discredit it — grim, inhuman and the rest? It is your vital that shrinks from it and your vital mind that supplies these epithets which express only your shrinking and not what the retirement really is. For it is the vital or the social part of it that shrinks from solitude; the thinking mind does not but rather courts it. The poet seeks solitude with himself or with Nature to listen to his inspiration; the thinker plunges into solitude to meditate on things and commune with a deeper knowledge; the scientist shuts himself up in his laboratory to pore by experiment into the secrets of Nature; these retirements are not grim and inhuman. Neither is the retirement of the sadhak into the exclusive concentration of which he feels the need; it is a means to an end, to the end on which his whole heart is set. As for the Yогin or bhakta who has already begun to have the fundamental experience, he is not in a grim and inhuman solitude. The Divine and all the world are there in the being of the one, the supreme Beloved or his Ananda is there in the heart of the other.

I say this as against your depreciation of retirement founded on ignorance of what it really is; but I do not, as I have often said, recommend a total seclusion, for I hold that to be a dangerous expedient which may lead to morbidity and much error. Nor do I impose retirement on anyone as a method or approve of it unless the person himself seeks it, feels its necessity, has the joy of it and the personal proof that it helps to the spiritual

experience. It is not to be imposed on anyone as a principle, for that is the mental way of doing things, the way of the ordinary mind — it is as a need that it has to be accepted, when it is felt as a need, not as a general law or rule.

Relations in Ordinary Life

The best way to prepare oneself for the spiritual life when one has to live in the ordinary occupations and surroundings is to cultivate an entire equality and detachment and the *samatā* of the Gita with the faith that the Divine is there and the Divine Will at work in all things even though at present under the conditions of a world of Ignorance. Beyond this are the Light and Ananda towards which life is working, but the best way for their advent and foundation in the individual being and nature is to grow in this spiritual equality. That would also solve your difficulty about things unpleasant and disagreeable. All unpleasantness should be faced with this spirit of *samatā*.

*

When one is living in the world, one cannot do as in an Asram — one has to mix with others and keep up outwardly at least ordinary relations with others. The important thing is to keep the inner consciousness open to the Divine and grow in it. As one does that, more or less rapidly according to the inner intensity of the sadhana, the attitude towards others will change. All will be seen more and more in the Divine and the feeling, action, etc. will more and more be determined, not by the old external reactions, but by the growing consciousness within you.

*

The difficulty which you experience from relatives and others is always one that intervenes as an obstacle when one has to practise the sadhana in ordinary or unfavourable surroundings. The only way to escape from it is to be able to live in oneself in one's inner being — which becomes possible when the responsiveness and luminosity of which you speak in your letter increase and

become normal, for then you are constantly aware of your inner being and even live in it—the outer becomes an instrument, a means of communication and action in the outer world. It is then possible to make the relations with people outside free from tie or necessary reaction—one can determine from within one's own reaction or absence of reaction; there is a fundamental liberation from the external nexuses,—of course, if one wills it to be so.

*

The life of *samsāra* is in its nature a field of unrest—to go through it in the right way one has to offer one's life and actions to the Divine and pray for the peace of the Divine within. When the mind becomes quiet, one can feel the Divine Mother supporting the life and put everything into her hands.

*

In her condition the one thing by which she can enter into the sadhana is to remember the Divine always, taking her difficulties as ordeals to be passed through, to pray constantly and seek the Divine help and protection and ask for the opening of her heart and consciousness to the supporting Divine Presence.

Chapter Three

Problems in Human Relations

Hatred and Dislike

That is quite right.¹ Only those who sympathise can help—surely also one should be able to see the faults of others without hatred. Hatred injures both parties, it helps none.

*

It is this feeling of dislike that must have been the ground for the attack to come in. All feelings of dislike for other sadhaks should be absolutely rejected. Each has his own nature, his own difficulties and has to struggle out of them with the Divine Help. Defects and limitations in them should not be made a ground for dislike.

*

These things [*reasons for disliking someone*] are not sufficient to justify dislike. These dislikes come from some vital feeling and these reasons put forward by the mind are excuses, not the real cause. This collaboration between the mind and the vital, the vital throwing up the wrong movement, the mind justifying it, is one of the chief difficulties in the way of getting rid of the vital deviations.

*

All antagonism to other sadhaks or dislike of them should go. There should be a calm goodwill and charity to all, but no inner mixing or interchange. Liking and disliking always means interchange of influences.

*

¹ *The correspondent said that he preferred to encourage a fellow sadhak for his good points rather than to hate him for his defects.—Ed.*

You can disapprove [of *what people say*], but there should be no feeling of dislike or disgust for the people.

*

The disgust should be for what is said, but not against those who say it.

*

Yes. One should not do to others what one cannot bear from others.

*

The position you took finally about what happened today is the right one — to make the effort for one's own perfection and not to be disturbed by any mistake in others but reply by a silent will for their perfection also is always the right attitude.

Quarrels and Clashes

Quarrels and clashes are a proof of absence of the Yogic poise and those who seriously want to do Yoga must learn to grow out of these things. It is easy enough not to clash when there is no cause for strife or dispute or quarrel; it is when there is cause and the other side is impossible and unreasonable that one gets the opportunity of rising above one's vital nature.

*

Well, I have said already that quarrels, cuttings are not a part of sadhana; the clashes and friction that you speak of are, just as in the outside world, rubbings of the vital ego. Antagonisms, antipathies, dislikes, quarrellings can no more be proclaimed as part of sadhana than sex impulses or acts can be part of sadhana. Harmony, goodwill, forbearance, equanimity are necessary ideals in the relation of sadhak with sadhak. One is not bound to mix, but if one keeps to oneself, it should be for reasons of sadhana, not out of other motives, — moreover it should be without any sense of superiority or contempt for others. The

cases of friction you speak of seem to me to arise from ordinary motives of discord and they are certainly not the results of any spiritual Force working to heal the dangers of social or vital attraction by the blessings (!) of personal discord. If somebody finds that association with another for any reason raises undesirable vital feelings in him or her, he or she can certainly withdraw from that association as a matter of prudence until he or she gets over the weakness. But ostentation of avoidance, public cuttings etc. are not included in the necessity and betray feelings that equally ought to be overcome. There is a great confusion of thought about these things — for the vital gets in the way and disturbs the right view of things. It is only what is done sincerely with a sound spiritual motive that is proper to Yoga. The rest cannot be claimed as the working of a spiritual force mysteriously advancing its ends by ways contrary to its own nature.

*

Yes — self-justification [*in a quarrel*] keeps the thing going because it gives a mental support. Self-justification is always a sign of ego and ignorance. When one has a wider consciousness, one knows that each one has his own way of looking at things and finds in that way his own justification, so that both parties in a quarrel believe themselves to be in the right. It is only when one looks from above in a consciousness clear of ego that one sees all sides of a thing and also their real truth.

*

These results [*unhappiness, dullness, obscurity*] are not a punishment, they are a natural result of yielding to egoism. All quarrels proceed from egoism which pushes its own opinion and affirms its own importance, considering that it is right and everybody else wrong and thus creates anger and sense of injury etc. These things must not be indulged, but rejected at once.

*

You must remember that anger creates an atmosphere which

spreads and gets hold of those around. If you give free vent to your anger, that spirit catches hold of others who are open to it like X and makes them also angry and violent. X's conduct has been serious, but the best way is to show your superiority to him by mastering your own anger. Going outside won't cure this weakness of yours. You must conquer it here in yourself—otherwise it will go wherever you go and create trouble for you.

*

As to X and Y, I entirely disapprove of Y's action. Violence and blows are out of place in the Yoga. It is not by these means or by any physical or external impulsion or pressure that sadhana can be enforced but only by a psychic or other inner influence. On the other hand X ought to be less undisciplined and to put a curb on his temper which seems to be much too fiery; but he must do it himself by his own will, recognising that self-control and self-mastery are necessary even in the ordinary life and still more necessary — quite indispensable — in Yoga.

*

X's vision of Y and the spirit among you which it expresses belong to the old quarrelling egoistic movement that spoilt your sadhana. It does not matter whether the vision has some foundation or none. Neither he nor anyone else need trouble about Y and his defects which are not your concern. If you start this kind of thing again, you are likely to fall back into the same blunders and lose your sadhana.

Obviously, if Y indulges the passions of which you speak, it is not surprising that his illnesses continue; they must be the physical expression of his vital disturbances. But on the other hand, Z too must understand that he is not to indulge his former obscure arrogance which made him pose as a spiritual head leading people to me. He should understand that there is only one Power at work and neither Z nor Y nor anybody else matters. Let each one open himself to the working of that Power in him and let there be no attempt at forming a body of sadhakas with somebody leading or intervening between the one Power and

the sadhakas. In that way there will be no room for rivalry or collision between opposing vital egoisms.

*

I am afraid that when vital passion disturbs the atmosphere, people very easily lose right perception and the sense of the thing that ought to be done, even those who are only or should be only onlookers. In this case everybody seems to have done and said or thought what ought not to have been thought and said and done. For you, however, looking at it from your standpoint only, the best thing is not to brood on these things, but to turn away from the memory of them altogether; for brooding on them only prolongs the inner consequences of a mistaken, disturbing and painful movement. There is no need that you should apologise for anything; what we should advise is to bury the past episode and its mistakes and return to normal undisturbing relations. Fix yourself more in an inner life and its opening to your soul's future.

*

It is better not to involve oneself in the dispute and to leave the combatants to throw their brahmastras at each other, oneself safe in a calm and judicious indifference. It is also the attitude most helpful to the sadhana. Of opinions and discussions there is no end and it is much better to remain inside and advance towards another light than the mind's—though there is more fire of a smoky kind than light in these discussions.

*

It is not always possible in life and work to avoid friction and collision; but it can be minimised or deprived of its worst developments if one has a large understanding of the men around one with whom one has to deal and acts in that spirit. If on the other hand one sticks to one's own position, done without regard for the standpoint of others, that creates resistance and friction.

Fault-Finding and Criticism

There is no harm in seeing and observing [*the behaviour of others*] if it is done with sympathy and impartiality—it is the tendency unnecessarily to criticise, find fault, condemn others (often quite wrongly) which creates a bad atmosphere both for oneself and others. And why this harshness and cocksure condemnation? Has not each man his own faults—why should he be so eager to find fault with others and condemn them? Sometimes one has to judge but it should not be done hastily or in a censorious spirit.

*

Men are always more able to criticise sharply the work of others and tell them how to do things or what not to do than skilful to avoid the same mistakes themselves. Often indeed one sees easily in others faults which are there in oneself but which one fails to see. These and other defects such as the last you mention are common to human nature and few escape them. The human mind is not really conscious of itself—that is why in Yoga one has always to look and see what is in oneself and become more and more conscious.

*

In ordinary life people always judge wrongly because they judge by mental standards and generally by conventional standards. The human mind is an instrument not of truth but of ignorance and error.

*

Do not dwell much on the defects of others. It is not helpful. Keep always quiet and peace in the attitude.

*

It is the petty ego in each that likes to discover and talk about the (real or unreal) defects of others—and it does not matter whether they are real or unreal. The ego has no right to judge them, because it has not the right view or the right spirit. It

is only the calm, disinterested, dispassionate, all-compassionate and all-loving Spirit that can judge and see rightly the strength and the weakness in each being.

*

Yes, all that is true. The lower vital takes a mean and petty pleasure in picking out the faults of others and thereby one hampers both one's own progress and that of the subject of the criticism.

*

If you find fault with anybody, that fault is likely to increase in that person and to come also into you.

*

It is true that the habit of gossip and fault-finding with others does interfere because it brings down the consciousness from a higher to a lower level. But I do not think a retirement such as you propose is the way to cure it. It would only be suspended and the tendency come up again when you resumed free intercourse with others. It is on its field itself that it has to be first observed, then cured by detachment from it and rejection of it when it comes. A partial retirement may sometimes be helpful for concentration,—but not for these things; there the only cure is what I suggest or else the descent of a higher consciousness to replace the present imperfect nature.

Benefiting from Criticism

Even sometimes a malignant (not fair or well-intentioned) criticism can be helpful by some aspect of it, if one can look at it without being affected by the unfairness.

*

Naturally, praise and blame may have that effect² (the human

² *The correspondent remarked that praise may lead to pride and vanity, just as blame may lead to resentment and revolt.—Ed.*

nature is more sensitive to these than to almost anything else, more even than to real benefit or injury), unless either equanimity has been established or else there is so entire a confidence and happy dependence upon someone that both praise and blame are helpful to the nature. There are some men who even without Yoga have so balanced a mind that they take and adjudge praise and blame calmly for what they are worth, but that is extremely rare.

Part Three

Sadhana on the Physical, Subconscious and Inconscient Levels

Section One
Sadhana on the Level
of the Physical

Chapter One

The Transformation of the Physical

The Need to Transform the Physical

The law of the physical is inertia, dullness, obstruction to whatever is new or not yet established.

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Apart from the individual difficulty there is a general difficulty in the physical earth-nature. Physical nature is slow and inert and unwilling to change; its tendency is to be still and take long periods of time for a little progress. It is very difficult for even the strongest mental or vital or even psychic will to overcome this inertia. It is only by bringing down constantly the consciousness and force and light from above that it can be done. Therefore there must be a constant will and aspiration for that and for the change and it must be a steady and patient will not tired out even by the utmost resistance of the physical nature.

*

It is because your consciousness in the course of the sadhana has come into contact with the lower physical nature and sees it as it is in itself when it is not kept down or controlled either by the mind, the psychic or the spiritual force. This nature is in itself full of low and obscure desires, it is the most animal part of the human being. One has to come into contact with it so as to know what is there and transform it. Most sadhaks of the old type are satisfied with rising into the spiritual or psychic realms and leave this part to itself—but by that it remains unchanged, even if mostly quiescent, and no complete transformation is possible. You have only to remain quiet and undisturbed and let the higher Force work to change this obscure physical nature.

*

There is nothing to be discouraged about. The fact is that after being so long in the mental and vital plane you have become aware of the physical consciousness, and the physical consciousness in everybody is like that. It is inert, conservative, does not want to move, to change—it clings to its habits (what people call their character) or its habits (habitual movements) cling to it and repeat themselves like clockwork in a persistent mechanical way. When you have cleared your vital somewhat, things go down and stick there. You see, if you have become self-conscious, you put pressure, perhaps, but the physical responds very slowly, hardly at first seems to move at all. The remedy? Aspiration steady and unchanging, patient work, wakening the psychic in the physical, calling down the light and force into these obscure parts. The light brings the consciousness of what is there; the force has to follow and work on them till they change or disappear.

*

What you have been doing is to penetrate more into the physical consciousness where the peace and light of the higher consciousness have to be brought down. This often brings at first some relaxation of the intensity of experience, dispersion or recurrence of old movements which had been pushed out from the other levels, but one must not be discouraged by that. The remedy is to be more insistent on bringing down the higher forces (peace etc.) into this field.

*

This negation [*of deeper peace etc.*] is the very nature of the physical resistance and the physical resistance is the whole base of the denial of the Divine in the world. All in the physical is persistent, obstinate, with a massive force of negation and inertia—if it were not so, sadhana would be extremely cursory. You have to face this character of the physical resistance and conquer it however often it may rise. It is the price of the transformation of the earth-consciousness.

*

It is the nature of the physical mind to be obstinate. Physical nature exists by constant repetition of the same thing — only a constant presentation of different forms of itself. This obstinate recurrence is therefore part of its nature when it is in activity; otherwise it remains in a dull inertia. When therefore we want to get rid of the old movements of physical nature, they resist by this kind of obstinate recurrence. One has to be very persistent in rejection to get rid of it.

There are two aspects of physical Nature as of all Nature — the individual and the universal. All things come into one from the universal Nature — but the individual physical keeps some of them and rejects others, and to those it keeps it gives a personal form. So these things can be said to be both inside it and coming outside from within or created by it because it gives a special form and also outside and coming in from outside. But when one wants to get rid of them, one first throws out all that is within into the surrounding Nature — from there the universal Nature tries to bring them back or bring in new and similar things of its own to replace them. One has then constantly to reject this invasion. By constant rejection, the force of recurrence finally dwindles and the individual becomes free and able to bring the higher consciousness and its movements into the physical being.

*

The difference [*between the physical consciousness of those who are doing sadhana and those who are not*] lies in the fact that those who are doing sadhana live on the physical plane in order to transform it — under the pressure of a Force created by the sadhana which urges towards that and must continue till it is achieved. Those who do not do sadhana live on the physical plane not to transform it but to continue it as it is — there is no such Force or pressure or necessity or urge. Those who are not sadhaks but have their minds turned to the higher consciousness are preparing for sadhana and will one day do it — whatever that sadhana may be.

The prevalence of the physical difficulties when one comes

down into the physical is the same phenomenon as the prevalence of the vital difficulties when one is on the vital plane. Transformation implies facing the difficulties and changing or overcoming what arises in each part of the being so that that part may respond to what is higher, but the full change of the whole can only come by the ascent to the Above and the descent from Above. The first step of that (usually though not always) is the realisation of the Self above and the full descent of the higher peace into all the being down to the most physical.

*

For your sadhana it is necessary first to establish the entire openness of the physical being and stabilise in it the descent of calm, strength, purity and joy with the feeling of the presence and working of the Mother's Force in you. It is only on that assured basis that one can become an entirely effective instrument for the work. Once that is done, there is still the dynamic transformation of the instrumental being to achieve and that depends on a descent of a higher and higher power of consciousness into the mind, vital and body—by "higher" being meant nearer and nearer to the supramental Light and Force. But that can only be done on the basis of which I have spoken and with the psychic being constantly in front and acting as an intermediary between the instrumental mind, vital and body and these higher planes of Being. So this basic stabilisation must first be completed.

*

It [*purification of the physical nature*] is rather a necessity of the work itself for the supramental descent. The effect in a particular person will still depend on the person himself though there will be much greater and quicker possibilities than now.

*

It is not possible to bring down the whole power or experience of a higher plane into the physical consciousness; it is only an influence that comes down to help in the transformation. When

the transformation has taken place, the physical will be more capable.

Coming Down into the Physical

I have said that it [*the sadhana*] has come down into direct contact with the external physical nature which is always full of the lower movements and when that happens you see them as they are when they are not under the control of the mind and psychic. Everybody has to come into this direct contact—otherwise there can be no transformation of this part of the being.

*

It is always the effect of the physical consciousness being uppermost (so long as it is not entirely changed) that one feels like this—like an ordinary man or worse, altogether in the outer consciousness, the inner consciousness veiled, the action of Yoga power apparently suspended. This happens in the earlier stages also, but it is not quite complete usually then because something of the mind and vital is active in the physical still or, even if the interruption of *sadhana* is complete, it does not last long and so one does not so much notice it. But when from the mental and vital stage of the Yoga one comes down into the physical, this condition which is native to the physical consciousness fully manifests and is persistent for long periods. It happens because one has to come down and deal with this part directly by entering into it,—for if that is not done, there can be no complete change of the nature. What has to be done is to understand that it is a stage and to persist in the faith that it will be overcome. If this is done, then it will be easier for the Force, working behind the veil at first, then in front to bring out the Yoga consciousness into this outer physical shell and make it luminous and responsive. If one keeps steadily the faith and quietude, then this can be more quickly done—if the faith gets eclipsed or the quietude disturbed by the long difficulty, then it takes longer but even then it will be done; for, though not felt, the Force is there at

work. It can only be prevented if one breaks away or throws up the sadhana, because one becomes too impatient of the difficulty to go through with it. That is the one thing that should never be done.

*

After receiving your account of your present condition which I understand perfectly well, my advice to you remains the same, to stick on and still stick on persistently until the dawn comes, which it surely will if you resist the temptation to run away into some outer darkness which it would have much more difficulty in reaching. The details you give do not at all convince me that X was right in thinking that your sadhana was not at all in the line of my Yoga or that you are right in concluding that you are not meant for this line. On the contrary, these are things which come almost inevitably in one degree or another at a certain critical stage through which almost everyone has to pass and which usually lasts for an uncomfortably long time but which need not be at all conclusive or definitive. Usually, if one persists, it is the period of darkest night before the dawn which comes to every or almost every spiritual aspirant. It is due to a plunge one has to take into the sheer physical consciousness unsupported by any true mental light or by any vital joy in life, for these usually withdraw behind the veil, though they are not, as they seem to be, permanently lost. It is a period when doubt, denial, dryness, greyness and all kindred things come up with a great force and often reign completely for a time. It is after this stage has been successfully crossed that the true light begins to come, the light which is not of the mind but of the spirit. The spiritual light no doubt comes to some to a certain extent, and to a few to a considerable extent, in the earlier stages, though that is not the case with all—for some have to wait till they can clear out the obstructing stuff in the mind, vital and physical consciousness, and until then they get only a touch now and then. But even at the best this earlier spiritual light is never complete until the darkness of the physical consciousness has been faced and overcome. It is not by one's own fault that one falls into this

state, it can come when one is trying one's best to advance. It does not really indicate any radical disability in the nature but certainly it is a hard ordeal and one has to stick very firmly to pass through it. It is difficult to explain these things because the psychological necessity is difficult for the ordinary human reason to understand or to accept. I will try to have a shot at it, but it may take some days.¹ Meanwhile, as you have asked what is my advice I send you this brief answer.

*

The greater difficulty [*in freeing oneself from vital desire*] is because the sadhana is now taking place directly on the physical plane, where the force of a habit or habitual movement once formed is very great. When the sadhana is taking place on the mental or vital plane, it is more easy to control or change, because the mind and vital are more plastic than the physical. But on the other hand if something is definitely gained on the physical plane, there is a more lasting and complete fulfilment than when it is on the mental or vital alone.

*

The resistance is becoming more of a physical character. That is to be expected, for it is the ordinary course that it is pushed down from the vital into the physical — moreover in the general sadhana now it is in the material and subconscious that the struggle is mainly going on. The part above the neck, like the neck itself, belongs to the externalising mind or physical mental. Your difficulties are likely to cease only when you bring down the peace and wideness into the whole body or at any rate feel its effects there. If the whole mind admits the higher consciousness, that will be a definite step towards this.

*

In dealing with the physical and subconscious the working is always slower than when it acts on the mind and vital because

¹ No subsequent letter of explanation has been found. — Ed.

the resistance of physical stuff is always heavier and less intelligent and adaptable; but as a compensation the work done in the being by this slower movement is in the end more complete, solid and durable.

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You feel as you do only because you are largely identified with the part that has to undergo change and so you feel the difficulty, even the impossibility of changing. But although the difficulty is there, the impossibility does not exist. Even this identification may be helpful, for so the change can be radical by a direct action in the part itself, instead of an indirect influence upon it through the mind or higher vital. Rest and restore your physical forces, open so that the Mother's Force may fully work on you, the trouble pass away and a new and stronger movement commence.

The Bringing of Realisation into the Physical

Yes, certainly, that is what I am insisting on—the bringing of realisation into this inert physical part which has made itself prominent. When any part of the being becomes prominent like this showing all its defects and limitations—here inertia or incapacity (*apravṛtti*), obscurity or forgetfulness (*aprakāśa*), it is in order to get set right,—it has come up for a first or preliminary transformation. Peace and light in the mind, love and sympathy in the heart, calm and power in the vital, a settled receptivity and response (*prakāśa*, *pravṛtti*) in the physical are the necessary change.

*

When I explained [*in the preceding letter*] about the physical inertia, I meant that it was this which had been preventing the elimination of the old movements all along and enabled them to return when they had been pushed out—for it is in the material half-conscious or subconscious that there is the bedrock of the resistance. When this comes up and shows itself in its separate existence, not sustained by the mind and vital, acting by the power of its own inertia and not covered by the sanction of the

mind or the vital, only repeating the old movements by force of old habit—it is then possible to meet the resistance at its root instead of cutting off the flowers and fruits and branches when they appear.

It is precisely this lothness to do anything that must be got rid of—for it is simply an acquiescence in the force of the inertia. If you can do nothing else, the old methods of violence to yourself etc. will obviously be unfruitful—you should call on the Divine Peace and Force to descend and deal with it and open yourself to the action. If this obstructing physical is made to admit and respond to that, then the key of the solution will be there.

*

The realisation in the mind of the One brings or ought to bring a certain freedom in the mind, but it is possible for the vital and the body under its impulse to go on having the ordinary movements—for they depend only partially on the mind for their action. They can even carry it away, *haranti prasabham manah*, or they can act in spite of the mind's reasoning and disapprobation. "I see the better and approve it, I follow the worse" as the Roman poet puts it—in the language of the Gita, *anicchannapi balād iva niyojitah*. It is necessary therefore that the realisation with its peace and force of purity should come down concretely into the vital and physical itself so that when the vital movements try to rise they are met by it and unable to remain because of its automatic pressure.

The Physical Sadhana

The physical sadhana is to bring down the higher light and power and peace and Ananda into the body consciousness, to get rid of the inertia of the physical, the doubts, limitations, external tendency of the physical mind, the defective energies of the vital physical (nerves) and bring in instead the true consciousness there so that the physical may be a perfect instrument for the Divine Will. The food and care for the body is only to get it into

good condition, afterwards it would not be necessary to attend to such things.

*

I understand that you have arrived at a prolonged lull or period of emptiness in your sadhana. This often happens especially when one is thrown out into the physical and external consciousness. The nervous and physical parts then become prominent and seem to become the standard of the being with that disappearance of the Yoga consciousness and the sensitiveness to small and outward things which you describe. A stage like this however may very well be an interval before a fresh progress. What you have to do is to insist on making time for meditation — at any time of the day when you are least likely to be disturbed — and through the meditation getting back the touch. There may be some difficulty because the physical consciousness is uppermost, but a persistent aspiration will bring it back. When once you again feel the connection reestablished between the inner being and the outer, call down the peace and light and power into the latter so as to build up a basis for a constant consciousness in the most external mind and being which will accompany you in work and action as much as in meditation and solitude.

*

Don't get disturbed. Remain quiet and let the Force work.

It is the most physical consciousness of which you have become aware; it is like that in almost everyone: when one gets fully or exclusively into it, one feels it to be like that of an animal, either obscure and restless or inert and stupid and in either condition not open to the Divine. It is only by bringing the Force and higher consciousness into it that it can fundamentally alter. When these things show themselves, do not be upset by their emergence, but understand that they are there to be changed.

Here as elsewhere, quiet is the first thing needed, to keep the consciousness quiet, not allow it to get agitated and in turmoil.

Then in the quiet to call for the Force to clear up all this obscurity and change it.

*

It is of course the physical consciousness that always came in with this ignorance, and the physical consciousness *is* stupid and obscure—even in men whose thinking minds are wise or at least intelligent. It is only by the Light from above that it can be illumined. It is always in the Peace and Power, which bring more and more that light, that you must take refuge.

*

“At the mercy of the external sounds and external bodily sensations”, “no control to drop the ordinary consciousness at will”, “the whole tendency of the being away from Yoga”—all that is unmistakably applicable to the physical mind and the physical consciousness when they isolate themselves, as it were, and take up the whole front, pushing the rest into the background. When a part of the being is brought forward to be worked upon for change, this kind of all-occupying emergence, the dominant activity of that part as if it alone existed, very usually happens—and unfortunately it is always what has to be changed, the undesirable conditions, the difficulties of that part which rise first and obstinately hold the field and recur. In the physical it is inertia, obscurity, inability that come up and the obstinacy of these things. The only thing to do in this unpleasant phase is to be more obstinate than the physical inertia and to persist in a fixed endeavour—steady persistency without any restless struggle—to get a wide and permanent opening made even in this solid rock of obstruction.

*

It is just in the physical consciousness that it is difficult to keep the fire burning—the physical can easily follow a constant routine, but not easily maintain a constant living endeavour. Nevertheless it can after a time be made ready to do so. All help will be given you.

*

You have entirely put yourself out in the external physical consciousness which is refusing to open itself on the plea of inability and by saying that all spiritual and inner things are unreal, only what is outward is real. That is what it always does, if you listen to it. But the plea of inability is untrue—and the other is also untrue. The inner, the spiritual, is perfectly true and real to you when you open yourself to it—as real as the physical or outward.

*

When you get the touch, concentrate on opening to it; do not accept the opposite suggestions of the physical consciousness. The whole difficulty comes from your identifying yourself with your external, physical consciousness which is only a small outward part of your self. You have to learn to live in the rest of your being, more real, more inward which is open to the Truth; you will then feel your physical consciousness as something external which can be worked upon through the true consciousness and changed by the Force.

*

It is very good that all should have gone like that and the true consciousness affirmed its control in the physical. These things are indeed attacks intended to prevent the control being established in the physical being as it was in the inner parts. Wherever the physical consciousness opens, the Force can sweep out all that could trouble. Sometimes it takes a little time to overcome the resistance, but finally all disappears before it.

*

Persevere quietly and let nothing discourage you. If the quietness and cheerfulness are not constant yet, that is to be expected; it is always like that at first when there is the working in the physical consciousness and its obstructions. If you persevere, they will become more and more frequent and last for a longer time, until you have a basis of peace and happiness and whatever disturbances come on the surface will no longer be able to penetrate

or shake this basis or even cover it over except perhaps for a moment.

The constant changing of the mood is also common enough because the physical vital is being worked upon at the same time and this changeability is a character of the physical-vital nature. Let not that discourage you,—as soon as the basis is more fixed this will diminish and the vital become more settled and even.

*

The physical consciousness has to become balanced, filled with the light and force from above, conscious and responsive. That cannot be done in a day—so go on steadily and dismiss both discouragement and impatience.

*

It [*the use of violence to change the physical*] was done by some people, but I don't believe in its usefulness. No doubt the physical is an obstinate obstacle, but it must be enlightened, persuaded, pressed even to change, but not oppressed or violently driven. People use violence with the mind, vital, body because they are in a hurry, but my own observation has always been that it leads to more reactions and hindrances and not to a genuinely sound advance.

Chapter Two

Levels of the Physical Being

The Physical Consciousness

A certain inertia, tendency to sleep, indolence, unwillingness or inability to be strong for work or spiritual effort for long at a time, is in the nature of the human physical consciousness. When one goes down into the physical for its change (that has been the general condition here for a long time), this tends to increase. Even sometimes when the pressure of the sadhana on the physical increases or when one has to go much inside, this temporarily increases — the body either needing more rest or turning the inward movement into a tendency to sleep or be at rest. You need not, however, be anxious about that. After a time this rights itself; the physical consciousness gets the true peace and calm in the cells and feels at rest even in full work or in the most concentrated condition and this tendency of inertia goes out of the nature.

*

There are many [*defects of the physical consciousness*] — but mainly obscurity, inertia, tamas, a passive acceptance of the play of wrong forces, inability to change, attachment to habits, lack of plasticity, forgetfulness, loss of experiences or realisations gained, unwillingness to accept the Light or to follow it, incapacity (through tamas or through attachment or through passive reaction to accustomed forces) to do what it admits to be the Right and the Best.

*

There is always some tendency to looseness, forgetfulness and inattention in the physical consciousness. One has to be very vigilant and careful to prevent this tendency having its way.

*

These are the usual suggestions of the Ignorance in the physical consciousness—everybody in that condition says the same thing, “All the rest are so nicely off, I only am not progressing and there is no hope for me” etc. These things should not be listened to at all.

*

It is an inertia of the physical consciousness which allows these desires to come and does not react against the suggestions; it is that also which responds to the pains and suggestion of illness. But you must not accept the suggestion that you *cannot* react and be free,—the physical consciousness itself cannot as yet, but the will can if it is called on to act and made accustomed to act always. Not the struggling will, but a quiet will insisting on the quietude of the mind and vital and insisting on the rejection of these adverse things. That would soon prove sufficient to hold the ground for the Peace and Force to act and they would do the rest.

*

It is no doubt as you say,¹ but that is always the difficulty of the physical consciousness until it has been enlightened from within. It is the peace you feel—the peace that is taking little by little hold of the inner being—that has to deepen and strengthen itself till it can take hold of the physical also. When it can do that, the externalised physical consciousness will feel it no longer alien to itself. The Peace will enable the Force and Light to enter also into the physical and the true understanding will come there too and remove the sense of distance and difference. That is how the Yoga force always works in principle—but the more the quietude, the more rapidly and surely it will work.

*

It is the last reaction of the physical consciousness [*feeling dull*,

¹ *The correspondent wrote that although she wanted to get rid of her desires, confusions and wrong movements, the outward, physical part of her being wanted to hold on to them.—Ed.*

weak, confused] that must be got rid of — in its place there must be at such times peace constant so that you do not get restless or feel troubled. It is not possible to be always in the best condition of consciousness or sadhana — there are times when the physical needs to be merely quiet, the aspiration becomes quiescent, there is no sense of the Divine, no forward movement. Properly taken, these periods become periods of rest and assimilation but for that the consciousness must learn to be quiet, not to be troubled or thrown back into a bad or uneasy condition — it must remain at repose until the movement is resumed in a quiet peace. Or at least the greater part of the consciousness must feel like that — not even in these periods dull, weak or confused. This feeling seems to be gaining on you, but the physical consciousness or at least a part of it is still uneasy during such intervals. It must go on receiving more of the light and peace till this can no longer happen.

*

There comes for many a stage in the opening of the consciousness when the entrance of any wrong thought or feeling or movement brings an ache or uneasiness or other sign in the body — this is because these movements are becoming foreign to the consciousness, even the physical, and so produce a discomfort.

*

Sometimes when these forces cannot have a success in attacking the vital directly because the psychic rejects the attack, they try to fall on the physical consciousness and the body (the emptiness, headache, disturbance in the chest were that) so as to weaken, if possible, the resistance to their pressure. At such times you must be as quiet as possible and call the Mother. After a time the attacks will not come or will not last.

*

The legs, knees, feet — these indicate the physical consciousness — it was therefore into the obscure layers of the physical consciousness that you went down.

The Mental Physical and the Vital Physical

And how is it possible to perfect the mind and vital unless the physical is prepared? — for there is such a thing as the mental and vital physical, and mind and vital cannot be said to be perfectly prepared until these are ready.

*

The small things go with difficulty because they belong to the vital physical and the things of the physical consciousness are obstinate owing to the great subjection of the physical to the force of habit. All the same the Will can act on them so as to dismiss them either rapidly or by a slow pressure.

*

There is always the conflict between the consciousness that is coming into you and the ignorant consciousness that was there before. The new consciousness is gaining ground always but still against much resistance especially in the vital physical (which is indicated in the stomach attacks). But there is only one way to go and that is to insist always on the Power and Peace which are more and more felt to be always there and more and more dissociate yourself from the other condition. It is on that basis that the right understanding can come.

*

It is something in the vital part of the physical consciousness which has not yet understood — it feels the pressure to change, yet it is drawn outward to people or things in the old way, but is dissatisfied because the growth of the new consciousness behind prevents it taking pleasure in them, so that it remains restless, not understanding anything. What it has got to learn is that it must fall quiet and open to a new consciousness from above and within. This part of the being is obscure, — not sufficiently mentalised to understand things, it acts from instinct, impulse and habit only. When its old instincts, impulses and habits are checked, it does not know what to do or what is demanded of

it. But after a certain amount of pressure from the mind and will it can be got to consent to a change of its ways.

The other thing, the habit of concentrating on one thing and forgetting everything else, is a turn of the vital—it is a faculty that has a value because it can give great intensity to the nature and to any endeavour made by the nature. Only it has to be turned in the right direction and used by the mind and the psychic being for a whole-hearted concentration and devotion to the Mother.

*

The attack comes evidently always on the vital physical and the physical—it is these parts that have to be cleared entirely—desires and dissatisfactions in the vital physical and the pain, unconsciousness and dullness in the physical. Do not yield to the idea of being helpless to repel or ignore when they come—even the pains can be rejected—you have to get the knack of bringing down the Force at once to drive them out.

*

The physical disturbance and weakness are simply the attack falling back on the physical system from the vital and producing there the corresponding movements—all of a nervous character—nervous restlessness, nervous pain and palpitation and trouble, nervous weakness of the body.

Take the lesson from what has happened, but now put away these thoughts and open yourself quietly to recover the true movement.

*

It [*the coming of disturbances*] is not the result of any pressure from above. If there were nothing coming from above, there would be no peace and clarity and the disturbances would still come and come more often.

The cravings once belonged to the vital physical, but when there is a sufficient force of peace in the being, then they go out and the vital physical is free and under the influence of the

quietude. The forces of disturbance do not belong any longer to the personality, but although they have gone out, they wait in the atmosphere and, if they get a chance, try to come back and resume hold of the exterior being so as either to break or, if they can no longer do that, cover up the inner peace. Because the physical vital has been accustomed to respond to them for a time willingly, now unwillingly, they are still able to make it answer to their vibrations. The peace and clarity must acquire such a force that they will remain even if these forces come back—then there will be the phenomenon of the inner peace remaining undisturbed in the inner being even while the outer is superficially disturbed. This is a well-marked stage in the progress. Afterwards a force can be brought down strong enough to fill the outer being also with so strong a peace and clarity that the disturbances can no longer enter there. One may feel them still sometimes in the atmosphere but is no longer touched by them at all.

*

As for the vital physical readmitting the forces of disturbance, it is not always because it wants; it may happen also because in spite of itself certain impacts or suggestions revive the old vibrations and the habit of responding has been so strong in it that it responds *in spite of itself*, and for a time it is unable to recover its balance. This happens in all parts of the being, but it is especially true of the physical parts—physical mind yielding to habitual thoughts, physical vital yielding to habitual desires and impulsions etc., body yielding to habitual sensations, illnesses etc. etc. Often sadhaks write, “But I don’t want these things, even my vital and body feel uncomfortable and wish them away, then why do they come?” It is because of this long established habit of response which is too strong for the yet too quiescent and passive will (if it can be called will) of rejection in the part affected. It is especially true of the physical parts because a passive quiescence, a habit of being driven by forces is their very nature, unless they are controlled from above or made to share in the idea and will of the higher parts.

The Material Consciousness

I do not see why you doubt the fulfilment in your material consciousness. If there is faith, quietude, openness in the rest of the being, the material is bound to open also. Tamas, inertia, ignorance, stupidity, littleness, obstruction to the true movement are universal characteristics of the material consciousness, so long as it is not enlightened, regenerated and transformed from above,—they are not peculiar to yours. Therefore, there is here no sufficient reason or justification for the doubt you describe.

When the Supramental comes down fully into the material consciousness, it will create the right conditions there. The oneness will be created, the constant presence and sense of contact will be felt in the material and there will be all the actual physical contact that is needed. The sadness you speak of is not psychic—for “painful longing” belongs to the vital, not to the psychic. The psychic never feels a sadness from disappointed desire, because that is not in its nature; the sorrow it sometimes feels is when it sees the Divine rejected or the mental, vital, physical in man or in nature turning away from the Truth to follow perversion, darkness or ignorance. However, with the reign of the Supramental even the vital external nature is bound to change and therefore there will be no chance of any feelings of this character.

*

You should not allow yourself to be discouraged by any persistence of the movements of the lower nature. There are some that tend always to persist and return until the whole physical nature is changed by the transformation of the most material consciousness; till then their pressure recurs—sometimes with a revival of their force, sometimes more dully—as a mechanical habit. Take from them all life-power by refusing any mental or vital assent; then the mechanical habit will become powerless to influence the thoughts and acts and will finally cease.

The Body Consciousness

The sense of being only the body belongs to the physical consciousness while the confusion came from the vital. The confusion must disappear because it makes a turmoil in the consciousness and stands in the way of the Force acting on the surface. The obstacle of the body consciousness is tedious, but it does not prevent the Force from growing and can be worn out by the action of the Force in time. It is a question of the Force, Peace, Light entering *into* the body and giving it the sense of not being only a body but the receptacle of a higher consciousness.

*

It is indeed the body consciousness that is still offering difficulties — but when the restlessness and confusion come, you must immediately offer it up and call for the opening of the part that resists. In this way it is possible to establish a condition in which as soon as the difficulty is there, the counteracting Force also comes. Then no long continued difficulty will be possible.

*

The flesh has a consciousness as well as the mind — all the consciousness is connected together so if the mind is freed, there is no reason why there should not be an effect on the physical also.

The Body

Man is not a body alone — the body is only a small part of his being.

*

One should not attach too much importance to the life of the body. The body is only an incident in the progress of the soul. Evolution of the soul is the objective of Karmic existence. When one has realised the soul, knowledge and enlightenment come and all the problems are solved. But before that, one should try to get peace, calm and light.

*

The body is always the most difficult part of the being because of its obscurity much more than of any bad will in it. But it could respond more and more as the Light grows.

*

The body itself must become more conscious so that it will make the right movements and avoid the wrong ones.

*

I mean [by "*the coming of consciousness into the body*"] the higher consciousness. The consciousness that is always there in the body is tamasic and obscure and the greater part of it is subconscious. If it opens then there will be an increasing union with the higher consciousness and it will be able to share the experiences and the developments in the mind and vital.

*

It depends on whether it [*the body*] is in tune with the vital or not. The nature of the body is tamasic—it is the vital which makes it move and uses it as an instrument: If the vital is enlightened then the Divine Force can act through it on the body.

*

It [*how the body receives the higher dynamism*] depends on the condition of the body or rather of the physical and the most material consciousness. In one condition it is tamasic, inert, unopen and cannot bear or cannot receive or cannot contain the force; in another rajas predominates and tries to seize on the dynamism, but wastes and spills and loses it; in another there is receptivity, harmony, balance and the result is a harmonious action without strain or effort.

*

I suppose the heat and thirst may be due to some struggle in the body, not altogether physical. I think it must be some contrary pressure on the body which the body is trying to throw off. I do not consider your condition of dissatisfaction and difficulties as

inner but as outer. It is an outer mass of old movements pressing on the physical consciousness and trying to keep its place by memory and recurrent habit. The physical consciousness has to push it out more and more till it is no longer felt as within it, but seen for what it really is, an outer Nature of the ignorance which had usurped the consciousness and prevented the psychic being from manifesting.

*

The physical troubles that belong to the constitution of the body are usually the last things to disappear. When the true consciousness fixes itself in the body as elsewhere, then they can be reduced and dispelled by the same process as that which removes the wrong habits of the mind and vital.

Care for the Body

No need to despise the physical being — it is part of the intended manifestation.

*

The body is meant to be an instrument of the Divine and a means of sadhana and a temple for the Mother's presence. It has to be purified, not despised and cast away — without it there can be no manifestation here.

*

To care too much for the body is bad in sadhana, but to neglect it or overstrain it is also bad — for it is a necessary instrument and must be kept in good condition.

Weakness of the Body

You must keep your body in good condition. It is the necessary instrument and channel and if it gets weak or unfit, that hampers the expression or dynamism of the mind and the spirit.

*

The weakness of the body has to be cured, not disregarded. It can only be cured by bringing in strength from above, not by merely forcing the body.

*

If your body is aching after the work, it may be that you are doing too much for your physical strength and straining the body. When you work, the Force comes down in you, takes the form of vital energy and supports your body so that it does not *at the time* feel the strain; but when you stop, the body goes back to its normal condition and feels the effects—it has not yet been sufficiently opened to keep the Force. You must see whether this effect (of pain) continues; if it passes away, it is all right; otherwise you must take care and not overstrain yourself by doing too much.

*

Overstraining [*in work*] only increases the inertia—the mental and vital will may force the body, but the body feels more and more strained and finally asserts itself. It is only if the body itself feels a will and force to work that one can do that.

*

The first rule [*for overcoming weakness of the body*] is—there must be sufficient sleep and rest, not in excess but not too little.

The body must be trained to work, but not strained beyond its utmost capacity.

The outer means without the inner is not effective. Up to a certain point by a *progressive* training the body may be made more capable of work. But the important thing is to bring down the force for work and the rasa of work in the body. The body will then do what is asked of it without grudging or feeling fatigue.

Even so, even when the force and rasa are there, one must keep one's sense of measure.

Work is a means of self-dedication to the Divine, but it must be done with the necessary inner consciousness in which

the lower vital and physical must also share.

A lazy body is certainly not a proper instrument for Yoga, it must stop being lazy. But a fatigued and unwilling body also cannot receive properly or be a good instrument. The proper thing is to avoid either extreme.

*

A strong mind and body and life-force are needed in the sadhana. Especially steps should be taken to throw out tamas and bring strength and force into the frame of the nature.

Forgetfulness of the Body

It [*living in the mind or the vital*] is more, I think, forgetting the body than non-identification with it. In an intense mentalisation or an intense vital activity the body takes a second place and becomes more outward and the same may happen to a certain extent more constantly to a man who lives in his mind or his vital and is identified more closely with that. But still it is the mental in the body, the vital in the body. There is no release, no getting entirely separate as in the spiritual liberation.

*

Yes, it is not possible for the human mind to live entirely in itself to such a degree as to ignore the body altogether — a real or complete liberation or non-identification is not possible without the spiritual release. All that is possible to the mind is a constant absorption in itself and an ignoring or forgetfulness as much as possible of the body. That one finds often in people who live a retired mental life (scholars, thinkers etc.) without the need to trouble themselves about their livelihood, family etc.

The Physical and the Mind

The physical consciousness has its own reactions — separate from those of the mind.

*

No, it is not necessary to lose the mental control; it is best to replace it gradually by the psychic or spiritual. But it happens to many that they lose it before the other is ready or while it is still imperfect and then the Nature-forces act in the physical consciousness which is sometimes held by the descending Peace or Power from above, sometimes by the ordinary Nature-forces. This alternation happens at one stage at least to almost everybody until the higher state prevails.

This over-sensitive brooding on past blows to the vital is an unhealthy sensitiveness. What is past ought not to have a hold like that but be allowed to fade out.

*

Probably in '33 you were doing more tapasya and putting a strong control on yourself? At any rate that was the state at one time. Afterwards when you came down from the mental-vital level, you let yourself go for a time, removing much of the control, hence now you find a difficulty in reestablishing it,—due to the habit of automatic repetition which is a characteristic of the physical nature. You have now to get the control in a different way by the reestablishment of the peace and building the higher consciousness upon it, the spiritual control replacing that of mental tapasya.

The Physical and the Vital

The physical depends on the vital at every step—it could not do anything without the help of the vital—so it is quite natural that it should receive its suggestions.

*

The physical world is only a last field in which not only the physical forces but those of other worlds also throw themselves for realisation. Whatever happens here has already been prepared or foreshadowed in the vital; it does not happen exactly as represented in the vital, but with a change suitable for the material world.

The Physical and the Psychic

All that is very good — it is the psychic condition that is increasing. The peace and spontaneous knowledge are in the psychic being and from there they spread to mind and vital and physical. It is in the outer physical consciousness that the difficulty still tries to persist and brings the restlessness sometimes into the physical mind, sometimes into the nerves, sometimes in the shape of bodily trouble into the body. But all these things can and must go. Even the illnesses can go entirely with the growth of peace and power in the nerves and physical cells — stomach pains, weakness of the eyes and everything else.

*

The narrowness etc. of which you complain are normal to the physical nature. It is the same thing acting in a different way which makes X rebellious to advice and full of irritation and bad temper when her mistakes are shown to her. The physical nature of almost everybody is like that, intolerant, easily irritated, lacking in patience when dealing with others. But this physical nature can be replaced and changed by the psychic nature and you have had the experience of what this psychic nature is and how it acts. You know therefore what change has to come in you and you know also that this new nature is already there in you preparing to come out. Have the faith therefore that it is sure to come — and when the physical comes and covers with the old movements try to remember that and remind the physical mind that it is only by this change in yourself and all that things can change. What is needed now is all should make this psychic change their main object, each for himself. If some develop it, then it will spread more rapidly among the rest. It is so only that the present state of the physical consciousness in the Asram full of ego and strife can become what it should be.

*

What has happened is that the psychic in you which had formerly been constantly in action in the mind and vital was for a

time clouded or covered over by the ignorance of the physical consciousness. It is the psychic that connected you with the Mother and turned all the movements of your being towards her or drew them from her or made them united with and dependent on her. It had so done with all your mental and vital being and its movements and it had guarded you against all wrong mental and vital suggestions and attacks, showing you what was true and what was false. Now it is this psychic being which has manifested again in your physical consciousness also. You have only to live in that and your whole being will be turned towards the Mother, remain in union with her and be protected from doubt and error and false suggestion—and you can once more progress as you did before towards the full realisation of the sadhana.

*

The habit of return of these feelings belongs to the physical consciousness and in his physical consciousness the human being is always weak and unable to get rid of or resist its habitual movements. There are three things that help him to do so (apart from his mental will which is not always strong enough to do it). There is first the psychic being; for a few days your psychic was extremely active and pushing these movements away whenever they tried to come or throwing them out soon when they got in. This activity of the psychic will return and eventually come down into the physical consciousness itself; then there will be very little difficulty. The second is the inner consciousness always awake. At present that is difficult, because to keep the inner consciousness awake at all times can only come by a deepening of yourself so that the veil between the outer and inner which lifts only in concentration may cease to exist even when one is in the ordinary unconcentrated condition. It is for this deepening that the strong tendency to go inside comes upon you. Lastly, the Mother's force always there and receiving also a response at once from the physical consciousness. These three things together can do anything. It takes time to make them all three constantly active together, but that is sure to come and

with them these inner difficulties will disappear.

*

You cannot so long as you have a body live without the physical consciousness, but you can live more centrally in the psychic and other parts and by them transform the physical.

The Ascent of the Being

The being is here on the physical plane although in touch with the mental and vital. The being that is the individual consciousness has to ascend and become conscious of all the planes (vital, mental and those above the mental) until it reaches the Divine Oneness which is above all the planes and from which they emerge.

Chapter Three

Difficulties of the Physical Nature

The Real Difficulty

It is no doubt quite true that if you could settle the true relation [*with the Mother*] in the psychic centre—the inner heart—and all the rest could be under its influence and take part in it, the fundamental difficulty would disappear; and that is what must happen. But the real difficulty is in the physical and external being—and it is this that the physical being is a creature of habit, of formed character, that is to say of a mass of accustomed movements. As your nature has been full of rajasic egoism, not only in this but in many past lives, it is the habit of this rajas and of the accustomed movements connected with it that the physical knows and to them it almost automatically responds; it is these movements that always easily took hold of you, mixed in the sadhana, even in the higher experience sometimes and cherished the revolt against the Mother because always her force was pressing for their removal; it was this pressure that they resented and felt as an absence of love. The mind in you is able to separate itself from these things and recognise (when not too much clouded) their true character, the higher vital also has another aim and aspiration; but the physical, especially the more material parts of it are still responding mechanically to the old movements which are wearing out indeed under the pressure, but are still strong enough to possess a great part of the consciousness when they come. One feels the power, the compulsory force of this mechanical physical response and gets the impression of their inevitability and the impossibility of ever getting free. This automatic compulsory character of the obstruction is the whole power of the difficulty in the material nature.

(1) The first thing is to reject the idea of helplessness, of impossibility of a successful reaction. The central will must

assert itself, not violently in a constant struggle, for that brings reaction, fatigue and inertia, but with a quiet pressure and insistence.

(2) The mind must learn (even the physical external mind) never to say yes to the suggestions and impulsions of the old movement or admit any justification for them however plausible or seemingly "true". However violently they return and insist, they must feel that they will never get any essential assent or sanction. You have almost reached that point, but it must be made more entire.

(3) There must be something in the vital itself that insists on its true aspiration and refuses even the vital consent or any vital pleasure in the wrong movements. If they come, they must feel their own fallen, ignorant, merely material brute character. This point you seem to be reaching, but it must be absolute.

(4) Lastly the physical, the material itself — to insist on the Light, the true will there also. For that, do not indulge the desires, the wrong impulses, the wrong brute feelings that come. Do not admit the idea that you cannot refuse. Throw them out each time they come, out of the body into the environmental consciousness till they can finally be pushed away from there also. For it is these that now separate you in the physical consciousness from the Mother.

Obstruction and Obscuration

The difficulty of the physical nature comes inevitably in the course of the development of the sadhana. Its obstruction, its inertia, its absence of aspiration or movement have to show themselves before they can be got rid of — otherwise it will always remain undetected, hampering even the best sadhana and preventing its completeness. This coming up of the physical nature lasts longer or less according to the circumstances, but there is none who does not go through it. What is necessary is not to get troubled or anxious or impatient, for that only makes it last more, but to put entire confidence in the Mother and quietly persist in faith, patience and steady will for the complete

change. It is so that the Mother's force can best work in the being.

*

The sense of helplessness, of impossibility of removal [*of obscurity*] is like the obscurity itself a characteristic of the physical consciousness which is inert and mechanical and accustomed to be moved inertly by whatever forces take hold of it. But this sense of helplessness or impossibility is unreal and not to yield to it, not to accept it, to remove it is quite possible and very necessary for overcoming this physical obstacle which would otherwise greatly delay the progress.

*

It [*the nature of the obstruction of the physical consciousness*] depends on the weak points of the individual and the stage of his progress. In a general way, the obstruction creates an inertia which impedes the working of the higher Powers. In the early stage it can obstruct progress altogether. Afterwards it works to slow it down or else impede it by intervals of stationary inertia. The main difficulty of the physical consciousness is that it is incapable, before it is transformed, of maintaining any tension of tapasya — it wants periods of assimilation, sinking back into the ordinary consciousness to rest, — also there is a constant forgetfulness of what has been done etc.

*

What you felt in your chest was the attempt of the old ignorance to bring back the vital restlessness, depression, confusion, through the physical attack — for it is on the obscuration of the physical that they now depend for stopping the Light and Force from coming and for obscuring their working and creating disturbance and destroying the quietude. Reject it as you did this time — whenever it tries to come.

*

What you say — especially the idea of being only body — proves

that it is now really in the physical obscurity and obstruction that the difficulty lies and the vital resistance even if it recurs is no longer the central obstacle. Do not be discouraged by this physical unconsciousness — keep the quietude and it will be worked out of the system.

*

Do not be discouraged. To go on calling is always the right thing. The struggle to surmount the physical obscurity and inertia is sometimes very tedious and baffling, but if one persists the liberation from it comes — and it will surely come.

*

The physical obstruction is less boisterous [*than the vital resistance*], but I have not found it less obstinate or less troublesome.

Inertia

Inertia is a tremendous force — one of the biggest world-forces.

*

Inertia is the very character of the physical consciousness left to itself — it is accustomed to be passive to forces and to be their instrument or give a mechanical response to them.

*

Inertia is mental, vital, physical, subconscious. Physical inertia can produce mental inertia, mental inertia can produce physical inertia, vital inertia almost always makes the physical lifeless and lustreless and dull, and that is inertia. Vital inertia can also infect the mind, unless the mind is very strong and clear. I have always said that the physical consciousness is the main seat and source of inertia.

*

The hold of inertia always increases when the working comes down into the physical and subconscious. Before that the inertia is overpowered though not eradicated by the action in mind and

vital — afterwards it comes up in its natural force and has to be met in its own field.

*

The physical's tendency to inertia is very great; even after the habit of living in the higher consciousness is there, some part may feel the pressure of the inertia — generally the outermost or most material parts. The inertia usually rises up from the subconscious. It does not abolish the higher consciousness in the physical, but dulls its action or else brings it down from a higher to a lower level, e.g. from the intuition to the higher mind or from the higher to the lower ranges of overmind. For some time it resists the completeness of the siddhi. It is only when the most material and the subconscious and the environmental consciousness are quite liberated that this retarding or lowering effect of the primal Inertia is entirely overcome.

*

What you describe — dullness, uneasiness, weakness, feeling old and worn out or ill, are the reactions that come when the inertia of the physical Nature is resisting the Light — the others about sense of feeling, dignity, self-respect (of the ego) are the reactions of the vital. Both must be refused acceptance. There is only one aim to be followed, the increase of the Peace, Light, Power and the growth of a new consciousness in the being. With that new consciousness the true knowledge, understanding, strength, feeling will come, creating harmony instead of revolt and struggle and union with the Divine consciousness and will.

*

Dullness and dispersion are the two sides of the physical's resistance to the peace and concentrated power. They correspond to the inertia and the chaotic activity of physical Nature, that aspect of it which makes some scientists now say that all is brought about by chance and there is no certitude of things but only probability.

*

It [*weakness of will*] is a first result of coming down into the physical consciousness or of the physical consciousness coming up prominently — formerly you were much in the mind and vital. The physical consciousness is full of inertia — it wants not to move but to be moved by whatever forces and that is its habit. This inertia has to be cured by putting it into contact with the right forces from above. That is why I asked you to aspire for the higher wideness, purity and peace, so that that may occupy the physical and the true Force work instead of these invading ideas and impulses.

*

It [*weakness of will*] is due to the influence of the physical consciousness. The physical consciousness or at least the more material parts of it are, as I have told you, in their nature inert — obeying whatever force they are habituated to obey, but not acting on their own initiative. When there is a strong influence of the physical inertia or when one is down in this part of the consciousness the mind feels like the material Nature that action of will is impossible. Mind and vital nature are on the contrary all for will and initiative and so when one is in mind or vital or acting under their influence will feels itself always ready to be active.

*

When the mental will acquiesces in the inertia, becomes passive to it, as we say — then one remains in the passive condition and there is no push against it until it of itself passes away. If the mental will or even the vital will or some dynamic part of the nature remains untouched and can react, then there is the effort to throw it off which may shorten the interim period.

*

Passivity must not lead to inactivity — otherwise it will encourage inertia in the being. It is only an inner passivity to what comes from above that is needed — inert passivity is the wrong kind of passivity.

*

If it is an inert tamasic passivity subject to any influence and unable to react, then it is subjection to Nature. If it is a sat-twick passivity of the Witness observing and understanding the movements of Nature, then it is an intermediate condition, often necessary for knowledge. If it is a luminous passivity open to the Divine, shut to all other influences, then it is not subjection to Nature but surrender to the Divine.

*

It is the neutrality of the physical consciousness which says, "I move only when I am moved. Move me who can."

*

The period of no-effort is usually when the physical consciousness is uppermost—for the nature of that is inertia, to be moved by the higher forces or to be moved by the lower forces or any forces, but not to move itself. One must still use one's effort if one can, but the great thing is to be able to call down the Force from above into the physical—otherwise to remain perfectly quiet and, undisturbed, expect its coming.

*

Silence need not bring lassitude; there is all possible strength in silence. But it is possible that in your trend towards silence there is a tendency to draw back the energy from the body consciousness. That would bring physical inertia.

*

If the calm and silence are perfectly established in the physical, then if inertia comes it is itself something quiet and unaggressive, not bringing such disturbances. But to get rid of inertia altogether a strong dynamic calm is needed.

*

If the physical being has felt and assimilated the silence and peace, then inertia ought not to rise up.

*

There is always more chance of inertia at night because of the large part taken by the subconscious in sleep—but, apart from that, there should be a reaction (internal) against the rising of inertia. A quietness in the cells of the body, even a sense of immobility (so that the body seems to be moved rather than to move) is a different thing and easily distinguishable from the inertia. The downflow of peace usually brings much of the static Brahman into the consciousness down to the physical, so that one feels the Upanishadic “unmoving it moves”.

*

The inertia itself is not a dynamic principle. The nature of inertia is *apravṛtti*—the action of the mechanical mind is a *pravṛtti*, though a tamasic obscure *pravṛtti*.

*

The rain has the effect of stressing the tamas of the vital physical consciousness and bringing out its greyer notes. Physical tamas by its laxity gives more opportunities for the play of sex etc.

*

Everything [*in the surrounding atmosphere*] can be responded to. Inertia also can spread waves of itself like other things.

Dealing with Inertia and Tamas

From what you describe it looks as if you had come down into the physical consciousness and were feeling the inertia that belongs to it. When that happens, the one way out is to open there so that the light and force may come down into the physical and replace the inertia. We shall try to get that done.

*

When one is covered by the physical inertia one may often feel as if the former experiences had never existed or were not real. But certainly your aspirations and experiences were real enough.

You have to fight out this difficulty until you have got through to the Light.

*

It is, I suppose, the full Inertia that has come upon you. Now you have to get the true Energy down into it.

*

It must be the tamas of the physical that has enveloped the inner consciousness. The one way to get out of it is to remain very quiet inwardly and call down persistently the Force from above.

*

It [*a condition of great inertia*] means that you are in full grips with the subconscious physical. However heavy and tedious the resistance you have to persevere till you have got the Peace, Knowledge, Force down there in place of the inertia.

*

I do not know that I can add anything more to what I have already written. It is only by a more constant dynamic force descending into an unalterable equality and peace that the physical nature's normal tendency can be eradicated.

The normal tendency of the physical nature is to be inert and in its inertia to respond only to the ordinary vital forces, not to the higher forces. If one has a perfect equality and peace then one can be unaffected by the spreading of the inertia and bring down into it gradually or quickly the same peace with a force of the higher consciousness which can alter it. When that is there there can be no longer the difficulty and fluctuations with a preponderance of inertia such as you are now having.

*

The first means [*of changing inertia into peace*] is not to get upset when it comes or when it stays. The second is to detach yourself, not only yourself above but yourself below and not identify. The third is to reject everything that is raised by the

inertia and not regard it as your own or accept it at all.

If you can do these things then there will be something in you that remains perfectly quiet even in the pits of inertia. Through that quiet part you can bring down peace, force, even light and knowledge into the inertia itself.

*

When the mind and the vital take hold of the physical and make it an instrument, then there is no inertia. But here the physical consciousness has been dealt with. If it could have received the peace of the self into itself without covering it over with inertia, then it would have been all right. But the vital has intervened somehow with its demand and dissatisfaction, so there has been this obstruction and inability to progress. This thing often happens in the sadhana and one must have the power either to reject it dynamically or else to remain detached until it has exhausted itself. Then the true movement begins again.

*

Inertia or anything else must be felt as separate, not part of one's real self which is one with the Divine.

The Difficulty of Eliminating Inertia and Tamas

You cannot expect a persistent inertia like that to disappear in three days because you make some kind of a beginning of effort to resist it.

*

The inertia of the physical consciousness is always a difficult thing to eliminate—it is that, more even than any vital resistance, which keeps all the movements of the ignorance recurring even when the knowledge is there and the will to change. But this difficulty has to be faced and overcome by an equal perseverance in the will of the sadhak. It is a steady flame that must burn, as steady as the obstruction is obstinate. Do not therefore be discouraged by the persistence of the obstruction of the ignorance.

The persistence of your own will to conquer with the Mother's force supporting it will come to the end of the resistance.

*

I don't know of any effective outward means of getting rid of it [*inertia*]. Some, in hours when they cannot do sadhana, spend the time in other occupations — reading, writing or working — and do not try at all to concentrate. But I suspect what you need is more strength in the body.

*

It is quite true that physical exercise is very necessary to keep off the tamas. I am glad you have begun it and I trust you will keep it up.

Physical tamas in its roots can be removed only by the descent and the transformation, but physical exercise and a regular activity of the body can always prevent a tamasic condition from prevailing in the body.

*

There should be no yielding to the tamas. In spite of it one should always go on quietly and persistently with the sadhana — otherwise one may be overweighed by the inertia of the physical consciousness from which the tamas comes.

*

The physical always is more tamasic than the rest of the being and does not respond easily. Moreover this is a time of struggle between the higher forces and the resisting forces on the material plane, it is therefore a time when intense attacks on that plane are possible. One has to be on one's guard and keep the true Force always round one as a protecting Power.

*

The adverse forces feel that there is something in you that is disconcerted and restive because of the continuance of the inertia and they hope that by pressing more and more they will

create a revolt. What is important for you in these circumstances is to make your faith, surrender and samata absolute. That is as great and essential a progress as to have high experiences, etc.

Physical Fatigue

Fatigue like this in the course of the sadhana may come from various reasons.

(1) It may come from receiving more than the physical is ready to assimilate. The cure is then a quiet rest in conscious immobility receiving the forces but not for any other purpose than the recuperation of the strength and energy.

(2) It may be due to the passivity taking the form of inertia — inertia brings the consciousness down towards the ordinary physical level which is soon fatigued and prone to tamas. The cure here is to get back into the true consciousness and rest there, not in inertia.

(3) It may be due to mere overstrain of the body — not giving it enough sleep or repose. The body is the support of the Yoga, but its energy is not inexhaustible and needs to be husbanded; it can be kept up by drawing on the universal vital Force but that reinforcement too has its limits. A certain moderation is needed even in the eagerness for progress — moderation, not indifference or indolence.

*

Exactly. "The body felt fatigue" — that is what I mean by the habit of tamas. The body cannot bear the continuous experience, it feels it as a strain. That is the case with most sadhaks. But in your case the obstacle seems to develop a great intensity when it comes. I have already told you the means of getting rid of it,¹ but it cannot be done in a day because it is a fixed habit of the nature and a fixed habit takes time to remove. But it can be done in not too long a time provided you don't get disturbed when it comes and deal with it firmly and steadily.

¹ See the letter beginning "The first means" on page 396. — Ed.

Giddiness

For the giddiness, it may be that in concentration you go partly out of your body; then, if you get up and move before the whole consciousness has come back, there is just such a giddiness as you describe. You can observe in future and see whether it is not this that happens. One has to be careful not to move after deep concentration or trance, till there is the full consciousness in the body.

Restlessness

Yes, this is the time when you have to persist till you are quite settled in the inner consciousness and the persistence of the silence and peace is a sign that it is now possible. When one feels this kind of silence, peace and wideness, one may be sure that it is that of the true being, the real self, penetrating into the mind and vital and perhaps also the physical consciousness (if it is complete). The restlessness of the physical is probably due to the peace and silence having touched the physical but not yet penetrated the material or body consciousness. The old restlessness is there in the body struggling to remain, although it cannot invade either mind or vital or even in a general way the physical consciousness as a whole. If the peace descends there, this restlessness will disappear.

*

This is a form that the resistance in the physical easily and often takes — a restlessness of discomfort in the nervous system. When it is in the legs, it means that it is the most material part of the consciousness that is the seat of the trouble. Since it has come up, it ought to be thrown out for good. Probably this part has become sufficiently conscious to feel the greater pressure when Mother comes down, but not enough to be able to receive and assimilate it, hence the uneasiness and resistance. If so, it should go of itself with a little more opening there.

*

Insist always on the quietude, the peace, the consciousness of the force. Persistently reject the restlessness; it comes always because the physical has the habit of receiving it, accepting it as its own real nature. Always deny it, always reject the unrest; gradually if not immediately, the physical will follow your will and change its habit and its notions.

Habitual Movements and Old Habits

It is obviously because of the past impressions and the habitual movement of consciousness connected with them [*that the old reactions continue*]. In the physical being the power of past impressions is very great, because it is by the process of repeated impressions that consciousness was made to manifest in matter — and also by the habitual reactions of consciousness to these impressions, what the psychologists, I suppose, would call behaviour. According to one school consciousness consists only of these things — but that is the usual habit of stretching one detail of Nature to explain the whole of her.

*

It is really, I think, the physical consciousness that is responsible [*for the return of old movements*]. It is forgetful and obscure and repeats always the old habitual movements even when the mind has abandoned them and the vital is quite willing to abandon them. But when the physical receives the old vibration, the lower vital is affected and responds — otherwise it would be merely a vibration and there would be no danger of its being accepted or affecting the conduct.

*

There is nobody who is free from difficulties, even those who seem the most advanced have them, and all have this obstinacy of the habitual movements in the physical consciousness which recur always in spite of the mind's knowledge and do not want to cease or change. It is only by perseverance in aspiration or will that this difficulty can disappear.

*

The opening of the physical and subconscious always takes a long time as it is a thing of habits and constant repetitions of the old movements, obscure and stiff and not plastic, yielding only little by little. The physical mind can be more easily opened and converted than the rest, but the vital physical and material physical are obstinate. The old things are always recurring there without reason and by force of habit. Much of the vital physical and most of the material are in the subconscious or dependent on it. It needs a strong and sustained action to progress there.

*

It [*getting out of the physical rut*] can only be done by being very quiet and opening oneself continually to the force. The physical needs a very *quiet, persistent* and *patient* action, because it is a thing of inertia and habits. The vehemence of force and struggle which suits the vital, does not act so successfully here. It is a steady opening to the Force, a quiet but unwavering insistence on Faith and the Truth that is to be that is in the end effective.

*

It is not that something is always “wrong” within you but that there is still in the subconscious physical being a part that was accustomed to respond very strongly to the vibrations of these thoughts and feelings and can still respond. Usually you would not allow them to come up at all in thought or feeling form,—it would only manifest as a depression of the body or fatigue — or, if it came, you would get over it at once and the vibrations would sink down and disappear. But in the atmosphere heavily surcharged with this invasion of the ordinary consciousness there is a lessened elasticity in the physical consciousness and they were able to rise. This is an exceedingly common experience. One has to detach oneself from these still weak parts and regard them as if a detail in the machinery that has to be set right. In your case also your nervous (vital physical) being is exceedingly conscious and sensitive and anything wrong in the atmosphere affects it more than it would most of the others.

*

It was certainly not because the Mother was different to you from other days or pushed you to a distance, but because you came rather shut up in that part of your physical being which is still shrinking from the Light. It is this part which was always fundamentally responsible for all your bad passages and painful moments even when the direct difficulty was higher up. Its nature is to cling to the old habitual preyogic consciousness and to shut up doors and windows against the help that is offered and lament in the darkness when it has felt itself hurt. This is a thing that everybody must get rid of who wants to progress. Do not go on identifying yourself with this part and calling it yourself. Get back into your inner being and look at this only as a small though obstinate part of the nature that has to change. For apart from its insistence there is no reason why your way should enter into a desert. It should enter into a wideness of liberation — open to the calm and peace and power and light of a consciousness that is wider than the personal and into which the ego can happily disappear.

*

The physical changes slowly always — its nature is habit — so it is only by constant descents [of *calmness, purity, light and strength*] that gradually its substance gets changed and it becomes accustomed to the higher condition.

*

The obstacle or wall of bondage which you feel is simply that of the habits of the ordinary physical consciousness. It is so with all, — the ordinary vital nature with its ego, desire, passions, disturbances, and the ordinary physical nature with its strong habits and outwardness are the chief obstacles that have to be overcome in the nature. When they fall quiet, then it is easier to enter into the true consciousness and unite with the Mother. But they are not accustomed to quietness and as soon as it is felt they want to come out of it and resume their ordinary movements. But this will go when the inner has sufficiently gained on the outer to dominate it. The inner things will grow and come out

more and more as you feel the inner faith growing until they are strong enough to rule the outer conduct. The obstacles you feel, the surging up of old things and repetition of restlessness etc. are due to this strength of habit of the physical nature—it lives by repeating always the same things and the same movements to which it has been accustomed in the past. The inner influence as it comes out will more and more create for it new habits of thought and feeling and action and it will then dwell firmly in these and not in the things of the old nature.

*

The habit in the physical is obstinate and seems unchangeable because it always recurs—even when one thinks it is gone. But it is not really unchangeable; if the physical mind detaches itself, stands separate, refuses to accept it, then the habit in the physical begins to lose its force of repetition. Sometimes it goes slowly, sometimes (but this is less frequent) it stops suddenly and recurs no more.

*

Yes; that [*the idea that things cannot change*] also is the fault of the physical consciousness. It is obsessed by the idea that “what is” must be,—that the habit of things cannot be altered. This inevitability it extends not only to what is but to what it merely thinks of as a fact—it lays itself open inertly to every suggestion or possibility that seems to be justified by the habit of things. It is the main obstacle to the material change.

*

As I have said, the response of the physical mind or vital to these forces is a habit. You get upset as soon as they touch either and lose control over yourself. The concentration in the heart is the way to get rid of them, but there must also be a detachment of the consciousness so that it can stand back from the attack and feel separate from it.

*

The response-giving mechanism is like that [*fixed in its ways*] in everybody. It is not by something shocking but by something enlarging and uplifting that it can get out of its rut of habit.

*

Habits are difficult to overcome. If any have to be got rid of, one must be very persistent and vigilant and not yield or let them have their way. It is only when one does that for a very long time that they go.

*

The physical always finds it difficult to take up a new attitude. It is only by training and discipline that it can be made to do so.

*

I meant [*by “training and discipline” of the physical*] that instead of forgetting it must be trained to remember and fix the right movements of consciousness and right states — by repetition, by enforcing again and again, by teaching it to reject persistently and at once the wrong states and wrong movements.

*

In the purification of the physical nature, more even than in the rest, it is not safe to assume that there will be no more attacks of old forces or habits of the nature — till the thing is actually and unmistakably done. One must remain vigilant till there is the full siddhi. For in the physical, habit, memory, mechanical response have an immense power of survival — therefore a return of old vibrations or formations is always possible. Only when there is the full purification and transformation is there the perfect security.

Mechanical Movements

As for the feeling of being driven, compelled, that is quite usual when it is the physical nature that is being dealt with; there is no need to be upset or think it cannot be got over. The physical

is the slave of certain forces which create a habit and drive it through the mechanical force of the habit. So long as the mind gives consent, you do not notice the slavery; but if the mind withdraws its consent, then you feel the servitude, you feel a force pushing you in spite of the mind's will. It is very obstinate and repeats itself till the habit — the inner habit revealing itself in the outward act — is broken. It is like a machine which once set in motion repeats the same movement. You need not be alarmed or distressed; a quiet persistent aspiration will bring you to the point where the habit breaks and you are free.

*

What you describe is what the Gita means by the realisation that all action is done by the Prakriti. You feel it mechanical because you are in the physical consciousness where all is mechanism. On the mental and vital plane one can have the same experience, but of the actions as a play of forces. What is lacking at present to you is the other side of the experience, viz. that of the silent Atman or else of the witness Purusha calm, tranquil, free, pure and undisturbed by the play of the Prakriti. It tries to come and you are on the point of going into it, but the tendency of externalisation is still too strong. This tendency took you when you came down into the physical — for it is the nature of the ordinary physical consciousness to precipitate itself into the action of the external personality. You have to get back the power of the internal consciousness, above as Atman, below as Purusha first witness and then master of the nature.

Externalisation

It is inevitable that in the course of the sadhana all sorts of conditions should come through which one is led towards the fullness of the true consciousness. You are now, as are most, in the physical consciousness and its principal difficulty is externalisation and this covering up of the active experience so that one does not know what is going on inside or feels as if nothing were going on. When that happens, it means that

something has come up, some part or layer of the physical, which needs to be worked on and, when that has been done, — it may take longer or shorter, — the conscious active inner experience recommences. The muteness in the mind is not a bad thing in itself, it is a favourable condition for the working. Also what you describe as taking place in the head, must be the working of the Force there, — it sometimes gives the impression of a headache. There must be a working in the physical mind to get rid of some difficulty or else to prepare it better for the admission of what comes from above.

It is necessary to have a great patience — so as to go through these conditions and not get apprehensive or restless — and a confidence that all difficulties will be overcome.

*

The push to externalisation must be rejected always — it is a way the physical consciousness has of slipping out of the condition of concentrated sadhana. To keep in the inner consciousness and work from it on the external being till that also is ready is very necessary when the work of change is being specially directed towards the physical consciousness.

*

As for the going within, the pull of the physical consciousness is always outward and even when experiences are going on and the sadhana in full activity, it is the physical resistance that prevents the sadhak from being all the time in the inner consciousness. This resistance disappears altogether only when one reaches an advanced stage of the sadhana. This resistance is now specially active in the Asram because the force is working on the physical and all that is contrary there has to be met and eliminated. But you have before this several times gone inside and felt the touch of the psychic, so that is bound to resume as soon as the physical difficulty is sufficiently cleared away from the consciousness.

Feelings of Incapacity and Discouragement

The thoughts and feelings expressed in your letter are born of the depression and have no truth in themselves apart from it. Your being here does not in the least take up space that could be occupied by “better” sadhaks. For a good sadhak there will always be a place in one way or another. The incapacity which you discover in yourself is simply the resistance of the habitual external and physical nature, which everyone has and which none, however good a sadhak, has yet been able to transform radically, because it is the last thing to change, and its resistance is acute just now because it is against this that the power of the sadhana is now pressing so that the change may come. When this part presents itself it always tries to appear as something unalterable, incapable of change, impervious to the sadhana. But it is not really so and one must not be deceived by this appearance. As for the fear of madness, it is only a nervous impression which you should throw away. It is not vital weakness that leads to such upsettings—it is an obscurity and weakness in the physical mind accompanied by movements of an exaggerated vital nature (e.g. exaggerated spiritual ambition) which are too strong for the mind to bear. That is not your case. You have had long experience of inner peace, wideness, Ananda, an inner life turned towards the Divine and one who has had that ought not to speak of general incapacity, whatever the difficulties of the external nature,—difficulties common in one form or another to all.

*

I have not the slightest doubt that you can do the sadhana if you cleave to it—not certainly on your own unaided strength, for nobody can do that, but by the will of the psychic being in you aided by the Divine Grace. There is a part in the physical and vital consciousness of every human being that has not the will for it, does not feel the capacity for it, distrusts any hope or promise of a spiritual future and is inert and indifferent to any such thing. At one period in the course of the sadhana this rises up and one feels identified with it. That has happened in you now,

but along with an attack of ill health and nervous indisposition which has turned this passage through the obscure physical into a dark and intense trouble. With enough sleep and a quieting of the nerves and return of physical energy that ought to disappear and it would be possible to bring the Light and Consciousness down into this obscure part. An intense concentration bringing struggle is not what is needed, but a very quiet attitude of self-opening. Not any effort of sadhana just now, but the recovery of tranquillity and ease is what is wanted at present to restore the opening of the nature.

*

The feeling of inability is just the thing you have to reject. It is true only of the physical material consciousness and it is true of everybody in the physical consciousness, because that is something very inert and all that it can do is open itself, remain quiet and receive the Influence. But there is no inability in the rest of the being: it can will and reject. If confusion and obscurity come, it is not bound to accept them,—it can open to the true Force and throw them away; it can keep itself open even when the forces of confusion throw themselves upon it. Only the concentration also must be quiet and steady,—not struggling and restless.

*

It is not because you cannot recover the true attitude, but because you admit in part of your mind the false suggestion of your inability that this mixed condition lasts longer than it should. It is part of your physical consciousness that keeps the memory of the old movements and has the habit of admitting them and thinking them inevitable. You must insist with the clearer part of your consciousness on the true Truth, rejecting always these suggestions and feelings, till this obscure part also is open and admits the Light.

*

As to what has happened in your sadhana, it is that you have allowed yourself to fall into a groove of the physical mind and

of the external vital nature and got fixed in a persistent or constantly recurrent repetition of the ideas and feelings which they present to you—feelings of settled disappointment and discouragement and pessimism about yourself and your spiritual future, and ideas—or, if you will allow me to call them so, notions—which come to the support of these feelings and sustain them. The result of this is to shut you up against the contact and spiritual influence and help you were once feeling or beginning to feel from us. It also shuts you up against your own deeper self and sterilises your personal effort. An accident of this kind is common enough in the path of spiritual effort, and the first thing to be done to get rid of its effects is to throw away resolutely the persistent ideas and feelings which keep you in the groove. I do not know whether you can return to the former condition, for it is seldom that one can go back to a point in the past; but it is always possible for you to go forward, recovering the force for propulsion of what you then gained and have certainly still within you assimilated in your inner being. If you want to carry on some part of the Yoga by your active efforts and aspiration, there is no reason why you should not find back that capacity; but the first effort to be made is to reject persistently, fully and tenaciously—not for two or three days, but always, so long as they insist or return—these disabling thoughts and feelings which hamstring all hope and faith in you, not to accept them, not to justify them, not to give them by your acquiescence the right to go on harping on the same note always of discouragement, incapacity and failure. The ideas by which you justify them are, I repeat, notions only of the physical mind, not true things—e.g. the notion that you *cannot* understand a given idea (intellectually accepting or not accepting is another matter); for it is perfectly certain that your thinking intelligence is quite trained enough to understand anything that is put before it. It is only the physical mind that is limited even in the most intelligent and opens up pits of stupidity or at least larger or smaller spaces of blank non-understanding in the face of unaccustomed ideas or a new line of possible experience or anything else either alien to the mind's habits or unwelcome to

something in the vital parts. I suppose we have all had experience of this incapable element in our nature, and if one fixes oneself in it, it can make even things that would ordinarily be easy for us seem difficult things and things difficult seem impossible. But why should a mind trained to think allow this poorer part of itself to dominate it? So with the other notions. There is nothing anyone else can do in the way of Yoga that you cannot do if you have the fixed will to do it; some things may take a longer time because of past training, habits, mental associations but there is nothing impossible, too difficult, no inherently insuperable obstacle.

*

It [*the thought of leaving the Ashram*] is one of the suggestions of the external physical consciousness that are filling the atmosphere just now. I explain that to you in the answers below.

You used to have dreams on the vital plane also long ago in which you passed through dangerous forests and wildernesses amid perils of land and water and wild beasts etc., but you reached safely under the Mother's protection where you were going. I remember your writing some to me. Also there have been dreams of difficult passages ending in the arrival on the true open way. Only these dreams you are having now indicate the difficulty of the passage through the physical (and no longer through the vital) consciousness — but the common element is that you are under the Mother's protection and reach the way at the end. This is quite natural because what everybody is passing through now are the difficulties of the physical and subconscious nature; but the Mother's protection is the same here as in the past stages of the sadhana.

*

It is the doubt that most or many are raising now in the Asram. "Where am I? Where am I going? Am I really doing the Yoga? It seems to me I am getting nothing. There is no progress anywhere. All is dry and mechanical. What is the use of being here?" These are the thoughts that have been moving about in the atmosphere

of the Asram and when you get such thoughts, it means that they are coming to you as suggestions from the atmosphere. If they are in the minds of any of those you move with, it is natural they should try to enter you, but even otherwise they can come to you, just as people catch cold because the germs are in the atmosphere.

Your attitude is all right, but evidently you have allowed your mind to be clouded by the suggestions of which I have spoken above. The feeling of having lost all one had is one of them; the feeling that all is mechanical and uninteresting and it is no use being here is another. Of course they are all false. When one listens to the suggestions, then things begin to *appear* like that. These suggestions are natural to the ignorant physical or body consciousness in human nature, just as suggestions of vital passion and disturbance are natural to the ignorant vital consciousness in human nature. You had vital reactions but you did not allow them to overcome you or make you think yourself unfit for the Yoga, because you relied upon the Mother and did not yield to the contrary vital Force. Here also you will have to have constant reliance on the Mother and reject the suggestions of the physical consciousness in the atmosphere when they come.

Stupidity and Ignorance

Your suggestion that I am telling you things that are untrue in order to encourage you is the usual stupidity of the physical mind—if it were so, it is not you who would be unfit for the Yoga, but myself who would be unfit to be in the search for the Divine Truth anybody's guide. For one can lead through lesser to greater Truth, but not through falsehood to Truth. As for your fitness or unfitness for the Yoga, it is not a question on which your physical mind can be an unerring judge—it judges by the immediate appearance of things and has no knowledge of the laws that govern consciousness or the powers that act in Yoga. In fact the question is not of fitness or unfitness but of the acceptance of Grace. There is no human being whose physical

outer consciousness — the part of yourself in which you are now living — is fit for the Yoga. It is by grace and enlightenment from above that it can become capable and for that the necessity is to be persevering and open it to the Light. Everybody when he enters the physical consciousness has the same difficulty and feels as if he were unfit, obscure and nothing done, nothing changed in him since he began the Yoga; he is apt to forget then all that has happened before or to feel as if he had lost it or as if it had all been unreal or untrue.

I suppose that is why you object to my phrase about your having gone so far. I meant that you had had openings in your thinking mind and heart and higher vital and experiences also and had seen very lucidly the condition of your own being and nature and had by that got so far that these parts were ready for the spiritual change — what remains is the physical and outer consciousness which has to be compelled to accept the necessity of change. That is no doubt the most difficult part of the work to be done, but it is also the part which, if once done, makes possible the total change of the being and nature. I therefore said that having gone so far it would be absurd to turn back now and give up because this resists — it always resists in everybody and very obstinately too. That is no reason for giving up the endeavour.

It is this consciousness that has expressed itself in your letter — or the obscure part of it which clings to its old attitude. It does not want to fulfil the sadhana unless it can get by it the things it wanted. It wants the satisfaction of the ego, "self-fulfilment", appreciation, the granting of its desires. It measures the Divine Love by the outward favours showered upon it and looks jealously to see who gets more of these favours than itself, then says that the Divine has no love for it and assigns reasons which are either derogatory to the Divine or, as in your letter, self-depreciatory and a cause for despair. It is not in you alone that this part feels and acts like that, it is in almost everybody. If that were the only thing in you or the others, then indeed there would be no possibility of Yoga. But though it is strong, it is not the whole — there is a psychic being and a mind and

heart influenced and enlightened by it which has other feelings and another vision of things and aim in sadhana. These are now covered in you by the upsurge of this part which has to change. It is tamasic and does not want to change, does not want to believe unless it can be done by reassuring the vital ego. But there is nothing new in all that—it is part of human nature and has always been there, hampering and limiting the sadhana. Its existence is no reason for despair—everyone has it and the sadhana has to be done in spite of it, in spite of the mixture it brings till the time comes when it has to be definitely converted or rejected. It is difficult to do it, but perfectly possible. These things I know and realise and it is therefore that I insist on your persevering and encourage you to go on; it is not my statement of the position that is untrue, it is the view of it taken by this obscure part of your being that is unsound and an error.

*

It is the instinctive (not mental) will in the outer being that is blind—the inner mind knows and understands and when it comes out it enlightens the rest so that all is clear. But the outer being readmits the darkness and confusion through a wrong movement of the vital or through an inert acceptance of the obscurity of the ignorant physical consciousness and the knowledge gets darkened over. But it is there and has only to come out again. The physical consciousness is constitutionally ignorant—it may be made to understand, but it goes on forgetting and feeling as if it had never known—till the Force and Light finally get hold of it and then it forgets no more.

Agnosticism

These feelings are the usual attitude of the physical consciousness left to itself towards the Divine—a complete Agnosticism and inability to experience.²

² *The correspondent complained about the difficulty of knowing the Divine and said that he was on the verge of Agnosticism. His letter ends: "But even if I were to know Him, how would it affect the solid material facts of earth?" —Ed.*

The knowledge of the impersonal Divine by itself does not affect the material facts of earth or at least need not. It only produces a subjective change in the being itself and, if it is complete, a new vision and attitude towards all things immaterial or material. But the complete knowledge of the Divine can produce a change in material things, for it sets a Force working which ends by acting even upon these material things that seem to the physical consciousness so absolute, invincible and unchangeable.

Fear of Death

In a certain part of the physical consciousness and in the subconscious there is always the human and animal fear of death and of anything that has to do with death. It is from there that these dreams are rising along with the fear felt by those parts of the nature. These things rise up in order to be rejected and the mind is rejecting them; for all fear must go and there must be in the physical the full confidence in the Divine.

Section Two

Food, Sleep, Dreams and Sex

Chapter One

Food

The Yogic Attitude towards Food

If you want to do Yoga, you must take more and more in all matters, small or great, the Yogic attitude. In our path that attitude is not one of forceful suppression, but of detachment and equality with regard to the objects of desire. Forceful suppression (fasting comes under the head) stands on the same level as free indulgence; in both cases, the desire remains; in the one it is fed by indulgence, in the other it lies latent and exasperated by suppression. It is only when one stands back, separates oneself from the lower vital, refusing to regard its desires and clamours as one's own, and cultivates an entire equality and equanimity in the consciousness with respect to them that the lower vital itself becomes gradually purified and itself also calm and equal. Each wave of desire as it comes must be observed, as quietly and with as much unmoved detachment as you would observe something going on outside you, and must be allowed to pass, rejected from the consciousness, and the true movement, the true consciousness steadily put in its place.

*

About food, tea etc. the aim of Yoga is to have no hankerings, no slavery either to the stomach or the palate. How to get to that point is another matter—it depends often on the individual. With a thing like tea, the strongest and easiest way is to stop it. As to food the best way usually is to take the food given you, practise non-attachment and follow no fancies. That would mean giving up the Sunday indulgence. The rest must be done by an inner change of consciousness and not by external means.

*

It is a mistake to neglect the body and let it waste away; the body

is the means of the sadhana and should be maintained in good order. There should be no attachment to it, but no contempt or neglect either of the material part of our nature.

In this Yoga the aim is not only the union with the higher consciousness but the transformation (by its power) of the lower including the physical nature.

It is not necessary to have desire or greed of food in order to eat. The Yogi eats not out of desire, but to maintain the body.

*

That [*disgust for eating*] is rather an excessive feeling. One should eat for maintenance of the body without attaching any other importance, but without repulsion.

*

The vital of most people is of this kind [*too weak to restrain its desires for pleasure*], except in a few who are indifferent to sex or to food desire or to both, by temperament and nature. There is always something in the lower vital which is recalcitrant and takes a pleasure in following its own way and disregarding the higher dictate, and there are always external forces hostile to the Yoga which try to take advantage of its obscurities, revolts and weaknesses. Neither neglect this turn of the nature (food desire) nor make too much of it; it has to be dealt with, purified and mastered but without giving it too much importance. There are two ways of conquering it—one of detachment, learning to regard food as only a physical necessity and the vital satisfaction of the stomach and the palate as a thing of little or no importance; the other is to be able to take without insistence or seeking any food given and to find in it (whether pronounced good or bad by others) the equal *rasa*, not of the food for its own sake, but of the universal Ananda. But the latter comes usually only when one can live in the cosmic consciousness or rise into the Overmind—and for this you are not yet ready. So the first way is the one you should keep in view.

*

Do not trouble your mind about food. Take it in the right quantity (neither too much nor too little), without greed or repulsion, as the means given you by the Mother for the maintenance of the body, in the right spirit, offering it to the Divine in you; then it need not create *tamas*.

*

It is much better to eat the meal in silence or at any rate in quietness.

Attachment to Food

It is the attachment to food, the greed and eagerness for it, making it an unduly important thing in the life, that is contrary to the spirit of Yoga. To be aware that something is pleasant to the palate is not wrong; only one must have no desire nor hankering for it, no exultation in getting it, no displeasure or regret at not getting it. One must be calm and equal, not getting upset or dissatisfied when the food is not tasty or not in abundance—eating the fixed amount that is necessary, not less or more. There should be neither eagerness nor repugnance.

To be always thinking about food and troubling the mind is quite the wrong way of getting rid of the food-desire. Put the food element in the right place in the life, in a small corner, and don't concentrate on it but on other things.

*

The attachment to good food must be given up as also the personal attachment to position and service; but it is not indispensably necessary for that purpose to take to an ascetic diet or to give up all means of action such as money and service. The Yогin has to become *nihsva* in this sense that he feels that nothing belongs to him but all to the Divine and he must be ready at any time to give up all to the Divine. But there is no meaning in throwing away everything in order to be externally *nihsva* without any imperative cause.

Greed for Food

The first thing to be attained about eating, is to get rid of the greed of food, the attachment and desire,—to take it only as a need of the body, to think little of it and not to allow it to occupy a big place in the life; also to be satisfied with what you get, not to hanker. At the same time sufficient food should be taken, avoiding either deficiency or excess; an excessive coercion or *nigraha* in this respect (as opposed to reasonable control) often brings a reaction. One should go steadily, but not try to get too much done at once.

*

As for Sannyasis and food, Sannyasis put a compulsion on their desires in this and other matters—they take ascetic food as a principle; but this does not necessarily kill the greed for food, it remains compressed and, if the compulsion or principle is removed, it can come up again stronger than before—for compression without removal often increases the force of these things instead of destroying them.

*

Not to eat as the method of getting rid of the greed of food is the ascetic way. Ours is equanimity and non-attachment.

*

These things [*persistent desires*] still rise in you because they have been for so long prominent difficulties and, as far as the first is concerned, because you gave it much justification from the mind at one time. But if the inner consciousness is growing like that they are sure to go. Only if they rise, don't give them harbourage. Perhaps with regard to the greed for food, your attitude has not been quite correct. Greed for food has to be overcome, but it has not to be given too much thought. The proper attitude to food is a certain equality. Food is for the maintenance of the body and one should take enough for that—what the body needs; if one gives less the body feels the need

and hankers; if you give more, then that is indulging the vital. As for particular foods the palate likes, the attitude of the mind and vital should be, "If I get, I take; if I don't get, I shall not mind." One should not think too much of food either to indulge or unduly to repress—that is the best.

*

One does not need to get a hatred for food in order to get rid of the greed for food. On the other hand, to develop dislike for certain things may help to reject them—but that too is not always the cure, for they may remain in spite of the dislike.

*

It is true that the greed of food, the desire of the palate are very strong in a great many if not most of the sadhaks; this is one of the things that they take as natural and seem not at all anxious to get it out of them. I do not think it is active in you; what you felt must have come in from the others,—for very often one feels the things that are in the atmosphere and one must be careful to distinguish that from one's own feeling.

*

As to taking tea or food there [*at a friend's place*], you must always remember that to be governed by these desires is not at all an ideal condition. But if you have the impulse and are not able easily and naturally to reject it, you can take on condition you scrupulously inform the Mother both of the act and of the movement and state of mind accompanying it. Also often the desire may not be yours, but may come on you from outside, imposed on you silently or otherwise by suggestion by the others; you must learn to see when it is like that and then you must reject it. Your aspiration must be for an inner change so that there will be no longer any need to indulge the desires, because they will no longer have a hold on you.

You must learn to watch yourself and know what is the true nature and source of the movements in you and report them

carefully—as in fact you had begun to do when you first had the psychic opening and could see the movements in you or many of them at least very clearly.

*

Of course—the vital is insatiable.¹ There are only two things that interfere with it [*greed for food*]—the limitations of the body and the disapprobation of the mind—but the latter is not always there. There is also of course the possibility of the psychic interfering, but to that the vital becomes pervious only at a certain stage. It is therefore the body that is the only check for most people.

*

These complaints about food are of long standing with many—they come from the animal man and will go on so long as the sadhaks identify themselves with the physical animal in them.

Taste

As regards the progress you have made, I do not think you have given us an exaggerated impression of it; it seems to be quite real. It is no part of this Yoga to suppress taste, *rasa* altogether; so, if you found the ice-cream pleasant, that does not by itself invalidate the completeness of your progress. What is to be got rid of is vital desire and attachment, the greed of food, being overjoyed at getting the food you like, sorry and discontented when you do not have it, giving an undue importance to it, etc. If one wants to be a Yогin, it will not do to be like the ordinary man to whom food, sex and gain are nine-tenths of life or even to keep in any of these things the reactions to which vital human nature is prone. Equality is here the test as in so many other matters. If you can take the Ashram food with satisfaction or at least without dissatisfaction, that is already a sign that attachment

¹ *The correspondent wrote that the vital being never seems to tire of the enjoyment of food, even though it results in illness, pain and misery for the body.—Ed.*

and predilection are losing their old place in the nature.

*

Taste is no more a guilty thing than sight or hearing. It is the desire that it awakens that has to be thrown away.

It is possible to get rid of taste like Chaitanya, for it is something that depends on the consciousness and so inhibition is possible. In hypnotic experiments it is found that suggestion can make sugar taste bitter or bitter things sweet. Berkeley and physiology are both right. There is a certain usually fixed relation between the consciousness in the palate and the *guna* of the food, but the consciousness can alter the relation if it wants or inhibit it altogether. There are Yogis who make themselves insensitive to pain also and that too can be done by hypnosis.

Another method is to find all things good to the taste without attachment to any.

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No—it [*taste*] is not a bondage, if there is no attachment. Taste is natural and quite permissible so long as one is not the slave of the palate. Certainly, the enjoyment of taste can be offered up. I don't know that there is any fruit of eating in the sense of the phrase in the Gita.

Sensitivity to Smell

This [*reaction of uneasiness after smelling food*] is due to an acute consciousness and sensitiveness of the physical being, especially the vital physical. The sense of being fed by smell has become thereby very acute—the feeding by smell is a well known thing, and there is the Sanskrit proverb, *ghrāṇam ardhabhojanam*, “smell is a half eating”. But this by itself would not produce the uneasiness, which must be due to an acute physical sensitiveness to the mass of ordinary human reactions concentrated about the food, greed etc. which fill the atmosphere. It does not look as if more than a very few of the sadhaks were free (even they mainly, not wholly) from these

reactions; most seem to accept them as quite normal and proper in a life of Yoga!!

It is good for the physical to be more and more conscious, but it should not be overpowered by the things of which it becomes aware or badly affected or upset by them. A strong equality and mastery and detachment must come in the nerves and body as in the mind, which will enable the physical to know and contact these things without feeling any disturbance; it should know and be conscious and reject and throw away the pressure of the movements in the atmosphere, not merely feel them and suffer.

Hunger

I suppose you have become aware of the principle of hunger in the vital physical. It is not really either by satisfying it or forcibly denying it that it will go—it is by putting a will on it to change and bringing down a higher consciousness that it can change.

*

To suppress hunger like that is not good, it very often creates disorders. I doubt whether fatness or thinness of a healthy kind depends on the amount of food taken—there are people who eat well and remain thin and others who take only one meal a day and remain fat. By underfeeding (taking less than the body really needs) one may get emaciated, but that is not a healthy state. The doctors say it depends mostly on the working of certain glands. Anyhow the important thing is now to get the nervous strength back.

As for the liver also eating little does not help, very often it makes the liver sluggish so that it works less well. What is recommended for liver trouble is to avoid greasy food and much eating of sweets and that is also one way of avoiding fat. But to eat too little is not good—it may be necessary in some stomach or intestinal illness, but not for the ordinary liver trouble.

*

This feeling of not being able to eat and of eating being unnecessary is a sort of suggestion that is coming to several people. It should be rejected and cleared out of the system as it may lead to weakening of the body by taking insufficient food. Often one does not feel weak at first, a vital energy comes which supports the body, but later on the body weakens. This feeling may sometimes come when one is going much inside and there is no insistence on the bodily needs; but it should not be accepted. If it is rejected, it is likely to disappear.

*

When I spoke about the inability to eat being a suggestion, I meant a suggestion to the body consciousness itself, not to your mind. When such suggestions come, they produce physical effects of this kind, instead of the idea of not eating there comes a sort of inability to eat.

*

The absence of hunger and thirst and the eating only for maintenance of the body without any feeling of having eaten is a state that sometimes comes when one is living more and more in the inner being and less in the body.

Quantity of Food

What is necessary is to take enough food and think no more about it, taking it as a means for the maintenance of the physical instrument only. But just as one should not overeat, so one should not diminish unduly—it produces a reaction which defeats the object—for the object is not to allow either the greed for food or the heavy tamas of the physical which is the result of excessive eating to interfere with the concentration on the spiritual experience and progress. If the body is left insufficiently nourished, it will think of food more than otherwise.

*

Too much eating makes the body material and heavy, eating

too little makes it weak and nervous—one has to find the true harmony and balance between the body's need and the food taken.

*

It depends on what you can digest. If you can digest, there is no harm in taking more since you feel hungry. All these things depend upon what is the true need of the body and that may differ in different cases according to the constitution of the body, the amount of work done or exercise taken. It is possible that you have reduced your food too much—so you can try taking more.

*

But it is quite natural. Exercise is always supposed to increase the appetite as the body needs more food to restore the extra expense of energy put out. Normally the more physical work the body has to do the more food it needs. On the other hand mental work requires no increase of food—that has been ascertained scientifically by experiment. Hunger may increase by other causes, but when it coincides with the taking up of play or physical exercise of a strenuous character, that is sufficient to explain it.

*

If the [*stomach*] pains are strong, you can abstain from work for a day or two till they have subsided. Of course if you feel that you suffer from anything else but liquid food, that settles the question—you can take liquid food only and if you take liquid food only then you will not be strong enough to work. But usually the thought takes a big part in determining these things—the mind has the impression that any solid food will hurt and the body follows—so naturally as a result any solid food does begin to hurt.

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The mental or vital vigour does not or need not depend on the

food — it is the physical that after a time begins to get strained if there is not sufficient nourishment.

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One can bring down the strength [*from above*], but it is also necessary to see that the body has sufficient food, sleep and rest — absence of these things strains the nerves and if the nerves are strained the body feels fatigue, becomes weakened.

*

It is possible there was a suppression or underfeeding — you were several times even proposing to eat still less and the Mother did not approve. When there is this suppression I have always noticed that there comes for a time a strong eagerness or necessity for eating largely as if the body were taking its compensation for the past want.

*

If these [*practices of self-control*] are done as moral virtues, they need not bring a spiritual state. It is only when they are observed as a spiritual discipline that they help — most of them, at least. A man may eat little and have no spirituality — but if he practises it as a means of self-mastery to get rid of the greed of food, then it helps.

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It is better to be careful in these matters of food etc., as in the stage through which your sadhana is passing there is a considerable sensitiveness in the vital physical part of the being and it may be easily disturbed by a wrong impact or a wrong movement like overfeeding.

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When the physical consciousness has been sensitised, too rich or heavy food becomes offensive to it.

*

It is true that as one reaches an advanced age a diminished diet may become desirable.

Fasting

I have myself fasted first for 10 days and then 23 days just to see what it was like and how far one could live without food, and certain things like that. I found that it was no good. To take with equanimity whatever comes (or does not come) seemed to me more the thing than any violent exercises like that.

*

I think it is not safe to admit any suggestion of not eating—sometimes it opens the door for the non-eating force to take hold of the mind and there is trouble. That comes easily because the inner being of course does not need any food and this non-need is attempted to be thrown by some forces on the body also which is not under the same happy law. It is better to allow the condition [*of peaceful concentration*] to grow in intensity until it can last even through the meal and after. I suppose it is not really the meal that disturbs but the coming out into the outer consciousness which is a little difficult to avoid when one goes to eat; but that can be overcome in time.

*

You must not let that movement [*of reducing food*] go too far. It is one of the dangers of the sadhana, because of the ascetic turn of Yoga in the past that as experiences come the suggestion comes that food or sleep etc. are not necessary and also there may come an inclination in the body not to eat or not to sleep. But if that is accepted the results are often disastrous. It is no more to be accepted than the inertia itself.

*

To make your sadhana depend upon not eating is to make a great mistake. When people fast like that, they get into an abnormal condition and can easily mistake imaginations and delusions for

true experiences. Much fasting in the end weakens the nervous system. So you must drop this habit of not eating for days together. For Yoga it is a mistake to eat too much but a mistake also to eat nothing or too little. If you eat too much, you become heavy and tamasic; if you fast or eat too little, you excite the vital energies and finally overexcite them, but at the same time you weaken the body and the nerves; both are bad for sadhana. You should eat regularly a moderate but sufficient amount of food; it is only if there is illness or disturbance of digestion that a low diet or not eating sometimes becomes necessary, but fasting even for the purpose of resting the stomach should not last more than a day.

For your sadhana you have to use, not outward means like this, but quietness, sincere peaceful aspiration, openness to the Mother.

*

It is a fact that by fasting, if the mind and the nerves are solid or the will force dynamic, one can get for a time into a state of inner energy and receptivity which is alluring to the mind and the usual reactions of hunger, weakness, intestinal disturbance, etc. can be wholly avoided. But the body suffers by diminution and there can easily develop in the vital a morbid overstrained condition due to the inrush of more vital energy than the nervous system can assimilate or coordinate. Nervous people should avoid the temptation to fast; it is often accompanied or followed by delusions and a loss of balance. Especially if there is a motive of hunger-strike or that element comes in, as it did in your case, fasting becomes perilous, for it is then an indulgence of a vital movement which may easily become a habit injurious and pernicious to the sadhana. Even if all these reactions are avoided, still there is no sufficient utility in fasting, since the higher energy and receptivity ought to come not by artificial or physical means but by intensity of the consciousness and strong will for the sadhana.

*

I never heard of it [*fasting to get realisation*]; but it is just the way to get the wrong realisation. The nerves get into an excited tense condition (when they do not collapse) and invent realisations or open to a wrong Force. At least that often happens.

*

The idea of giving up food is a wrong inspiration. You can go on with a small quantity of food, but not without food altogether, except for a comparatively short time. Remember what the Gita says, “Yoga is not for one who eats in excess nor for one who abstains from eating altogether.” Vital energy is one thing—of that one can draw a great amount without food and often it increases with fasting; but physical substance, without which life loses its support, is of a different order. If at any time it became possible to renew the body without food and that proved necessary for the Yoga, the Mother and I would be the first to do it. So keep to your established diet and do not get impatient with Nature.

*

The transformation to which we aspire is too vast and complex to come at one stroke; it must be allowed to come by stages. The physical change is the last of these stages and is itself a progressive process.

The inner transformation cannot be brought about by physical means either of a positive or a negative nature. On the contrary, the physical change itself can only be brought about by a descent of the greater supramental consciousness into the cells of the body. Till then at least the body and its supporting energies have to be maintained in part by the ordinary means, food, sleep, etc. Food has to be taken in the right spirit, with the right consciousness; sleep has to be gradually transformed into the Yogic repose. A premature and excessive physical austerity (*tapasyā*) may endanger the process of the sadhana by establishing a disturbance and abnormality of the forces in the different parts of the system. A great energy may pour into the mental and vital parts, but the nerves and the body may be overstrained and

lose the strength to support the play of these higher energies. This is the reason why an extreme physical austerity is not included here as a substantive part of the sadhana.

There is no harm in fasting from time to time for a day or two or in reducing the food taken to a small but sufficient modicum; but entire abstinence for a long period is not advisable.

Types of Food

I think the importance of sattvic food from the spiritual point of view has been exaggerated. Food is rather a question of hygiene and many of the sanctions and prohibitions laid down in ancient religions had more a hygienic than a spiritual motive. The Gita's definitions seem to point in the same direction — tamasic food, it seems to say, is what is stale or rotten with the virtue gone out of it, rajasic food is that which is too acrid, pungent etc., heats the blood and spoils the health, sattvic food is what is pleasing, healthy etc. It may well be that different kinds of food nourish the action of the different gunas and so indirectly are helpful or harmful apart from their physical action. But that is as far as we can confidently go. What particular eatables are or are not sattvic is another question and more difficult to determine. Spiritually, I should say that the effect of food depends more on the occult atmosphere and influences that come with it than on anything in the food itself. Vegetarianism is another question altogether; it stands, as you say, on a will not to do harm to the more conscious forms of life for the satisfaction of the belly.

As to the question of practising to take all kinds of food with equal rasa, it is not necessary to practise nor does it really come by practice. One has to acquire equality within in the consciousness and as this equality grows one can extend it or apply it to the various fields of the activity of the consciousness.

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Those who are ready to give up animal food, should certainly

do so. The others can do it when they are ready.²

*

It is rather certain kinds of food that are supposed to increase it [*sexual desire*]—e.g. meat, onions, chillis etc.

*

It [*the chilli*] is an aphrodisiac—has a strong effect on the sex centre.

*

If it [*taking chillis*] is once only in some months it can't be harmful for the body. For the sadhana what is harmful is taking to satisfy desire, fancy, impulse—it is not the thing in itself.

*

There is no sin at all in eating these things [*onions, potatoes, etc.*]. The only objection to eating much onions is that it is supposed to stimulate not tamoguna but rajas, but there are other foods not forbidden that do that.

*

I think onions can be described as rajaso-tamasic in their character. They are heavy and material and at the same time excitant of certain strong material-vital forces. It is obvious that if one wants to conquer the physical passions and is still very much subject to the body nature and the things that affect it, free indulgence in onions is not advisable. It is only for those who have risen above the body consciousness and mastered it and are not affected by these things that it does not at all matter; for them the use of this or that food or its disuse makes no difference. At the same time I must say that the abstinence from rajasic or tamasic foods does not of itself assure freedom from the things they help to stimulate. Vegetarians, for instance, can be as sensual and excitable as meat-eaters; a man may abstain

² This letter was written to someone living outside the Ashram.—Ed.

from onions and yet be in these respects no better than before. It is a change of consciousness that is effective and this kind of abstention helps that only in so far as it tends to create a less heavy and more refined and plastic physical consciousness for the higher will to act upon. That is something, but it is not all; the change of consciousness can come even in spite of non-abstinence.

Onions are allowed here because the palate of the sadhaks demands something to give a taste to the food. We do not insist on these details, or make an absolutely strict rule, as the stress here is more on the inward change, the outward coming as its result. Only so much is insisted on as is essential for organisation and inner and outer discipline and to point the way to an indispensable self-control. It is pressed on all that the greed of the palate has to be conquered, but it has to be done in the last resort from within, as also the other passions and desires of the lower nature.

*

Betel is anaesthetic, depressive and yet with a certain toxic effect — that is why it is prohibited.

Whatever is done without purpose is a useless and wrong movement.

Eating things from outside is not safe either from the physical or from the spiritual point of view.

Intoxicants

It is the habit in the subconscious material that feels an artificial need created by the past and does not care whether it is harmful or disturbing to the nerves or not. That is the nature of all intoxications (wine, tobacco, cocaine etc.), people go on even after the deleterious effects have shown themselves and even after all real pleasure in it has ceased because of this artificial need (it is not real). The will has to get hold of this subconscious persistence and dissolve it.

*

Smoking is only a morbid craving of physical desire—there is no other reason for people doing it. Smoking is tamasic and prevents control of mind.

*

These intoxicants [*such as bhang*] put one in relation with a vital world in which such things [*as music and song*] exist.

Chapter Two

Sleep

The Yogic Attitude towards Sleep and Food

This is not a Yoga in which physical austerities have to be done for their own sake. Sleep is necessary for the body just as food is. Sufficient sleep must be taken, but not excessive sleep. What sufficient sleep is depends on the need of the body.

*

The loss of sleep must not be there. In this Yoga we insist on regular sleep, rest, food, because then the balance can be kept between the strength of the body and the force of all that comes into it from above. Otherwise the body is not able to keep and hold what comes — there is disturbance and loss of the right poise and balance.

*

The first thing I tell people when they want not to eat or sleep is that no Yoga can be done without sufficient food and sleep (see the Gita on this point). This is not Gandhi's asram or a miracle-shop. Fasting and sleeplessness make the nerves morbid and excited and weaken the brain and lead to delusions and fantasies. The Gita says Yoga is not for one who eats too much or sleeps too much, neither is it for one who does not eat or does not sleep, but if one eats and sleeps suitably — *yuktāhārī yuktanidraḥ* — then one can do it best. It is the same with everything else. How often have I said that excessive retirement was suspect to me and that to do nothing but meditate was a lopsided and therefore unsound sadhana.

*

I must ask you to remember what I told you about sadhana. If

you want to do the sadhana here, you must sleep well and eat well. If you try to stop sleeping or eating or unduly diminish sleep and food, you will weaken the body and excite the vital and wrong and excited and exaggerated movements will come into you. Remember this in future.

*

There are stories told of people living without sleep or food—living without sleep has happened, but it came by an abnormal condition in the person which cannot be brought at will. There is no instance of anyone living without food,—none that is to say which is beyond doubt—but that also may be possible—but here also it must depend on some abnormal condition which cannot be brought at will.

The Need of Sleep and Rest

It is not a right method to try to keep awake at night; the suppression of the needed sleep makes the body tamasic and unfit for the necessary concentration during the waking hours. The right way is to transform the sleep and not suppress it, and especially to learn how to become more and more conscious in sleep itself. If that is done, sleep changes into an inner mode of consciousness in which the sadhana can continue as much as in the waking state, and at the same time one is able to enter into other planes of consciousness than the physical and command an immense range of informative and utilisable experience.

*

By not sleeping enough you weaken the forces of the physical consciousness and so the physical basis of the sadhana is less strong than it should be. It gets more open to the forces of inertia.

*

Is that all your sleep [*three-and-a-half hours*]? If so, it is far too little. If you do not sleep enough, the body and the nervous

envelope will be weakened and the body and the nervous envelope are the basis of the sadhana.

*

I am glad the peace is coming back at last and I trust it will increase and push out these other things. But how is it,—you have not been taking proper rest? Rest is absolutely necessary for the body and still more for the nervous system; not only for working but for sadhana rest to the body and the nerves is essential. If you allow them to be strained and tired, they will not be able to adapt themselves readily for the required change, all sorts of things, confusion, suggestions etc. are likely to come into a tired nervous system. They too must be strong and at peace.

*

It is the want of sleep itself that brings the symptoms of uneasiness. The action of the Sadhana cannot of itself bring this kind of reaction, it is only if the body gets strained by want of sleep, insufficient food, overwork or nervous excitement that there are these things. It is probably because the nerves are strung in the daytime and you do not relax into ease that it is difficult to sleep.

*

One can assimilate [*spiritual experience*] in sleep also. Remaining awake like that is not good, as in the end it strains the nerves and the system receives wrongly in an excited way or else gets too tired to receive.

*

You should have continuous sleep at night and sufficient—otherwise you will feel sleepy in the day which will be a hindrance to work.

*

Sleep is necessary; this kind of broken rest is not good. It is the consciousness in sleep itself that has to change.

*

Such pressure [*to sleep*] only comes (1) when the body needs sleep, not having had enough or because enough rest is not given, (2) when it wants to recuperate after illness or strong fatigue, (3) when there is a pressure from above which the physical consciousness or part of it replies to by trying to go inside.

*

Take care to rest enough. You must guard against fatigue as it may bring relaxation and tamas. To rest well is not tamas, as some people suppose; it can be done in the right consciousness to maintain the bodily energy — like the *savasana* of the strenuous Hathayogin.

*

Both for fevers and for mental trouble sleep is a great help and its absence very undesirable — it is the loss of a curative agency.

The Amount of Sleep Needed

The ordinary period of sleep most people give themselves is 8 hours. In bad health (I am not speaking of acute illness) it can extend to 9. 12 hours is excessive unless one is seriously ill or recovering from illness or else has underslept for a long time and the body is making up arrears of needed sleep.

*

8 hours [*of sleep*] at night is all right, the additional 2 hours is probably necessitated by the bad sleep you were having before. The body recoups itself in this way. That is why it is a mistake to take too little sleep — the body gets strained and has to recoup itself by abnormal sleep afterwards.

*

The normal allowance of sleep is said to be 7 to 8 hours except in advanced age when it is said to be less. If one takes less (5 to 6 for instance) the body accommodates itself somehow, but if the control is taken off it immediately wants to make up for

its lost arrears of the normal 8 hours. So often when one has tried to live on too little food, if one relaxes, the body becomes enormously rapacious for food until it has set right the credit and loss account. At least it often happens like that.

*

It must be the want of sleep that keeps your nervous system exposed to weakness — it is a great mistake not to take sufficient sleep. 7 hours is the minimum needed. When one has a very strong nervous system, one can reduce it to 6, sometimes even 5 — but it is rare and ought not to be attempted without necessity.

*

The feeling that you have in the morning proves that you need more sleep, so it is not wise to cut it short to the minimum as that in the end tells on the body. It is better to continue the sleep when you feel sleepy. 7 hours is not too much for sleep.

*

$5\frac{1}{2}$ hours [*of sleep*] is quite insufficient. Six is the absolute minimum, it can go up to seven hours.

*

It is not possible to do at once what you like with the body. If the body is told to sleep only 2 or 3 hours, it may follow if the will is strong enough — but afterwards it may get exceedingly strained and even break down for want of needed rest. The Yogis who minimise their sleep, succeed only after a long tapasya in which they learn how to control the forces of Nature governing the body.

The Real Rest which Restores

In sleep one very commonly passes from consciousness to deeper consciousness in a long succession until one reaches the psychic and rests there or else from higher to higher consciousness until one reaches rest in some silence and peace. The few minutes one

passes in this rest are the real sleep which restores—if one does not get it, there is only a half rest. It is when you come near to either of these domains of rest, that you begin to see these higher kind of dreams.

*

A long unbroken sleep is necessary because there are just ten minutes of the whole into which one enters into a true rest—a sort of Sachchidananda immobility of the consciousness—and that it is which really restores the system. The rest of the time is spent first in travelling through various states of consciousness towards that and then coming out of it back towards the waking state. This fact of the ten minutes true rest has been noted by medical men, but of course they know nothing about Sachchidananda!

*

This feeling of having enough sleep [*when one wakes at night*] and after sleeping again of not having had enough is not unusual. It might be inferred that the first sleep is really enough and the second is a tamasic sleep which leaves the body unrested. Some doctors say that there are about ten minutes of rest which are the true sleep and all the rest is only a process of getting into the ten minutes and getting out again—for these ten minutes are difficult to arrive at. Perhaps you get your ten minutes before the first waking. The difficulty is that the length of sleep seems important and that by the habit of less the nerves continually seem to get strained—at least I have seen that with many. If that can be overcome then so much sleep might not be requisite.

*

According to a recent medical theory one passes in sleep through many phases until one arrives at a state in which there is absolute rest and silence—it lasts only for ten minutes, the rest of the time is taken up by travelling to that and travelling back again to the waking state. I suppose the ten minutes sleep can be called *susupti* in the Brahman or Brahmaloka, the rest is *svapna*

or passage through other worlds (planes or states of conscious existence). It is these ten minutes that restore the energies of the being, and without it sleep is not refreshing.

According to the Mother's experience and knowledge one passes from waking through a succession of states of sleep consciousness which are in fact an entry and passage into so many worlds and arrives at a pure Sachchidananda state of complete rest, light and silence; afterwards one retraces one's way till one reaches the waking physical state. It is this Sachchidananda period that gives sleep all its restorative value. These two accounts, the scientific and the occult-spiritual, are practically identical with each other. But the former is only a recent discovery of what the occult-spiritual knowledge knew long ago.

People's ideas of sound sleep are absolutely erroneous. What they call sound sleep is merely a plunge of the outer consciousness into a complete subconsciousness. They call that a dreamless sleep; but it is only a state in which the surface sleep consciousness which is a subtle prolongation of the outer still left active in sleep itself is unable to record the dreams and transmit them to the physical mind. As a matter of fact the whole sleep is full of dreams. It is only during the brief time in which one is in the Brahmaloka that the dreams cease.

Getting Good Sleep

The sleep before 12 is supposed to be the best.

*

To sleep without a burdened stomach is obviously more healthy, both psychologically and physically.

*

I don't think the lack of sleep when it comes is due to want of work; for even those who do no work at all, get good sleep. It is something else; but it must be got over.

*

It is restlessness in you which prevents you from keeping still inwardly or outwardly. To sleep well the vital and physical and mind also must learn how to relax themselves and be quiet.

*

Obviously—it [*reading a novel before going to bed*] threw you into a tamasic consciousness and consequently the sleep was heavy in a gross subconsciousness and the fatigue was the result.

*

You should not jump up from sleep. Rise quietly and take a little time. You must give time for the consciousness to come back fully into the body.

Sleep during the Day

Many people can't stand afternoon sleep. But when it is more refreshing, it is because it is lighter than the night sleep—one does not go so deep down to the subconscious.

*

According to the old Ayurvedic shastra “sleep by day impairs the vitality”; but there are conditions in which the rule may not apply. It is however true that these [*sexual*] dreams do easily occur during sleep by day and the dreams themselves come in a state of deep subconscious relaxation, tamasic inertia when the system can be touched by any subconscious suggestion or influence.

Sleep and Sadhana

Sadhana can go on in the dream or sleep state as well as in the waking.

*

Once one is in full sadhana, sleep becomes as much a part of it as waking.

*

If the sleep becomes conscious even for a time, then experience and sadhana of itself can go on in the sleep state and not only in the waking condition.

*

It is usually only if there is much activity of sadhana in the day that it extends also into the sleep state.

*

There is no reason at all why intensity of sadhana should bring insufficient sleep.

*

If you feel the need of sleep you ought to sleep. The pressure of sadhana should not be allowed to become excessive.

*

It [*sleepiness during the day*] may possibly be due to the attempt of the higher consciousness to descend then. It sometimes produces this effect of sleepiness on the body, for the physical attempts to go inside to meet the descending consciousness and if it is not accustomed to enter into one of the higher samadhis on such occasions, the going inside translates itself to the physical as sleep. The exercise may have contributed, of course, by its reaction on the body.

Loss of Consciousness during Sleep

In sleep one easily loses the consciousness of the day, because of the lapse of the physical being into the subconscious. You have to get the power to reestablish it when you wake.

*

Sleep, because of its subconscious basis, usually brings a falling down to a lower level, unless it is a conscious sleep; to make it more and more conscious is the one permanent remedy: but also until that is done, one should always react against this sinking

tendency when one wakes and not allow the effect of dull nights to accumulate. But these things need always a settled endeavour and discipline and must take time, sometimes a long time. It will not do to refrain from the effort because immediate results do not appear.

*

It often, even usually happens that after sleep—not the sleep of meditation, but the ordinary sleep—one finds one's consciousness has gone down. It is no use getting distressed by that; one has to remain quiet and call back the higher consciousness.

*

The consciousness in the night almost always descends below the level of what one has gained by sadhana in the waking consciousness—unless there are special experiences of an uplifting character in the time of sleep or unless the Yogic consciousness acquired is so strong in the physical itself as to counteract the pull of the subconscious inertia. In ordinary sleep the consciousness in the body is that of the subconscious physical, which is a diminished consciousness, not awake and alive like the rest of the being. The rest of the being stands back and part of its consciousness goes out into other planes and regions and has experiences which are recorded in dreams such as that you have related. You say you go to very bad places and have experiences like the one you narrate; but that is not a sign, necessarily, of anything wrong in you. It merely means that you go into the vital world, as everybody does, and the vital world is full of such places and such experiences. What you have to do is not so much to avoid at all going there, for it cannot be avoided altogether, but to go with full protection until you get mastery in these regions of supraphysical Nature. That is one reason why you should remember us and open to the Force before sleeping; for the more you get that habit and can do it successfully, the more the protection will be with you.

*

The difficulty of keeping the consciousness at night happens to

most—it is because the night is the time of sleep and relaxation and the subconscious comes up. The true consciousness comes at first in the waking state or in meditation, it takes possession of the mental, the vital, the conscious physical, but the subconscious vital and physical remain obscure and this obscurity comes up when there is sleep or an inert relaxation. When the subconscious is enlightened and penetrated by the true consciousness, this disparity disappears. The Pishachic woman that tried to enter [*in a dream*] is the false vital impure Shakti—and the voice that spoke was that of his psychic being. If he keeps his psychic being awake and in front, it will always protect him against these dark forces as it did this time.

*

The sleep you describe in which there is a luminous silence or else the sleep in which there is Ananda in the cells, these are obviously the best states. The other hours, those of which you are unconscious, may be spells of a deep slumber in which you have gone out of the physical into the mental, vital or other planes. You say you were unconscious, but it may simply be that you do not remember what happened; for in coming back there is a sort of turning over of the consciousness, a transition or reversal, in which everything experienced in sleep except perhaps the last happening of all or else one that was very impressive, recedes from the physical awareness and all becomes as if a blank. There is another blank state, a state of inertia, not truly blank, but heavy and unremembering; but that is when one goes deeply and crassly into the subconscious; this subterranean plunge is very undesirable, obscuring, lowering, often fatiguing rather than restful, the reverse of the luminous silence.

*

To get rid of the subconscious in sleep, the proper way is not to diminish sleep, for that only overstrains the body and helps the lower forces to trouble it. The right way is to change gradually (it cannot be done all of a sudden) the character of the sleep.

Conscious Sleep

At night when one sinks into the subconscious after being in a good state of consciousness, we find that state gone and we have to labour to get it back again. On the other hand, if the sleep is of the better kind, one may wake up in a good condition. Of course, it is better to be conscious in sleep, if one can.

*

It is better to go to sleep and make it a discipline to become conscious in your sleep. Sleep may be only a habit, but it is a necessary habit at present and the thing to do is not to suppress, but to transform it into a conscious inner state.

*

You must not try to avoid sleep at night—if you persist in doing that, the bad results may not appear immediately, but the body will get strained and there will be a breakdown which may destroy what you have gained in your sadhana.

If you want to remain conscious at night, train yourself to make your sleep conscious—not to eliminate sleep altogether, but to transform it.

*

Sleep cannot be replaced, but it can be changed; for you can become conscious in sleep. If you are thus conscious, then the night can be utilised for a higher working—provided the *body* gets its due rest; for the object of sleep is the body's rest and the renewal of the vital-physical force. It is a mistake to deny to the body food and sleep, as some from an ascetic idea or impulse want to do—that only wears out the physical support and, although either the Yogic or the vital energy can long keep at work an overstrained or declining physical system, a time comes when this drawing is no longer so easy nor perhaps possible. The body should be given what it needs for its own efficient working. Moderate but sufficient food (without greed or desire), sufficient sleep, but not of the heavy tamasic kind, this should be the rule.

*

To keep yourself awake is not permissible—it depresses the body in the end and excites the brain and leads to an unquiet and unbalanced consciousness. The body needs sufficient rest in order to be able to bear the pressure of sadhana.

You can pray or will before sleeping to be conscious in sleep, and you can get your waking mind full of the Mother. That is the best way. But you must not expect to be able to succeed all at once. First, the sleep-mind must become conscious of what it is doing in sleep; only afterwards can you determine what it is to do there.

*

In the sleep what holds the body is the subconscious—and the subconscious acts according to the already formed present habits or else the impressions left by past thoughts, feelings, memories, activities. If the thought of the Mother and her force and working are fixed in the conscious hours, then it will be easier to bring it into the subconscious.

*

As for asserting one's will in sleep it is simply a matter of accustoming the subconscious to obey the will laid upon it by the waking mind before sleeping. It very often happens for instance that if you fix upon the subconscious your will to wake up at a particular hour in the morning, the subconscious will obey and you wake up automatically at that hour. This can be extended to other matters. Many have found that by putting a will against sexual dreams or emission on the subconscious before sleeping, there comes after a time (it does not always succeed at the beginning) an automatic action causing one to awaken before the dream concludes or before it begins or in some way preventing the thing forbidden from happening. Also one can develop a more conscious sleep in which there is a sort of inner consciousness which can intervene.

*

This [*unconsciousness in sleep*] is quite usual. Consciousness in

sleep can only be gradually established with the growth of the true consciousness in the waking state.

*

You cannot expect to be conscious at once in sleep: it takes a long time. If you can be always conscious in waking, then it will be easier to be conscious in sleep.

*

The sleep consciousness can be effectively dealt with only when the waking mind has made a certain amount of progress.

*

All dream or sleep consciousness cannot be converted at once into conscious sadhana. That has to be done progressively. But your power of conscious samadhi must increase before this can be done.

*

That is all right [*if the activity of sadhana goes on at night*]. It shows that the sadhana is becoming continuous and that you are becoming conscious and using a conscious will in sleep as well as in waking. This is a very important step forward in the sadhana.

*

You are more conscious in your sleep than in your waking condition. This is because of the physical consciousness which is not yet sufficiently open; it is only just beginning to open. In your sleep the inner being is active and the psychic there can influence more actively the mind and vital. When the physical consciousness is spiritually awake, you will no longer feel the trouble and obstruction you now have and will be as open in the waking consciousness as in sleep.

Concentration before and after Sleep

The gap made by the night and waking with the ordinary con-

sciousness is the case with everybody almost (of course, the “ordinary” consciousness differs according to the progress); but it is no use waiting to be conscious in sleep; you have to get the habit of getting back the thread of the progress as soon as may be and for that there must be some concentration after rising.

At night, you have to pass into sleep in the concentration—you must be able to concentrate with the eyes closed, lying down and the concentration must deepen into sleep—that is to say, sleep must become a concentrated going inside away from the outer waking state. If you find it necessary to sit for a time you may do so, but afterwards lie down, keeping the concentration till this happens.

*

It [*meditation before sleep*] can certainly have an effect—though not perhaps through the whole sleep—for the sleep passes through many phases or planes and the effect is not likely to survive all these changes of consciousness and domain. It is possible however to get after a time a control and consciousness in the sleep itself. As for the subconscious, it can certainly have an effect, but most when there is a precise and positive will put upon the subconscious in the meditation.

*

You have to start [*becoming conscious in sleep*] by concentrating before you sleep always with a specific will or aspiration. The will or aspiration may take time to reach the subconscious, but if it is sincere, strong and steady, it does reach after a time—so that an automatic consciousness and will are established in the sleep itself which will do what is necessary.

*

You need not meditate at once [*after waking in the morning*]—but for a few minutes take a concentrated attitude calling the Mother’s presence for the day.

Hearing Music after Waking

The expression [*of sweet melodious music*] was of the psychic plane—and the music was of that domain. Very often coming out of a conscious sleep like that the inner consciousness (which heard the music) lasts for a few seconds even after waking, before it goes back and is entirely covered by the waking mind. In that case what was heard or seen in sleep would continue for those few seconds after waking.

The Waking Mind and Sleep

It is the waking mind which thinks and wills and controls more or less the life in the waking state. In the sleep that mind is not there and there is no control. It is not the thinking mind that sees dreams etc. and is conscious in a rather incoherent way in sleep. It is usually what is called the subconscious that comes up then. If the waking mind were active in the body, one would not be able to sleep.

*

You are mixing up different things altogether—that is why you cannot understand [*the previous reply*]. I was simply explaining the difference between the ordinary waking consciousness and the ordinary sleep consciousness as they work in men whether sadhaks or not sadhaks—and it has nothing to do with the true self or psychic being. Sleep and waking are determined not by the true self or psychic being, but by the mind's waking condition or activity or its cessation—when it ceases for a time, then it is the subconscious that is there on the surface and there is sleep.

Depression in Sleep

The depression coming on you in sleep must have been due to one of two causes. It might have been the trace left by an unpleasant experience in some disagreeable quarter of the vital world and there are places in plenty of that kind there. It can

hardly have been an attack, for that would surely have left a more distinct impression of something having happened, even if there was no actual memory of it; but merely to enter into certain places or meet their inhabitants or enter into contact with their atmosphere can have, unless one is a born fighter and takes an aggressive pleasure in facing and conquering these ordeals, a depressing and exhausting effect. If that is the cause, then it is a question of either avoiding these places, which can be done by an effort of will, once one knows that it is this which happens, or putting around you a special protection against the touch of that atmosphere. The other possible cause is a plunge into a too obscure and subconscious sleep—that has sometimes the effect you describe. In any case, do not allow yourself to be discouraged when these things happen; they are common phenomena one cannot fail to meet with as soon as one begins to penetrate behind the veil and touch the occult causes of the psychological happenings within us. One has to learn the causes, note and face the difficulty and always react—never accept the depression thrown on one, but react as you did the first time. If there are always forces around which are concerned to depress and discourage, there are always forces above and around us which we can draw upon,—draw into ourselves to restore, to fill up again with strength and faith and joy and the power that perseveres and conquers. It is really a habit that one has to get of opening to these helpful forces and either passively receiving them or actively drawing upon them—for one can do either. It is easier if you have the conception of them above and around you and the faith and the will to receive them—for that brings the experience and concrete sense of them and the capacity to receive at need or at will. It is a question of habituating your consciousness to get into touch and keep in touch with these helpful forces—and for that you must accustom yourself to reject the impressions forced on you by the others, depression, self-distrust, repining and all similar disturbance.

As for the actual mastery of a situation by occult powers, it can only come by use and experiment—as one develops strength by exercises or develops a process in the laboratory by finding

out through the actual use of a power how it can and ought to be applied to the field in which it operates. It is of no use waiting for the strength before one tries; the strength will come with repeated trials. Neither must you fear failure or be discouraged by failure—for these things do not always succeed at once. These are things one has to learn by personal experiences, how to get into touch with the cosmic forces, how to relate or equate our individual action with theirs, how to become an instrument of the Master Consciousness which we call the Divine.

There is something a little too personal in your attitude—I mean the insistence on personal strength or weakness as the determining factor. After all, for the greatest as for the smallest of us our strength is not our own but given to us for the game that has to be played, the work that we have to do. The strength may be formed in us, but its present formation is not final,—neither formation of power nor formation of weakness. At any moment the formation may change—at any moment one sees, especially under the pressure of Yoga, weakness changing into power, the incapable becoming capable, suddenly or slowly the instrumental consciousness rising to a new stature or developing its latent powers. Above us, within us, around us is the All-Strength and it is that that we have to rely on for our work, our development, our transforming change. If we proceed with the faith in the work, in our instrumentality for the work, in the Power that missions us, then in the very act of trial, of facing and surmounting difficulties and failures, the strength will come and we shall find our capacity to contain as much as we need of the All-Strength of which we grow more and more perfect vessels.

Chapter Three

Dreams

All Sleep Full of Dreams

Again, about the sleep, it is like that because the ordinary state of sleep is an unconscious condition. One has always dreams throughout the night, but the surface being is then unconscious and records only a few of them that come through and even these it records in an incoherent way. Really one is acting or working on one plane or another throughout sleep except for a few minutes. When the inner consciousness grows, then one becomes more and more aware of what is going on, what one is doing and sleep is no longer quite the same thing—for it is more conscious.

*

They [*people who speak of “sound and dreamless sleep”*] simply mean that when they come back, they are not conscious of having dreamed. In the sleep the consciousness goes into other planes and has experiences there and when these are translated perfectly or imperfectly by the physical mind, they are called dreams. All the time of sleep such dreams take place, but sometimes one remembers and at other times does not at all remember. Sometimes also one goes low down into the subconscious and the dreams are there, but so deep down that when one comes up there is not even the consciousness that one had dreamed.

*

All sleep is full of dreams. Why should night or day make any difference?

Different Kinds of Dreams

Everybody has dreams in sleep though all do not remember

them. In these dreams one goes to all kinds of places in all kinds of worlds and sees and does things there or has experience of what happens there. Some of these dreams have importance and a meaning for the sadhana — most have none or very little.

*

These dreams are not all mere dreams, all have not a casual, incoherent or subconscious building. Many are records or transcripts of experiences on the vital plane into which one enters in sleep, some are scenes or events of the subtle physical plane. There one often undergoes happenings or carries on actions that resemble those of the physical life with the same surroundings and the same people, though usually there is in arrangement and feature some or a considerable difference. But it may also be a contact with other surroundings and with other people, not known in the physical life or not belonging at all to the physical world.

In the waking state you are conscious only of a certain limited field and action of your nature. In sleep you can become vividly aware of things beyond this field — a larger mental or vital nature behind the waking state or else a subtler physical or a subconscious nature which contains much that is there in you but not distinguishably active in the waking state. All these obscure tracts have to be cleared or else there can be no change of the Prakriti. You should not allow yourself to be disturbed by the press of vital or subconscious dreams — for these two make up the larger part of dream-experience — but aspire to get rid of these things and of the activities they indicate, to be conscious and reject all but the divine Truth; the more you get that Truth and cling to it in the waking state, rejecting all else, the more all this inferior dream-stuff will get clear.

*

It is the subconscious that is active in ordinary dreams. But in the dreams in which one goes out into other planes of consciousness, mental, vital, subtle physical, it is part of the inner being, inner mental or vital or physical that is usually active.

*

A dream, when it is not from the subconscious, is either symbolic or else an experience of some supraphysical plane or a formation thrown in by some mental or vital or either force or in rare cases an indication of some event actual or probable in the past, present or future.

*

This is an instance of a dream of exact physical prevision. The power to have such dreams is comparatively rare, for ordinarily such previsions come in inner vision but not in sleep. In dreams vital or mental formations often take shape which sometimes fulfil themselves in essence, but not with this accuracy of detail.

It is only a particular class of dreams that do that. Most coherent dreams are either symbolic or indicate things that take place in the mental or vital planes rather than on the physical.

This indicates a power of conscious thought-formation. Thoughts have an effective power—usually by creating an atmosphere or tendencies—thus when one is ill, those around should not have thoughts of gloomy foreboding, grief or fear, for that works against cure. But the capacity of conscious thought-formation is a special power and uncommon. It can be acquired or come of itself by sadhana.

*

All dreams of this kind [*indicating future events*] are very obviously formations such as one often meets on the vital, more rarely on the mental plane. Sometimes they are the formations of your own mind or vital; sometimes they are the formations of other minds with an exact or a modified transcription in yours; sometimes formations come that are made by the non-human forces or beings of these other planes. These things are not true and need not become true in the physical world, but they may still have effects in the physical if they are framed with that purpose or that tendency and, if they are allowed, they may realise their events or their meaning—for they are most often symbolical or schematic—in the inner or the outer life. The proper course with them is simply to observe and understand

and, if they are from a hostile source, reject or destroy them.

There are other dreams that have not the same character but are a representation or transcription of things that actually happen on other planes, in other worlds under other conditions than ours. There are, again, some dreams that are purely symbolic and some that indicate existing movements and propensities in us, whether familiar or undetected by the waking mind, or exploit old memories or else raise up things either passively stored or still active in the subconscious, a mass of various stuff which has to be changed or got rid of as one rises into a higher consciousness. If one learns how to interpret, one can get from dreams much knowledge of the secrets of our nature and of other-nature.

*

Those [*dreams*] which are formed from subconscious impressions arranged at haphazard (subconscious mind, vital or physical) either have no significance or some meaning which is difficult to find and not very much worth knowing even if it is found. Other dreams are either simply happenings of the mental, vital or subtle physical worlds or else belong to the wider mental, vital or subtle physical plane and have a meaning which the figures of the dream are trying to communicate.

*

It often happens that when something is thrown out of the waking consciousness it still occurs in dream. This recurrence is of two kinds. One is when the thing is gone, but the memory and impression of it remains in the subconscious and comes up in dream-form in sleep. These subconscious dream-recurrences are of no importance; they are shadows rather than realities. The other is when dreams come in the vital to test or to show how far in some part of the inner being the old movement remains or is conquered. For in sleep the control of the waking consciousness and will is not there. If then even in spite of that one is conscious in sleep and either does not feel the old movement when the circumstances that formerly caused it are repeated in dream or else soon conquers and throws it out, then it must be understood

that there too the victory is won. Your dream which seems to have corresponded with realities was a true experience of this kind; the old movement did come from habit, but at once you became conscious and rejected it. This is an encouraging sign and promises complete removal in a very short time.

*

Subconscious dreams and lower vital dreams are usually incoherent. Higher vital dreams are usually and mental dreams are always coherent.

Subconscious Dreams

When one is in the physical consciousness, then the sleep is apt to be of the subconscious kind, often heavy and unrefreshing, the dreams also of the subconscious kind, incoherent and meaningless or if there is a meaning the dream symbols are so confused and obscure that it is not possible to follow it. It is by bringing the Mother's Light into the subconscious that this can be dispelled and the sleep becomes restful or luminous and conscious.

*

A dream from the subconscious plane has no meaning; it is simply a *khichudi* of impressions and memories left in the subconscious from the past.

*

Dreams of this kind [*in which old vital movements occur*] arise from the subconscious. It is one of the most embarrassing elements of Yogic experience to find how obstinately the subconscious retains what has been settled and done with in the upper layers of the consciousness. But just for that reason these dreams are often a useful indication as they enable us to pursue things to their obscure roots in this underworld and excise them. No, it does not indicate that you are taking in any part of your consciousness your present pursuit of Yoga as a stopgap, but merely that old vital tendencies and activities are still there in that mys-

terious and obscure subconscious limbo and that their ghosts can rise twittering to the surface when the conscious will is in abeyance. If the dream was trivial, it would seem to show that this ghost was not a strong demon like the militant Norwegian saga *revenants* but a phantom from an unsubstantial Hades.

*

Most people have that kind of dream at night. It is because the thoughts and memories that belong to the past are there always in some part of the being, even if they are not active in the waking state, and they become active at night. That is why one is constantly meeting the people once known, either one goes to the old places and meets them or they come.

*

You seem to be attaching too much importance to dreams. Keep your waking mind and vital free—you can deal afterwards with the dreams which will then be only memories from the subconscious.

Vital Dreams

Most among the sadhaks see many dreams of the vital plane when they sleep. In sleep the being goes out into other worlds and planes and it has to pass through the vital on the way—and as the vital is nearest to the waking consciousness, it is there it most vividly remembers. Probably you see better dreams but do not remember them.

*

In dreams on the vital plane there is always a deviation from the norm of the physical fact—sometimes this is because of the free play in the vital, but at others it is only a fantasy of formation either in the vital itself or in the subconscious mind which transcribes the incidents of the dream and sometimes alters them by contributions of its own.

*

These are dreams of the vital plane — they have probably some reference to something going on in your vital, but these dreams cannot be precisely interpreted unless there is either a clue that is clear on the surface or else you yourself can relate it to something in your experience of which you are aware. The images of the ascent and the coming down of water (consciousness or some other gift from above) are frequent and the general meaning is always the same — but the precise significance here is not clear.

*

Your dreams are of a very familiar kind, both coming often to sadhaks. The first is a sort of formation on the vital plane or a possibility for the future — whether or how it will come about in the physical is a different matter. The other is an excursion into the vital world where there are all the types and forms of things that happen here, each having its own region or province there. One is constantly going into these planes (and others also, mental and psychic and subtle physical as well as vital) and seeing and doing things there. Very often what one does and experiences there is a symbol of things in the nature, tendencies, achievements, difficulties, things hidden within or only half-seen on the surface. This one came clearly to show how far you have travelled from certain elements, tendencies or possibilities that were there in the past. The feeling in the dream was the sign of that progress.

*

A great many people have these dreams [of *flying*]. It is the vital being that goes out in sleep and moves about in the vital worlds and has this sense of floating in the air in its own (vital) body. The waves of a sea having the colour of lightning must have been the atmosphere of some vital province. I have known of some sadhaks, when they go at first out of the body in a more conscious way, thinking they have actually levitated, the vividness of the movement is so intense, but it is simply the vital body going out.

*

Flying during sleep over houses, streets, etc. simply means that the consciousness in the vital sheath has gone out and is moving over places in the vital or subtle physical world (even sometimes the material); it is always in the vital sheath that one flies like that.

The ascending movement is different—in that, it is the consciousness that goes high up to other planes or lands and comes down again to the body.

*

It is a dream of the vital plane. In these dreams the figures of the physical life take another form and meaning and the consciousness that lives and acts among them is not the outer physical consciousness but some inner vital part of the being. The insurrection of the French soldiers is a figure of some disturbance on the vital plane which wants to happen and affect the inner life. The import of the dream is the readiness of the vital inner consciousness to put its reliance on the Mother and take refuge in her against all possible disturbances or perils of the inner life.

*

These dreams are of the vital plane. Those about going home come from a part of the vital which still keeps the memory of the past relations and goes there during the sleep. The dreams about the Mother record meetings with her on the vital plane. For the first you should throw them away when you awake and not let your vital keep their impress. The experiences you had there (of the Mother coming in the heart and telling you) were psychic in character, not of the vital dream kind.

The difficulty you have in sadhana may come from the vital or physical mind becoming active. That often happens after the first experiences of calm and silence. One has to detach oneself from these activities in meditation as a witness and call down the original calm into these parts also. But this may take time. If one can in meditation sufficiently isolate oneself from the surroundings and go inside, the quietude comes more quickly.

*

The dream was of a kind one often has in the vital plane in which one gets into inextricable difficulties till suddenly one finds the way out. Gujerat in the dream was not Gujerat, but only a symbol of one part of the vital world which is opposed to the spiritual life and full of vital powers that come in the way either by fraud or by force. These dreams are indications of certain parts of vital nature (not one's own, but the general vital Nature) which stand in the way of spiritual fulfilment. When one goes there and masters them, then one is free from any intervention of these parts of Nature in the sadhana.

Symbolic Dreams on the Vital Plane

The dreams you describe are very clearly symbolic dreams on the vital plane. These dreams may symbolise anything, forces at play, the underlying structure and tissue of things done or experienced, actual or potential happenings, real or suggested movements or changes in the inner or outer nature.

The timidity of which the apprehension in the dream was an indication, was probably not anything in the conscious mind or higher vital, but something subconscious in the lower vital nature. This part always feels itself small and insignificant and has very easily a fear of being submerged by the greater consciousness—a fear which in some may amount at the first contact to something like a panic alarm or terror.

*

These dreams are quite symbolical of the vital forces that come and attack you. If you face them with courage they are reduced to helplessness. I don't think it is at all your father and brother that you meet—although something of their hostile feelings may be taken advantage of by those forces to take their forms—also they may do it in order to create sympathy in you and prevent you from acting against them. But apart from that the figures of the physical mother and father and relatives are very often symbolical of the physical or the hereditary nature or

generally of the ordinary nature in which we are born.

*

Your dream was evidently a symbolic representation of some part of the vital plane (corresponding to a part of human nature also) in which the Mother had made her house (established something of her consciousness). The village represented some formation of human life in which there is outward beauty and harmony as in certain parts of European life, but no touch of the Divine. The jungle represented the surroundings in which this formation has been made—it is made in the midst of a vital nature which is wild and savage and full of dangerous things—the village, the formation is therefore something quite insecure and artificial. That is indeed the nature of much of human civilisation, an artificial construction in the midst of a dangerously unregenerated vital nature, and it can collapse at any moment. The sea is the vital consciousness itself, for water is often a symbol of the vital. The footpath seems to indicate something the Mother wants the sadhaks to build, to form in that part of the vital, but which is not easy to make and only can be made by constant perseverance which will finally prevail against the instability of the vital. Vital dreams of this kind are often very interesting and instructive if one can get the clue to their symbols, but to get the clue is not always easy.

*

The dream you relate in your letter is not of the psychic but of the vital plane—it relates entirely to conflicting movements of the vital consciousness, representing on the one side the attachments of the vital nature, on the other the movement of the higher (inner) vital to get free from them. Dreams like this one on the vital plane have to be observed and understood as indications of what is going on within you, but must not be taken too literally, as they are often symbolic and figurative, and cannot be always accepted as decisive directions for action in the external life. Thus the figure of the Mother taking a meal of rice with rice-water and salt might be a valid symbol—in this case for the

Mother's freedom from all food desire and the necessity of your lower vital attaining to the same freedom; but if you gave it an external and physical application, e.g. that the Mother had actually taken to such a diet and you should do the same, the interpretation would be an obvious mistake. So also the part about the service can only have been enacted on the vital plane to test or to stimulate the vital being's readiness to give up the service, if and when the Mother might demand any such action from you. But to deduce from a vital experience of this kind, however useful for a vital change, that you ought actually to give up service, would be as much a mistake as to take up a diet of rice and salt and rice-water on the strength of that part of the dream.

*

Yes, your feeling about the protection is perfectly true.

The dream about X and going to the Mother was an experience of something that took place on the vital plane. Things happen there that have some connection with the nature and life here, but they happen differently because there it is not the physical beings that meet, but the vital beings of people. One can gather what is the nature of one's own inner vital being—which is often very different from the physical personality that acts in front in the body. By the acting of the consciousness in these dreams the inner parts of the being begin to be more active and have more influence on the outer nature. Your inner vital being seems from the dream experiences that you have related to be very strong, faithful, clear-minded, resolute, able to deal with the hostile forces and their activities in the right way and do the right thing.

The sensation of going somewhere means that part of the consciousness is going into some other plane than the physical. The men you saw and also the vision that came afterwards belonged to these supraphysical worlds. The vision seems to be symbolic of something from above, but of what is not quite clear from the details. Gold is the colour of the Truth that comes from above.

Formations in Vital Dreams

These are dreams of the vital planes. Sometimes they are actual appearances — things that happen on that plane. But sometimes they are merely formations, thoughts or feelings put into shape. Not necessarily your thoughts or feelings, but those of others also or things floating in the atmosphere — or else formations made by the beings of those planes.

*

I said this dream was an actual happening on the vital plane, not a formation. If somebody attacks you in the street, that is not a formation. But if somebody hypnotises you and suggests to you that you are ill — that suggestion is a formation put in by the hypnotiser.

*

Your dream was not a sign of the worldly desire in you, but only a test or ordeal dream such as you have had before. Your absence of response in the dream shows that you have no such inclination towards these things as many have. The whole was only a formation or suggestion of outer forces on the vital plane to see what kind of response, if any, your consciousness would make.

*

These are dreams of the vital plane in which the vital plane takes up the spiritual experience and tries to turn it into forms of ego with a suggestion afterwards of loss of power and of consciousness and a fall. You should attach no importance to these dreams except as an indication of mixture in the sleeping state.

*

It is singular that you should have accepted dreams of this kind as true or allowed them to determine or influence your conduct even in the slightest degree. These dreams are nothing but formations of the obscure lower-vital consciousness; they are made up of its desires, instincts and subconscious memories, all jumbled

together to weave an incoherent dream-scene and dream-story and, in this case, used by some vital Desire-Force of that plane to turn you into the instrument of its movement. They have no other value for the Sadhana than to show you vividly what is there in your lower vital nature, whether awake on the surface or lying in wait in the subconscious parts. The only thing to do with them is to turn the Light upon those parts and call on the Divine Power to expunge them from the nature. It is perfectly easy for this Desire-Force or for the subliminal part of the mind to create images of anyone it pleases or to reproduce the voice and make him or her speak or act in any way convenient to it.

*

These are experiences of the vital plane; they have a meaning if one knows how to interpret them. This one indicates the possibility of strong attacks on the vital plane, but at the same time promises protection. These are formations of the vital plane, sometimes things that try to happen but not necessarily effective. One can observe and understand, but not allow them to influence the mind; for often adverse forces try to influence the mind by suggestion through these dream experiences.

*

Your experience of the peace in the body was a very good one. As for the bad dream, it was a hostile formation from the vital world—a suggestion in a dream form intended to upset you. These things should be dismissed—you should say in yourself “It is false—no such thing can happen” and throw it away as you would a wrong suggestion in the waking state.

Unpleasant or Bad Vital Dreams

The experience of the hill and the rose and the sudden cold is one of those dream experiences that one gets on the vital plane,—for there things good and bad, pleasant and unpleasant are very close to each other.

*

Everybody has unpleasant or bad dreams and one can have them very frequently — they mean only that one gets into contact with or passes through the darker parts of the vital world. All of us do that in sleep, for we go out of the material plane and pass through many realms. But there is no reason to be afraid of these things. Have faith in the protection of the Mother and go to sleep with it around you — that is the best way of passing through these regions.

*

These are dreams sent from the vital world. There are three things she must develop with regard to them:

- (1) to get the habit of calling the Mother at once in the dream itself;
- (2) not to fear — if one does not fear, these other world forces become helpless;
- (3) to put no belief in the reality of such formations and regard them only as suggestions put into form, just as one gets a frightful imagination of this or that happening but the reason knows it to be a mere work of imagination and is not moved by it.

*

In sleep one enters into places of the vital world in which there are such dangers [*as the threat of violence*]; but if one goes there in full reliance on the Mother's protection, all dangers either disappear or become ineffective.

*

These dreams come from the vital world, — there is nobody in the Asram who does not have them or else has not had them. You must not get afraid or upset at these things, but look at them with indifference, without fear and passion.

Do not always be thinking of the Hostile Force or believe that everything of this kind is an attack of the Hostile Force. It is simply that in dream you entered into one part of an obscure vital world and saw or heard things there. Even if you are attacked,

you have to remain quiet and firm and call in the Mother's Protection and Force.

*

It is evident that X's experience was only what is called a nightmare—an attack in sleep from some force of the vital world, to which he probably opened himself in some way, it may be by answering to the man from the street who carried the worst vital atmosphere around him. The figure of the woman was only a form given by his subconscious mind to this force. These forces are around everywhere, not only in one particular room or house, and if one opens the door to them, they come in wherever you are. It would have no importance but for the nervous reaction of irrational terror indulged in by X. One who wants to do sadhana has no business to indulge in such panics; it is a weakness incompatible with the demands of the Yoga and, if one cannot throw it aside, it is safer not to try the Yoga.

*

Don't allow these bad dreams to trouble you. They are formations meant to disturb the consciousness—if you are troubled and fear they succeed. If you refuse to accept them or, still better, dissolve them, in dream or when you wake, then they can do nothing.

Mental Dreams

There are many kinds of mental dreams, but the main difference [*between mental and vital dreams*] is that the mental are quite clear and coherent, their symbols are well-connected and easily intelligible and the forms also are clear cut and distinct in their significance. The vital are full of a pell mell of scenes, forms and incidents; the significance if any is fluid and depends upon a vital symbolism which it is not always easy for the mind to follow—everything is nearer to ordinary life and its confusions but still more chaotic.

People Seen in Dreams

The people of dream are very often different from the people of actuality. Sometimes it is the real man who comes on another plane—sometimes it is a thought, force etc. that puts on his appearance by some trick of association or other reason.

*

These figures and intimations in dream may be due to three different causes—

(1) Beings whom you meet in the supraphysical world and who interest themselves in you.

(2) Forces of Nature, mind nature or vital nature, that take these human appearances and in a symbolic dream convey to you some formation of the universal Mind or Life. These messages can take the form of intimations or warnings of what is going to happen. The woman must have been such a Force of Nature, for her child and box are evidently symbolic—the child of some creation or formation of hers which she wanted you to accept and keep in your consciousness, the box of some habitual movements which this force also wanted you to harbour. The offer to take care of you was only a way of saying that it wanted to control you. To dismiss all that was the right thing to do.

(3) Constructions of your own mind in the form of dreams so as to convey to you intimations it had received or perceptions of some force of nature which, as in the last dream, it wanted the inner being to reject.

The Waking and Dream States

There is no solid connection [*between the waking and dream states*], but there can be a subtle one. Events of the waking state often influence the dream world, provided they have a sufficient repercussion on the mind or the vital. Formations and activities of the dream planes can project something of themselves or of their influence into the waking physical state, though they seldom reproduce themselves with any exactness there. It is only

if the dream consciousness is very highly developed that one can usually see things there that are afterwards confirmed by thoughts, speech or actions of people or events in the physical world.

*

It is a very small number of dreams that can be so explained [*as arising from external causes*]¹ and in many cases the explanation is quite arbitrary or cannot be proved. A much larger number of dreams arise from subconscious impressions of the past without any stimulus from outside. These are the dreams from the subconscious which are the bulk of those remembered by people who live in the external mind mostly. There are also the dreams that are renderings of vital movements and tendencies habitual to the nature, personal formations of the vital plane. But when one begins to live within then the dreams are often transcriptions of one's experiences on the vital plane and beyond that there is a large field of symbolic and other dreams which have nothing to do with memory. Of course it has been proved that a very long and circumstantial dream can happen in a second or two, so that objection to Bergson's statement does not stand. But there are also prophetic dreams and many others. Memory holds together the experiences but it is absurd to identify consciousness (even in the restricted European idea of consciousness) with memory. This theory of memory is part of Bergson's fundamental idea that Time is everything. As for *spirituelle*, in Europe mostly no distinction is made between the spiritual and the mental or vital.

Dream-Experiences

Yes, certainly, dream-experiences can have a great value in them and convey truths that are not so easy to get in the waking state.

*

¹ *The correspondent, who had just read Henri Bergson's L'énergie spirituelle, asked whether Bergson is right that many dreams are brought about by external causes. He also noted that Bergson seems to consider all consciousness as memory. Finally he wondered why Bergson used the word "spirituelle" in the title of the book since there was hardly anything about "spirit" in it.—Ed.*

When you practise Yoga, the consciousness opens and you become aware—especially in sleep—of things, scenes, beings, happenings of other (not physical) worlds and yourself in sleep go there and act there. Very often these things have an importance for the sadhana. So you need not regret seeing all this when you sleep or meditate.

But in no case should you fear. The fact that you were able to destroy the beings that fought with you (these were beings of a hostile vital world) is very good, for it shows that in your vital nature somewhere there is strength and courage. Moreover, using the Mother's name and having her protection, you should fear nothing.

*

They are dreams of the mental and higher vital planes in which things happen with another rhythm than here and freer forms, but some of them are formative of things and events here—not that they are fulfilled exactly like prophecies, but they create forces for fulfilment.

*

The dreams are experiences on the vital plane, actual contacts with myself and the Mother in your inner being, not symbolic though they may have symbolic elements, but expressing relations, influences or mutual workings of our consciousness with yours. The second dream has symbolic elements. The ladder is of course a symbol of an ascent from one stage to another. The snake indicates an energy, sometimes a good one, more often a bad one (vital or hostile). It may be that the energy was quiescent and therefore not alarming, but by touching it to see how it was it awoke and you found it was something not safe to handle. There is no clear indication what this energy was. These dream-experiences do not depend on the waking thoughts as do ordinary subconscious dreams which are dreams only and not experiences. They have a life, a structure, an arrangement and forms and meanings of their own; but they are often connected with the inner condition and experiences or movements of the

sadhana. It is not clear whether the flower incident was symbolic or only something that happened on the inner plane. It might have been possible to say if it had been indicated what flower it actually was that you had given.

*

These experiences are normal when the inner consciousness is growing and becoming more and more the natural seat of the being—it is the spontaneous intuitive knowledge of this inner consciousness which is becoming prominent in place of the ordinary reliance of the external mind on sense data and external happenings. It is indeed the being as a whole that becomes conscious—the substance of consciousness that becomes aware of things, not an outer instrumental part.

In the sleep part of the consciousness goes out to other planes of being and sees and experiences things there. It is quite possible for the witness consciousness to follow these happenings which usually transmit themselves in a coherent transcription to the sleeping part of the consciousness—the latter receives them and they appear as clear significant dreams as opposed to the incoherent dreams of the subconscious. Or else the witness consciousness may feel itself there watching the happenings as well as here. This will probably develop after a while.

*

It is the condition of your consciousness I spoke of—the more conscious you become, the more you will be able to have dreams worth having.

Remembering Dreams

Everybody spends the night dreaming—only most of the dreams and even the fact of having dreamed are forgotten. Also most dreams are incoherent. It is only when one becomes more conscious in sleep by sadhana, that the dreams become coherent.

*

When the sleep is more awake, so to say, then one has dreams of all kinds; when there is no such awareness of dreams, it is because the sleep of the body is more deep,—the dreams are there but the body consciousness does not note them or remember that it had them.

*

The consciousness goes into another plane of existence [*during sleep*] and, as the physical consciousness is not connected with or takes no part in the experience there, when it returns, nothing is remembered.

*

The subconscious remains in the body [*during sleep*]. The being really goes out into different planes of consciousness, but its experiences are not kept in the memory, because the recording consciousness is too submerged to carry the record to the waking mind.

*

On coming to the waking consciousness the night experiences are often lost or else fade from the physical memory in a short time, unless they are immediately fixed and recorded before rising.

*

Most people move most in the vital in sleep because it is the nearest to the physical and easiest to remain. One does enter the higher planes but either the transit there is brief or one does not remember. For in returning to the waking consciousness it is again through the lower vital and subtle physical that one passes and as these are the last dreams they are more easily remembered. The other dreams are remembered only if (1) they are strongly impressed on the recording consciousness, (2) one wakes immediately after one of them, (3) one has learned to be conscious in sleep, i.e. follows consciously the passage from plane to plane. Some train themselves to remember by remaining

without moving when they wake and following back the thread of the dreams.

*

It [*remembering one's dreams*] depends on the connection between the two states of consciousness at the time of waking. Usually there is a turnover of the consciousness in which the dream state disappears more or less abruptly, effacing the fugitive impression made by the dream events (or rather their transcription) on the physical sheath. If the waking is more composed (less abrupt) or, if the impression is very strong, then the memory remains at least of the last dream. In the last case one may remember the dream for a long time, but usually after getting up the dream memories fade away. Those who want to remember their dreams sometimes make a practice of lying quiet and tracing backwards, recovering the dreams one by one. When the dream state is very light, one can remember more dreams than when it is heavy.

*

There is a change or reversal of the consciousness that takes place [*on waking up*], and the dream-consciousness in disappearing takes away its scenes and experiences with it. This can sometimes be avoided by not coming out abruptly into the waking state or getting up quickly, but remaining quiet for a time to see if the memory remains or comes back. Otherwise the physical memory has to be taught to remember.

Understanding the Meaning of Dreams

Unless they are really significant dreams it is a waste of time [*to study them*].

*

Yes, these are symbolic dreams, but the exact meaning varies with the mind and condition of the one who sees them.

*

That [*dream*] is evidently unlike many others a symbol dream on the vital plane. But it is difficult to interpret these vital symbolic dreams unless they offer their own clue — they are a sort of hieroglyph in their forms. Once one gets the clue some of them can be very significant — others of course are rather trivial.

*

No; all dreams are not true. Even of those which have some truth in them, may have to be interpreted rightly before you can know what is true in them. There are others that are true — they are experiences that you have in other planes or worlds into which you go when you are asleep. As for the bad dreams, you should not allow them to upset you, but reject them as untrue.

*

How do you say that vital dreams have no link or reason? They have their own coherence, only the physical mind cannot always get at the clue by following which the coherence would unroll itself. For that matter the sequences of physical existence are coherent to us only because we are accustomed to it and our reason has made up a meaning out of it. But subject it to the view of a different consciousness and it becomes an incoherent phantasmagoria. That's how the Mayavadin or Schopenhauer would speak of it, the former say deliberately that dream-sequences and life-sequences stand on the same footing, only they have another structure. Each is real and consequent to itself — though neither, they would say, is real or consequent in very truth.

*

The physical mind (or else the subconscious) almost always interferes in dreams and gives its own version. It is only when there is a clear experience on the mental or vital plane that it does not try to intervene.

*

I am not sure that it is advisable to tell these dreams to others — as a rule, the movements of the sadhana should be kept to

oneself, because by speaking of them to others there is likely to be a dispersion of their force and perhaps a calling in of other atmospheres by the mental or vital reaction of the people to whom you tell them. It is only to very fit persons that one can safely speak about them. I don't think these dreams could be made into a book because they need a special knowledge to understand them and this knowledge is not common. For yourself you can do it, but perhaps it would be better to wait a little before you do it.

The Meaning of Some Dreams

It is a symbolic dream. The flower-rain is the descent of something from the supramental or else from the higher realms of consciousness—the lake is a formation of it in the consciousness, the steamer symbolises a new movement of the Yoga which Sri Aurobindo is bringing down. The Mother's descent with the diamond light is the sanction of the Supreme Power to the movement, the Peacock being the Bird of Victory.

*

The dreams are very significant and show a great progress in the inner being. The first dream means that to call the Mother is not enough; by that the immediate difficulty is dispelled, but the full victory which will prevent any return of the attack is not won; for that you must cease to be helpless before the attack, you must be able to fight and repel it (of course with the Mother's Force near whether manifest or veiled and supporting you). At present you have got so far that you can sometimes repel it with your safety pin, that is, by a small action supported by the peace behind; but the strength, confidence, courage to leap on the attacking force and drive it out (hands and feet) is not yet there.

In the second dream the servant is the outer physical consciousness while you are your own inner being. The inner being awakes in the darkness of the physical obscurity but is not troubled. It knows and writes the mantra of the Truth and Light and

that brings the beginning of the white Light, the highest True Light in the darkness which once begun is sure to increase.

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The strings you saw me pulling down [*in a dream*] are the lines of consciousness which can connect the personal being with the Divine Truth; they are above out of reach, I am bringing them down into the human mind, life and body. You can see only a part of them because they reach into the heights far above the human mind, and you see only a little of what is brought down because they go into all parts of the Nature down to the subconscious of which the ordinary mind can see very little. That is the meaning of the dream.

*

The meaning of the dream is not very difficult to discover. Our house here represents the higher consciousness in which we live and from which its light must come to you. Between you and it there is what the old books call a lid—represented by the blinds of the windows—created by the mind and the ordinary consciousness. This lid is changed to glass which means that between you and the higher consciousness there is left only a transparent lid (probably the higher mind which is the first stage of the higher consciousness) and through that the light can come to you in your own Adhar. It is a kind of promise or prospect held out to you in answer to your prayer.

*

The three grey-white birds must be your mental, vital and physical consciousness, partly enlightened by the inner Peace etc., therefore white, but still not quite released from the old nature, so grey—the dull movement is due to the obscuration by the old nature. But still they fly towards the right which is the dynamic side in women, the side of action and effectuation and this movement releases into flight the psychic in all its luminousness and purity. That seems to be the significance.

*

The dreams of the lower regions of the consciousness — the lower vital, the physical consciousness or the sheer subconscience — have always or almost always a double character. For there are two parts of the consciousness concerned — one that remains attached to the body but in a passive unsupported subconscious condition not capable of coherent and ordered experience and another that goes out into various planes and worlds of consciousness, has experiences there, moves among their scenes and beings and events, sees symbolic figures, scenes, happenings etc. The experiences of the two mix together often and make a double texture.

The quiescent part is subject during sleep to impressions from outside which it distorts into dream-figures or else, more freely, to impressions arising from the subconscious — sometimes impressions of the day or from the waking environment, sometimes impressions from the past, sometimes things hereditary or even imprecise impressions left from past lives which come up under some obscure or secret impulsion. When one practises Yoga, the more superficial impressions, those which are in a sort accidental or occasional, outside touches, the day's memories etc., do not, after a time, play so active a part as in the sleep of ordinary people; but the others aggrandise their scope and increase. These subconscious emergences are by no means, however obscure or trivial they may seem, always without any use for Yoga. They can indicate things with which the subconscious is burdened and from which it has to be freed, binding memories of the vital and of the cells which have to be dismissed, forms, embedded notions, tendencies, habitual movements which it is no longer good to harbour, seeds of the past which have to be pulled out so that their undesirable fruit may no longer recur. For in the lower obscurer part of our being we are creatures of habit of nature and fixed past formations and complexes — as they are termed by a current Western psychology, — and these things have to be got rid of if we are not to be bound to our past selves, if there is to be a true and complete liberation and transformation of the external being. If one can learn to detect and understand the indications

of these dreams when they come up and act upon what they show us to be still there in the obscure bed of our nature, it can be a great help for the successful change of what seems to be the most obscure and trivial and yet the most sticky and intractable part of the nature.

The other, the active part of our consciousness does not remain in the inert and sleeping physical consciousness, but goes out into other planes of existence. For the most part with most people it is some part of the vital, lower or higher, that goes out into the corresponding vital planes, and the experiences it has there are transcribed in the physical consciousness or brought back to it and these transcriptions or these reports are what we call dreams or experiences on the vital plane. The reports, if one may so call them, are the memories of the outgoing part which it brings back to the physical — but it is not easy to retain them in the memory after waking. For there is a crossing of a border, a bridge or a gulf and the turning over of the consciousness, what was put behind by sleep coming in front, what was in front in sleep going behind and in this transition, in this reversing process, the report or memory which can be very vivid and complete is usually lost or only some last experience or a fragment of it lingers and even that is apt to fade away in a very short time. Especially if one wakes abruptly or under pressure or rises immediately without waiting to retain the dream-experience, it is apt to disappear at once and altogether. One can train oneself however to remember one's dreams so that the material is ready to hand for interpretation and use, if they are of a nature to demand interpretation or lend themselves to use. But also, apart from these reports, there is the transcription or translation into the terms of the physical consciousness. For there is a thread that connects the outgoing and the instaying consciousnesses and along this thread messages can be sent either from here to the wandering part, most often for calling it back, but also for other purposes or from the wanderer signalling or transmitting his experiences, as it were, to the body in the measure in which it can receive them. Unfortunately the terms of this transcription are usually supplied by the quiescent and very ill-ordered

consciousness that remains in the body, terms belonging to its own normal life and range, and therefore the transcription is often trivial, confused, perplexing, tiresomely null in its terms even when the experience itself is vivid, significant, coherent and full of interest. But as the dream consciousness in sleep develops, the outgoing part can increase its hold, and either manipulate the terms supplied to it from the physical being so as to express directly and vividly or else in significant symbols its own characteristic consciousness and experience or else it can impose its own terms, figures, scenes with more or less modification on the recipient consciousness in the body. In the end the consciousness can become so trained that even for dreams on the vital plane the difference between dreams and visions and experiences disappears or at most one can distinguish between dream-visions and dream-experiences and visions and experiences in a state of willed and perfectly self-conscious concentration. Even the dreams of the lower vital and the subtle physical become entirely vivid, real, coherent, significant and expressive of a truth that one can at once recognise. The dream-experiences of the highest vital, the psychic and the mental or still higher planes have always this character, because when they can get through they impose themselves more than those of the lower vital realms and are less subject to distortion or mixture by the physical subconscious.

In the lower vital dreams, before this development comes, there is usually a mixture or a double texture. This has two disadvantages, first that the scheme used, the terms, the figures are so trivial and uninteresting that one easily misses any significance there can be behind them and, secondly, that the interpretation also becomes often very doubtful or hard to seize. And when as often happens, there is a symbology of the lower vital using the terms of the normal external consciousness, its system which is quite clear and convincing to the lower vital itself, can seem very absurd, incoherent and unintelligible to the physical mind. For the lower vital uses the happenings, scenes, figures, persons of the physical life, but in defiance of the order and logic of the physical world and even without any reference to it, it fits

them into a quite different significance-scheme of its own for its own purpose. One has then to seek for a clue in some especially significant figure or detail, and if one cannot find it or cannot catch the clue when it is there, then one remains perplexed or doubtful or simply blank about the meaning of the dream; if it is found, it can often light up all the night and put them into a sufficient coherence.

The last three dreams described by you are of this character. The figures are supplied from the old social life in England,—though the place is not England; in the first, with some attempt at structure, in the others in a more haphazard inconsequent way; but so far as that goes, all seem trivial and unmeaning and, as one might say, not worth dreaming. The strong significant power and purposefulness and quite intelligible symbolism of the higher vital, the psychic or the mental dream-experiences is not there. But still there are in the first dream three *points de repère*, the railway-journey, the meeting with the father and mother, the communion, and these all are suggestive symbols. The railway-journey is *always* in vital dreams a symbol of a journey or progress of the inner being; here it is in the vital consciousness that some movement of progress is under way and it is in the course of it that you get down at a station, that is to say in some particular region of the lower vital where you meet your father and mother. A meeting of this kind by itself might simply be an actual encounter on the vital plane with some contact or interchange there — for in the vital one can meet thus both those who have passed beyond and those who are still in the body. But once the presence of a symbolism is established, it is probable that the father and mother are also part of the symbolism and, as they very often do, represent what might be called the Purusha and Prakriti of that particular kingdom. If it is an actual encounter, it must be with some part of their vital selves which is in sympathy with or representative of this domain, not with the actual persons, not with their whole selves. But the assistant here is clearly not any earthly person, but a being of this world who embodies one of its characteristic forces, the zeal of a dogmatic and ritual religious traditionalism without any deeper

spirit or experience behind it; it is with this external ritualism that you clash in the dream, he insisting on the form, you careless of the form and admitting it only as a means for contact with the original spiritual truth behind it. That would justify our taking the whole thing as symbolism, representing a special lower vital world — one which plays a large part in moulding this external human life as it is now. It is a world of social forms, social and domestic feelings, social intercourse; whatever appearance of spiritual life there is, is traditional and formal: this is what you felt in the blessing of your father. The last part of the dream is more obscure — there is evidently a meaning in the luggage and the lost trunk, but the clue is insufficient; if one could catch it, it would probably explain why you got down at all in this province of the lower vital world instead of continuing your journey.

This is a very good example of the nature of these dreams and their indications and that is why I have dealt with it at a greater length than its importance seems to warrant. The other two are of the same world, but the third is ambiguous and in the second the clue is missing. The second, if taken as only an encounter with ordinary beings of the human world met on the vital plane seems merely absurd and trivial; but if the people represent forces or movements of this particular vital province, then some meaning is there — for I have always found that there is something which even the most casual or insignificant dreams of this kind are trying to indicate. If we take the two dreams together, the elderly lady would represent the interest certain beings in this kind of world take in some kind of pseudo-spiritual stuff of the lower occultist kind, e.g. Steiner's anthroposophy — taken by her more as a fad than anything else, a fad which she imposes on her guests. That would explain her wanting to sit in the rain — for the rain is a symbol of a descent from some other consciousness, and it would explain also the remark of the guest who had been in India, that is to say in some hot-air province of this world where the contact with occultist spirituality or pseudo-spirituality could be had more abundantly than here! To the physical mind the working out of the imagery is absurd and

illogical, but this kind of dream cares only to get its symbols through and, not addressing itself to the mind, it disregards logical coherence. The whiskey would be the image of the dram drinking which this kind of occultism can be; along with the rain it would be the clue image.

This is how these dreams are built and the question at once arises, what is their utility and why should they with their triviality and incoherent symbolism and the obscurity and pettiness of the world to which they belong take so large a place. The answer is that it is here between the subconscious and the petty lower vital world that there is the hidden basis of a great part of man's ordinary movements, especially the things that are hereditary, customary, imposed by education and surrounding and left strongly entrenched in the subconscious obscurity, even when suppressed and rejected and entirely contradicted by the mind and will and the higher vital: it is the field of the suppressed complexes of the Freudians, it is the basis of the herd mind, it is the support of all that is petty and obscure in the being and of many other undesirable things. In your dreams—even in your lower vital—you are out of sympathy with this world, irritated and ill at ease and yet there is something in the subconscious nature that is tied and constantly going there as soon as the waking mind and will are quiescent. So it is with all, for one has to go there for two reasons, first either to become acquainted with its movements and work them out in the subtle experience till they go out of the system by rejection or to clear them out by a conscious action or else to work upon this world and bring into it a real consciousness and a true Light.

Chapter Four

Sex

The Role of Sex in Nature

Of course, it [*the sexual impulse*] is perfectly natural and all men have it. Nature has put it as part of her functioning for the purpose of procreation, so that the race may continue. In the animals it is used for that purpose, but men have departed from Nature and use it for pleasure mainly—so it has taken hold of them and harasses them at all times.

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Certainly, Nature gave it [*sexual pleasure*] to encourage her aim of procreation. The proof is that the animal does it only by season and as soon as the procreation is over, drops it. Man having a mind has discovered that he can do it even when there is not the need of Nature—but that is only a proof that Mind perverts the original intention of Nature. It does not prove that Nature created it only to give man a brief and destructive sensual pleasure.

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The terrestrial sex-movement is a utilisation by Nature of the fundamental physical energy for purposes of procreation. The thrill of which the poets speak, which is accompanied by a very gross excitement, is the lure by which she makes the vital consent to this otherwise unpleasing process—whatever X or others may feel, there are numbers who experience a recoil of disgust after the act and repulsion from the partner in it because of the disgust, though they return to it when the disgust has worn off for the sake of this lure.

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Conversion [*of the sexual movement*] is one thing and acceptance of the present forms in ordinary human nature is another.

The reason given for indulging the sex-action is not at all imperative. It is only a minority that is called to the strict Yogic life and there will be always plenty of people who will continue the race. Certainly, the Yogi has no contempt or aversion for human nature; he understands it and the place given to each of its activities with a clear and calm regard. Also, if an action can be done with self-control without desire under the direction of a higher consciousness, that is the better way and it can sometimes be followed for the fulfilment of the divine will in things that would not otherwise be undertaken by the Yogan, such as war and the destruction which accompanies war. But a too light resort to such a rule might easily be converted into a pretext for indulging the ordinary human nature.

Sex a Movement of General Nature

All movements are in the mass movements of Nature's cosmic forces — they are movements of universal Nature. The individual receives something of them, a wave or pressure of some cosmic force, and is driven by it; he thinks it is his own, generated in himself separately, but it is not so, it is part of a general movement which works just in the same way in others. Sex, for instance, is a movement of general Nature seeking for its play and it uses this or that one — a man vitally or physically "in love" as it is called with a woman is simply repeating and satisfying the world-movement of sex, if it had not been that woman, it would have been another; he is simply an instrument in Nature's machinery, it is not an independent movement. So it is with anger and other Nature-motives.

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There is no how to these things — the sex-impulse exists for its own sake and it uses the person as an instrument and hooks him on to another — whenever it can throw the hook, it throws it and once the connection is there holds on for some time at least. This is the physical vital and subtle physical action — for if it is the gross physical that dominates, there is no choice — any

woman will serve the fun. The sensation you feel is physical vital + subtle physical, that is why it is so concrete. Naturally these sensations do not stop by enjoyment — they are recurrent and so long as the pressure lasts they continue. It is only by rejection or by the domination of a contrary force that they cease.

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Naturally, the sex-movement is a force in itself, impersonal and not dependent on any particular object. It fastens on one or another only to give itself body and a field of enjoyment. When it is checked in the vital interchange, it tends to lose its vital character and attacks through its most physical and elemental movement. It is only when it is thrown out from the vital physical and most physical that it is conquered.

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The sexual sensations do not "become" a principle of the physical consciousness — they are there in the physical nature already — wherever there is conscious life, the sex-force is there. It is physical Nature's main means of reproduction and it is there for that purpose.

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The sexual impulse is its own reason to itself — it acts for its own satisfaction and does not ask for any reason, for it is instinctive and irrational.

*

The sex exists for its own satisfaction and this or that person is only an excuse or occasion for its action or a channel for awakening its activity. It is from within, by the peace and purity from above coming into that part and holding it, that it must disappear.

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The sex exists in itself — put a number of sexual men together debarred from all possibility of feminine society — after a time

they will begin to satisfy themselves homosexually.

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Sex-sensation may begin anywhere. As vital love it begins in the vital centre, heart or navel — many romantic boys have this and it starts a love affair (often at the age of 10 or even 8) before they know anything about sex-connection. With others it begins with the nerves or with that and the sex-organ itself. There are others who do not have it. Many girls would not have it at all throughout life if they were not taught and excited by men. Some even then hate it and tolerate only under a sort of social compulsion or for the sake of having children.

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There is no “delight” in the sex-affair, it is necessarily and can only be a passing excitement and pleasure which finally wears itself out with the wearing out of the body.

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Yes, it [*the sex-pull*] has become rampant everywhere, especially as men no longer believe in the old moral restraints and nothing else has been substituted.

Sex and Ananda

Sex is a degradation or distortion of the Ananda Force.

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It is true that the sex-centre and its reactions can be transformed and that an Ananda from above can come down to replace the animal sex-reaction. The sex-impulse is a degradation of this Ananda. But to receive this Ananda before the physical (including the physical vital) consciousness is transformed, can be dangerous; for other and lower things can take advantage and mix in it and that would disturb the whole being and might lead into a wrong road by the impression that these lower things are part of the sadhana and sanctioned from above or simply by

the lower elements overpowering the true experience. In the last case the Ananda would cease and the sex-centre be possessed by the lower reactions.

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The sadhak has to turn away entirely from the invasion of the vital and the physical by the sex-impulse—for, if he does not conquer the sex-impulse, there can be no settling in the body of the divine consciousness and the divine Ananda.

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The *hlādikā śakti* is the Shakti of the Divine Ananda and Love taking possession of the whole being down to the vital and physical. But it is the Ananda and love of the Divine—the spiritual, it cannot be turned to a human love and vital pleasure. It can have nothing to do with marriage. In your dream it was neither the divine nor the human that came, but a supernormal and supraphysical vital *kāma* and joy—a being from that world intervening in the sleep and trying to take possession of what should be given only to the Divine. That is a particularly dangerous kind of intervention, so I had immediately to put you on your guard against it. It was of the nature of a supraphysical temptation such as the appearance of the Apsaras to the Tapaswis in the stories of the epics and Puranas. The other dreams were dreams of success and fame and were also of the vital plane. You need not be depressed by these ordeals in the subtle worlds; they come to all in one form or another; only you have to learn vigilance and find your way through these lesser planes to the highest, so that it may be the highest that will come down into you. When these trials come, it is a sign that you are advancing, for otherwise the Powers of these worlds, whether lesser gods or Daityas, would not take the trouble to test you.

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The only truth in that [*the saying that “sexual pleasure and Brahmananda are brothers”*] is that all intense pleasure goes back at its root to Ananda—the pleasure of poetry, music,

production of all kinds, battle, victory, adventure too—in that sense only all are brothers of Brahmananda. But the phrase is absolutely inaccurate. We can say that there is a physical Ananda born of Brahmananda which is far higher, finer and more intense than the sexual, but of which the sexual is a coarse and excited degradation—that is all.

Sex and Love

Nature in the material world started with the physical sex-pull for her purpose of procreation and brought in the love on the basis of the sex-pull, so the one has a tendency to wake the other. It is only by a strong discipline or a strong will or a change of consciousness that one can eliminate the pull.

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It is not that it is not possible to keep the love pure, but the two things [*love and sex-desire*] are so near each other and have been so much twined together in the animal beginnings of the race that it is not easy to keep them altogether separate. In the pure psychic love there is no trace of the sex-desire, but usually the vital affection gets very strongly associated with the psychic which is then mixed though still not sexual; but the vital affection and the vital physical sex-emotion are entirely close to each other, so that at any moment or in any given case one may awake the other. This becomes very strong when the sex-force is strong in an individual as it is in most vitally energetic people. To increase always the force of the psychic, to control the sex-impulse and turn it into the *ojas*, to turn the love towards the Divine are the true remedies for this difficulty. Seminal force not sexually spent can always be turned into *ojas*.

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When the psychic puts its influence on the vital, the first thing you must be careful to avoid is any least mixture of a wrong vital movement with the psychic movement. Lust is the perversion or degradation which prevents love from establishing its reign; so

when there is the movement of psychic love in the heart, lust or vital desire is the one thing that must not be allowed to come in—just as when strength comes down from above, personal ambition and pride have to be kept far away from it; for any mixture of the perversion will corrupt the psychic or spiritual action and prevent a true fulfilment.

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The movement of self-existent psychic or spiritual love general and without a special object can come, but it must be kept free from all taint of sex—otherwise it cannot endure.

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What is real love? Get clear of all the sentimental sexual turmoil and go back to the soul,—then there is real love. It is then also you would be able to receive the overwhelming love without getting the lower being into an excitement which might be disastrous.

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What is this idea that this desire of the heart hungering to love women is not sex-desire? That and the physical lust are both forms of sex-desire.

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Why hanker [*to meet and talk with women*] when it is a vital desire? It is a form of sex and usually calls up the more physical desire.

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Oneness with all [*expressed through embracing and kissing*]¹ would then mean satisfying the sex-instinct with all—that would be a rather startling *siddhānta*, though there is something like it in the practice of Tantra of the left hand. But the left-hand Tantriks are more logical than you—for why should oneness,

¹ *The correspondent suggested that the “lighter movements” of sex, such as embracing and kissing, seem justified as expressions of one’s love for all.—Ed.*

if it is to justify sex-expression, support only the lighter and not the cruder forms of love-expression? But is sex really based on love or sex-love based on sex-instinct? and is sex-instinct an expression of the spiritual feeling of the One in all? Is it not really based on duality, except when it simply seeks satisfaction and pleasure where there is no question of love at all? Is one attracted to a woman by the sense that she is oneself or by the fact that she is somebody else attracting one by some charm or beauty which one wants to enjoy or possess or simply by the fact of the difference from oneself, the fact of her being a female and not a male so that the sex-instinct can find a full field there?

*

Abnormal is a word which you can stick on anything that is not quite common, cheap and ordinary. In that way genius is abnormal, so is spirituality, so is the attempt to live by high ideals. The tendency to physical chastity in women is not abnormal, it is fairly common and includes a very high feminine type.

The mind is the seat of thought and perception, the heart is the seat of love, the vital of desire — but how does that prevent the existence of mental love? As the mind can be invaded by the feelings of the emotional or the vital, so the heart too can be dominated by the mind and moved by mental forces.

There is a vital love, a physical love. It is possible for the vital to desire a woman for various vital reasons without love — in order to satisfy the instinct of domination or possession, in order to draw in the vital forces of a woman so as to feed one's own vital or for the exchange of vital forces, to satisfy vanity, the hunter's instinct of the chase etc. etc.² This is often called love, but it is only vital desire, a kind of lust. If however the emotions of the heart are awakened, then it becomes vital love, a mixed affair with any or all of these vital motives strong, but still vital love.

There may too be a physical love, the attraction of beauty,

² This is from the man's viewpoint — but the woman also has her vital motives.

the physical sex-appeal or anything else of the kind awakening the emotions of the heart. If that does not happen, then the physical need is all and that is sheer lust, nothing more. But physical love is possible.

In the same way there can be a mental love. It arises from the attempt to find one's ideal in another or from some strong mental passion of admiration and wonder or from the mind's seeking for a comrade, a complement and fulfiller of one's nature, a *sahadharmani*, a guide and helper, a leader and master or from a hundred other mental motives. By itself that does not amount to love, though often it is so ardent as to be hardly distinguishable from it and may even push to sacrifice of life, entire self-giving etc. etc. But when it awakes the emotions of the heart, then it may lead to a very powerful love which is yet mental in its root and dominant character. Ordinarily, however, it is the mind and vital together which combine; but this combination can exist along with a disinclination or positive dislike for the physical act and its accompaniments. No doubt if the man presses, the woman is likely to yield, but it is *à contre-coeur*, as they say, against her feelings and her deepest instincts.

It is an ignorant psychology that reduces everything to the sex-motive and the sex-impulse.

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There are a number of women who can love with the mind, the psychic, the vital (the heart), but they shrink from a touch on the body and even when that goes, the physical act remains abhorrent to them. They may yield, under pressure, but it does not reconcile them to the act which always seems to them animal and degrading. Women know this, but men seem to find it hard to believe it; but it is perfectly true.

Sex and the New European Mystics

The idea of the new European mystics like Lawrence and Middleton Murry etc. is that the indulgence of sex is the appointed way to find the Overself or the Under Self, for that is what it

really seems to be! Brunton of course knows better. But if the personal Overself is all that is wanted and not the Divine, then sex and many other things are permissible. One has only to realise that one is not the body, not the life, not the mind, but the Overself and then do whatever the Overself tells you to do.

*

I spoke of the *personal* Overself—meaning the realisation of something in us (the Purusha) that is not the Prakriti, not the movements of mind, vital or physical, but something that is the Thinker, etc. This Purusha can give assent to any movement of nature or withhold it or it can direct the Prakriti what to do or not to do. It can allow it to indulge sex or withhold indulgence. It is usually the mental Purusha (Manomaya Purusha) that one thus realises, but there is also the Pranamaya or vital Purusha. By the word Overself they probably mean this Purusha—they take it as a sort of personal Atman.

Sex-Indulgence and the Integral Yoga

What has this Yoga got to do with sex and sex-contact? I have told you repeatedly that sex has to be got rid of and overcome before there can be siddhi in this Yoga.

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Any suggestion about Tantric practices must certainly be a trick of the vital. The sex-impulsions can be got rid of without them. They persist only because something still wants to reserve a place for them. So the best answer to the question about the sadhana (What is the place of sex in our sadhana?) is “No place”. One must give up the sex-satisfaction and be satisfied with the Divine Love and Ananda.

*

The whole mistake is not to have a clear and unmistakable direction that sex (whether open or masquerading as deep romantic affection) and this Yoga cannot go together. This notion

of making sex help the sadhana is one that has been taken hold of by many under one form or another and it has always proved an immense stumbling block to all who indulged it. It ties the being down to the vital and prevents the spiritual liberation which is essential as the basis of the transformation of the nature. Even the higher experiences begin to get coloured with the sexual tinge and falsified in their substance.

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There is one simple answer to X's falsehood and perversions. In this way of Yoga an absolute mastery of the sex-movements and an entire abstention from the physical (animal) indulgence are first conditions, because this way aims not only at a mental and vital but a physical transformation. A psychic purity is demanded in all the consciousness and there is needed a transformation of all the vital and physical energies which in the absence of these conditions is impossible.

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The Mother has already told you the truth about this idea. The idea that by fully indulging the sex-hunger it will be finished and disappear for ever is a deceptive pretence held out by the vital to the mind in order to get a sanction for its desire—it has no other *raison d'être* or truth or justification. If an occasional indulgence keeps the sex-desire simmering, a full indulgence would only sink you in its mire. This hunger like other hungers does not cease by temporary satiation; it renews itself after a temporary abeyance and wants again indulgence. Neither sops nor gorgings are the right treatment for it. It can only go by a radical psychic rejection or a full spiritual opening with the increasing descent of a consciousness that does not want it and has a truer Ananda.

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I do not know what you mean by harm, but the harm of sex to a sadhak is that it stands as a strong barrier to the realisation and spiritual progress and in that way it harms not only oneself

but the person on whom one imposes the sex-touch.

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It is not a question of fear³ — it is a question of choosing between the Divine Peace and Ananda and the degraded pleasure of sex, between the Divine and the attraction of women. Food has to be taken to support the body but sex-satisfaction is not a necessity. Even for the rasa of food it can only be harmonised with the spiritual condition if all greed of food and desire of the palate disappears. Intellectual or aesthetic delight can also be an obstacle to the spiritual perfection if there is attachment to it, although it is much nearer to the spiritual than a gross untransformed bodily appetite; in fact in order to become part of the spiritual consciousness the intellectual and aesthetic delight has also to change and become something higher. But all things that have a rasa cannot be kept. There is a rasa in hurting and killing others, the sadistic delight, there is a rasa in torturing oneself, the masochistic delight — modern psychology is full of these two. Merely having a rasa is not a sufficient reason for keeping things as part of the spiritual life.

*

It is possible for anger to be felt as pleasant — there are many people who dislike sweet things — so also there are many, especially women, who dislike the sex-sensation, even hate it.⁴

For the taste, when it exists — some eliminate it by rejection and the calling down of peace and purity into the cells, others by substituting for the lower rasa the higher Ananda — some like the Vaishnavas try to sublimate it by the *madhura bhāva* taking up the sexual rasa from the sex-centre into the heart and turning it there towards the Divine, but the last is a rather risky method.

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³ *Fear of harm to one's sadhana through indulgence in sex. The correspondent said that he did not wish to live in fear of harm from sex. In all enjoyment, he said, there is some risk of harm, even in eating tasty food.* — Ed.

⁴ *The correspondent wrote that the feeling of anger is not pleasant, whereas the taste of sugar and the sex-sensation are pleasant. Is it possible, he asked, to eliminate the liking for sugar or for sex?* — Ed.

It is one of the aims of the Yoga to centralise and harmonise all the parts of the being—not around the ego as is done in ordinary life, but around first the psychic being and then the central being in its station above the head—or else round a nexus of the two. It is the thing that was preparing in you. The consciousness was moving to take its station above the head. But in the meanwhile it has gone down into the physical and the first result has been a relaxation and diffusion which has given an opening to the old movements to recur. When a movement like that happens [*an attraction to women*], there is generally a good reason for it, something that has to be dealt with in the physical consciousness. Instead of getting upset or discouraged, one has to observe from this point of view and see what has to be done.

There is no sense in getting discouraged like this because things recur. They always do. In a transformation such as we have undertaken, movements are not got rid of once for all. They go down from one level of the nature to the other and it is only when one has got them out of the physical and subconscious that one can say "Now that is done." If these recurrences were to be taken as a proof of failure, there are few in the Asram who should not be pronounced as failures. I don't think more than 2 or 3 have got over some sex-trouble; it lasts in one form or another even when people are "advanced"—as they say here. It is because sex is one of the strongest things in man's nature and cannot be overcome till one has got the sex out of the subconscious. Why then consider your case as if it were unique or build on it the idea of personal impossibility or unfitness? It is no use indulging the idea of giving up. You can't give up. So the only thing to do is to recover yourself, look at these things with detachment and push forward to the realisation of the self that was coming.

*

Sex is not a rational force; it is purely irrational, a power of the inferior, animal nature; you cannot therefore be rightly astonished if it acts irrationally without any justification or reason

and without any other cause than its own habit and instinct. Moreover, this force as it is now acting in you with regard to X seems to be purely vital physical and physical in its character. It is not supported by your thinking mind or your rational will, these are opposed to its continuance; it has no emotional support, for you are no longer attracted by her or in love with her; the higher vital does not seem to be concerned, for neither beauty nor passion draws or drives you. But at this level of sex none of these things are necessary. The vital physical and physical urge of sex does not ask for beauty or love or emotional gratification or anything else; desire, repetition of vital-physical habit and bodily gratification (most usually, but not necessarily by the sex-act) are its motive forces. To set it in action nothing more is needed. Moreover, by mental and other rejections it has plunged down in the subconscious and is hidden there and rises suddenly from there. It is itself born from the Inconscient as a blind push of its dark force of Nature. It owes no allegiance. It can only be got rid of by a firm and persistent rejection, separation, detachment, not yielding to it by any act, refusing to take joy in it in any part of the being, until it is a dead thing and has no longer any motive or power of existence.

*

It is not meant by “the sacrifice of works” that there should be no choice between different acts, no control over impulse and desire. To regard the sex-act as an offering might easily lead to the sanctification of desire.

*

A married man can get experiences, especially if he is not gross or over-sexy by nature. But if he follows this Yoga, he will have to drop copulation or he will get upsettings.

*

What are these strange ideas? Do you imagine that after the transformation, copulation between man and woman and the desire to copulate will continue as the normal functionings of

the life and the body? If so, why should it be forbidden in the sadhana? The injunction would then be not to stop sex-intercourse, but to copulate freely and sublimely and divinely.

Subtle Forms of Sex-Indulgence

Sex (occult) stands on a fair level of equality with ambition etc. from the point of view of danger, only its action is usually less ostensible — i.e. the Hostiles don't put it forward so openly as a thing to be followed after in the spiritual life.

*

This movement [*of vital interchange*] is a wrong and a dangerous one. It is not so much repeating the old game under the garb of Yoga, but, what is worse, turning the Yoga-power itself into the instrument of satisfaction of a vital force. There must be absolute abstention from all vital interchange with others. The warning has often been given that no special or personal relation, even under the colour of a psychic connection or otherwise, must be formed with the women sadhakas. The whole principle of this Yoga is to give oneself entirely to the Divine alone and to nobody and to nothing else, and to bring down into ourselves by union with the Divine Mother Power all the transcendent light, force, wideness, peace, purity, truth-consciousness and Ananda of the supramental Divine. In this Yoga, therefore, there can be no place for vital relations or interchanges with others; any such relation or interchange immediately ties down the soul to the lower consciousness and its lower nature, prevents the true and full union with the Divine and hampers both the ascent to the supramental Truth consciousness and the descent of the supramental Ishwari Shakti. Still worse would it be if this interchange took the form of a sexual relation or a sexual enjoyment, even if kept free from any outward act; therefore these things are absolutely forbidden in the sadhana. It goes without saying that any physical act of the kind is not allowed, but also any subtler form is ruled out. It is only after becoming one with the supramental Divine that we can find our true spiritual relations

with others in the Divine; in that higher unity this kind of gross lower vital movement can have no place.

To master the sex-impulse,—to become so much master of the sex-centre that the sexual energy would be drawn upwards, not thrown outwards and wasted—it is so indeed that the force in the seed can be turned into a primal physical energy supporting all the others, *retas* into *ojas*. But no error can be more perilous than to accept the immixture of the sexual desire and some kind of subtle satisfaction of it and look on this as a part of the sadhana. It would be the most effective way to head straight towards spiritual downfall and throw into the atmosphere forces that would block the supramental descent, bringing instead the descent of adverse vital powers to disseminate disturbance and disaster. This deviation must be absolutely thrown away, should it try to occur and expunged from the consciousness, if the Truth is to be brought down and the work is to be done.

It is an error too to imagine that, although the physical sexual action is to be abandoned, yet some inward reproduction of it is part of the transformation of the sex-centre. The action of the animal sex-energy in Nature is a device for a particular purpose in the economy of the material creation in the Ignorance. But the vital excitement that accompanies it makes the most favourable opportunity and vibration in the atmosphere for the inrush of those very vital forces and beings whose whole business is to prevent the descent of the supramental Light. The pleasure attached to it is a degradation and not a true form of the divine Ananda. The true divine Ananda in the physical has a different quality and movement and substance; self-existent in its essence, its manifestation is dependent only on an inner union with the Divine. You have spoken of Divine Love; but Divine Love, when it touches the physical, does not awaken the gross lower vital propensities; indulgence of them would only repel it and make it withdraw again to the heights from which it is already difficult enough to draw it down into the coarseness of the material creation which it alone can transform. Seek the Divine Love through the only gate through which it will consent to enter, the gate of the psychic being, and cast away the lower vital error.

The transformation of the sex-centre and its energy is needed for the physical siddhi; for this energy is the support in the body of all the mental, vital and physical forces of the nature. It has to be changed into a mass and a movement of intimate Light, creative Power, pure Divine Ananda. It is only the bringing down of the supramental Light, Power and Bliss into the centre that can so change it. As to the working afterwards, it is the supramental Truth and the creative vision and will of the Divine Mother that will determine it. But it will be a working of the conscious Truth, not of the Darkness and Ignorance to which sexual desire and enjoyment belong; it will be a power of preservation and free desireless radiation of the life-forces and not of their throwing out and waste. Avoid the imagination that the supramental life will be only a heightened satisfaction of the desires of the vital and the body; nothing can be a greater obstacle to the Truth in its descent than this hope of a glorification of the animal in human nature. Mind wants the supramental state to be a confirmation of its own cherished ideas and preconceptions; the vital wants it to be a glorification of its own desires; the physical wants it to be a rich prolongation of its own comforts and pleasures and habits. If it were to be that, it would be only an exaggerated and highly magnified consummation of the animal and the human nature, not a transition from the human into the Divine.

It is dangerous to think of giving up "all barrier of discrimination and defence against what is trying to descend" upon you. Have you thought what this would mean if what is descending is something not in consonance with the divine Truth, perhaps even adverse? An adverse Power could ask no better condition for getting control over the seeker. It is only the Mother's Force and the divine Truth that one should admit without barriers. And even there one must keep the power of discernment in order to detect anything false that comes masquerading as the Mother's Force and the divine Truth, and keep too the power of rejection that will throw away all mixture.

Keep faith in your spiritual destiny, draw back from error and open more the psychic being to the direct guidance of the

Mother's light and power. If the central will is sincere, each recognition of a mistake can become a stepping stone to a truer movement and a higher progress.

*

I have stated very briefly in my previous letter my position with regard to the sex-impulse and Yoga. I may add here that my conclusion is not founded on any mental opinion or preconceived moral idea, but on probative facts and on observation and experience. I do not deny that so long as one allows a sort of separation between inner experience and outer consciousness, the latter being left as an inferior activity controlled but not transformed, it is quite possible to have spiritual experiences and make progress without any entire cessation of the sex-activity. The mind separates itself from the outer vital (life-parts) and the physical consciousness and lives its own inner life. But only a few can really do this with any completeness and the moment one's experiences extend to the life-plane and the physical, sex can no longer be treated in this way. It can become at any moment a disturbing, upsetting and deforming force. I have observed that to an equal extent with ego (pride, vanity, ambition) and rajasic贪欲 and desires it is one of the main causes of the spiritual casualties that have taken place in sadhana. The attempt to treat it by detachment without complete excision breaks down; the attempt to sublimate it, favoured by many modern mystics in Europe, is a most rash and perilous experiment. For it is when one mixes up sex and spirituality that there is the greatest havoc. Even the attempt to sublimate it by turning it towards the Divine as in the Vaishnava *madhura bhāva* carries in it a serious danger, as the results of a wrong turn or use in this method so often show. At any rate in this Yoga which seeks not only the essential experience of the Divine but a transformation of the whole being and nature, I have found it an absolute necessity of the sadhana to aim at a complete mastery over the sex-force; otherwise the vital consciousness remains a turbid mixture, the turbidity affecting the purity of the spiritualised mind and seriously hindering the upward turn of the forces of the body. This Yoga demands a full

ascension of the whole lower or ordinary consciousness to join the spiritual above it and a full descent of the spiritual (eventually of the supramental) into the mind, life and body to transform it. The total ascent is impossible so long as sex-desire blocks the way; the descent is dangerous so long as sex-desire is powerful in the vital. For at any moment an unexcised or latent sex-desire may be the cause of a mixture which throws back the true descent and uses the energy acquired for other purposes or turns all the action of the consciousness towards wrong experience, turbid and delusive. One must therefore clear this obstacle out of the way; otherwise there is either no safety or no free movement towards finality in the sadhana.

The contrary opinion of which you speak may be due to the idea that sex is a natural part of the human vital-physical whole, a necessity like food and sleep, and that its total inhibition may lead to unbalancing and to serious disorders. It is a fact that sex suppressed in outward action but indulged in other ways may lead to disorders of the system and brain troubles. That is the root of the medical theory which discourages sexual abstinence. But I have observed that these things happen only when there is either secret indulgence of a perverse kind replacing the normal sexual activity or else an indulgence of it in a kind of subtle vital way by imagination or by an invisible vital interchange of an occult kind,—I do not think harm ever occurs when there is a true spiritual effort at mastery and abstinence. It is now held by many medical men in Europe that sexual abstinence, *if it is genuine*, is beneficial; for the element in the *retas* which serves the sexual act is then changed into its other element which feeds the energies of the system, mental, vital and physical—and that justifies the Indian idea of Brahmacharya, the transformation of *retas* into *ojas* and the raising of its energies upward so that they change into a spiritual force.

As for the method of mastery, it cannot be done by physical abstinence alone—it proceeds by a process of combined detachment and rejection. The consciousness stands back from the sex-impulse, feels it as not its own, as something alien thrown on it by Nature-force to which it refuses assent or identification

— each time a certain movement of rejection throws it more and more outward. The mind remains unaffected; after a time the vital being which is the chief support withdraws from it in the same way, finally the physical consciousness no longer supports it. This process continues until even the subconscious can no longer rouse it up in dream and no farther movement comes from the outer Nature-force to rekindle this lower fire. This is the course when the sex-propensity sticks obstinately; but there are some who can eliminate it decisively by a swift radical dropping away from the nature. That however is more rare.

It has to be said that the total elimination of the sex-impulse is one of the most difficult things in sadhana and one must be prepared for it to take time. But its total disappearance has been achieved and a practical liberation crossed only by occasional dream-movements from the subconscious is fairly common.

*

I have not said [*in the preceding letter*] that the sex-impulse has not been mastered in other Yogas. I have said that it is difficult to be free from it entirely and that the attempt at sublimation as in the Vaishnava sadhana has its dangers. That is evidenced by all one knows of what has frequently and even largely happened among the Vaishnavas. Transcendence and transformation are different matters. There are three kinds or stages of transformation contemplated in this sadhana, the psychic transformation, the spiritual and the supramental. The first two have been done in their own way in other Yogas; the last is a new endeavour. A transformation sufficient for spiritual realisation is attainable by the two former; a transformation sufficient for the divinisation of human life is, in my view, not possible except by a supramental change.

Transformation of the Sex-Energy: The Theory of Brahmacharya

The sex-energy utilised by Nature for the purpose of reproduction is in its real nature a fundamental energy of life. It can

be used not for the heightening but for a certain intensification of the vital emotional life; it can be controlled and diverted from the sex-purpose and used for aesthetic and artistic or other creation and productiveness, or preserved for heightening of the intellectual or other energies. Entirely controlled it can be turned into a force of spiritual energy also. This was well known in ancient India and was described as the conversion of *retas* into *ojas* by Brahmacharya. Sex-energy misused turns to disorder and disintegration of the life-energy and its powers.

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That is correct.⁵ The whole theory of Brahmacharya is based upon that by the Yogis. If it were not so, there would be no need of Brahmacharya for producing *tejas* and *ojas*.

It is not a question of vigour and energy *per se*, but of the physical support — in that physical support the *ojas* produced by Brahmacharya counts greatly. The transformation of *retas* into *ojas* is a transformation of physical substance into a physical (necessarily producing also a vital-physical) energy. The spiritual energy by itself can only drive the body, like the vital and mental, but in driving it it would exhaust it if it has not a physical support. (I speak of course of the ordinary spiritual energy, not of the supramental to be which will have not only to transmute *retas* into *ojas* but *ojas* into something still more sublimated.)

*

The sex-impulse is certainly the greatest force in the vital plane; if it can be sublimated and turned upwards *ojas* is created which is a great help to the attainment of higher consciousness. But mere restraint is not sufficient.

*

Doctors advise marriage because they think satisfaction of the sexual instinct is necessary for the health and repression causes

⁵ The correspondent wrote: "Is it not said that the sexual fluid, if prevented from being spent away, becomes transformed into *tejas* and *ojas*?" — Ed.

disturbances in the system. This is true only when there is no true giving up of the sexual indulgence, but only a change in the way of indulging it. Nowadays a new theory has come up which confirms the Indian theory of Brahmacharya, viz. that by continence *retas* can be changed into *ojas* and the vigour and power of the being enormously increase.

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It [*inhibition of the sex-impulse*] would not be permanently effective in itself, because the seed would always be there unless removed by a transformation of the sex-impulse; but the inhibition can help towards this transformation. It is now being recognised in Europe by the doctors—who used formerly to say that sex was to be inhibited at the risk of complications in the body, that on the contrary there is part of the seminal force that is used for health, strength, youth etc. (turned into *ojas*, as the Yogins say), another that serves for sex purposes; if a man is perfectly chaste, the latter turns more and more into the former. Only of course the external inhibition does not help this change, if the mind indulges in sex-thought or the vital or body in the unsatisfied sex-desire or sex-sensation. But if all these are stopped then the inhibition is useful.

*

You mean the doctors.⁶ But even all doctors do not agree on that; there are many (I have read their opinions) who say that sex-satisfaction is not an absolute necessity and sex-abstinence can be physically very beneficial and is so—of course under proper conditions. As for scientists the product of the sex glands is considered by them (at least so I have read) as a great support and feeder of the general energies. It has even been considered that sex force has a great part to play in the production of poetry, art etc. and in the action of genius generally. Finally, it is a doctor who has discovered that the sex-fluid consists of two parts, one meant for sex-purposes, the other as a basis of general energy,

⁶ The correspondent wrote, "Some scientists say that sex is an absolute physiological necessity." —Ed.

and if the sex-action is not indulged, the first element tends to be turned into the second (*retas* into *ojas*, as the Yogis had already discovered). Theories? So are the statements or inferences of the opposite side — one theory is as good as another. Anyhow I don't think that the atrophy of the sex-glands by abstinence can be supported by general experience. X's contention [*that the sex-glands of those who practise Brahmacharya may atrophy*] is however logical if we take not individual results but the course of evolution and suppose that this evolution will follow the line of the old one, for the useless organs are supposed to disappear or deteriorate. But will the supramental evolution follow the same course as the old one or develop new adaptations of its own making? — that is the uncertain element.

*

You have not understood [*what was said in the preceding letter*]. I was answering the statement that scientists don't attach any value to sex-gland product and think it is only of use for an external purpose. Many scientists on the contrary consider it a base of productive energy; among other things it plays a part in artistic and poetic production. Not that artists and poets are anchorites and Brahmacharis but that they have a powerful sex-gland activity, part of which goes to creative and part to (effectual or ineffectual) procreative action. On the latest theory + Yoga theory, the procreative part would be *retas*, the creative part the basis of *ojas*. Now supposing the artist or poet to conserve his *retas* and turn it into *ojas*, the result would be an increased power of creative productivity. Q.E.D., sir! Logic, sir!

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The most recent discovery about the sex is that the liquid is composed of two elements — one is used for sexual purposes, the other supplies all kinds of higher energies, vital, mental and, I would add, spiritual. It was formerly supposed by the doctors that the sex-liquid had to be spent in order to relieve its excess from time to time, otherwise there would be bad results. It is now found that that is not necessary — if the sex is controlled both in

act and thought, there is an automatic *diminution* of the amount of liquid used for sex and a corresponding increase of the other element available for higher energies. In other words, the old knowledge of the Vedic and Vedantic Yogis and Rishis about becoming *urdhwaretah*, viz. that by control one can turn *retas* into *ojas* and use it for higher energies vital, mental and spiritual is amply justified by this discovery. The use made naturally depends upon a man's occupations and interests. The athlete etc. would use it for physical strength and its work, the poet and artist for creation, others for study or mental work of different kinds, the Yogi for the increase and use of spiritual energy.

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If it [*turning the seminal energy into ojas*] is to be done by a process, it will have to be by Tapasya (self-control of mind, speech, act) and a drawing upward of the seminal energy through the Will. But it can be better done by the descent of the Force and its working on the sex-centre and consequent transformation, as with all other things in this Yoga.

Mastery of the Sex-Impulse through Detachment

As to the sexual impulse. Regard it not as something sinful and horrible and attractive at the same time, but as a mistake and wrong movement of the lower nature. Reject it entirely, not by struggling with it, but by drawing back from it, detaching yourself and refusing your consent; look at it as something not your own, but imposed on you by a force of Nature outside you. Refuse all consent to the imposition. If anything in your vital consents, insist on that part of you withdrawing its consent. Call in the Divine Force to help you in your withdrawal and refusal. If you can do this quietly and resolutely and patiently, in the end your inner will will prevail against the habit of the outer Nature.

*

To be conscious [*of the sexual movement*] is the first step, but by itself it is not enough; there must come an automatic force

of rejection which the moment desire and passion arise throws it off so that it ebbs back from the mind or vital or wherever it touches. This comes either by a strong will of rejection becoming habitual in its action on the consciousness, or by the detached inner being developing an automatic dynamic strength in itself so that it is not only not touched, but refuses these things by an active purifying power or, finally, by the full emergence of the psychic and its government of the mind, vital and body. The last is the most rapid and easy way. Till then these things recur. But probably in yourself there is still some sense of the old idea of sin or fault which makes you feel troubled. You must take it as an adjustment of the nature that is going on in which old movements which you no longer accept as yours return from force of habit and get a habitual response from some part of the being. But if that part of the being can be made to reject it, then the response begins to fade away. You must not allow yourself or your mind to feel troubled by the returns; for that only weakens the power of resistance. There should be calm dissociation of yourself from these things; then the detached inner being will become more easily dynamic and able to reject them from the vital nature.

*

The trouble of the sex-impulse is bound to dwindle away if you are in earnest about getting rid of it. The difficulty is that part of your nature (especially, the lower vital and the subconscious which is active in sleep) keeps the memory and attachment to these movements, and you do not open these parts and make them accept the Mother's Light and Force to purify them. If you did that and, instead of lamenting and getting troubled and clinging to the idea that you cannot get rid of these things, insisted quietly with a calm faith and patient resolution on their disappearance, separating yourself from them, refusing to accept them or at all regard them as part of yourself, they would after a time lose their force and dwindle.

*

The small tendencies, rajasic vital, which you enumerate are of minor importance. They have to be removed in this sense that attachment to these things has to be given up; the vital part of the being must be prepared to consent to their absence with quietude and indifference, taking them only if they are given freely by the Divine without demand or claim or clinging, but there is nothing very grave about them otherwise.

The one serious matter is the sex-tendency. That must be overcome. But it will be more easily overcome if instead of being upset by its presence you detach the inner being from it, rise up above it and view it as a weakness of the lower nature. If you can detach yourself from it with a complete indifference in the inner being, it will seem more and more something alien to yourself, put upon you by the outer forces of Nature. Then it will be easier to remove.

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There is something in that. Too much importance given [*to sex troubles*], too much tension does sometimes make the struggle worse. To dissociate quietly and to reject steadily without being moved by the recurrence is the best way—if one knows how to do the trick.

*

As for the other point, the right attitude is neither to worry always about the sex-weakness and be obsessed by its importance so as to be in constant struggle and depression over it, nor to be too careless so as to allow it to grow. It is perhaps the most difficult of all to get rid of entirely; one has to recognise quietly its importance and its difficulty and go quietly and steadily about the control of it. If some reactions of a slight character remain, it is not a thing to get disturbed about—only it must not be permitted to increase so as to disturb the sadhana or get too strong for the restraining will of the mental and higher vital being.

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It is best not to pay too much attention to this [*sex-*]movement,

but to let it drop off quietly by lack of support and assent from the mind and the higher vital.

*

To think too much of sex, even for suppressing it, makes it worse.

You have to open more to positive experience. To spend all the time struggling with the lower vital is a very slow method.

*

Detachment is the first step. If you can detach yourself from the sex suggestions even when having them as you say, then they do not matter so much as the tamas, inertia etc. which interfere with your sadhana. They can wait for their final removal hereafter.

*

It is true that the removal of the sex-impulse in all its forms and, generally, of the vital woman-complex is a great liberation which opens up to the Divine considerable regions of the being which otherwise tend to remain shut up. These things are a degradation of the source in the being from which bhakti, divine love and adoration arise. But the complex has deep roots in human nature and one must not be disappointed if it takes time to pull them up. A resolute detachment rejecting them as foreign elements, refusing to accept any inner association with them as well as outer indulgence even of the slightest kind is the best way to wear out their hold upon the nature.

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Pranayama and other physical practices like asana do not necessarily root out sexual desire—sometimes by increasing enormously the vital force in the body they can even exaggerate in a rather startling way the force too of the sexual tendency, which, being at the base of the physical life, is always difficult to conquer. The one thing to do is to separate oneself from these movements, to find one's inner self and live in it; these movements will not then any longer appear as belonging to

oneself but as surface impositions of the outer Prakriti upon the inner self or Purusha. They can then be more easily discarded or brought to nothing.

Mastery through a Change in the Consciousness

Hurting the flesh is no remedy for the sex-impulse, though it may be a temporary diversion. It is the vital and mostly the vital-physical that takes the sense-perception as pleasant or otherwise. If by the real Being you mean the silent Atman, that does not identify itself [*with the sex-sensation*], but is felt as standing aloof. If you mean the Purusha, the sensation is a movement of Prakriti and the Purusha can stand back from it and reject it or identify and accept it.

Reduction of diet has not usually a permanent effect; it may give a greater sense of physical or vital-physical purity, lighten the system and reduce certain kinds of tamas. But the sex-impulse can very well accommodate itself to a reduced diet. It is not by physical means but by a change in the consciousness that these things can be surmounted.

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It is only if the whole consciousness is awake and aware of its concealed movements that such [*sexual*] reactions can be avoided. It does not mean that you are worse than others, but that in all men the sexual element is there, active or dormant, indulged or suppressed. It can only be overcome by a spiritual awakening in *all* parts of the nature.

Mastery through the Force of Purity

There is a force of purity, not the purity of the moralist, but an essential purity of spirit, in the very substance of the being. When that comes, then sex-waves either cannot approach or they pass without imparting any impulse, without touching anywhere.

*

The desires of the heart and the body which stand in the way of Brahmacharya give a glow to the vital and emotive nature and prevent it from being dry and shut to feeling. To keep the heart warm and open, not dried up or closed, and at the same time attain to spiritual purity the best way is to turn it towards that which is eternal, pure and ever true, behind and beyond these earthly emotions — the ever-living Love, Bliss and Beauty.

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If it [*peace*] is established *all through*, then it brings purity and the purity throws off the sexual suggestions.

Mastery through the Working of the Higher Consciousness and Force

It is always difficult to get rid of sex when it has had a strong hold on the system. It needs probably more than a mental will, — a stronger Force from above, to get rid of it altogether.

*

X seems in his letter to want only a liberation from sexual thoughts and desires by an intervention of another's will; but this is not how it should be done. Those who practise this Yoga can escape from it by a rejection of sexual suggestions aided by the influence of the Divine Power which acts through the Mother, but it is not instantaneous, except in the case of those who have a complete receptivity and an absolute faith. Usually it takes a steady tapasya to get rid of a lifelong habit.

*

What seems to be best is that the movement of rising above should be completed and if you can feel there the wideness, peace, calm, silence of the Self and that can come down into the body through all the centres and there can be the working of the Force in that condition of the physical being, then the vital-physical difficulty can be faced. The effort to do it by personal tapasya can carry one to a certain point, it can throw out sex etc.,

but for most it does not prevent all coming back by attack—unless the force of tapasya is so great and continuous that these forces get no chance. But the elimination of these things can only come, I think, by the descent of the higher consciousness—bringing with it the self-existent calm and wideness, the higher force and the Ananda occupying all down to the cells of the body. It is quite certain that these three together in the body can leave no room for sex—even if sex came, it would at once get so transmuted that it would be sex no longer.

*

It is the physical centre—sex is only one of its movements. Naturally, if the sex is active (instead of giving place to Beauty and Ananda) and if the lower movements are active, it forms an obstacle to the establishment of the higher consciousness. But the higher can descend, if there is at all an opening, even before the lower movements have definitely gone—it has then to complete the work of displacing them.

*

It [*the sex-impulse*] can be got rid of only when a higher consciousness comes down permanently into the vital.

*

I don't think it [sex] is *always* feeble in its going, sometimes it gets a singular intensity just before it goes—but it exhausts itself, tires and sinks, pressed out by the pressure from above. It depends of course on the nature. Sometimes it goes out like a snuffed candle, sometimes dwindles away, sometimes expires in a last flame. There is no rule applicable to everybody.

Rejection of the Sex-Impulse from the Various Parts of the Being

The sex-impulse is the chief difficulty in your way and, if that were got rid of, it would make the ground clear for the sadhana in you to take a much fuller course. If it persists, it is because

some part of your being still clings to it and your mind and will have remained divided and found some kind of half-justification for the continuance. The first thing is for the mind and also the higher vital to withdraw their consent altogether; if that is done, it becomes only a mechanical return from outside on the physical and finally only an active memory which will disappear when it is able to find no welcome in any part of the nature.

*

The sex-trouble is serious only so long as it can get the consent of the mind and the vital will. If it is driven from the mind, that is, if the mind refuses its consent, but the vital part responds to it, it comes as a large wave of vital desire and tries to sweep the mind away by force along with it. If it is driven also from the higher vital, from the heart and the dynamic possessive life force, it takes refuge in the lower vital and comes in the shape of smaller suggestions and urges there. Driven from the lower vital level, it goes down into the obscure inertly repetitive physical and comes as sensations in the sex-centre and a mechanical response to suggestion. Driven from there too, it goes down into the subconscious and comes up as dreams or night-emissions even without dreams. But to wherever it recedes, it tries still for a time from that base or refuge to trouble and recapture the assent of the higher parts — until the victory is complete and it is driven even out of the surrounding or environmental consciousness which is the extension of ourselves into the general or universal Nature.

*

Is it that the body does not accept the sex-thoughts and desires? If so, you are entitled to reject it as something external to you or at most existing only in the subconscious. For it is only what something in us accepts, supports, takes pleasure in, or still mechanically responds to, that can still be called ours. If there is nothing of that, it belongs to general Nature but not to us. Of course it returns and tries to take possession of its lost territory, but that is a foreign invasion. The rule of these

things is that they have to be extruded outside the individual consciousness. Rejected by the mind and higher vital, they still try to hold on to the lower vital and physical. Rejected from the lower vital, they still hold the body by a physical desire. Rejected from the body, they retire into the environmental consciousness (sometimes the subconscious also, rising in dreams)—I mean by the environmental a sort of surrounding atmosphere which we carry about with us and by which we communicate with the universal forces—and try to invade from there. Rejected from there, they become in the end too weak to be more than external suggestions till that too ends—and they are finished and non-existent.

*

There are two places into which it [*the suggestion of sex*] can retire—the subconscious vital below or the environmental consciousness around. When it returns it surges up from below, if it is the former, or approaches and invades from outside, if it is the latter.

*

It [*the pleasure of sex*] is the reason why the vital sex-difficulty is the hardest to get rid of—even those who have sincerely given up the more physical form are liable to the vital form of the impulse. But it is harmful because it allows a subtle infiltration of the forces that stand in the way of the sadhana. One must get rid of them if the vital is to become entirely pure and able to contain the divine love and Ananda.

*

Of course [*the vital is connected with the play of sex*]. It is the vital that gives it its intensity and power to hold the consciousness.

*

It is the entire inner rejection of the sex-pulls and vital pulls that is necessary, a rejection by the whole lower vital itself—the

outer rejection can only be effective if this inner rejection comes to reinforce it. Usually people adopt the outer rejection because otherwise (if these things are indulged) the inner rejection is not likely to come since the vital trend is always being confirmed by the outer action — but if the outer is rejected, then the conflict is confined to the internal desire and fought out there. Naturally an outer renunciation by itself does not liberate.

*

There are people outside the Asram even who have got free from the sex without seclusion — even sleeping in the same bed with the wife. I know one at least who did it without any higher experience. The work of these people is ordinary service or professional work, but that did not prevent their having the sex-struggle nor did it help them to get rid of it. The thing came after a prolonged struggle because they were determined to be rid of it and at a certain stage they got a touch which made the determination absolutely effective. Possibly they were sattwic, but that did not prevent their having strong sex-impulses and a hard and prolonged struggle.

I meant by cutting off [*the sex-impulse*] a determined rejection of the inward as well as the outward movement whenever it comes. Something in the nature accepts and lets itself go helplessly and something in the mind allows it to do so. The mind does not seem to believe in its power to say No definitely to inward movements as it would to an outer contact — and yet the Purusha is there and can put its definite No, maintaining it till the Prakriti has to submit — or else till the confirming touch from above makes its determination perfectly effective.

*

Sex is your main difficulty — it is in fact the only very serious one and it is so because it is always behind and you have sometimes pushed it back, but never cut with it entirely. It is the physical vital that is weak and when the thing comes, becomes pliant to it in spite of the mental will's resistance. But even so; if the mental will made itself real and strong, these crises would be met and

overcome, or at least pass without leading to indulgence in one form or another. The other possibility is the settled descent of the higher consciousness into the physical being. It is in these two ways that liberation from sex is possible.

*

The sexual urge is something that tries to take complete hold and leave no room for inhibition or control. It has a power of temporary possession which no other passion or life-impulse has to the same degree, more even than anger which comes second to it. That is why it is so difficult to get rid of it — because even when the mind or higher vital refuses, the vital physical feels this possessive force and has an ingrained tendency to be passive to its urge.

*

In the vital physical the “[sex-]response” lingers long after the mind and higher vital have turned from it. I have seen that in men who were mentally and emotionally quite sincere. A few get rid of it easily, but these are a small minority. But there must be no justification on the “what harm” basis — that is an attempt of the lower vital to get the mind and higher vital to adhere. There is always room for harm so long as the sex-response is not eliminated in *both*, not in you only.

*

It is the crude vital-physical that returns upon you in this way [*sexual suggestions*] — and these returns must be the cause of all the feeling of illness, weakness, tamas that you get. A purification of this part by the descent of the higher consciousness into it is a very great necessity for your sadhana.

*

Sex is strongly connected with the physical centre, but also with the lower vital — it is the lower vital that gives it most of its intensity and excitement. It can be disconnected from the lower vital and then it becomes a purely physical movement

of a mechanical kind which has no great force except for the more animal natures. If the physical centre also is freed, then the sex-impulse ceases.

*

It [*sexual desire*] is the habitual mechanical response to the sex-force in the physical nature. It gets this intensity in spite of the mind's rejection because something in the vital physical (nervous) being still remembers and responds to the suggestion of the craving and the pleasure. If the nervous being can be got to reject it then it becomes a purely physical wave without mental assent or vital desire—that is the last stage after which it can be thrown out of even the environmental Nature through which the suggestion or denial of the general sex-force comes to the individual being.

*

These difficulties [*of human relationship*] in one form or another are felt by all—but they take a stronger form when the root is sexual. The obstinacy with which they return is due to the obscurity of the physical which always responds to an old habit of the nature (even when the mind has rejected it) and it is this obscurity and subjection to habit that the adverse vital forces take advantage of to repeat the trouble.

*

It is of course the physical that is at once responsive in the most material way to sex-suggestion. What you are doing [*rejecting the sex-movement*] is right. As you are controlling it in the waking state, it comes out at night. That too has to be got rid of.

*

That is usual—the subconscious acts of itself on its own store of impressions or habitual past movements. When one drives sex from the mind and conscious vital and physical it remains in the subconscious and rises from there in sleep.

Sex and the Subconscious

The sex-sensation came from the subconscious. When it is unable to manifest in the waking consciousness, it comes up from the subconscious in sleep. The mind must not allow itself to be disturbed—it will go out with the rest.

*

There is no reason for you to be depressed or discouraged. The defects of the nature of which you speak are habits of the lower vital and the external being; if you recognise them fully and frankly and detect them and reject whenever they act or try to act upon you, they will in time disappear. The sexual desires show that the subconscious still retains the old impressions, movements and impulses; make the conscious parts of the being entirely free and aspire and will for the higher consciousness to come fully into the subconscious so that even in sleep and dream something in you may be aware and on guard and reject these things when they try to take form at that time.

*

I do not suppose the sex-touch came at all from them personally; at most some contact with the outside world and its consciousness might have touched the subconscious. But the real reason for these upsurgings of old movements is the subconscious itself where the old things remain in seed and can sprout up after long cessation or interruption. To be completely secure against all possibility of their return one must have established the higher consciousness in all the being down to the subconscious. But meanwhile these returns can be used as a test of the progress made. If for instance the sex-thought rises into the mind, but cannot remain there, that means the mind is substantially free; if the sex-desire comes into the vital and falls away without taking a hold, it is the same for the vital. The last question is for the body where it can come as a physical urge or sensation. If it can hold none of these there is no refuge left for it except the subconscious from which it can try to rise, especially in dreams,

or the environmental consciousness from which it can try to come as a wave invading the being.

*

If you can exclude sex from the waking thought and consciousness, the survival in sleep will not be so important. It will mean that the sex has sunk down from the conscious mind, vital, physical being into the subconscious; from there it comes up in sleep. But if it has no support from the conscious being, it may be active for a time but its activity will afterwards diminish, become more and more rare till it is eliminated. This may take time, shorter or longer, but in the end the elimination is bound to come.

*

If the waking state is freed from indulgence whether mental or physical in sex-thoughts, sex-impulses, sex-action, then the subconscious can be better dealt with; till then what is indulged by the mind in the waking state or else is suppressed but not yet entirely rejected can always lurk in the subconscious and rise from it in sleep. Turn away the conscious mind and vital from the sex-impulse *entirely*, that is the first step.

*

Naturally, if you read about these [*sexual*] things [*in novels*] they enter the mind and pass into the subconscious where they leave their impression. If the consciousness is not free from the sexual impulse, this impression can rise up from the subconscious and work in the mind.

*

The sex-impulse is deeply rooted in the subconscious and it is difficult to get rid of it. Only the full transformation of the physical consciousness can do that — except for a few who are not strongly bound by it.

Tamasic Inertia and the Sex-Impulse

When there is the dullness—tamas of any kind—it is much easier for the sex-force to act.

*

Inactivity is an atmosphere in which sex easily rises.

*

A state of tamasic inertia of the mind and body is always favourable to the sex-urge by the sex-impulse. What I meant was that there is something (not the whole) of your lower vital and physical that can respond to the sex-impulse. There may be another part that has already the aspiration—but when the condition favourable to the sex-invasion comes, then the aspiration is quiescent or not strong enough and the other elements allow the sex-force to come in.

*

The exercise has probably helped [*the body*] both by engaging the vital energies of the body and by giving it strength and tone. Sex always increases when the vital physical is indolent, unoccupied or without tone.

*

It is the most dangerous moment for sex things when just after waking one remains lying in bed; one should either go to sleep again, if there is time, or else fix the mind on wholesome things.

*

There is no condition more dangerous for the sex-imagination to come than this lying in bed in a half-awake or else a relaxed inert condition unoccupied by any activity or any experience.

Sex-Thoughts and Imaginations

That [*indulgence in sex-thoughts*] is just the thing that ought

not to be done. It would be merely a gratuitous increasing of the difficulties. For the spiritual endeavour is part of your nature and, if it is difficult to get rid of the sex-impulse, you would find it still more difficult to do without the spiritual life in you. Sex is the one difficulty in its way that is hardest to get rid of, because it sticks and returns, but one has to be more persistent than the difficulty — there is no other way.

*

By giving up contact [*with women*] it [*sexual desire*] can be reduced to two forms — dream and imagination. Dream is not of much importance unless it affects the waking mind which it need not at all do; it can besides be discouraged and, if not fed, fades out in the end. Imaginations can only be got rid of by a tapasya of the will not allowing them to run their course, but breaking them off as soon as they begin. They come most easily when lying in bed after waking from sleep in a tamasic condition. One has to break them off either by shaking off the tamas or by emptying the mind and going to sleep again. At other times one ought to be able to stop it by turning the mind elsewhere.

*

To let the memory or imagination dwell on things that excite the sex-desire is unhealthy for the sadhana and an obstacle to the development of the Yogic consciousness. Discourage these imaginations and memories when they come.

*

That [*support of the sex-sensation by the imagination*] is the difficulty. The imagination means a consent of the physical or else the vital mind. Otherwise the [*sex-*]sensation is often only due to physical causes and, if not supported by this automatic assent of a part of the mind, would before long diminish in its habit of recurrence.

*

Care must be taken that the sexual or erotic imagination does

not take hold of the consciousness representing itself as spiritual truth.

Sexual Difficulties among Men

In most men the sexual is the strongest of all the impulses of Nature.

*

The vital needs something to hook itself on to, but for a sadhak women are obviously the wrong things for it to hook itself on to — it must get hold of the right peg.

*

If it [*the vital*] admires all beautiful things, not women only, without desire — then there would be no harm [*in admiring women*]. But specially applied to women, it is a relic of the “sex-appeal”.

*

It [*the sense of one's own vital charm and power of attraction*] is the usual vanity of the lower vital — it is very common. Any man can have an attraction for any woman, and vice versa, when the sex-forces are active, but that attraction is not his, it is the pull of the sex-force.

Sex-Dreams and Emissions

There are two kinds of these [sex-]dreams, one kind which are things happening on the vital plane, another kind which is made up of impressions and impulses coming up from the subconscious, not actual happenings. Dreams in which emission takes place are usually of the second kind — but not always; for sometimes they come through the touch of vital beings or forces in the vital plane or through a meeting of one's own sexual thought-forms with those of another there.

*

Apart from the total rejection of sex-thoughts and imaginations and actions, which ends by acting in the subconscious also, I don't know any remedy for sex-dreams except the putting of a force as concrete as possible on the sex-centre and organ prohibiting this urge and its result, put when about to sleep and renewed each time one wakes and goes to sleep again. But this all cannot manage to use, for they employ a mental will instead of a concrete force (the mental will can be effective, but is not always so). This method, besides, only acts for the time, it inhibits but except in rare cases does not permanently cure; it does not get rid of the sex-impressions in the subconscious, and of course it means thinking of the sex-affair though only negatively.

I have heard it said that even very advanced Yogis get the dreams at least once in six months,—I don't know how far it is true or what the Yogis themselves say about it. But the sex-impressions in the heart can be got rid of long before the end of life, and even the seed state in the subconscious which comes up in dreams, though sticky enough, is not quite so irremovable as all that.

Anyway, the dream kind is not so much to trouble about, unless it is frequent—it is the waking state that must be rigorously cleared out. Sometimes, if that is done, there is automatic extension of the habit of rejection to the subconscious, so that when the dream is coming there is an automatic prohibition that stops it. Under a regime like that I think the sex-pressure would become, if not non-existent, yet permanently quiescent in its seed state and so practically *non est*.

*

Night-dreams are involuntary upsurgings of the sex-impressions from the subconscious; most men when they are not indulging in the sex-act have it from time to time though it varies in period from a week, a fortnight, a month to three or four months or even less. To have it more frequently indicates either indulgence in sex-imaginings which stimulate the sex-centre or else a nervous weakness in that part due to past indulgence. Some have

benefited by putting a will on the body before going to sleep at night that these dreams should not happen — though it may not succeed at the beginning, it tells in most cases after a time by fixing a certain inhibitory force on the subconscious from which these dreams arise. As to children indulging, that is not hereditary, but a thing taught by bad company and these children are sometimes spoiled in this way at a very early age.

*

When the waking consciousness has renounced the indulgence of the sexual desires and impulses, these take refuge in the subconscious as impressions, memories, suppressed desires and come up in sleep as dreams and involuntary sleep emissions. If the waking consciousness is not itself clear, if, that is to say, though there is no physical indulgence, yet there are imaginations in the mind or desires in the vital or the body, then these dreams and emissions can be frequent. Even if the waking consciousness is clear, the subconscious emergences can still come for a time, but in time they diminish. Some are able to get rid of this by putting a strong prohibiting will or force on the subconscious or on the sex-centre before going to sleep, but this does not succeed with everyone. The main thing is to get the increasing force of brahmacharya in the waking consciousness, complete expulsion of sex-thoughts, speech, physical craving or impulse — the subconscious remnants will either die out or be cleared out afterwards when one is able to bring the higher consciousness down here.

*

In order that the dream emissions may diminish or cease, it is necessary first to have complete brahmacharya, *kāyamano-vākyena* — not only to banish sexuality from the bodily action, but also sexual impulses from the vital and body consciousness and sexual thoughts and imaginations from the mind and speech — and not talk or like to talk about sexual things. The dreams arise from the subconscious where all impressions and instincts are stored up and any of these things stimulates the subconscious and increases its store which can well up in dreams. If one makes

the waking consciousness entirely pure, then by putting a will or force on the subconscious (especially before going to sleep) one can after a time eliminate the sex-dreams and emissions.

*

It is obviously an attack which falls upon your nervous system through the subconscious. It comes in sleep because in the waking consciousness you are more on your guard and able to react against attacks. Usually this kind of dream and discharge come when the physical consciousness is in a tamasic condition through fatigue or strain or any other cause, in a heavy sleep or under a stress of inertia.

The first thing to do is to reject the after consequences as you have done this time—for you say you do not feel any weakness, but rather as if nothing had happened. It is not at all inevitable that one should feel weakness after a dream of this kind and a discharge; it is only by a habitual association in the physical mind that these forces can bring these reactions of nervous weakness.

As for preventing the discharge, it can be done by becoming more conscious in sleep. You were conscious of all that happened, but you must besides develop the power of a conscious will which sees what is going to happen and interferes to prevent it, either by waking in time or by stopping the dream or prohibiting the discharge. All this is perfectly possible, it is a matter of habit and a little persistence.

It is also often found very effective to put a will or force upon the body consciousness before going to sleep that it should not happen—especially when you feel the predisposing condition of heaviness or inertia, it should be done. This will is not always immediately successful, but after a time the subconscious gets the habit of responding to the will or force thus laid upon it and the trouble dwindles and finally disappears altogether.

*

As for the discharges, that is less dangerous; most who live unmarried have them from time to time. Only, if they occur too

often, they are depressing to the vital force. Certainly, they must be stopped; but do not have exaggerated ideas on the matter. To stop them, the first necessity is to discourage sexual imaginations in the waking state. Even if that is totally done, the discharge may still continue at night, because the subconscious keeps the memory and the habit. To stop it, you have to have a strong will before sleeping that it should not happen; also, if you can learn how to do it, direct a strong force on the sexual centre before going to sleep to inhibit this kind of accident. After a time this method usually succeeds.

Physical Causes of Sex-Dreams and Emissions

This [*problem of emission*] is a quite usual phenomenon when one stops sexual activity and rejects it in the conscious mind and vital. It takes refuge in the subconscious where the mind has no direct control and comes up in the form of dreams causing emission. That lasts so long as the subconscious itself is not cleared. This can sometimes be done by putting a strong will or, if possible, a concrete current of Force on the sex-centre before sleeping against this thing happening. The success is not always immediate, but if effectively done it tends first to reduce frequency and finally stop it.

These things (accumulation of urine, hot stimulating food etc.) are all predisposing or auxiliary causes or can be so. There is often as described a rhythm in this subconscious urge—it happens at a particular time in the month or else after a fixed period of time (week, fortnight, month, six months).

*

The first thing necessary in such matters [*sex-dreams and emissions*] is to be perfectly calm and refuse to be upset by these difficulties. If they rise one must take it that they do so in order to be worked out. If there is nothing in the waking consciousness to encourage the sex-difficulty, then these dreams or discharges without dream can only be a rising up of old dormant impressions in the subconscious. Such risings often take place when the

Force is working in the subconscious to clear it. It is also just possible that the discharges may be due, especially where there are no dreams, to purely material causes, e.g. the pressure of undischarged urine or faecal matter on the bladder. But in any case the thing is not to be disturbed and to put a force or will on the sex-centre or sex-organ for these things to cease. This can be done just before sleeping — usually after a time if done regularly, it has an effect. A calm general pressure of Will or Force on the physical subconscious is to be put. The subconscious may be often obstinate in its continual persistence, but it can and does accommodate itself quickly or slowly to the will of the conscious being.

*

The pressure from the kidneys or the intestines causing dream of sex-tendency or imagination is the last and most physical form — it often remains when the others have gone. The body dull and the mind half awake is indeed what gives it its opportunity. But if it is only for a few minutes and leaves no after effect, then the tendency ought to disappear after a time.

*

Your dreams were mostly on the vital physical plane. There if there is any physical contact of a sexual or other kind that acts strongly on the sexual centre or on a sensory contact, it may even without raising any lust produce an emission by a mechanical blind and inconscient action of a purely physical (not even vital physical) kind. It is only when the sex-centre has become very strong that this becomes impossible.

Worry, Depression and Sex-Dreams and Emissions

People get too much worried about these [sex-]dreams which are only mechanical movements of the subconscious physical. If the conscious vital is cleared, they will after some time, with a little concentration, dwindle away.

*

It is a mistake to make so much of emissions—everybody has them. The subconscious has its own movement and the want of control there is a thing one can get rid of only when there is the full light down there. At most one can deal with this special factor by putting a will into the subconscious (in the sex-centre or the organ itself) for prohibition, so that even in the subconscious during sleep there may be something that reacts. Many have been able to diminish and almost get rid of the recurrence by this means, but others have succeeded less well. In one case there was a recurrence every fortnight and that stood in spite of the will. As for the waking difficulty do not make too much of it. Press on with the positive side of the sadhana towards realisation—these things will fade and disappear when the higher consciousness is down in the sex-centre. Meanwhile it has first to be controlled and got rid of as much as possible.

*

There is no reason to be depressed to this extent or to have these imaginations about failure in the Yoga. It is not at all a sign that you are unfit for the Yoga. It simply means that the sexual impulse rejected by the conscious parts has taken refuge in the subconscious, somewhere probably in the lower vital physical and the most physical consciousness where there are some regions not yet open to the aspiration and the light. The persistence in sleep of things rejected in the waking consciousness is a quite common occurrence in the course of the sadhana.

The remedy is (1) to get the higher consciousness, its light and the workings of its power down into the obscurer parts of the nature, (2) to become progressively more conscious in sleep, with an inner consciousness which is aware of the working of the sadhana in sleep as in waking, (3) to bring to bear the waking will and aspiration on the body in sleep.

One way to do the last is to make a strong and conscious suggestion to the body, before sleeping, that the thing should not happen; the more concrete and physical the suggestion can be made and the more directly on the sexual centre, the better. The effect may not be quite immediate at first or invariable; but

usually this kind of suggestion, if you know how to make it, prevails in the end; even when it does not prevent the dream, it very often awakes the consciousness within in time to prevent untoward consequences.

It is a mistake to allow yourself to be depressed in the sadhana even by repeated failures. One must be calm, persistent and more obstinate than the resistance.

*

It is all nervous. If you did not get depressed and despondent and create a weakness by the depression, the discharges would do no harm. All get them except those who indulge and so get out the sex-fluid or those who have a strong Yogic or other control over their sleep. That control has to be got, but the first thing is to get rid of this reaction of despondency and weakness which is quite unnecessary.

*

There is no inevitable necessity for a dream emission making the body weak — it is probably the past sanskar that makes it have such strong results.

Masturbation

The theory of masturbation as a physiological necessity is a most extraordinary idea. It weakens the nervous force and nervous balance, — as is natural since it is an artificial and wholly uncompensated waste of the energy — and it disorganises the sex-centre. Those who indulge in it inordinately may even upset their nervous balance altogether and bring about neurasthenia or worse. It is not by disorganisation of the sex-centre and sex-functioning that one should avoid the consequences of the sex-action, but by control of the sex itself so that it may be turned into higher forms of Energy.

It is perfectly possible to check the habit. There are any number of people who have had it for years and yet been able to stop it.

*

The habit you speak of is exceedingly harmful and dangerous; it wastes the energy that should be preserved for the sadhana; it tends to weaken the mind, dislocate the consciousness, exhaust the nervous power, diminish the life-force, create inertia and impotence in the body. The excitations etc. that accompany it build up nothing; their tendency is to disintegrate. Often the result of this habit is to destroy the health and bring in undermining illnesses — it always does so when there is unrestrained indulgence.

There is only one thing to do for those on whom it comes — to break off the habit entirely, uncompromisingly and for ever and *never to touch the sex-centre*.

*

Necessarily, you must give up the perverse habit which is one of the main causes of your despondency, vital weakness etc. There is nothing that has more power to derange and weaken the system. If not only in your mind but in your vital also you had made the resolution to give it up, it would have disappeared long ago.

*

There is one way by which it is possible for you to get rid of the perverse habit: to establish a strong mental control and so get rid of the wrong movement. It is not true that it is unconquerable; on the contrary, the fact that you were able to interrupt it for some time shows that you can conquer it. It returned because these things are a movement of certain universal life-forces that, once allowed a habitual wrong response in the individual system, tend to continue in that form and, even if evicted, try always to recur. Your mind has rejected them, but something in your vital nature — the part that responds directly to the universal life-forces — still takes pleasure and has preserved the capacity and desire of the wrong response. A resolute and persistent effort of will can enforce in the end the rejection of the desire and finally even of any mechanical habit of the movement upon this part of the nature also. Only you must not be discouraged by relapses;

your will must be more persevering than the habit and persist till there is a complete conquest.

*

It is of course true that the nerves get upset by the habit of masturbation (frequently done daily or continued for a long time) apart from other untoward results. In Hathayoga and Rajayoga to carry on sex along with the Yoga is extremely dangerous. But it is not safe (physically) with any Yoga, unless the practice of Yoga is only nominal or unless the mind and nerves are made of iron. The spiritual unsafeness is of course always there.

*

Any intervention, however imperative, cannot be effective without the cooperation and assent of the being. If you continue to entertain and justify with your mind such [*sexual*] movements as you described and gave expression to, if you go on doing physical violence to yourself and adopting it as a means of sadhana or admitting as a part of sadhana the method of revolt or other Asuric errors, how do you expect to have the will and needed discrimination? You have first to throw out these things which have been shown to you to be false and from a hostile source. It is because the mind justified or excused them, that the will became weak to dismiss them. You have to dismiss these errors altogether, if you want to do this Yoga in which they have no place at all.

On the other hand, if you are unable to control these movements and dismiss them in spite of your mind refusing them, that means a weak condition of the nerves in which the remedy I proposed is the only one. I meant by change of air not only a change of climate, but of place, surroundings and atmosphere — to remain for a time where there will not be any pressure. You speak of the danger of not being able to come back or of losing the sadhana, but to allow these things to go farther is much more dangerous to the sadhana and, if they increase or continue, you will not be able to remain here.

As for the secretiveness you spoke of, it is one main reason

of your going astray—for it has made you shut yourself up in your own wrong movement. If you have got yourself into an imprisoning circle, the first thing you have to do is to get out of it—secretiveness must be renounced altogether.

*

If you cannot stop the masturbation, I think you are right in going [*from the Ashram*], as to continue might have serious consequences for the nervous system. It is better in that case to live the ordinary life and let the sex-instinct have its natural outlet so long as it is so irresistible. It is not necessary to wait for training somebody to do the work. Mother appreciates very much all the work you have done and we had hoped the earnest spiritual effort you have made would prevail over this tendency. But it would not be wise to insist too much against the obstinately strong indication that the vital nature needs a relief. Wherever you are, the Mother's blessings and mine will be with you and you will receive from us all the inner help we can give you.

Sexual Difficulties among Women

There is no universal rule. Women can be as sexual as men or more. But there are numbers of women who dislike sex and there are very few men. One Sukhdev in a million, but many Dianas and Pallas Athenes. The virgin is really a feminine conception; men are repelled by the idea of eternal virginity. Many women would remain without any wakening of the sexual instinct if men did not thrust it on them and that cannot be said of many, perhaps of any man! But there is another side to the picture. Women are perhaps less physically sexual than men on the whole,—but what about vital sexuality? the instinct of possessing and being possessed etc. etc.?

*

If there were not the sex-push in her, how could that [*feeling of unpleasant warmth*] be? The sex-push is not merely the impulse to the act, as she perhaps thinks, as the push to envelop and

occupy the man and to possess and be possessed. That is so especially with women, the sex-act being very often less attractive to them than to men; but of course always, if the vital physical reaches a certain point, the physical sex-movement tends to follow.

*

She may not have the sex-feeling towards you, but there is a certain kind of vital push, throwing out of tentacles—I don't know exactly how to express it—the secret object of which in Nature is to attract the man, to draw his attention and fix it on the woman, hook and draw him in a less or greater degree. The intention may not be at all conscious in the woman's mind, that is to say, it may not be clear or even present to her mind,—it may be merely instinctive or subconscious. There need be no physical sexual intention, only the vital in spontaneous movement. All women of a strongly vital temperament (and X is that) have it—some more, some less. There may be no specific sex-impulse in it, but it will still raise the sex-idea in the man. X naturally has no psychological knowledge and these things are too subtle for her to perceive or realise. She may easily think she is acting in a perfectly innocent and natural way and not at all know this activity of the Nature push in her.

*

A smile or any movement, appearance or action of the woman can be the starting point for these vibrations. I don't suppose it is anything inherent in the smile itself, but all these things have been the habitual means by which sex has been excited in man (*hāvabhāva*) and the woman uses them, often unconsciously and by mere habit when coming into contact with man, whether she has or has not any intention of pleasing or moving the man, it still comes up as an instinctive movement. X is of the type of woman who has this instinctive movement to please the male. But even when the woman smiles quite casually and without even the habitual instinctive movement, still there may be the vibration on the man's side owing to the habit of response in

him to feminine attractions. These things are almost mechanical in their starting. As I wrote before it is the automatic answer of the physical or vital mind (imagination etc.) that prolongs it and makes it effective. Otherwise the vibrations would die away after a time.

*

Dress has always been used by woman as an aid to her “sex-appeal” as it is now called and man has always been susceptible to it; women also often find dress in man a cause of attraction (e.g. soldier’s uniform). There are also particular tastes in dress —that a sari of a particular colour should attract is quite normal. The attraction works on the sense and the vital, while it is the mind that dislikes the psychological defects and gets cooled down by their exposure; but this repulsion of the mind cannot last as against the stronger vital attraction.

*

It is of course the universal sex-force that acts, but certain people are more full of it than others, have the sex-appeal as they now say in Europe. This sex-appeal is exercised especially by women even without any conscious intention of putting it on a particular person. Consciously they may turn it on a particular person, but it may exercise itself on many others whom they do not wish particularly to capture. All women have not the sex-appeal, but some force of sex-pull there is in most. There is of course a similar pull in men for women.

*

The sex-pull is that of a general force, which uses the individual for its purpose and it takes advantage of any proximity of the other sex to work in. The remedy lies in oneself—in immediate detachment (standing apart, not accepting as one’s own) and rejecting it.

*

It is certainly naive to think that because a girl is simple, i.e. instinctive and impulsive and non-mental in her movements, she

can be relied upon to be an asexual friend. Some women can be, but it is usually those who have a clear mental consciousness and strong will of self-control or else those who are incapable of a passion for more than one person in their life and you are lucky enough not to be that person.

*

Tell X on behalf of myself and the Mother that she must not allow herself to be crushed by the burden of the past. All she has to do is to turn her back on this past of sexual weakness, for which she was not herself primarily responsible, and to consecrate herself entirely to the Divine. If she so consecrates herself, the past will be wiped out and a new life begin for her. This is the true atonement and the only one asked from her.

*

Write to X that this case of Y and Z is perfectly clear. The girl [Z] is moved by sexual desire and its impulse of vital interchange; not being satisfied in her married life, she seeks the satisfaction from others. All these pleas about affection etc. are the usual tricks with which women (and men too) cover their approach to the vital and sexual interchange. Sometimes they use the trick knowingly, sometimes they try to deceive themselves also with it—or in some cases they actually believe in it, the vital covering up the mind and deluding it. It does not matter which it is,—the actual fact behind the cover and the final outcome are the same. Even sadhaks when moved by the sexual force are deceived by their vital or try to deceive themselves, alleging spiritual affinities, psychic ties or anything else that can justify their lapse; if they yield they can go far out of the way.

For Y it is a test,—difficult for him because he is at an age when the sexual element is awake but there is not sufficient experience for a true understanding of its workings and not sufficient maturity of mind to make up for want of experience. If he yields to the girl's pressure, he is likely to lose his sadhana, perhaps for a long time—if he is led too far it might even be

a decisive fall. If he wants the spiritual life, he must be on his guard and draw back entirely from this movement.

Social Contact and Sex

In an Asram or other religious institution men and women are not usually allowed to live together. Where they do, as among the Vaishnavas, these difficulties [*of sex*] invariably arise. The difficulty lies in the enormous place given to sex in the lower Nature. But there is no reason if one fixes oneself firmly in the spiritual consciousness why one should not speak and act between men and women without the least reference to sex.

*

You can have right relations with women only when you can forget that they are women and meet them as human beings — when you can forget sex in your feeling and action towards them.

*

All that [*mental excitement when a man meets a woman*] happens because the vital is conscious of sex in the approach and immediately assumes the “man to woman” attitude. To get rid of that, one must be able to look on the woman and feel to her as to a human being only. That is difficult and needs a certain training; for even if the mind is able to take the position, the vital is unreliable and one has to be on guard that it does not suddenly or surreptitiously get in into the relation with its partiality for the sex-interchange.

*

Of course one must be able to come in contact with women without feeling or thinking about sex; but to seek contact and test is not the way, it can too easily turn the other side when the mastery is not complete. The facing and conquering must be an inner process — the Tantrik outer method is not indicated.

*

It [*renunciation of contact with women*] has been prescribed not only in your case, but to all who drag the sex-idea into their relations with women in the Yoga. External as well as internal renunciation of the sex-relation vital or physical has been made the rule. The idea of internal detachment and external indulgence has been found always to be a cover under which the vital continues its operations. For you the continuance would be dangerous both spiritually and for the body.

*

It usually happens that when actual indulgence of the vital is given up (external exchange, touch or contact), imagination still goes on. But if this can be overcome, then the whole thing is overcome. External indulgence on the other hand keeps the activity alive. This is the *raison d'être* of the external avoidance. If anything can be got rid of without the necessity of avoidance, so much the better.

*

Both methods [*giving up contact with women and keeping it*] have their disadvantage. If one allows the opportunities, the sex-movement continues — if one suppresses only, then the movement goes back into imaginations. If it is only imaginations then there is less harm, for in the end the imaginations can be got rid of, but if the imaginations precipitate into some material act, then nothing is gained.

*

The mental acceptance of X's philosophy about sex was the mistake. It may be true that ordinarily mixing with women removes shyness etc., — though it is not always so, for many people are sex-timid by nature — but that is a means for ordinary life, not Yoga, and in ordinary life marriage is the direct means for getting rid of sex-uneasiness; marriage or else having love affairs with women and satisfying the sex. But that is not the proper means for an Asram and Yoga. In Yoga the proper means is to train the mind and vital to meet women without thought of sex, to

look on them as sadhaks and human beings only, not as objects of sexual possession and enjoyment.

*

Strength and purity in the lower vital and wideness in the heart are the best condition for meeting others, especially women, and if that could always be there sex could hardly have a look in.

Touch and Sex

The association [*of touch*] with sex is vital-physical — otherwise there need be no connection between the expression of affection by touch and the sex-feeling. Except in unusual cases, when the mother and son or brother and sister embrace, they do not have the sex-feeling. It is a sort of habitual conversion operated in the passage from the emotional to the physical and, being a habit only, though a strong one, can be changed.

*

It [*touch*] is vital-physical. All sex movement has a vital element in it, but the mere vital movement is not directly interested in touching or the sex act. It is interested more in the play of the emotions, domination and subjection, quarrels, reconciliations, the interchange of vital forces etc. It is the vital-physical consciousness that gives so much importance to the touch, embrace, sex act etc.

*

In ordinary society people touch each other more or less freely according to the manners of the society. That is quite a different matter because there the sex-impulse is allowed within certain more or less wide or narrow limits and even the secret indulgence is common, although people try to avoid discovery. In Bengal when there is purdah, touching between men and women is confined to the family, in Europe there is not much restriction so long as there is no excessive familiarity or indecency; but in Europe sex is now practically free. Here all sex-indulgence

inner or outer is considered undesirable as an obstacle to the sadhana — as it very evidently is. For that reason any excessive familiarity of touch between men and women has to be avoided, anything also in the nature of caressing, as it creates or tends to create sex-tendency or even the strong sex-impulse. Casual touching has to be avoided also if it actually creates the sex-impulse. These are commonsense rules if the premiss is granted that sex has not to have any indulgence.

*

It is surprising you should not see that these things [*kisses and caresses*] belong to the vital sex-movement, even if there is no physical sex-act. If one wants to live in the unreformed vital plane, one can indulge them — but it is certainly unyogic.

*

The difficulty about the kisses and embraces is that they are the expression of a vital love which is not based on the psychic or spiritual or at least does not keep to that basis, so that when it touches the body, it awakens the reactions of the ordinary body love. The ordinary vital and the ordinary body love are intimately connected with sex — and for sex procreative intention is not at all necessary.

*

Avoidance of touch is best so long as there is the sex-response to touch on either side. At a higher stage, it is indifferent to touch or not to touch. What it will be in the supramental culmination, let the supramental decide.

Touch may be neutral or it may imply interchange of forces. When the interchange is that of spiritual or spiritualised forces, then it has its meaning and it is that that will justify it in the supramental realisation. But till then, it is better to be circumspect.

Celibacy

Celibacy means first “not marrying” — it can be extended to not having sexual (physical) relations with any woman, though that is not its proper meaning. It is not equivalent to Brahmacharya. Brahmacharya is not binding in *bhaktimārga* or *karmayoga*, but it is necessary for ascetic *jñānayoga* as well as for Raja and Hatha yogas. It is also not demanded from Grihastha yogis. In this Yoga the position is that one must overcome sex, otherwise there can be no transformation of the lower vital and physical nature; all physical sexual connection should cease, otherwise one exposes oneself to serious dangers. The sex-push must also be overcome but it is not a fact that there can be no sadhana or no experience before it is entirely overcome, only without that conquest one cannot go to the end and it must be clearly recognised as one of the more serious obstacles and indulgence of it as a cause of considerable disturbance.

*

Celibacy is one thing and freedom from sex-pushes is another. These have to be conquered and got rid of, but if freedom from them were made a test of fitness to go on, I wonder how many could be declared fit for my Yoga. The will to conquer must be there, but the elimination of the sex-impulse is one of the most difficult things for human nature and, if it takes time, that is only natural.

*

If it is like that [*a natural control of sexual excitement*] then it is the power of self-control, automatic and therefore belonging to the inner being that is coming — the genuine thing. Of course to be complete the sexual passion and the thoughts that encourage it should disappear also. The idea about impotence [*being caused by celibacy*] is rather irrational — impotence comes from over-indulgence or wrong indulgence (certain perverse habits); it does not come from self-control. Self-control means only a diversion to other powers, because the controlled sex-power becomes a

force for the life-energies, the powers of the mind and the more and more potent workings of the spiritual consciousness.

*

Why impose one rule of Brahmacharya to an advanced age on all men or the age of 25 on all women? Everybody is not intended to be a Brahmachari. Men and women belong to every stage of development and need different kinds of experience suitable for their stage in order to grow and advance farther.

Marriage

It is not helpful to abandon the ordinary life before the being is ready for the full spiritual life. To do so means to precipitate a struggle between the different elements and exasperate it to a point of intensity which the nature is not ready to bear. The vital elements in you have partly to be met by the discipline and experience of life, while keeping the spiritual aim in view and trying to govern life by it progressively in the spirit of Karmayoga.

It is for this reason that we gave our approval to your marriage.

*

If she consents to marry, that would be the best. All these vital disturbances proceed from suppressed sex-instinct, suppressed but not rejected and overcome. A mental acceptance or enthusiasm for the sadhana is not a sufficient guarantee nor a sufficient ground for calling people, especially young people, to begin it. Afterwards these vital instincts rise up and there is nothing sufficient to balance or prevail against them, only mental ideas which do not prevail against the instinct but on the other hand also stand in the way of their natural social means of satisfaction. If she marries now and gets experience of the human vital life, then hereafter there may be a chance of her mental aspiration for sadhana turning into the real thing.

*

As to the question of marriage in general, we do not consider it advisable for one who desires to come to the spiritual life. Marriage means usually any amount of trouble, heavy burdens, a bondage to the worldly life and great difficulties in the way of single-minded spiritual endeavour. Its only natural purpose would be, if the sexual trend was impossible to conquer, to give it a restricted and controlled satisfaction. I do not see in what way it could help you to keep the mind under control and subjugation; a restless mind can only be quieted from within.

*

It is not right once you have turned to the Divine, to allow despondency of any kind to take hold of you. Whatever the difficulties and troubles, you must keep this confidence that by relying on the Divine, the Divine will take you through. Now I answer the questions you put to me in your letter.

1. If to follow the spiritual path is your resolve, marriage and family life can only come across it. Marriage would be the right thing only if the sexual push was so strong that there was no hope of overcoming it except by a controlled and rational indulgence for some time during which it could be slowly brought under subjection to the will. But you say its hold on you is diminishing, so that does not seem indispensable.

2. As for leaving all and coming away from there that must be only when there is a clear and settled decision within you. To do so on an impulse would be to feel all the pull of old things after you come here and entail severe disturbance and struggle in the sadhana. When the other things fall away or are cut away from you then it can be done. Persist in your aspiration, insist on your vital to have faith and be more quiet. It will come.

*

You are right in feeling that the protection and grace are always there and that all has been for the best. In your wife's condition, the best was that she should change her body and she has been able to do so in the state of mind which would give her the

happiest conditions both after death and for a renewal hereafter of the spiritual development for which she had begun to aspire. It is good also that you have been able to keep your poise and the freedom of your spirit in this occurrence.

Again, you are entirely right in your resolution not to marry again; to do so would be in any case to invite serious and probably insuperable difficulties in your following the path of Yoga, and, as in this path of Yoga it is necessary to put away sexual desire, marriage would be not only meaningless but an absolute contradiction of your spiritual life. You can expect full support and protection from us in your resolve and, if you keep a sincere will and resolution in this matter, you may be sure that the Divine Grace will not fail you.

The Relationship of Man and Woman

These are ideas of the vital plane⁷ where the strong demand subservience from those who are not physically or otherwise so strong. The spiritual truth is quite other than these things.

Skin Diseases and Sex

Yes, of course, skin diseases have much to do with sexual desires — not of course always, but often.

*

I suppose it [*pimples on the face*] is often the result of suppressed sexuality — suppressed in act but still internally active. These things do not act in the same way with all, with some it may act on the blood, with some it may not or else not in the same form. Moreover I do not suppose that sex is the only cause of pimples on the face — there are other things also that can give that.

⁷ The correspondent asked whether there was any "basic truth" in these two ideas: first, that in a relationship the woman should surrender to the man, and second, that a man has a right to be attracted to several women at a time, whereas a woman should be devoted to one man alone. — Ed.

Section Three

Illness, Doctors and Medicines

Chapter One

Illness and Health

Illness and Yoga

Whatever it may be—the power of the illness to prevent the sadhana ought not to exist. The Yogic consciousness and its activities must be there whether there is health or illness.

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You ought not to allow the physical illnesses to interfere with your sadhana or affect your mind—these illnesses are nothing compared with what many others have had to pass through—you have some constipation, headaches, rheumatic pains, that ought not to be so difficult to bear. You have to separate yourself from the body consciousness and not allow yourself to be overpowered by it.

*

Physical sufferings are due to attacks of the forces of the Ignorance. But if one knows how to do it, one can make them a means of purification. There are however better and less difficult means of purification.

*

Illness must not be accepted as a means of transformation; it rather indicates certain difficulties encountered by the force of transformation especially in the vital and the body. But it is not necessary that these difficulties should be allowed to take this obscure form of illness. All illness should be rejected and all suggestions of illness; the Force should be called in to cure by the assent to health and the refusal of assent to the suggestions that bring or prolong its opposite.

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All illnesses are obviously due to the imperfect nature of the body and the physical nature. The body can be immune only when it is open to the higher consciousness and the latter can descend into it. Till then what he writes is the remedy—if he can also call in the force to throw out the illness, that is the most powerful help possible.

*

It is only by the conquest of the material nature that illness can cease altogether to come.

*

I do not think X's trance has anything to do with her ill health; I have never known the habit of trances of that kind to have any such result, only the violent breaking of a trance might have a bad result though it would not necessarily produce a disaster. But there is the possibility that if the conscious being goes out of the body in an absolutely complete trance, the thread which connects it with the body might be broken or else cut by some adverse force and it would not be able to return into the physical frame. Apart from any such fatal possibility there might be a shock which might produce a temporary disorder or even some kind of lesion; as a rule, however, a shock would be the only consequence.

The general question is a different matter. There is a sort of traditional belief in many minds that the practice of Yoga is inimical to the health of the body and tends to have a bad effect of one kind or another and even finally leads to a premature or an early dropping of the body. Ramakrishna seems to have held the view, if we can judge from his remarks about the connection between Keshav Sen's progress in spirituality and the illness which undermined him, that one was the result and the desirable result of the other, a liberation and release from life in this world, mukti. That may or may not be; but I find it difficult to believe that illness and deterioration of the body is the natural and general result of the practice of Yoga or that that practice is the cause of an inevitable breakdown of health or of the final

illnesses which bring about their departure from the body. On what ground are we to suppose or how can it be proved that while non-Yogis suffer from ill health and die because of the disorders of Nature, Yogis die of their Yoga? Unless a direct connection between their death and their practice of Yoga can be proved—and this could be proved with certainty only in particular cases and even then not with an absolute certainty—there is no sufficient reason to believe in such a difference. It is more rational to conclude that both Yogis and non-Yogis fall ill and die from natural causes and by the same dispensation of Nature; one might even advance the view, since they have the Yoga Shakti at their disposal if they choose to use it, that the Yogi falls ill and dies not because of but in spite of his Yoga. At any rate, I don't believe that Ramakrishna (or any other Yogi) fell ill because of his trances; there is nothing to show that he ever suffered in that way after a trance. I think it is said somewhere or he himself said that the cancer in his throat of which he died came by his swallowing the sins of his disciples and those who approached him: that again may or may not be, but it will be his own peculiar case. It is no doubt possible to draw the illnesses of others upon oneself and even to do it deliberately; the instance of the Greek king Antigonus and his son Dimitrius is a famous historical case in point. Yogis also do this sometimes; or else adverse forces may throw illnesses upon the Yogi, using those round him as a door or a passage or the ill wishes of people as an instrumental force. But all these are special circumstances connected, no doubt, with his practice of Yoga; but they do not establish the general proposition as an absolute rule. A tendency such as X's to desire or welcome or accept death as a release could have a force because of her advanced spiritual consciousness which it would not have in ordinary people.

On the other side there can be an opposite use and result of the Yogic consciousness: illness can be repelled from one's own body or cured, even chronic or deep-seated illnesses and long-established constitutional defects remedied or expelled and even a predestined death delayed for a long period. Narayan Jyotishi,

a Calcutta astrologer, who predicted, not knowing then who I was, in the days before my name was politically known, my struggle with Mlechchha enemies and afterwards the three cases against me and my three acquittals, predicted also that though death was prefixed for me in my horoscope at the age of 63, I would prolong my life by Yogic power for a very long period and arrive at a full old age. In fact I have got rid by Yogic pressure of a number of chronic maladies that had got settled in my body, reduced others to a vanishing minimum, brought about steadily progressing diminution of two that remained and on the last produced a considerable effect. But none of these instances either on the favourable or unfavourable side can be made into a rule; there is no validity in the tendency of human reason to transform the relativity of these things into an absolute.

Finally I may say of X's trances that they are the usual *savikalpa* kind opening to all kinds of experiences, but the large abiding realisations in Yoga do not usually come in trance but by a persistent waking sadhana. The same may be said of the removal of attachments; some may be got rid of sometimes by an experience in trance, but more usually it must be done by persistent endeavour in waking sadhana.

Illness Not the Result of the Force

Illness does not rise up by the descent of the Force, nor hereditary taint nor madness. They come up of themselves, as in X's case who never had even the smallest grain of a descent or a Force anywhere. It is only after he went off his centre, that we are putting Force (not as a descent, but as an agent) to keep him as straight and as sound as possible.

*

A descent [*of the force*] cannot possibly produce nausea and vomiting etc. There can, if one pulls down too much force, be produced a headache or giddiness; both of these go if one keeps quiet a little, ceases pulling and assimilates. A descent cannot

produce blood pressure, madness or apoplexy or heart failure or any other illness.

*

A heat is sometimes created in the body by the pressure of a Force of tapas because there are things that resist in the vital or in the body habit or in the brain-mind — the cause of the heat is therefore not the Force itself but the resistance. As soon as the system is cleared there is no sense of heat any longer. But this heat is clearly distinguishable from illness.

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Whatever force is sent is for cure. Increase of illness or physical suffering is not the result of the force.

The Lower Nature, the Hostile Forces and Illness

Attacks of illness are attacks of the lower nature or of adverse forces taking advantage of some weakness, opening or response in the nature, — like all other things that come and have got to be thrown away, they come from outside. If one can feel them so coming and get the strength and the habit to throw them away before they can enter the body, then one can remain free from illness. Even when the attack seems to rise from within, that means only that it has not been detected before it entered the subconscious; once in the subconscious, the force that brought it rouses it from there sooner or later and it invades the system. When you feel it just after it has entered, it is because though it came direct and not through the subconscious, yet you could not detect it while it was still outside. Very often it arrives like that, frontally or more often tangentially from the side, direct, forcing its way through the subtle vital envelope which is our main armour of defence, but it can be stopped there in the envelope itself before it penetrates the material body. Then one may feel some effect, e.g. feverishness or a tendency to cold, but there is not the full invasion of the malady. If it can be stopped earlier or if the vital envelope of itself resists and remains strong,

vigorous and intact, then there is no illness; the attack produces no physical effect and leaves no traces.

*

Illness is always an attack of contrary forces in Nature—but not always of what are specially called the Hostile Forces or intended to frustrate aspiration. A desire is an ordinary force of the lower Nature, though it may be used by the Hostile Forces.

*

Hostile [*source of illness*] here means hostile to the Yoga. An illness which comes in the ordinary course as the result of physical causes—even though adverse universal forces are the first cause—is an ordinary illness. One brought by the forces hostile to Yoga to upset the system and prevent or disturb progress—without any adequate physical reason—is a hostile attack. It may have the appearance of a cold or any other illness, but to the eye which sees the action of forces and not only the outward symptoms or results, the difference is clear.

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These are waves of the hostile force which come trying whom they can touch. When you feel an attack of this kind, you must realise that this comes on you from outside and touches some weak point in you, and you have to remain as quiet as you can, reject it and open yourself. I judge from what you have written that it was the physical and vital-physical consciousness that it made restless and inclined to revolt and it did not take the whole of your consciousness. If you can keep it localised like that when it comes and remain quiet in mind and heart and reject it, then it will not be so difficult to throw it out. The peace and force must be called down into this vital-physical (nervous) part and the whole body until you feel the atmosphere and force pervading you and in you always in all the body and not only upon or around you. If you still find a difficulty, it is because of the past habit of reaction in the nervous being and a certain weakness there; but persevere, do not consent to the invasion of the old

forces. The habit will lessen and disappear and the true Force occupying the body will remove the weakness.

*

It is a hostile pressure that is organising a habit in the body of recurrence at a fixed time or times. This habit of fixed recurrence gives a great force for any illness to persist, as the body consciousness expects the recurrence and the expectation helps it to come.

*

It is this expectation in the mind [*that an attack of obscurity will come at a fixed time*] that helps most to maintain the rhythm of the attack. If it could be got rid of, the rhythm also could be broken.

*

According to all statements the deaths in early age are much less in Europe and men live longer on the whole. But certain diseases have greatly increased in spite of the advance in hygiene — influenza, T.B. and venereals. There are also new diseases coming in that hardly existed before. That seems obviously the work of the Hostiles.

The Suggestion of Illness

The feeling of illness is at first only a suggestion; it becomes a reality because your physical consciousness accepts it. It is like a wrong suggestion in the mind; if the mind accepts it, it becomes clouded and confused and has to struggle back into harmony and clearness. It is so with the body consciousness and illness. You must not accept but reject it with your physical mind and so help the body consciousness to throw off the suggestion. If necessary, make a counter-suggestion, "No, I shall be well; I am and shall be all right." And in any case call in the Mother's Force to throw out the suggestion and the illness it is bringing.

*

By suggestion [of *illness*] I do not mean merely thoughts or words. When the hypnotist says, "Sleep", it is a suggestion; but when he says nothing but only puts his silent will to convey sleep or makes movements of his hands over the face, that also is a suggestion.

When a force is thrown on you or a vibration of illness, it carries to the body this suggestion. A wave comes in the body —with a certain vibration in it, the body remembers "cold" or feels the vibrations of a cold and begins to cough or sneeze or to feel chill—the suggestion comes to the mind in the form, "I am weak, I don't feel well, I am catching a cold."

*

A suggestion is not one's own thought or feeling, but a thought or feeling that comes from outside, from others, from the general atmosphere or from external Nature,— if it is received, it sticks and acts on the being and is taken to be one's own thought or feeling. If it is recognised as a suggestion, then it can be more easily got rid of. This feeling of doubt and self-distrust and hopelessness about oneself is a thing moving about in the atmosphere and trying to enter into people and be accepted; I want you to reject it, for its presence not only produces trouble and distress but stands in the way of restoration of health and return to the inner activity of the sadhana.

*

The suggestion of weakness comes to the subconscious part of the body consciousness and therefore the mind is most often unaware of it. If the body itself were truly conscious, then the suggestions could be detected in time and thrown off before they took effect. Also the rejection by the central consciousness would be supported by a conscious rejection in the body and act more immediately and promptly.

*

All these suggestions that came to you were of course part of the attack on the physical consciousness,— the attack on the body

is used to raise these ideas and the ideas are used to make it more difficult for the body to recover. At a certain stage attacks fall heavily on the body because the opposing forces find it more difficult than before to upset the mind or vital directly, so they fall on the physical in the hope that that will do the trick, the physical being more vulnerable. But the sensibility of the body to attacks is no proof of incapacity, just as a finer sensibility of the mind or vital to attacks was no proof—it can in due time be overcome. As for the feelings about the Mother and that her love is only given for a return in work or to those who can do sadhana well, that is the usual senseless idea of the vital-physical mind and has no value.

There is nothing wrong in taking care of the body in regard to health and, if the liver has gone wrong, the instinct to refuse too sweet or greasy or heavy foods is a right instinct. Mother has no objection to your abstaining while the illness is there nor has she insisted on your taking *dal*. Her objection is only to what people often do, getting ideas about this or that food and abstaining even when there is no acute illness. During an acute state of bad liver, abstinence is often necessary. Only one must not create by wrong ideas a nervous incapacity of the stomach or a chronic nervous dyspepsia. She had no other meaning.

I hope you will be all right soon. If the body does not right itself, you must keep me informed from time to time.

*

There is a general suggestion in the air about catching dengue or influenza. It is this suggestion that is enabling the adverse forces to bring about symptoms of this kind and spread the complaints; if one rejects both the suggestions and the symptoms, then these things will not materialise.

*

That is how illnesses try to come from one person to another—they attack, by a suggestion like this or otherwise, the nervous being and try to come in. Even if the illness is not contagious, this often happens, but it comes more easily in contagious illnesses.

The suggestion or touch has to be thrown off at once.

There is a sort of protection round the body which we call the nervous envelope — if this remains strong and refuses entrance to the illness force, then one can remain well even in the midst of plague or other epidemics — if the envelope is pierced or weak, then illness can come in.

What you felt attacked was not really the physical body, but this nervous envelope and the nervous body (*prāṇakoṣa*) of which it is an extension or cover.

*

A body is not a cloth — nor is a sick body a torn cloth. A body weak or sick can renew itself, recover its vitality — that happens to thousands of people. A cloth has not a renewable vitality. It is only if one is old beyond fifty-five or sixty that the renewal becomes difficult — even then health and strength can be kept or recovered enough to keep the body in a good condition.

I do not also quite catch what you mean about the inner being. If you mean by the *vikās* the development of the sadhana, to recover health and strength is very necessary for that. The body is an instrument for the sadhana no less than the mind and vital, and it should be kept in a good condition as far as possible. Not to care for the body, thinking it is of no importance compared with the inner state, is not the rule of this Yoga.

*

It is a pity that X could not write all this time. Formerly when she wrote often she used to get better after writing. It is also a pity that she has been told by the doctors that she is not going to live; even if it is true, such a thing should not be told unless in case of necessity (which does not exist in her case) for it takes away much of the power of resistance and diminishes what chances of cure and survival there were. X's physical destiny has always been against her but this is a thing that can be cancelled if one can have sufficient faith and inner strength and openness and receive the spiritual force.

*

These auto-suggestions [*of being restored to good health*]—it is really faith in a mental form—act both on the subliminal and the subconscious. In the subliminal they set in action the powers of the inner being, its occult power to make thought, will or simple conscious force effective on the body—in the subconscious they silence or block the suggestions of death and illness (expressed or unexpressed) that prevent the return of health. They help also to combat the same things (adverse suggestions) in the mind, vital, body consciousness. Where all this is completely done or with some completeness, the effects can be very remarkable.

*

In much the same way as Coué's suggestion system cured most of his patients, [*so an ordinary doctor would cure his patients,*] only by a physical instead of a mental means. The body consciousness responds to the suggestion or the medicine and one gets cured for the time being or it doesn't respond and there is no cure. How is it that the same medicine for the same illness succeeds with one man and not with another or succeeds at one time with a man and afterwards doesn't succeed at all? Absolute cure of an illness so that it cannot return again depends on clearing the mind, the vital and the body consciousness and the subconscious of the psychological response to the force bringing the illness. Sometimes this is done by a sort of order from above (when the consciousness is ready, but it cannot always be done like that). The complete immunity from all illness for which our Yoga tries can only come by a total and permanent enlightenment of the below from above resulting in the removal of the psychological roots of ill health—it cannot be done otherwise.

Curative Auto-Suggestion: The Coué Method

It is the final discovery that one makes that in this world everything depends upon consciousness and its movements, even the things that seem not to do so. In these matters of illness, vital trouble etc., that resolves itself into suggestion (hostile) and

auto-suggestion. Coué, though he did not know these things, had the brilliant intuition of adopting the contrary method of curative auto-suggestion and giving it a thorough and systematic application. Here it does not succeed so well because the anti-Coué spirit is very strong in many, the habit of entertaining hostile suggestions or this openness to them. Yet in Yoga also faith and right auto-suggestion are of great use until the point comes when no suggestion is necessary because the Truth-consciousness acts automatically and produces its natural results.

*

The suggestions that create illness or unhealthy conditions of the physical being come usually through the subconscious—for a great part of the physical being, the most material part, is subconscious, i.e. to say, it has an obscure consciousness of its own but so obscure and shut up in itself that the mind does not know its movements or what is going on there. But all the same it is a consciousness and can receive suggestions from Forces outside, just as the mind and vital do. If it were not so, there would not be any possibility of opening it to the Force and the Force curing it; for without this consciousness in it it would not be able to respond. In Europe and America there are many people now who recognise this fact and treat their illnesses by making conscious mental suggestions to the body which counteract the obscure secret suggestions of illness in the subconscious. There was a famous Doctor in France who cured thousands of people by making them persistently put such counter-suggestions upon the body. That proves that illness has not a purely material cause, but is due to a disturbance of the secret consciousness in the body.

To bear quietly and in silence does help to release from the reaction of grief, if one makes the vital quiet; but it should be at the same time surrendered to the Mother. For the Mother to know from within is not enough; there must be this laying before her and giving up to her so that the reaction may disappear.

*

It is certainly better not to dwell on the difficulties or give them too much voice, because, our experience shows us, to do so helps to make them return like a recurring decimal. The Coué formula is too crude and simple to be entirely true in principle, but it has a great practical force, and behind it there is a very great truth in a world and a consciousness governed by the Overmind Maya: it is this, that what we affirm strongly gets power to persist in the consciousness and experience and calls circumstances to its support, what we deny and reject and refuse to support by the power of the Word, tends, after a time and some resistance, to lose force in the consciousness and the circumstances and movements that support it tend also to recur less often and finally disappear. It is fundamentally the principle of the mantra. On that ground I approve of your resolution not to give any more the *avalambana* of the written word to these things. A constant affirmation from within on the other side — of that which is to be realised — brings always in the end a response from above.

*

These things [*cures by faith-healing and psychotherapy*] are a matter of evidence and the evidence for Coué's success is overwhelming. There have also been many great healers (*guérisseurs*) all over the world whose successes are well-attested. Faith-healing and psychotherapy are also facts.

Faith, Confidence and Cure

Most of them [*illnesses*] can be got rid of almost at once by faith and calling in the force. Those that are chronic are more difficult, but they too can be got rid of by the same means if persistently used.

*

You have only to admit that the mind and vital can influence the body — then no difficulty is left. In this action of mind and vital on the body faith and hope have an immense importance. I do not at all mean that they are omnipotent or infallibly effective

—that is not so. But they assist the action of any force that can be applied, even of an apparently purely material force like medicine. In fact however there is no such thing as a purely material force, but the action may be purely material when it is a question of material objects. But in things that have life or mind and life one cannot isolate the material operation like that. There is always a play of other forces mixed with it in the reception at least and for the most part in the inception and direction also.

*

Remain quiet, within, concentrated only on receiving strength and health, confident that we are with you all the time, and you will soon be all right.

Parts of the Being and Illness

Your description makes it clear that the obstruction in the throat is not physical, it is the obstruction of a formation of obscure force in the physical mind,—for the throat is the centre of the physical mind. In your other parts of the mental there is not any opposition, but here in the physical mind there is probably a habitual form of old external ideas which are rejected but something of them remains. It is this that translates itself in the obstruction and pain. It is a mechanical difficulty which we must try to remove.

*

It is neither the vital nor the body that contains these illnesses—it is a force from outside that creates them and the nervous being (physical vital) and the body respond from habit or inability to throw it away. It is always better not to say, “I will now have no more illness”, it attracts the attention of these malevolent powers and they immediately want to prove that they can still disturb the body. Simply when they come, reject them.

*

The nervous (vital-physical) being supports the body—if it is calm and strong and solid, then the body is well supported and can withstand illness and weakness or, if illness comes, it will bear and more easily get rid of it. If the nervous being is weak, then it is the opposite. If the nervous being is not merely weak, but nervous and unstable, over-sensitive, vehement or excitable, then there is much fluctuation, restlessness, exaltation and depression in the being—there may even be a wrongly acute creative imagination which brings in disorders into the body that are nervous and not physical—there is no physical illness of the heart but there are pains and palpitations, nothing physically wrong with stomach and intestines and yet there is inability to digest—nervous dyspepsia; pains are created in different parts of the body and so on—sometimes there is hysteria.

These conditions are not always native to the body—they are often created by troubles in the life, some disturbing illness or other reasons—but often it is due to some hereditary cause or otherwise native to the system. Women tend to get like this sometimes if there is disorder of the menstruation.

When there is this tendency of the nervous being, it is imperative to get down peace and strength into the nervous being and not allow it to upset the body or the general system.

*

Always the same rigid mind that turns everything into a statement of miraculous absoluteness! It is my experience and the Mother's that all illnesses pass through the nervous or vital-physical sheath of the subtle consciousness and subtle body before they enter the physical. If one is conscious of the subtle body or with the subtle consciousness, one *can* stop an illness on its way and prevent it from entering the physical body. But it may have come without one's noticing, or when one is asleep or through the subconscious, or in a sudden rush when one is off one's guard; then there is nothing to do but to fight it out from a hold already gained on the body. Let us suppose however that I am always on guard, always conscious, even in sleep—that does not mean that I am immunised in my very nature from

all illness. It only means a power of self-defence against it when it tries to come. Self-defence by these inner means may become so strong that the body becomes practically immune as many Yogis are. Still this "practically" does not mean "absolutely" for all time. The absolute immunity can only come with the supramental change. For below the supramental it is the result of an action of a Force among many forces and can be disturbed by a disruption of the equilibrium established — in the supramental it is a law of the nature; in a supramentalised body immunity from illness would be automatic, inherent in its new nature.

There is a difference between Yogic Force on the mental and inferior planes and Supramental Nature. What is acquired and held by the Yoga Force in the mind and body consciousness is in the supramental inherent and exists not by achievement but by nature — it is self-existent and absolute.

*

What I meant was that the body consciousness through old habit of consciousness admits the force of illness and goes through the experiences which are associated with it — e.g. congestion of phlegm in the chest and feeling of suffocation or difficulty of breathing etc. To get rid of that one must awaken a will and consciousness in the body itself that refuses to allow these things to impose themselves upon it. But to get that, still more to get it completely is difficult. One step towards it is to get the inner consciousness separate from the body — to feel that it is not you who are ill but it is only something taking place in the body and not affecting your consciousness. It is then possible to see this separate body consciousness, what it feels, what are its reactions to things, how it works. One can then act on it to change its consciousness and reactions.

*

I am glad to know the disturbance was expelled last night. Now the receptivity in the body consciousness has to be kept so that it may not at all return or, if it tries, may immediately be expelled. You must always try to keep the quietude, not allow depressing

or disturbing thoughts or feelings to enter you or take hold of your mind or your speech—there is no true reason after one has gained the inner quietness and wideness why that should be allowed to lapse and these things enter. And if the mind keeps its quietude and receptivity to higher forces only, it can then easily pass on that quietude and receptivity to the body consciousness and even to the material cells of the body.

*

As the body consciousness becomes more open to the Force (it is always the most difficult and the last to open up entirely), this frequent stress of illness will diminish and disappear.

*

As for the question about the illness, perfection in the physical plane is indeed part of the ideal of the Yoga, but it is the last item and, so long as the fundamental change has not been made in the material consciousness to which the body belongs, one may have a certain perfection on other planes without having immunity in the body.

Accepting and Enjoying Illness

Your theory of illness is rather a perilous creed—for illness is a thing to be eliminated, not accepted or enjoyed. There *is* something in the being that enjoys illness, it is possible even to turn the pains of illness like any other pain into a form of pleasure; for pain and pleasure are both of them degradations of an original Ananda and can be reduced into the terms of each other or else sublimated into their original principle of Ananda. It is true also that one must be able to bear illness with calm, equanimity, endurance, even recognition of it, since it has come, as something that had to be passed through in the course of experience. But to accept and enjoy it means to help it to last and that will not do; for illness is a deformation of the physical nature just as lust, anger, jealousy etc. are deformations of the vital nature and error and prejudice and indulgence of

falsehood are deformations of the mental nature. All these things have to be eliminated and rejection is the first condition of their disappearance while acceptance has a contrary effect altogether.

*

If one has faith and is open to the Force, illnesses can of course be removed in that way. What I objected to was the acceptance of illness and taking pleasure in it; that is admissible in Yogas which do not aim at transformation of the physical consciousness, but not here.

*

By will [*to get rid of illness*] I meant this that there is something in the body that accepts the illness and has certain reactions that make this acceptance effective — so there must always be a contrary will in the conscious parts of the being to get rid of this most physical acceptance.

*

All that is quite wrong.¹ Illness is a wrong movement of the body and is no more to be cherished than a wrong movement of the mind or vital. Pain and illness have to be borne with calm, detachment and equanimity, but not cherished — the sooner one gets rid of them the better.

*

It is always wrong to wish for illness. Fever is not a purifying action; it is the sign of an attack on the body and a fight and resistance to the attack. Illness in the body is like impurity in the vital, a thing undesirable and to be rejected. It may happen that in throwing out the illness (the attacking force) one throws out also something within, some impurity which helped it to come, but that is the result of a Force working within and not

¹ The correspondent wrote: "Some sadhaks hold the theory that illness is a thing to be cherished. It comes to us from the Divine who wants to test our faith by it. Illness makes us remember the Divine more often than otherwise. Therefore one should not even ask the Mother to throw it away from us. How do you regard this?" — Ed.

of the illness. It is quite possible that an illness or attack can be transferred in this way from one to another and indeed it very commonly happens; but it does not follow that it happened in this instance.

*

It was the mind that did not want it [*illness*]; this vital when left to itself often invites illness, it finds it dramatic—thinks it makes it interesting to others, likes to indulge the tamas, etc. etc.

*

That [*weakness of the body*] also is tamas. If you threw off the strain of the idea of weakness, the strength would come back. But there is always something in the vital physical which is pleased with becoming more weak and ill so that it can feel and lament its tragic case.

*

If this [*stomach acidity and colic*] is his only illness, there is absolutely no reason why it should not be cured, if he keeps proper habits and diet and above all the right attitude. I expect that the reason why the illness has such a hold and strong effect on him, is in the imagination and the nerves, more than anything else. There is something there that expects the illness, accepts it when it comes and gives it free play. He must learn to keep calm and quiet in the mind and vital being, to refuse to regard the illness and the tendency to it in the body as something normal to it, regarding it rather as something imposed from outside, and he must believe firmly that it must and will go. If he can keep this attitude and open to the true force, the mind and nervous being once strengthened, the illness and weakness will disappear.

Depression and Illness

It is not anything physical but a vital depression (in some part of the vital, not the whole) that prevents the body from recovering its elasticity. There was some part of the vital that was resisting a radical change and even, unknown to your mind, trying to go

on as it was under cover of the change in the rest of your being. This has now, owing to this last affair, received a blow and got depressed and, when the vital is depressed like that, it affects the body. You say rightly that it is part of a change or turn that is taking place. But these effects of inertia and weakness need not continue; as soon as this vital part acquiesces gladly in the turn or change, the elasticity and energy will return.

*

It is good that you reject the sense of illness and allow no depression. Let there be no apprehension in the physical consciousness; with faith make it open to the Force.

*

The seeds of these old illnesses remain in the subconscious after they are cured. So when the subconscious is being worked, an adverse push bringing a general depression may make them sprout up; but they can be counteracted by the Force if you are vigilant and persistent in your sadhana and not remain to trouble.

Fear and Illness

If you have fear or apprehension of illness in your vital, that is the first thing to be thrown away, as it helps the illnesses to come in.

*

People taking the utmost precautions catch an illness, while often those who take no precautions escape. One has to take reasonable care if there is some immediate and definite cause of apprehension, but that is all.

*

What is the difficulty [*in understanding how the subtle forces of illness attack the body using bacilli and viruses for their purpose*]? You are like the scientists who say or used to say that there is no such thing as mind or thought independent of the physical brain. Mind and thought are only names for brain

quiverings. Or that there is no such thing as vital Force because all the movements of life depend upon chemicals, glands and what not. These things and the germs also are only a minor physical instrumentation for something supraphysical.

They [*the forces of illness*] first weaken or break through the nervous envelope, the aura. If that is strong and whole, a thousand million germs will not be able to do anything to you. The envelope pierced, they attack the subconscious mind in the body, sometimes also the vital mind or mind proper — prepare the illness by fear or thought of illness. The doctors themselves said that in influenza or cholera in the Far East 90 per cent got ill through fear. Nothing to take away the resistance like fear. But still the subconscious is the main thing.

If the contrary Force is strong in the body, one can move in the midst of plague and cholera and never get contaminated. Plague too, rats dying all around, people passing into Hades. I have seen that myself in Baroda.

*

I have gone through the report of the Doctor and it seems to be clear from it — he says so himself — that there is nothing serious the matter and no danger. If there is some dilation of the heart, it was so slight that it was difficult to detect it and all else in it is healthy and normal.

Whatever is wrong in the system can easily be set right — but the first thing necessary is that you should dismiss this fear which hampers the action of the Force and opposes the cure. It is also necessary that you should now abstain finally not only from alcohol and wine, but from sex and smoking. Healthy conditions of living are necessary to help the Force to undo what has been done in the past and restore the full strength and normality of the body.

Fix in yourself the calm and courage of the sadhak. Fear nothing, open yourself, reject the weaknesses that remain — then the progress that had begun here will complete itself and the body also become an abiding place of the true consciousness and force.

Inertia and Illness

The human body has always been in the habit of answering to whatever forces chose to lay hands on it and illness is the price it pays for its inertia and ignorance. It has to learn to answer to the one Force alone, but that is not easy for it to learn.

*

It is a weakness and inertia in the physical nature which makes it undergo and acquiesce in the attacks of illness, instead of refusing and repelling them. That is the character of the material physical in all. It can only be remedied by the Force and Consciousness from above occupying the whole physical being.

*

There seem to be two elements in the physical difficulty that is weighing on you. The first is the liver trouble which weakens and must weaken still more if it leads you to diminish your food below what the body needs for maintaining sufficient strength to react — also probably the nervous tendency to insomnia with its consequences. The second is an inertia of the lower vital and physical consciousness which prevents it from throwing off the lassitude, from reacting against the attacks and from opening steadily to the Force which would remove these things. All that is due to the breakdown of the poise that you had for so long, the vital trouble that caused it and the reaction of the lower vital to the insistence on throwing out the causes of the trouble. This reaction seems to have been a listlessness at losing the things to which it was still holding — such a reaction always brings the inertia of the physical consciousness, while the right reaction in the lower vital brings on the contrary a sense of peace, release, quietude which definitely opens the lowest physical parts to the higher consciousness and force. If you can get over this and get back the old poise, then all these things can be made to disappear.

X was of course right from the medical point of view in recommending exercise — both for the liver and as a tonic to the body it is helpful. So some walking may be advisable. Care

should be taken of the body certainly, the care that is needed for its good condition, rest, sleep, proper food, sufficient exercise; what is not good is too much preoccupation with it, anxiety, despondency in illness etc., for these things only favour the prolongation of ill-health or weakness. For such things as the liver attacks treatment can always be taken when necessary.

But it is always the right inner poise, quietude inward and outward, faith, the opening of the body consciousness to the Mother and her Force that are the true means of recovery — other things can only be minor aids and devices.

Anger and Illness

What has caused all the trouble for X is his insistence on his ego, its ideas, claims, desires, intentions and his aggressiveness in expressing them so that he quarrels with everybody. This quarrelsomeness opens him to all sorts of forces of the vital plane and their attacks. It is also the cause of the damage done to the liver and organs of digestion — for anger and quarrelsomeness always tend to spoil the liver and through it the stomach and intestines. As his quarrelsomeness is colossal, so also is the damage done to liver and digestion extreme. He must get rid of his egoism, quarrelsomeness and bad feelings towards others, if he wants to recover his health and his sadhana.

Work and Illness

I do not know why working with X must make good health impossible, unless you mean that there is too much work imposed on you, — but then the work can be lessened. In fact a complete rest and relief from the work can be arranged at present and for the future we can see afterwards. If you mean that working according to somebody else's ideas makes or keeps you ill, I do not see why it should be so. 999 people out of every 1000 do that — only a few are able to carry out their own ideas and even they have to a large extent to suit their ideas to those of other people in the actual execution of their work. If you mean

that to have to work under discipline, doing things in what you consider not the best way, makes you nervous, discouraged and ill, that is a pity. It would be so much better if you could leave the responsibility of the way of doing things to the Mother and do cheerfully what you have to do. However, if you cannot bring yourself to that attitude, some other way will have to be found hereafter. But at the present, if that is the case, to take rest as a relief would seem the only way.

*

It is no use stopping work because of rheumatism (unless it is of the kind that disables one from working), — it only makes things worse.

Sleep and Illness

Yes. If you don't sleep enough the physical system becomes more open to these attacks [of *illness*]. If it is kept in good condition, then usually it repels them automatically and one does not notice even that there has been an attack.

*

I said that when the body is in good condition it automatically repels any attack of illness which is in the air without the mind even having to notice that there is an attack. If the attack is automatically repelled what is the need of dealing with it?

Pain

Pain is caused because the physical consciousness in the Ignorance is too limited to bear the touches that come upon it. Otherwise, to cosmic consciousness in its state of complete knowledge and complete experience, all touches come as Ananda.

*

Yes — all pain can become Ananda — pain is only the perversion of what in the original Consciousness would be Ananda.

*

Pain can be turned into Ananda, but I don't think that there is a special stage for that.

*

Peace in the cells first, then consolidated force [*is the secret of being able to bear heat and cold*]. Pain and discomfort come from a physical consciousness not forceful enough to determine its own reaction to things.

*

The healing of the nervous pain in the stomach does not depend on more or less eating—often these pains come when one does not eat enough, not only when one eats too much—so it is not by eating less you can cure it.

These pains are a part of the pressure of the old nature on the body; that is why we consider it can only be healed by the Peace and Power bringing a new movement of the physical nature there. In the stage of the struggle between the two natures, the peace does not always remain, but it will remain longer and longer as you get the habit of opening constantly to it.

*

The pains in the body come from the same source as the trouble in the vital nature; both are attacks from the same outside Force that wants to mislead or, when it cannot mislead, to trouble and disturb you. When once you can get rid of the vital invasion and prevent its recurrence, it will be easier to get rid too of the physical trouble whose origin is nervous (vital-physical); although its symptoms seem to be those of a physical illness, it is really an attack on the nervous part and a weakening of it for the time that gives you these pains.

Remain always quiet and persist in opening yourself. The Force that releases you from the vital trouble, can also remove the disturbance in the nervous part and the physical body.

*

The physical pain is obviously due to attacks—any physical

cause being only a means for the action of the attack. I have often seen that when the mind and consciousness have rejected the attacks, the contrary forces fall on some weak point in the body hoping that by pain or illness they will depress the consciousness and so make it less strong to resist and reject them. We must see whether this recurrence of the pain cannot be quietly pushed out altogether.

*

It is a great gain if you feel no depression when the attack on the body comes.

The pain itself is, from your description, evidently nervous and, if you develop openness in the more physical layers of the being, then the action of the Force can always remove it or you will yourself be able to use the Force to push it away. It is a matter of getting the habit of opening in the body consciousness.

The consciousness or unconsciousness, as you have seen in the matter of the French studies, is dependent on the condition. It is not that you are unconscious, but that the physical being is prone to the tamasic condition (the condition of inertia) and then it becomes either inactive or obscure, stupid and unconscious; when the tama goes away the condition becomes bright and what was difficult before becomes natural and easy. The whole thing is to get the physical out of its habit of falling back into tama or inertia, and that can be done by opening and accustoming it to the action of the Force. When the action of the Force becomes constant, then there will be no more tama.

*

You had opened your consciousness, so the pain disappeared. If it came back during sleep, it must have been because you lost touch and fell back into the ordinary consciousness. That often happens.

*

Pains of that kind must be due to some resistance or obstruction to the force on the body — it is not the pressure that creates them.

*

All these pains are a sign that you have put too great and sudden a strain on your physical system. The mind and vital were ready, but the body could not follow. You will have to diminish your work until you recover from the pains and fatigue. You may remember that I suggested to you to do only part of the sweeping work; it was for this reason that I was not sure that the physical system was ready. Now you should follow that — do only part of the work and ask X to arrange for the rest. See whether with this diminution and taking rest during the spare time the pain and the fatigue of the body disappear. If it does, then we can see what is best to do.

*

That is what they [*pains*] do at first; when one drives them out of one place, they go to another. It is better than their fixing in any place.

Separation and Detachment from Pain

The body [*experiences physical pain*], naturally — but the body transmits it to the vital and mental. With the ordinary consciousness the vital gets disturbed and afflicted and its forces diminished, the mind identifies and is upset. The mind has to remain unmoved, the vital unaffected, and the body has to learn to take it with equality so that the higher Force may work.

The Self is never affected by any kind of pain. The psychic takes it quietly and offers it to the Divine for what is necessary to be done.

*

You must arrive at a complete separation of your consciousness from these feelings of the body and its acceptance of illness and from that separated consciousness act upon the body. It is only so that these things can be got rid of or at least neutralised.

*

If it [*the consciousness*] is separate, it should not suffer from

them [*pains*]. Even for the pains, the body may suffer but the consciousness should not feel itself suffering or overpowered.

*

I suppose there are only two ways [*to prevent the lowering effect of pain*]: (1) to think of something else if you can manage it, (2) to be able to detach yourself from the body consciousness, so that the body alone feels the pain, the mind and the vital are not affected.

*

It is a detachment of even the physical mind from the pain that makes one able to go on as if nothing were there, but this detachment of the physical mind is not easy to acquire.

*

It is by an attack on your physical consciousness that the old forces are bringing back the wrong condition. As you got the power before to stand back from the vital movement and localise it, while the rest of your consciousness observed and was not overpowered, so you must learn to stand back from the physical pain or uneasiness and localise it. If you can do that and do it completely, the pain or uneasiness itself will be more easily and quietly removed and you will not be overpowered like this with the sense of weakness. You can see that the Force has the power to take away the pains; but you allow yourself to be nervously overcome and therefore it is difficult for it to act with a continuous result. What was done at that time in the vital, must be done in the physical also. It is the only way to get free from the attacks.

*

The main difficulty seems to be that you are too subject to an excitement of the nerves—it is only by bringing quietude and calm into the whole being that a steady progress in the sadhana can be assured.

The first thing to be done in order to recover is to stop

yielding to the attack of the nerves—the more you yield and identify yourself with these ideas and feelings, the more they increase. You have to draw back and find back something in you that is not affected by pains and depressions, then from there you can get rid of the pains and depressions.

Chapter Two

Doctors and Medicines

Cure by Yogic Force and by Medicines

To heal [*illness*] by the true force is obviously the best—provided the body is amenable. It has a consciousness of its own which must be fully enlightened before it gives a full response.

*

Yes, if the faith and opening are there, medicines are not indispensable.

*

To separate yourself from the thing and call in the Mother's force to cure it [*is the Yogic method*]—or else to use your own will force with faith in the power to heal, having the support of the Mother's force behind you. If you cannot use either of these methods then you must rely on the action of the medicine.

*

Yogic force is all right when one is in a Yogic condition and when it acts. But when it does not, medicine is handy.

*

All ill-health is due to some inertia or weakness or to some resistance or wrong movement there [*in the vital*], only it has sometimes a more physical and sometimes a more psychological character. Medicines can counteract the physical results.

*

Medicines are a *pis aller* that have to be used when something in the consciousness does not respond or responds superficially to the Force. Very often it is some part of the material consciousness that is unreceptive—at other times it is the subconscious

which stands in the way even when the whole waking mind, life, physical consent to the liberating influence. If the subconscious also answers, then even a slight touch of the Force can not only cure the particular illness but make that form or kind of illness practically impossible hereafter.

*

As for the illness itself, we understood from what you wrote that it was only a cold and not a serious illness. In such a case one can take medicines from the Dispensary to hasten the cure or one relies on the Force and opens oneself to the Mother, rejecting the suggestions of illness, putting oneself on the side of the helping forces. You had sufficient experience of sadhana to know that and we did not think it necessary to write what we supposed to be in your knowledge.

*

Try to keep yourself open to our Force in the body, that is the main thing. If the nerves (physical) are quieted, the illness itself will be less intense in its symptoms and can be more easily got over.

*

As for curing you by the Force, the main obstacle is your own vital movements. All this egoistic insistence on your own ideas, claims, preferences—assertion of your own righteousness as against the wickedness of others, complaints, quarrels, disputes, rancours against those around you and the reactions they cause—have had this effect on your liver and stomach and nerves. If you give up all that and live quietly and at peace with others, thinking less of yourself and others and more of the Divine, it would make things much easier and help to restore your health. Quietness of the mind in facing your illness is also necessary—agitation stops the action of the Force.

*

Certainly, one can act from within on an illness and cure it. Only it is not always easy as there is much resistance in Matter,

a resistance of inertia. An untiring persistence is necessary; at first one may fail altogether or the symptoms increase, but gradually the control of the body or of a particular illness becomes stronger. Again, to cure an occasional attack of illness by inner means is comparatively easy, to make the body immune from it in future is more difficult. A chronic malady is harder to deal with, more reluctant to disappear entirely than an occasional disturbance of the body. So long as the control of the body is imperfect, there are all these and other imperfections and difficulties in the use of the inner force.

If you can succeed by the inner action in preventing increase, even that is something; you have then by *abhyāsa* to strengthen the power till it becomes able to cure. Note that so long as the power is not entirely there, some aid of physical means need not be altogether rejected.

*

Illness marks some imperfection or weakness or else opening to adverse touches in the physical nature and is often connected also with some obscurity or disharmony in the lower vital or the physical mind or elsewhere.

It is very good if one can get rid of illness entirely by faith and Yoga-power or the influx of the Divine Force. But very often this is not altogether possible, because the whole nature is not open or able to respond to the Force. The mind may have faith and respond, but the lower vital and the body may not follow. Or if the mind and vital are ready, the body may not respond, or may respond only partially, because it has the habit of replying to the forces which produce a particular illness and habit is a very obstinate force in the material part of the nature. In such cases the use of the physical means can be resorted to,—not as the main means, but as a help or material support to the action of the Force. Not strong and violent remedies, but those that are beneficial without disturbing the body.

The Role of Doctors

If the whole being is open to the force, then only outward means have not to be taken or used very little. But till then Doctors and their ways of treating things cannot be dispensed with altogether.

*

I have got X's report. I gather from it that there is general nervous weakness. I shall write to ask him if this is correct and what treatment he proposes to give. As for medical treatment it is sometimes a necessity. If one can cure by the Force as you have often done, it is the best—but if for some reason the body is not able to respond to the Force (e.g. owing to doubt, lassitude or discouragement or for inability to react against the disease), then the aid of medical treatment becomes necessary. It is not that the Force ceases to act and leaves all to the medicines,—it will continue to act through the consciousness but take the support of the treatment so as to act directly on the resistance in the body, which responds more readily to physical means in its ordinary consciousness.

*

You refuse to speak to the Doctor and on the other hand your body is not yet able to receive the Forces in such a way as to cure it. When the body is not able to receive the Forces *unaided*, it is then that we send the Doctor and work through him—but here your mind comes in and refuses. So both means are stopped.

*

Where the illness becomes pronounced and chronic in the body, it is necessary often to call in the aid of physical treatment and that is then used as a support of the Force. X in his treatment does not rely on medicines alone, but uses them as an instrumentation for the Mother's force.

*

You are very much behind the times. Do you not know that even

many doctors now admit and write it publicly that medicines are an element but only one and that the psychological element counts as much and even more? I have heard that from doctors often and read it over reputable medical signatures. And among the psychological elements, they say, one of the most important is the doctor's optimism and self-confidence, (his faith, what? it is only another word for the same thing) and the confidence, hope, helpful mental atmosphere he can inspire in or around his patient. I have seen it stated categorically that a doctor who can do that is far more successful than one who knows Medicine better but cannot.

*

Miracles can be done, but there is no reason why they should be all instantaneous, whether from Gods or doctors.

Medical Systems

Of course injections are all the fashion; for everything it is “inject, inject and again inject”. Medicine has gone through three stages in modern times—first (at the beginning in Molière’s days) it was “bleed and douche”, then “drug and diet”, now it is “serum and injection”. Praise the Lord! not for the illnesses, but for the doctors. However each of these formulas has a part truth behind it—with its advantages and disadvantages. As all religions and philosophies point to the Supreme but each in a different direction, so all medical fashions are ways to health—though they don’t always reach it.

*

Medicine is not exactly science. It is theory + experimental fumbling + luck.

*

The theory [of *allopathic medicine*] is imposing, but when it comes to application, there is too much fumbling and guesswork for it to rank as an exact science. There are many scientists (and

others) who grunt when they hear medicine called a science. Anatomy and physiology, of course, are sciences.

*

There are plenty of allopathic doctors who consider homeopathy, Nature-Cure, Ayurveda and everything else that is not orthodox "medical science" to be quackery. Why should not homeopaths etc. return the compliment?

*

I have put down a few comments to throw cold water on all this blazing hot allopathism. But all these furious disputes seem to me now of little use. I have seen the working of both systems [*allopathy and homeopathy*] and of others and I cannot believe in the sole truth of any. The ones damnable in the orthodox view, entirely contradicting it, have their own truth and succeed — also both the orthodox and heterodox fail. A theory is only a constructed idea-script which represents an imperfect human observation of a line of processes that Nature follows or can follow; another theory is a different idea-script of other processes that also she follows or can follow. Allopathy, homeopathy, naturopathy, osteopathy, Kaviraji, hakimi have all caught hold of Nature and subjected her to certain processes; each has its successes and failures. Let each do its own work in its own way. I do not see any need for fights and recriminations. For me all are only outward means and what really works are unseen forces behind; as they act, the outer means succeed or fail — if one can make the process a right channel for the right force, then the process gets its full utility — that is all.

*

Tumour, syphilis etc. are specialities, but what I have found in my psycho-physical experience is that most disorders of the body are connected, though they go by families,—but there is also connection between the families. If one can strike at their psycho-physical root, one can cure even without knowing the pathological whole of the matter and working through the

symptoms is a possibility. Some medicines invented by demi-mystics have the power. What I am now considering is whether homeopathy has any psycho-physical basis. Was the founder a demi-mystic? I don't understand otherwise certain peculiarities of the way X's medicines act.

*

Of course [X *consults his homeopathy books in choosing medicines*]. He learned homeopathic medicine in America and his ideas of homeopathy are the American ideas. But how does his knowledge prevent intuition? Even an allopathic doctor has often to intuit what medicine he should give or what mixture—and it is those who intuit best that succeed best. All is not done by sole rule of book or sole rule of thumb even in orthodox Science.

The Right Use of Medicines

X wrote two or three days ago that you were not regular in taking his medicine and in that case he could not be responsible (if the treatment was not strictly followed to the end) if the cure was imperfect or if afterwards there was a relapse which might be irremediable. Dr. Y told the Mother that he was amazed at the improvement in your case. He had not believed such a thing was possible, but he had seen with his own eyes and now knew that it was. It would be a pity if such a result were not carried out to full success because of carelessness in following the treatment. I would recommend you to give it a full chance.

*

I did not mean that it [*cure through the Force*] cannot be done without medicines. But if it is to be done with the aid of medicines, then the right medicine is helpful, the wrong one obviously brings in a danger.

*

It is not enough for a medicine to be a specific [*for it to be*

helpful]. Certain drugs have other effects or possible effects which can be ignored by the physician who only wants to cure his case, but cannot be in a whole-view of the system and its reactions. The unfavourable reactions of quinine are admitted by medical opinion itself and doctors in Europe have been long searching for a substitute for quinine.

*

There are some remedies which cure the disease temporarily but are bad for the system like quinine—others which suit some people but harm others, others which have a good effect one way, but a bad one in another way. That is why Mother does not like them to be used indiscriminately. Some she disapproves of altogether, e.g. quinine. She also disapproves of the excessive use of purgatives.

*

It is hardly possible to give a list of drugs [*not to be prescribed for persons practising Yoga*], but the general rule is that very strong or violent medicines should be avoided as much as possible—for Yoga increases the sensitivity of the vital and physical reactions and drugs tend to produce stronger or other effects than with ordinary persons.

*

The morphia stuns locally or otherwise the consciousness and its reaction to the subconscious pressure and so suspends the pain or deadens it. Even that it does not always do—X took five morphine injections in succession without even diminishing his liver inflammation pains. What became of the power of the drug over the subconscious in that case? The resistance was too strong just as the resistance of Y's subconscious to the Force.

*

Injection should be taken only if indispensable. Medical treatment can be resorted to if the illness is or has become of a chronic kind.

Chapter Three

Specific Illnesses, Ailments and Other Physical Problems

Cancer

I do not know why the doctors speak of cancer as inevitable. There are so many people who carry gall-stones in the bladder for so many years without any development of cancer. It is evident that it is a dangerous illness, not easily curable—but we cannot say positively either that she will not survive. There is no such thing as an incurable illness in reality—for what the doctors call such is only an illness for which they have not yet been able to discover a physical remedy. X has one force on her side, her faith and her will to survive for the sadhana; on the other side is a kind of destiny of the body which is strong but not absolutely insurmountable. Her faith must be left intact—and we must send force to help her. That is all that we can say at present. If she can by her faith draw down and open to such a force as will counteract the adverse physical forces in her body, then she will survive.

*

Of course it [*cancer*] can [*be cured by Yoga*], but on condition of faith or openness or both. Even a mental suggestion can cure cancer—with luck, of course, as is shown by the case of the woman operated on unsuccessfully for cancer, but the doctors lied and told her it had succeeded. Result, cancer symptoms all ceased and she died many years afterwards of another illness altogether.

Tuberculosis

T.B. is the result of a strong psychic-vital depression. Sex cannot

directly cause T.B. though it may be a factor in bringing about a fall of the vital forces and a withdrawal of the psychic supporting forces leading to T.B. The lack of vitality which easily comes as a result of modern civilisation is therefore a very strong contributing cause. Moderns have not the solid nervous system and the natural (as opposed to the artificial and morbid) zest of life that their ancestors had. But I don't know about the soldiers — the hideous trench war with all its ghastly circumstances and surroundings was, I imagine, far more difficult to bear than the open air marching and fighting of the Napoleonic times.

Fever

Fever is of course more often than not a struggle of the body to fight out impurities that have got in, but sometimes the remedy is as bad if not worse than the disease. It is the same with the mind difficulties — an illness sometimes results in a throwing out of some impurities but it can also do more harm than good.

Influenza

The first thing to do is to keep throughout a perfect equanimity and not to allow thoughts of disturbed anxiety or depression to enter you. It is quite natural after this severe attack of influenza that there should be weakness and some fluctuations in the progress to recovery. What you have to do is to remain calm and confident and not worry or be restless — be perfectly quiet and prepared to rest as long as rest is needed. There is nothing to be anxious about; rest, and the health and strength will come.

Head Cold

What you describe [*a "loaded" head with sluggish thinking and mechanical thoughts*] happens very usually during a cold in the head, as ordinarily one depends upon the brain cells for the transmission of the mental thought. When the mind is not so dependent on the brain cells, then their obscuration by the cold

does not interfere with clear seeing and thinking and one is not thrown back in the mechanical mind.

Weak Vision

Finally about your eyes. The wearing of glasses does inevitably confirm any weakness in the eyes, so we would not recommend you to resort to them for a strain which can surely be remedied in other ways.

*

It is better to take the sun-treatment (for the eyes) if you give up your spectacles. It is not a treatment in the ordinary sense, as there are no medicines, but a use of certain natural forces and physical observations to correct the impaired mechanism of the eye.

*

You will have to be careful about your eyes. Reading by night (too much) is inadvisable. There are two suggestions of the sun-treatment man which I have found to be not without foundation. First, one should blink freely in looking at things or reading and not fix the eyes or stare. Second, palming gives a very useful rest — palming means keeping the hands crossed over the closed eyes (without pressing on the eyes) so as to shut out all light.

Glaucoma

We cannot take the responsibility of advising against operation. Glaucoma is supposed to bring inevitable blindness — there is no known successful medical treatment — the operation is considered the only chance of avoiding the natural result of the illness. So they must be left free to undergo it if there is no way out.

Stammering

I don't think stammering has anything to do with insufficient

lung-power nor is it usually caused by malformation of the vocal organ—it is commonly a nervous (physico-nervous) impediment and is perfectly curable. I can't say that I know of any especial device for it—people have used various kinds of devices to get over it, but behind them all will-power and a patient discipline of the utterance are indispensable.

Menstrual Problems

The attack you had on the body must, from the description, have been a crisis of the circulation due to the period you are passing through, the turning of the age when the menstruation is preparing to cease but has not yet ceased altogether. It is a very uncomfortable period because of the irregularities and these things can happen—they cease when this period of life is over. Some pass through it very easily with only the irregularities of the flow and an occasional trouble of this kind; others have more difficulty. If there is then no sexual movement in the nature or none of any intensity, then things go more smoothly.

Constipation

Constipation is not determined by food; it is due to an inertia in the physical—get off the inertia and the constipation goes.

Sciatica

Sciatica is something more than nervous—it affects the movement of the muscles through the nerves. It can be got rid of at once, however, if you can manage to direct the Force on it.

*

There is no outer means. Sciatica is a thing which yields only to inner concentrated force or else it goes away of itself and comes of itself. Outer means at best can only be palliatives.

*

If you cannot get rid of the sciatica by inner means, the medical remedy (not for curing it, but for keeping free as long as possible) is not to fatigue yourself. It comes for periods which may last for weeks, then suddenly goes. If you remain quiet physically and are not too active, it may not come for a long time. But that of course means an inactive life, physically incapable. It is what I meant by eternising the sciatica — and the inertia also.

*

The inertia is there because there was always in your outer being a great force of tamas and it is this that is being used by the resistance. There was also a deficiency of steady will-power in the outer mind which makes it more difficult for the Force to come down than for the Knowledge. When you are entirely open the Force can act on the sciatica and it lessens or disappears, but with the consciousness blocked by the inertia these difficulties come in the way.

*

If you can cure by withdrawing [*from work*] so much the better. The sciatica has often tried to fall on the Mother and on myself — we have always found that it cannot resist the Force quietly and persistently applied. Other illnesses can resist, but sciatica being entirely tamasic cannot. The application of Force does not yet, probably, come natural to you, so it brings a sense of struggle not of quiet domination, hence the restlessness etc.

Growing Taller

It is rather difficult to grow taller when once the period of growth is over. It may come in the period of material transformation at the end of the Yoga — but that is far off and I don't think there are any means by which it can be done otherwise.

Bearing the Heat

Dry heat is supposed to be less bad for the general health than

damp heat. There is however usually less need of food and therefore less appetite. From the point of view of Yoga if one can keep a certain quiet in the material body, "peace in the cells", the heat is easier to bear.

Section Four

The Subconscious and the Inconscient and the Process of Yoga

Chapter One

The Subconscious and the Integral Yoga

The Change of the Subconscious

The change of the subconscious is most important for our Yoga — for without it there can only be an incomplete personal experience without the change we seek for being established in the very roots of the being here and consequently in the earth-consciousness.

*

No man is perfect; the vital is there and the ego is there to prevent it. It is only when there is the total transformation of the external and the internal being down to the very subconscious, that perfection is possible. Till then imperfection will remain as our common heritage.

*

So long as there is not the Supramental change down to the subconscious complete and final the lower nature has always a hold on some part of the being.

*

The Yoga cannot be done in a minute. Some essential changes are made rapidly, but even these have to be worked out and confirmed in the detail of action. What you speak of [*a sudden change in the subconscious*], only the Supramental could do if it acted directly or some force fully supported by the Supramental, but that occurs rarely.

The Subconscious, the Inner Being and the Outer Being

In our Yoga we mean by the subconscious that quite submerged part of our being in which there is no wakingly conscious and coherent thought, will or feeling or organised reaction, but which yet receives obscurely the impressions of all things and stores them up in itself and from it too all sorts of stimuli, of persistent habitual movements, crudely repeated or disguised in strange forms can surge up into dream or into the waking nature. For if these impressions rise up most in dream in an incoherent and disorganised manner, they can also and do rise up into our waking consciousness as a mechanical repetition of old thoughts, old mental, vital and physical habits or an obscure stimulus to sensations, actions, emotions which do not originate in or from our conscious thought or will and are even often opposed to its perceptions, choice or dictates. In the subconscious there is an obscure mind full of obstinate sanskaras, impressions, associations, fixed notions, habitual reactions formed by our past, an obscure vital full of the seeds of habitual desires, sensations and nervous reactions, a most obscure material which governs much that has to do with the condition of the body. It is largely responsible for our illnesses; chronic or repeated illnesses are indeed mainly due to the subconscious and its obstinate memory and habit of repetition of whatever has impressed itself upon the body consciousness. But this subconscious must be clearly distinguished from the subliminal parts of our being such as the inner or subtle physical consciousness, the inner vital or inner mental; for these are not at all obscure or incoherent or ill-organised, but only veiled from our surface consciousness. Our surface constantly receives something, inner touches, communications or influences, from these sources but does not know for the most part whence they come.

*

The subconscious is below the waking physical consciousness—it is an automatic, obscure, incoherent, half-unconscious realm

into which light and awareness can with difficulty come. The inner vital and physical are quite different — they have a larger, plastic, subtler, freer and richer consciousness than the surface vital and physical, much more open to the Truth and in direct touch with the universal.

*

The inner being does not depend on the subconscious, but the outer has depended on it for thousands of lives — that is why the outer being and physical consciousness's habit of response to the subconscious can be a formidable obstacle to the progress of the sadhana and is so with most. It keeps up the repetition of the old movements, is always pulling down the consciousness and opposing the continuity of the ascent and bringing the old nature or else the tamas (non-illumination and non-activity) across the descent. It is only if you live wholly and dynamically in the inner being and feel the outer as a quite superficial thing that you can get rid of the obstruction or minimise it until the transformation of the outer being can be made complete.

*

It [*a condition of obscurity*] is most probably something that has come from outside and covered. This happens at this stage when the working is in the physical and subconscious — for that is the nature of these parts, to live in the external with the inner being covered up by a sort of natural veil of obscurity. Therefore when one makes the opening through this veil, it has a tendency to come back. When that happens, one has to remain undisturbed and call down the Force and Light from above to remove the obstacle. This must be done till the opening is permanent and complete and no covering is possible.

The Subconscious and the Physical Being

The subconscious difficulty is *the* difficulty now¹ — because the

¹ *This letter was written in April 1935.—Ed.*

whole struggle in the general sadhana is now there. It is in the subconscious, no longer in the vital or conscious physical that the resistance is all massed together.

*

There is a close connection between the subconscious and the physical and lower vital parts; so long as the subconscious is not cleared, the seed you speak of remains.

*

The material [*consciousness*] is for the most part subconscious — it depends upon the subtler parts for its waking consciousness.

*

The subconscious material plane is a field that still opposes the entrance of the Divine Light.

*

Until they [*the material and subconscious parts of the being*] aspire or at least assent fully to the aspiration and will of the higher being, there can be no lasting change in them.

*

It [*the reason the physical can help to remove inertia*] is because, the subconscious being just below the physical, the enlightened physical can act on it directly and completely in a way in which mind and vital cannot and by this direct action can help to liberate the mind and vital also.

*

Yes, what you write is correct. When the physical consciousness has to be changed, it is of course essential to work on the subconscious, as it has a great influence on the physical which is very dependent on it.

The loss of consciousness comes naturally at first when the subconscious is being worked upon. You have to be careful that it does not become habitual. If you react with a will for the

change of this tendency (no struggle is needed) it will pass in time.

*

It is not a fact that formless things [*such as vague subconscious impressions*] can have no power—all that is necessary is that they should have a force in them. The subconscious influences the body because all in the body has developed out of the subconscious and all in itself still is only half conscious and much of its action can be called subconscious. It is therefore much more easily influenced by the subconscious than by the conscious mind and conscious will or even the vital mind and vital will except in those things in which a conscious mental or vital control has been established and the subconscious itself has accepted it. If it were not so, man's control of his actions and physical states would be complete, there would be no illness or, if there were, it could be immediately cured by mental action. But it is not so. For that reason the higher consciousness has to be brought down, the body and the subconscious enlightened by it and accustomed to obey its control.

*

It is good. Emptiness and silence of the consciousness prepare the being to live within, with the outer consciousness only as a means of communication and action on the physical world instead of living in the external only.

As there is a superconscious (something above our present consciousness) above the head from which the higher consciousness comes down into the body, so there is also a subconscious (something below our consciousness) below the feet. Matter is under the control of this power, because it is that out of which it has been created—that is why matter seems to us to be quite unconscious. The material body is very much under the influence of this power for the same reason; it is why we are not conscious of what is going on in the body, for the most part. The outer consciousness goes down into this subconscious when we are asleep, and so it becomes unaware of what is going

on in us when we are asleep except for a few dreams. Many of these dreams rise up from the subconscious and are made up of old memories, impressions etc. put together in an incoherent way. For the subconscious receives impressions of all we do or experience in our lives and keeps these impressions in it, sending up often fragments of them in sleep. It is a very important part of the being, but we can do nothing much with it by the conscious will. It is the higher Force working in us that in its natural course will open the subconscious to itself and bring down into it its control and light.

*

It is in the Yogic consciousness that one feels the seat of the subconscious below the feet, but the influence of the subconscious is not confined there—it is spread in the body. In the waking state it is overpowered by the conscious thinking mind and vital and conscious physical mind, but in the sleep state it comes on the surface.

Habits and the Subconscious

The subconscious is a thing of habits and memories and repeats persistently or whenever it can old suppressed reactions, reflexes, mental, vital or physical responses. It must be trained by a still more persistent insistence of the higher parts of the being to give up its old responses and take on the new and true ones.

*

The subconscious is the support of habitual action—it can support good habits as well as bad.

*

The exterior consciousness can be invaded by what rises up from the subconscious or comes in from outside and owing to a renewed vibration of the past habit can respond—but that does not mean that the will of the vital or of the physical mind is for these things. If there was anything in them normally on the side

of sex or violence, then you could say the impurities were there. But if it were so, there would be more than these attacks, there would be a daily struggle with anger and desire.

If one had to wait for an absolute purity free from all possibility of these attacks before beginning to realise the Divine, nobody would ever be able to realise. It is as the realisation progresses, that the fundamental transformation takes place.

The Environmental Consciousness and the Subconscious

These cravings and desires are old habits of the physical which came to it from the universal Nature and which it accepted and took as part of itself and its life. When these things are rejected by the waking consciousness they try to take refuge in the subconscious or else in what may be called the environmental consciousness and from there they press upon the consciousness trying to recover their hold or simply to recur for a time. If they are in the subconscious they come up most usually in dreams, but they may also surge up into the waking consciousness. If they come from the environment they take the form of thought-suggestions or impulses or a vague restless or disturbing pressure. It is probably this environmental pressure that you feel. When the body is full of the new consciousness, Peace and Power at the same time, then this outward pressure is felt but can no longer disturb and finally it recedes to a distance (no longer pressing immediately on the physical mind or body) and either gradually or rapidly disappears.

By environmental consciousness I mean something that each man carries around him, outside his body, even when he is not aware of it,— by which he is in touch with others and with the universal forces. It is through this that the thoughts, feelings etc. of others pass to enter into one—it is through this also that waves of the universal force—desire, sex, etc.—come in and take possession of the mind, vital or body.

*

When these things [*base feelings such as jealousy*] are rejected

and disappear for a time, some part of them may go out into the environmental consciousness and from there they can return in a wave from the general Nature. If one is conscious, one can even feel them coming in. The rejection of such returns is an important part of the purification and it is not complete till this power of returning is no longer there. But also it may be that some part is not so much rejected as suppressed by mental control, then it sinks into the subconscious and when the subconscious is active (as in dream or in a passive state of the mind) or else when the subconscious itself is brought up for purification, then it may rise up even with much violence. There especially the sense that one has to begin all again and nothing has been done may come upon the sadhak. But it is not so really. One has to be firm and not get upset but this time detach firmly and completely so as to uproot completely from the nature.

*

What is taking place, the subsiding of the surge of subconscious thoughts and movements, and their pressure on the mind, is just what ought to take place. It is not a suppression or pulling back into the subconscious, it is an expulsion from the conscious self into which it has arisen. It is true that something more may rise from the subconscious, but it will be what is still left there. What is now rejected, if it goes anywhere and is not abolished, will go not into the subconscious but into the surrounding consciousness which one carries around him — once there it no longer belongs to oneself in any way and if it tries to return it will be as foreign matter which one has not to accept or allow any longer. These are the two last stages of rejection by which one gets rid of the old things of the nature, they go down into the subconscious and have to be got rid of from there or they go out into the environmental consciousness and are no longer ours.

The idea that one should let what rises from the subconscious go on repeating itself till it is exhausted is not the right idea. For that would needlessly prolong the troubled condition and might be harmful. When these things rise they have to be observed and then thrown out, not kept.

The Rising Up of Things from the Subconscious

The human like the animal mind lives largely in impressions rising up from the subconscious.

*

What must have happened was that as the physical consciousness is now being worked upon, all the past impressions (which usually remain in the subconscious and rise up from time to time and meanwhile influence the thought and action and feelings without being noticed) rose up in a mass and threw themselves on the consciousness. This usually happens in order that the sadhak may see and reject them and get liberated entirely (in the subconscious as well as the conscious parts) from his physical past. That is why you felt afterwards the sense of release. The throat is the centre of the externalising mind (physical mind).

*

I do not think you have gone back—probably what has been happening to many if not most in the Asram (especially those who have done some serious sadhana) is happening to you. It is the rising of old habitual thoughts, feelings, impulses in a confused way from the subconscious in a mechanical repetition. The subconscious is the basis of the ordinary physical nature and the light has to come into it also. Moreover even if the progress gained has been covered over by these things, what is once gained is not lost; it always reemerges after obscuration and one can get back into it. Ideas of discouragement should always be rejected.

*

What is happening just now [*the rising of confused, depressing thoughts*] is that there is a great uprush of the subconscious in which are the seeds or the strong remnants of the habitual difficulties of the nature. But its character is a confusion and obscurity without order or clear mental or other arrangement—it is a confused depression, discouragement, inability to progress

— a feeling of what are we doing? why are we here? how can we go on? will anything ever be attained? and along with it old difficulties recurring in a confused and random but often violent and distressing fashion.

You cannot “begin” again; it would be too difficult a thing in this confusion. You have to get back to the point at which you deviated. If you can get back to the Peace that was coming and with it aspire to the freedom and wideness of the Purusha consciousness forming a *point d'appui* of detachment and separation from all this confusion of the subconscious Prakriti, then you will have a firm ground to stand upon and proceed. But for that you must make your choice firmly and refuse to be upset at every moment and diverted from it.

*

But in reality these things [*old movements of the lower nature*] are not sufficient reasons for getting sad and depressed. It is quite normal for difficulties to come back like that and it is not a proof that no progress has been made. The recurrence (after one has thought one has conquered) is not unaccountable. I have explained in my writings what happens. When a habitual movement long embedded in the nature is cast out, it takes refuge in some less enlightened part of the nature, and when cast out of the rest of the nature, it takes refuge in the subconscious and from there surges up when you least expect it or comes up in dreams or sudden unconscious movements or it goes out and remains in wait in the environmental being through which the universal Nature works, and attacks from there as a force from outside trying to recover its kingdom by a suggestion or repetition of old movements. One has to stand fast till the power of return fades away. These returns or attacks must be regarded not as parts of oneself, but as invasions—and rejected without allowing any depression or discouragement. If the mind does not sanction them, if the vital refuses to welcome them, if the physical remains steady and refuses to obey the physical urge, then the recurrence of the thought, the vital impulse, the physical feeling will begin to lose

its last holds and finally they will be too feeble to cause any trouble.

*

You do not realise how much of the ordinary natural being lives in the subconscious physical. It is there that habitual movements, mental and vital, are stored and from there they come up into the waking mind. Driven out of the upper consciousness, it is in this cavern of the Panis that they take refuge. No longer allowed to emerge freely in the waking state, they come up in sleep as dreams. It is only when they are cleared out of the subconscious, their very seeds killed by the enlightening of these hidden layers, that they cease for good. As your consciousness deepens inwardly and the higher light comes down into those inferior covered parts, the things that now recur in this way will disappear.

*

What you describe seems to be in its nature an uncontrolled rushing up of the subconscious taking the form of a mechanical recurrence of old thoughts, interests or desires with which the physical mind is usually occupied. If that were all, the only thing would be to reject them, detach yourself and let them pass till they quieted down. But I gather from what you write that there is an attack, an obscure force using these recurrences to invade and harass the mind and body. It would be helpful if you could give an exact description of the main character of the thoughts that come, what things and ideas they are concerned with etc. But in any case the one thing to do is to open yourself to the Mother's force by aspiration, thought of the Mother or any other way and let it drive out the attack. We shall send Force continually till this is done. It will be better to let us know every three days or so how you go on, for that will help to make the action of the Force more precise.

*

These thoughts that attack in sleep or in the state between sleep and waking do not belong to any part of your conscious being, but come either from the subconscious or from the surrounding

atmosphere through the subconscious. If they are thoughts you had in the past and have thrown out from you, then what rises must be impressions left by them in the subconscious—for all things thought, felt or experienced leave such impressions which can rise from there in sleep. Or the thoughts can have gone out from you into the environmental consciousness, that is, an atmosphere of consciousness which we carry around us and through which we are connected with universal Nature and from there they may be trying to return upon you. As it is difficult for them to succeed in the waking state, they take advantage of the absence of conscious control in sleep and appear there. If it is something new and not yours, then it can be neither of these, but an attack of some outside Force.

It is to be hoped that as you have rejected them, they will not come again, but if they do, then you must put a conscious will before going to sleep that they should not come. A suggestion of that kind on the subconscious is often successful, if not at once, after a time; for the subconscious learns to obey the will put upon it in the waking state.

*

The dream you had was really a rising up of past formations or impressions from the subconscious. All that we do, feel or experience in life leaves an impression, a sort of essential memory of itself in the subconscious and this can come up in dreams even long after those feelings, movements or experiences have ceased in the conscious being,—still more when they have been recent and are only now or lately thrown away from the mind or vital. Thus long after one has ceased to think of old acquaintances or relatives dreams about them go on coming up from this source. So too when sex or anger no longer troubles the conscious vital, dreams of sex or dreams of anger and strife can still rise. It is only when the subconscious is cleared that they cease; meanwhile they are of not much importance (provided one understands what they are and is not affected) so long as the old movements are not allowed to recur or remain in the waking state.

*

It [*variation in the intensity of past memories*] is always so with the impressions left in the subconscious physical. One day they come as pale and distant things, with no life in them, another they seem to get a certain force. It depends on whether they are caught up by a current of force from the universal or rise up of themselves with no force except what is left in them from the past.

*

All these movements simply mean that a certain part of the nature, full of habitual emotional movements, had been lying suppressed but not definitely dealt with and has now come up with as much force as possible, taking advantage of the descent of the consciousness from the peace and Ananda. It is an old habitual movement of the egoistic vital that is repeating itself. You had pushed it down into the subconscious and away to the outskirts of your nature, but not cleared the nature of it entirely. It is not surprising that it has pushed back the inner self and its experiences for the time being; if it had not done that, it could not last for a moment. But that is no reason why you should talk as if it were a hopeless downfall; it is not that, though it is a serious stumble. You have to recognise it for what it is and get out of the wave and throw it away from you. Steady yourself and look straight at what has happened without overstressing its importance; it will then pass away sooner.

*

As for the mood that came on you, it comes up from the subconscious, where things of the old nature sink when they are rejected. When moods come up like that, you have to remain quiet and call the Mother till it is gone. After a time this power of mechanical repetition without reason from the subconscious gets worn out and disappears — then these moods come no more.

*

All that [*sense of grief and sorrow*] is probably things that rise

from the subconscious—or perhaps the subconscious itself is being worked upon to arrive at a state of light and peace. It sometimes enters into a happy condition, sometimes into a neutral one, sometimes it raises up a causeless sorrow. The movements of the subconscious take place even without reason, of themselves, owing to the inherent habit in Nature, that is why the grief is without discoverable cause. It is only because it is in the subconscious that you cannot locate it. When the grief comes, you must dissociate yourself from it and reject it, not taking it as your own, until it ceases to come and call down the Mother's peace and Ananda in its place.

*

Yes, surely it is present [*vanity in the subconscious*]. All normal reactions and characteristics are there in the subconscious, and even remain there after they have been rejected from the conscious nature and can return from it in the conscious nature.

*

Certainly, the subconscious has many more fears in it than those admitted or acknowledged by the waking consciousness.

*

The dark wells of the subconscious are deep and until they are altogether cleared some gushing up of the old sources is always possible.

Dealing with the Subconscious

As for the subconscious that is best dealt with when the opening of the consciousness to what comes down from above is complete. Then one becomes aware of the subconscious as a separate domain and can bring down into it the silence and all else that comes from above.

*

The subconscious can be entirely dealt with only when the other

parts are sufficiently open and changed — but meanwhile it can feel the pressure of the change in the mind and vital.

*

The conscious parts have to be prepared first — impossible to deal successfully with the subconscious till then, except in points and details. Just as the musician has first to learn the right principle and execution of his music with his mind and vital (aesthetic) perception and will — and teach his fingers to execute it — afterwards the subconscious in his fingers will learn its work and do the right thing of itself — e.g. touching the right keys without his eyes having to follow.

*

These [*vital and physical weaknesses*] are symptoms and feelings that can easily come in the period when the subconscious is being dealt with — tamas, age, decay, illness, death, weakness, inertia, the mechanical play (as if the inevitable round of a machine) of the lower vital have their seeds in the subconscious and when the subconscious rises up in its native power, these threaten to rise with them. Never consent to the attack or allow the faith and the will to go down before them. Affirm always the higher Truth against them and call down the Power and Light into the cells, into the whole body and plunge them into the subphysical below the body so that the very roots of the subconscious may get illuminated and change. It is only by doing this that realisation in the body will become possible.

*

It [*insincerity in the vital*] can only be dangerous if the waking mind accepts it. All the same, so long as it remains in the subconscious, it keeps a seed of possibility — so it must be got out altogether.

*

Just as one can concentrate the thought on an object or the vision on a point, so one can concentrate will on a particular

part or point of the body and give an order to the consciousness there. That order reaches the subconscious.

Dealing with Memories from the Subconscious

It is most probably from the subconscious [*that the past memories come*]. When these memories arise, they should be treated on the basis that they have arisen in order to be dissolved and dismissed, so that by their persistent dissolution one may not be tied by the impressions in the subconscious to the past (that is the machinery of Karma) but free for the spirit's unbound future.

The best is when you can get the true knowledge about it, why it happened and what purpose it served; then it goes easily.

*

Reject them [*past memories*] from their roots with the idea that they have come up in order to be abolished from the subconscious. It may take a little time to get rid of some memories which are persistent and recurrent, but usually this process has an effect of clearance after a time.

*

If you do not pay attention, they [*past memories*] fall into the background and become a mechanical action which it is more easy to get rid of.

*

This review of the past is a very good sign, for it usually comes when there is a preparation of the physical consciousness and subconscious for change. One has not to regret the stumbles of the past but look with a quiet eye and understand, for all came—the stumbles included—as part of the necessary experience by which the being learns and advances through error to the Light and through the imperfections of Nature towards the divine perfection.

Clearing or Emptying the Subconscious

There is always a great deal to do in the subconscious, but if you specially feel it [*the need to clear the subconscious*], it must be that the time for clearing it has come. If the other parts keep open and responsive, this should not give too much trouble.

*

It is only if the mind is silent that the subconscious can be empty. What has to be done is to get all the old ignorant unyogic stuff out of the subconscious.

*

If the subconscious is emptied, it would mean that you have got beyond the ordinary consciousness and the subconscious itself is prepared to be an instrument of the Truth.

Illumining the Subconscious

The subconscious is a dark and ignorant region, so that it is natural that the obscurer movements of the Nature should have more power there. It is so indeed with all the lower parts of the nature from the lower vital downwards. But it does send up good things also though more rarely. It has in the course of the sadhana to be illumined and made a support of the higher consciousness in the physical nature instead of a basis of the instinctive lower movements.

*

The work [*going on in the subconscious*] is of a general nature, not individual, but necessarily everyone here is to some extent affected by it.² If consciousness and light is not brought into the subconscious, then there can be no change. For it is in the subconscious that there are the seeds of all the old lower vital instincts and movements and however much they may be cleared in the

² This letter was written in November 1937.—Ed.

lower vital itself, they may sprout up again from below. Also the subconscious is the secret basis of the bodily consciousness. The subconscious must admit into itself the higher consciousness and the Truth light.

*

[*First effects of the Light penetrating and changing the subconscious:*]

1. The subconscious begins to show more easily what is in it.
2. Things rising from there come to the awareness of the mind before they can touch or affect the consciousness.
3. The subconscious becomes less the refuge of the ignorant and obscure movements and more an automatic response of the material to the higher consciousness.
4. It gives less covert and less passage to the suggestions of the hostile forces.
5. It is more easy to be conscious in sleep and to have higher forms of dream experience. Hostile dreams—e.g. sex-suggestions can be met and stopped in the dream itself and any result like emission prevented.
6. A waking will put on the dream state before sleeping becomes more and more effective.

*

The subconscious is to be penetrated by the light and made a sort of bedrock of truth, a store of right impressions, right physical responses to the Truth. Strictly speaking, it will not be subconscious at all, but a sort of bank of true values held ready for use.

Psycho-analysis and the Integral Yoga

Your practice of psycho-analysis was a mistake. It has, for the time at least, made the work of purification more complicated, not easier. The psycho-analysis of Freud is the last thing that one should associate with Yoga. It takes up a certain part, the

darkest, the most perilous, the unhealthiest part of the nature, the lower vital subconscious layer, isolates some of its most morbid phenomena and attributes to it and them an action out of all proportion to its true role in the nature. Modern psychology is an infant science, at once rash, fumbling and crude. As in all infant sciences, the universal habit of the human mind — to take a partial or local truth, generalise it unduly and try to explain a whole field of Nature in its narrow terms — runs riot here. Moreover, the exaggeration of the importance of suppressed sexual complexes is a dangerous falsehood and it can have a nasty influence and tend to make the mind and vital more and not less fundamentally impure than before.

It is true that the subliminal in man is the largest part of his nature and has in it the secret of the unseen dynamisms which explain his surface activities. But the lower vital subconscious which is all that this psycho-analysis of Freud seems to know — and even of that it knows only a few ill-lit corners, — is no more than a restricted and very inferior portion of the subliminal whole. The subliminal self stands behind and supports the whole superficial man; it has in it a larger and more efficient mind behind the surface mind, a larger and more powerful vital behind the surface vital, a subtler and freer physical consciousness behind the surface bodily existence. And above them it opens to higher superconscious as well as below them to lower subconscious ranges. If one wishes to purify and transform the nature, it is the power of these higher ranges to which one must open and raise to them and change by them both the subliminal and the surface being. Even this should be done with care, not prematurely or rashly, following a higher guidance, keeping always the right attitude; for otherwise the force that is drawn down may be too strong for an obscure and weak frame of nature. But to begin by opening up the lower subconscious, risking to raise up all that is foul or obscure in it, is to go out of one's way to invite trouble. First, one should make the higher mind and vital strong and firm and full of light and peace from above; afterwards one can open up or even dive into the subconscious with more safety and some chance of a rapid and successful change.

The system of getting rid of things by *anubhava* can also be a dangerous one; for on this way one can easily become more entangled instead of arriving at freedom. This method has behind it two well-known psychological motives. One, the motive of purposeful exhaustion, is valid only in some cases, especially when some natural tendency has too strong a hold or too strong a drive in it to be got rid of by *vicāra* or by the process of rejection and the substitution of the true movement in its place; when that happens in excess, the sadhaka has sometimes even to go back to the ordinary action of the ordinary life, get the true experience of it with a new mind and will behind and then return to the spiritual life with the obstacle eliminated or else ready for elimination. But this method of purposive indulgence is always dangerous, though sometimes inevitable. It succeeds only when there is a very strong will in the being towards realisation; for then indulgence brings a strong dissatisfaction and reaction, *vairāgya*, and the will towards perfection can be carried down into the recalcitrant part of the nature.

The other motive for *anubhava* is of a more general applicability; for in order to reject anything from the being one has first to become conscious of it, to have the clear inner experience of its action and to discover its actual place in the workings of the nature. One can then work upon it to eliminate it, if it is an entirely wrong movement, or to transform it if it is only the degradation of a higher and true movement. It is this or something like it that is attempted crudely and improperly with a rudimentary and insufficient knowledge in the system of psycho-analysis. The process of raising up the lower movements into the full light of consciousness in order to know and deal with them is inevitable; for there can be no complete change without it. But it can truly succeed only when a higher light and force are sufficiently at work to overcome, sooner or later, the force of the tendency that is held up for change. Many, under the pretext of *anubhava*, not only raise up the adverse movement, but support it with their consent instead of rejecting it, find justifications for continuing or repeating it and so go on playing with it, indulging its return, eternising it; afterwards when they want to get rid of

it, it has got such a hold that they find themselves helpless in its clutch and only a terrible struggle or an intervention of divine grace can liberate them. Some do this out of a vital twist or perversity, others out of sheer ignorance; but in Yoga, as in life, ignorance is not accepted by Nature as a justifying excuse. This danger is there in all improper dealings with the ignorant parts of the nature; but none is more ignorant, more perilous, more unreasoning and obstinate in recurrence than the lower vital subconscious and its movements. To raise it up prematurely or improperly for *anubhava* is to risk suffusing the conscious parts also with its dark and dirty stuff and thus poisoning the whole vital and even the mental nature. Always therefore one should begin by a positive, not a negative experience, by bringing down something of the divine nature, calm, light, equanimity, purity, divine strength into the parts of the conscious being that have to be changed; only when that has been sufficiently done and there is a firm positive basis, is it safe to raise up the concealed subconscious adverse elements in order to destroy and eliminate them by the strength of the divine calm, light, force and knowledge. Even so, there will be enough of the lower stuff rising up of itself to give you as much of the *anubhava* as you will need for getting rid of the obstacles; but then they can be dealt with with much less danger and under a higher internal guidance.

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I find it difficult to take these psycho-analysts at all seriously when they try to scrutinise spiritual experience by the flicker of their torch-lights,— yet perhaps one ought to, for half-knowledge is a very powerful thing and can be a great obstacle to the coming in front of the true Truth. This new psychology looks to me very much like children learning some summary and not very adequate alphabet, exulting in putting their a-b-c-d of the subconscious and the mysterious underground super-ego together and imagining that their first book of obscure beginnings (c-a-t=cat, t-r-e-e=tree) is the very heart of the real knowledge. They look from down up and explain the higher lights by the lower obscurities; but the foundation of these things is above

and not below, *upari budhna eṣām*. The superconscious, not the subconscious, is the true fountain of things. The significance of the lotus is not to be found by analysing the secrets of the mud from which it grows here; its secret is to be found in the heavenly archetype of the lotus that blooms for ever in the Light above. The self-chosen field of these psychologists is besides poor and dark and limited; you must know the whole before you can know the part and the highest before you can truly understand the lowest. That is the province of a greater psychology awaiting its hour before which these poor gropings will disappear and come to nothing.

Chapter Two

The Inconscient and the Integral Yoga

The Descent of the Sadhana into the Inconscient

There is another cause of the general inability to change which at present afflicts the sadhak.¹ It is because the sadhana, as a general fact, has now and for a long time past come down to the Inconscient; the pressure, the call is to change in that part of the nature which depends directly on the Inconscient, the fixed habits, the automatic movements, the mechanical repetitions of the nature, the involuntary reactions to life, all that seems to belong to the fixed character of a man. This has to be done if there is to be any chance of a total spiritual change. The Force (generally and not individually) is working to make that possible, its pressure is for that,—for, on the other levels, the change has already been made possible (not, mind you, assured to everybody). But to open the Inconscient to the light is a Herculean task; change on the other levels is much easier. As yet this work has only begun and it is not surprising that there seems to be no change in things or people. It will come in time, but not in a hurry.

As for experiences, they are all right but the trouble is that they do not seem to change the nature, they only enrich the consciousness—even the realisation, on the mind level, of the Brahman seems to leave the nature almost where it was, except for a few. That is why we insist on the psychic transformation as the first necessity—for that does change the nature—and its chief instrument is bhakti, surrender etc.

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¹ This letter was written in April 1944, the one that follows it in June 1944. The final letter in the group was written in April 1947.—Ed.

The sunlit path can only be followed if the psychic is constantly or usually in front or if one has a natural spirit of faith and surrender or a face turned habitually towards the sun or psychic predisposition (e.g. a faith in one's spiritual destiny) or if he has acquired the psychic turn. That does not mean that the sunlit man has no difficulties; he may have many, but he regards them cheerfully as "all in the day's work". If he gets bad beatings, he is capable of saying, "Well, that was a queer go, but the Divine is evidently in a queer mood and if that is his way of doing things, it must be the right one; I am surely a still queerer fellow myself and that, I suppose, was the only means of putting me right." But everybody can't be of that turn, and surrender which would put everything right is, as you say, difficult to do completely. That is why we do not insist on total surrender at once, but are satisfied with a little to begin with, the rest to grow as it can.

I have explained to you why so many people (not by any means all) are in this gloomy condition, dull and despondent. It is the tamas, the inertia of the Inconscient, that has got hold of them. But also it is the small physical vital which takes only an interest in the small and trivial things of the ordinary daily and social life and nothing else. When formerly the sadhana was going on on higher levels (mind, higher vital etc.), there was plenty of vigour and verve and interest in the details of the Asram work and life as well as in an inner life; the physical vital was carried in the stream. But for many this has dropped; they live in the unsatisfied vital physical and find everything desperately dull, gloomy and without interest or issue. In their inner life the tamas from the Inconscient has created a block or a bottleneck and they do not find any way out. If one can keep the right condition and attitude, a strong interest in work or a strong interest in sadhana, then this becomes quiescent. That is the malady. Its remedy is to keep the right condition and to bring gradually or, if one can, swiftly the light of the higher aspiration into this part of the being also, so that whatever the conditions of the environment, it may keep also the right poise. Then the sunlit path should be less impossible.

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The extreme acuteness of your difficulties is due to the Yoga having come down against the bedrock of Inconscience which is the fundamental basis of all resistance in the individual and in the world to the victory of the Spirit and the Divine Work that is leading toward that victory. The difficulties themselves are general in the Asram as well as in the outside world. Doubt, discouragement, diminution or loss of faith, waning of the vital enthusiasm for the ideal, perplexity and a baffling of the hope for the future are the common features of the difficulty. In the world outside there are much worse symptoms such as the general increase of cynicism, a refusal to believe in anything at all, a decrease of honesty, an immense corruption, a preoccupation with food, money, comfort, pleasure to the exclusion of higher things and a general expectation of worse and worse things awaiting the world. All that, however acute, is a temporary phenomenon for which those who know anything about the workings of the world-energy and the workings of the Spirit were prepared. I myself foresaw that this worst would come, the darkness of night before the dawn; therefore I am not discouraged. I know what is preparing behind the darkness and can see and feel the first signs of its coming. Those who seek for the Divine have to stand firm and persist in their seeking; after a time, the darkness will fade and begin to disappear and the Light will come.

Part Four

Difficulties in the Practice of the Integral Yoga

Section One

Difficulties of the Path

Chapter One

The Difficulties of Yoga

Difficulties and the Aim of Life

It is the lesson of life that always in this world everything fails a man—only the Divine does not fail him, if he turns entirely to the Divine. It is not because there is something bad in you that blows fall on you,—blows fall on all human beings because they are full of desire for things that cannot last and they lose them or, even if they get, it brings disappointment and cannot satisfy them. To turn to the Divine is the only truth in life.

*

As for the blows, well, are they always given by the Yoga—is it not sometimes the sadhak of the Yoga who gives blows to himself? There are plenty of blows too in ordinary life according to my experience. Blows are the order of existence, and of Yoga; our nature or the nature of things brings them upon us until we learn to present to them a back which they cannot touch.

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The ordinary life naturally has its mental, vital and physical pleasures, but it is of a superficial character and there is no firm foundation of the consciousness anywhere—all is at the mercy of the play of forces. In Yoga there is the period of struggle and difficulty in which the difficulty and suffering can be acute and the period of the foundation in the true consciousness after which there is no serious disturbance of the peace and freedom leading to the state of realisation in all the being in which grief etc. are impossible.

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All X's troubles are due partly to past Karma in another life, partly to his nature which is unable to harmonise with his

surroundings or to master them by strong will and clear understanding or to face them with calm poise and balance. Life is for experience and growth and until one has learned one's lesson things go on happening that are the result of one's imperfect balance with Nature or inner imperfections. All that happens is for the best is true only if we see with the cosmic view that takes in past and future development which is aided by ill fortune, as well as good fortune, by danger, death, suffering and calamity, as well as by happiness, success and victory. It is not true if it means that only things happen which are fortunate or obviously good for the person in the human sense.

*

What you describe is a nature divided against itself by a mind which has corrupted its action through a wrong use of its powers and a physical weakened by indulgence of vital desire.

Introspection is good only when it is used as a means for changing the nature so as to bring it into accordance with a higher ideal steadily held before you. The present nature of man is egoistic in motive, full of falsehoods created by the Ignorance into which he is born and which the mind and life accept in order to follow their ego's aims and desires. By introspection one comes to see that, but by itself that can only create distrust of oneself, loss of motive to action, cynicism and weakness. One must have the faith and aspiration towards a higher consciousness which one has to build up in place of this lower nature, then the introspection and the knowledge of the defects of the nature it gives become useful, as it helps one to see what has to be changed while the higher ideal gives what has to take the place of the old movements and the old nature.

But all that is not easy to do unless you resolve to give an aim to your life and erect the higher ideal towards which you have to grow. Just as the mind can destroy the force of life and its balance, so it can do that also, it can help to restore the power on a new basis and acquire a new and greater force and true balance. But for that you must have the will to do it. To create

the will the mind must press for faith and vision and discourage their opposites.

What you have written has some power of thought and style and vision though of a mixed character. There is no harm in writing these things when they of themselves come; it may help the inner element of aspiration to grow in you.

Difficulties and the Integral Yoga

This Yoga is certainly difficult, but is any Yoga really easy? You speak of the lure of liberation into the extracosmic Absolute, but how many who set out on the path of Nirvana attain to it in this life or without a long, strenuous and difficult endeavour? Which of the paths has not to pass through the dry desert in order to reach the promised land? Even the path of Bhakti which is said to be the easiest is full of the lamentations of the bhaktas complaining that they call but the Beloved eludes their grasp, the place of meeting is prepared but even now Krishna does not come. Even if there is the joy of a brief glimpse or the passion of *milana*, it is followed by long periods of *viraha*. It is a mistake to think that any path of Yoga is facile, that any is a royal road or short cut to the Divine, or that like a system of "French made easy" or "French without tears", so there can be a system of "Yoga made easy" or "Yoga without tears". A few great souls prepared by past lives or otherwise lifted beyond the ordinary spiritual capacity may attain realisation more swiftly; some may have uplifting experiences at an early stage, but for most the *siddhi* of the path, whatever it is, must be the end of a long, difficult and persevering endeavour. One cannot have the crown of spiritual victory without the struggle or reach the heights without the ascent and its labour. Of all it can be said, "Difficult is that road, hard to tread like the edge of a razor."

You find the path dry precisely because you have not yet touched the fringe of it. But all paths have their dry periods and for most though not for all it is at the beginning. There is a long stage of preparation necessary in order to arrive at the inner psychological condition in which the doors of experience

can open and one can walk from vista to vista — though even then new gates may present themselves and refuse to open until all is ready. This period can be dry and desert-like unless one has the ardour of self-introspection and self-conquest and finds every step of the effort and struggle interesting or unless one has or gets that secret of trust and self-giving which sees the hand of the Divine in every step of the path and even in the difficulty the grace or the guidance. The description of Yoga as “bitter like poison in the beginning” because of the difficulty and struggle “but in the end sweet as nectar” because of the joy of realisation, the peace of liberation or the divine Ananda and the frequent description by sadhaks and bhaktas of the periods of dryness shows sufficiently that it is no unique peculiarity of this Yoga. All the old disciplines recognised this and it is why the Gita says that Yoga should be practised patiently and steadily with a heart that refuses to be overcome by despondency. It is a recommendation applicable to this path but also to the way of the Gita and to the hard “razor” path of the Vedanta, and to every other. It is quite natural that the higher the Ananda to come down, the more difficult may be the beginning, the drier the deserts that have to be crossed on the way.

Certainly, the supramental manifestation does not bring peace, purity, force, power of knowledge only; these give the necessary conditions for the final realisation, are part of it, but Love, Beauty and Ananda are the essence of its fulfilment. And although the supreme Ananda comes with the supreme fulfilment, there is no real reason why there should not be the love and Ananda and beauty of the way also. Some have found that even at an early stage before there was any other experience. But the secret of it is in the heart, not the mind — the heart that opens its inner door and through it the radiance of the soul looks out in a blaze of trust and self-giving. Before that inner fire the debates of the mind and its difficulties wither away and the path however long or arduous becomes a sunlit road not only towards but through love and Ananda.

Nevertheless, even if that does not come at first, one can arrive at it by a patient perseverance — the psychic change is

indeed the indispensable preliminary of any approach to the supramental path and this change has for its very core the blossoming of the inner love, joy, bhakti. Some may find a mental opening first and the mental opening may bring peace, light, a beginning of knowledge first, but this opening from above is incomplete unless it is followed by an opening inward of the heart. To suppose that the Yoga is dry and joyless because the struggles of your mind and vital have made your first approach to it dry is a misunderstanding and an error. The hidden springs of sweetness will reveal themselves if you persevere, even if now they are guarded by the dragons of doubt and unsatisfied longing. Grumble, if your nature compels you to it, but persevere.

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The only thing to do with such depressing thoughts is not to indulge them, to send them away at once. Vital difficulties are the common lot of every human being and of every sadhak—they are to be met with a quiet determination and confidence in the Divine Grace.

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It needs either a calm resolute will governing the whole being or a very great *samatā* to have a quite smooth transformation. If they are there, then there are no revolts though there may be difficulties, no attacks, only a conscious dealing with the defects of the nature, no falls but only setting right of wrong steps or movements.

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These obstacles can only be got rid of gradually by persistent sadhana. The alternation of dark and bright states is normal and inevitable.

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The headache if it comes is only a result of the body not being accustomed to the pressure or else to some resistance there. The difficulties of course rise up, but it is not always in the

beginning. Sometimes the first effect is such that one feels as if there were no difficulties,—they rise afterwards when the exultation wanes and the normal consciousness has a chance to assert itself against the flood of power or light from above. There is a resistance that has to be fought out or worked out—fought out if the nature is unsteady or resists violently, worked out if the will is steady and the nature moderate in its reactions. On the other hand if there has been a long preparation and the resistances of the nature have been already largely dealt with by the psychic or by the enlightened mental will, then there are no primary or later aggravations but a steady and quiet pulsing of the change, the remaining difficulties falling away of themselves as the new consciousness develops, or else there may be no difficulties at all, only a necessary readjustment and change.

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If X has allowed any fall in her consciousness and action which retards her sadhana and is not yet able wholly to overcome her weakness, that is no reason why you should allow *her* difficulty to overcome *your* faith and endeavour. There is no natural connection between the two and no reason why there should be—it is only your mind that is making one. Each sadhak has his own separate sadhana, his own difficulties, his own way to follow. His sadhana is between him and the Divine; no one else has a part in it. Nor is there any reason why, even if one falls or fails, the other should torment himself for that, lose his faith and abandon his way. X's struggle, whatever its nature or limits, is her own and concerns herself and the Mother. It is not yours and ought not to touch or concern you at all; if you allow it to touch and shake you because she happens to be your sister, you bring in an unnecessary difficulty to add to your own and hamper your own progress. Keep to your own path, concentrate on your own obstacles to overcome them. As for her, you can at most pray to the Divine Power to help her and leave it there.

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Yoga has always its difficulties, whatever Yoga it be. Moreover

it acts in a different way on different seekers. Some have to overcome the difficulties of their nature first before they get any experiences to speak of, others get a splendid beginning and all the difficulties afterwards, others go on for a long time having alternate risings to the top of the wave and then a descent into the gulfs and so on till the vital difficulty is worked out—that is the case with X; others have a smooth path which does not mean that they have no difficulties—they have plenty, but they do not care a straw for them, because they feel sure that the Divine will help them to the goal, or that he is with them even when they do not feel him—their faith makes them imperturbable. What Y feels is true—there are certain signs by which one can know it. As for Z he never tried to do Yoga, so he is not a case in point at all—if he had wanted he might have done something, but except at the beginning he did not want it in the least.

For yourself it seems to me that the consciousness is growing towards the point at which there can be the decisive change upwards and inwards, decisive and effective, and there is no cause for depression—for that change is the one thing needful.

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The difficulties that remain, although not identical, are similar in their cause and their fundamental nature to those you have either largely or completely overcome, and they can be conquered in the same way; it is a question of time and of acquiescence within yourself in the pressure from the Divine which makes man change.

Human nature and the character of the individual are a formation that has arisen in and out of the unconsciousness of the material world and can never get entirely free from the pressure of that Inconsciousness. As consciousness grows in the being born into this material world, it takes the form of an Ignorance slowly admitting or striving with difficulty after knowledge and human nature is made of that Ignorance and the character of the individual is made from the elements of the Ignorance. It is largely mechanistic like everything else in material Nature and there is almost invariably a resistance and, more often than not, a strong

and stubborn resistance to any change demanded from it. The character is made up of habits and it clings to them, is disposed to think them the very law of its being and it is a hard job to get it to change at all except under a strong pressure of circumstances. Especially in the physical parts, the body, the physical mind, the physical life movements, there is this resistance; the tamasic element in Nature is powerful there, what the Gita describes as *aprakāśa*, absence of light, and *apravṛtti*, a tendency to inertia, inactivity, unwillingness to make an effort and, as a result, even when the effort is made, a constant readiness to doubt, to despond and despair, to give up, renounce the aim and the endeavour, collapse.

Fortunately, there is also in human nature a sattwic element which turns towards light and a rajasic or kinetic element which desires and needs to act and can be made to desire not only change but constant progress. But these too, owing to the limitations of human ignorance and the obstructions of the fundamental unconsciousness, suffer from pettiness and division and can resist as well as assist the spiritual endeavour. The spiritual change which Yoga demands from human nature and individual character is, therefore, full of difficulties, one may almost say that it is the most difficult of all human aspirations and efforts. In so far as it can get the sattwic and the rajasic (kinetic) elements to assist it, its path is made easier but even the sattwic element can resist by attachment to old ideas, to preconceived notions, to mental preferences and partial judgments, to opinions and reasonings which come in the way of higher truth and to which it is attached: the kinetic element resists by its egoism, its passions, desires and strong attachments, its vanity and self-esteem, its constant habit of demand and many other obstacles. The resistance of the vital has a more violent character than the others and it brings to the aid of the others its own violence and passion and that is a source of all the acute difficulty, revolt, upheavals and disorders which mar the course of the Yoga. The Divine is there, but He does not ignore the conditions, the laws, the circumstances of Nature; it is under these conditions that He does all His work, His work in the world and in man and

consequently also in the sadhak, the aspirant, even in the God-knower and God-lover; even the saint and the sage continue to have difficulties and to be limited by their human nature. A complete liberation and a complete perfection or the complete possession of the Divine and possession by the Divine is possible but it does not usually happen by an easy miracle or a series of miracles. The miracle can and does happen but only when there is the full call and complete self-giving of the soul and the entire widest opening of the nature.

Still, if the call of the soul is there, although not yet full, however great and obstinate the difficulties, there can be no final and irretrievable failure; even when the thread is broken it is taken up again and reunited and carried to its end. There is a working in the nature itself in response to the inner need which, however slowly, brings about the result. But a certain inner consent is needed; the progress that you have marked in yourself is due to the fact that there was this consent in the soul and also in part of the nature; the change was insisted on by the mind and desired by part of the vital; the resistance in part of the mind and part of the vital made it slow and difficult but could not prevent it. The strong development you have observed in your powers with its proof in the response of others is due to the same reason; part of your being consented to it, wanted and needed it as a self-fulfilment of the nature and the soul wanted it as a means of service to the Divine; the rest was due to the pressure of the Divine force and my pressure. As for the distaste, the lack of interest etc. all this is temporary and belongs only to a part of you. In so far as it comes from a kind of *vairāgya*, it may have helped you in overcoming some of your attachments, but it is defective in so far as the element of *tamas* and *apravrtti* is there; it is not so fundamental as to resist the victorious drive of the pressure of the Divine Force.

You ask what I want you to do. What I want is that you should persist and give more and more that assent in you which brought about the progress you have made so that here too the resistance may diminish and eventually disappear.

And you must now get rid of an exaggerated insistence

on the use of reason and the correctness of your individual reasoning and its right to decide in all matters. The reason has its place especially with regard to certain physical things and general worldly questions — though even there it is a very fallible judge — or in the formation of metaphysical conclusions and generalisations; but its claim to be the decisive authority in matters of Yoga or in spiritual things is untenable. The activities of the outward intellect there lead only to the formation of personal opinions, not to the discovery of Truth. It has always been understood in India that the reason and its logic or its judgment cannot give you the realisation of spiritual truths but can only assist in an intellectual presentation of ideas; realisation comes by intuition and inner experience. Reason and intellectuality cannot make you see the Divine, it is the soul that sees. Mind and the other instruments can only share in the vision when it is imparted to them by the soul and welcome and rejoice in it. But also the mind may prevent it or at least stand long in the way of the realisation or the vision. For its prepossessions, preconceived opinions and mental preferences may build a wall of arguments against the spiritual truth that has to be realised and refuse to accept it if it presents itself in a form which does not conform to its own previous ideas: so also it may prevent one from recognising the Divine if the Divine presents himself in a form for which the intellect is not prepared or which in any detail runs counter to its judgments and prejudices. One can depend on one's reason in other matters provided the mind tries to be open and impartial and free from undue passion and is prepared to concede that it is not always right and may err; but it is not safe to depend on it alone in matters which escape its jurisdiction, especially in spiritual realisation and in matters of Yoga which belong to a different order of knowledge.

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The Divine may be difficult, but his difficulties can be overcome if one keeps at him.

Why Difficulties Come

No, it is not a test. The difficulties come because the mind, vital and physical or some part is open to the movements which bring the difficulties.

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The difficulties are there in vital and physical nature because they are full of obscurity, falsehood, inertia and ignorance. They have to be got rid of by opening the vital and physical wholly to the power of the psychic and the power of the Truth from above.

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It is quite true that falsehood reigns in this world; that is the reason why these difficulties manifest. But you have not to allow yourself to be shaken. You must remain calm and strong and go straight, using the power of Truth and the Divine Force supporting you to overcome the difficulties and set straight what has been made crooked by the falsehood.

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All who enter the spiritual path have to face the difficulties and ordeals of the path, those which rise from their own nature and those which come in from outside. The difficulties in the nature always rise again and again till you overcome them; they must be faced with both strength and patience. But the vital part is prone to depression when ordeals and difficulties rise. This is not peculiar to you, but comes to all sadhaks — it does not imply an unfitness for the sadhana or justify hopelessness. But you must train yourself to overcome this reaction of depression, calling in the Mother's force to aid you.

All who cleave to the path steadfastly can be sure of their spiritual destiny. If anyone fails to reach it, it can only be for one of two reasons, either because they leave the path or because for some lure of ambition, vanity, desire etc. they go astray from the sincere dependence on the Divine.

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The Power does not descend with the object of raising up the lower forces, but in the way it has to work at present, that uprising comes in as a reaction to the working. What is needed is the establishment of the calm and wide consciousness at the base of the whole Nature so that when the lower nature appears, it will not be as an attack or struggle but as if a Master of forces were there seeing the defects of the present machinery and doing step by step what is necessary to remedy and change it.

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It [*progress, then struggle*] is the usual course of the process by which the change of consciousness is effected. The lower Forces seldom yield the ground without a protracted and often repeated struggle. What is gained can be covered over, but it is never lost.

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If you go down into your lower parts or ranges of nature, you must be always careful to keep a vigilant connection with the higher already regenerated levels of the consciousness and to bring down the Light and Purity through them into these nether still unregenerated regions. If there is not this vigilance, one gets absorbed in the unregenerated movement of the inferior layers and there is obscuration and trouble.

The safest way is to remain in the higher part of the consciousness and put a pressure from it on the lower to change. It can be done in this way, only you must get the knack and the habit of it. If you achieve the power to do that, it makes the progress much easier, smoother and less painful.

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There are higher forces and the lower—the latter have to be worked out by contact with the higher and in the working out sometimes they rise, sometimes disappear till they are done with. It is not necessarily due to some mistake or fault that they rise.

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I am not aware of any case in which the lower forces did not

rise up. If such a case occurred, I fancy it would be the first in human history.

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All the difficulties are bound to vanish in time under the action of the Force. They rise, because if they did not rise the action would not be complete, for all has to be faced and worked out, in order that nothing may be left to rise up hereafter. The psychic being itself can throw the light by which the full consciousness will come and nothing remain in the darkness.

Chapter Two

The Difficulties of Human Nature

Obstacles of Human Nature

There are only three fundamental obstacles that can stand in the way:

- (1) Absence of faith or insufficient faith.
- (2) Egoism—the mind clinging to its own ideas, the vital preferring its own desires to a true surrender, the physical adhering to its own habits.
- (3) Some inertia or fundamental resistance in the consciousness, not willing to change because it is too much of an effort or because it does not want to believe in its own capacity or the power of the Divine—or for some other more subconscious reason.

You have to see for yourself which of these it is.

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These obstacles are usual in the first stages of the sadhana. They are due to the nature being not yet sufficiently receptive. You should find out where the obstacle is, in the mind or the vital, and try to widen the consciousness there, call in more purity and peace and in that purity and peace offer that part of your being sincerely and wholly to the Divine Power.

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In one form or another the resistance of the mind and the Prana seeking to be independent and fulfil ego under the plea of spiritual realisation is a frequent obstacle in the Yoga.

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The main difficulty in the sadhana consists in the movements of the lower nature, ideas of the mind, desires and attractions of the vital, habits of the body consciousness that stand in the

way of the growth of the higher consciousness — there are other difficulties, but these make the bulk of the opposition.

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Each part of the nature wants to go on with its old movements and refuses, so far as it can, to admit a radical change and progress, because that would subject it to something higher than itself and deprive it of its sovereignty in its own field, its separate empire. It is this that makes transformation so long and difficult a process.

Mind gets dulled because at its lower basis is the physical mind with its principle of tamas or inertia — for in matter inertia is the fundamental principle. A constant or long continuity of higher experiences produces in this part of the mind a sense of exhaustion or reaction of unease or dullness. Trance or *samādhi* is a way of escape — the body is made quiet, the physical mind is in a state of torpor, the inner consciousness is left free to go on with its experiences. The disadvantage is that trance becomes indispensable and the problem of the waking consciousness is not solved; it remains imperfect.

The Dual Nature of the Human Being

There are usually in the human being two different tendencies in two parts of the being, one psychic or mental supported by the psychic which seeks the better way and higher things, the other whose main seat is in the vital part of the being which is full of the life-instincts and life-desires, which is attached to or turns towards the things of the lower nature and is subject to the passions, anger, sex etc. If the higher part is dominant, then the lower is kept under control and does not give much trouble. But often the latter is supported by outer forces and powers of the lower Nature in the universe and sometimes these intrude and give the coarse part of the being a separate personality and independence of its own. This may be the explanation of the dream of the ugly monster and of the resistance of this other personality. If it be so, then this must be regarded not as

part of oneself but as a foreign element to the true being. It is only by a persistent choice of the dictates of the higher and a persistent rejection of the other that the latter loses ground and finally recedes. This should be met as calmly as possible without allowing the mind to be troubled by any fall or failure — with a quiet constant vigilance and resolute will.

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The difficulty is that in everyone there are two people (to say the least) — one in the outer vital and physical clinging to the past self and trying to get or retain the consent of the mind and the inner being, the other which is the soul asking for a new birth. That which has spoken in you and made the prayer is the psychic being expressing itself through the aid of the mind and the higher vital, and it is this which should always arise in you through prayer and through turning to the Mother and give you the right idea and the right impulse.

It is true that if you refuse always the action suggested by the old Adam, it will be a great step forward. The struggle is then transferred to the psychological plane, where it will be much easier to fight the matter out. I do not deny that there will be difficulty for some time; but if there is the control of action, the control of thought and feeling is bound to come. If there is yielding, on the contrary, a fresh lease is given to the old self.

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The reason why you have these alternating moods is because there are two different elements in you. On one side there is trying to develop in you your psychic being which, when it awakes, gives you the sense of closeness or union with the Mother and the feeling of Ananda; on the other, there is your old vital nature, restless and full of desires and, because of this restlessness and desire, unhappy. It is this old vital nature, which you were accepting and indulging, that made you go wrong and stood in the way of your progress. It is when the desire and restlessness of the vital are rejected that the psychic in you comes forward and then the vital itself changes and feels full of the joy and

the nearness. When the old unhappy and restless vital comes up again, you feel yourself unfit, without pleasure in anything. What you have to do when this returns is not to accept it, to call in the Mother's nearness again and let the psychic being grow in you. If you do that persistently, rejecting restlessness and desire, the vital part of you will change and become fit for the sadhana.

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I have explained to you that there is a division between your internal and external being — as it is in the case of most people. Your inner being wants and has always wanted the Truth and the Divine — when the peace and power are felt it comes forward and you feel it as yourself and understand things and grow in knowledge and happiness and true feeling. The external nature is being changed by the influence of the inner being, but what is pushed out returns constantly from old habit — and then you feel this old nature as if it were yourself. This external nature has been like that of almost all human beings, like that of most of the sadhaks here, selfish and full of desires and wanting its own desires, not the Truth and the Divine. When it returns like this and covers you up, all these old ideas and feelings which are always the same take hold of you and try to push you to despair — for it is an enemy force that pushes them back into you. The difficulty is that your physical consciousness does not yet know how to reject this when it comes. The inner being rejects it, but as the physical consciousness lets it in, the inner being is pushed back for the time being. You must absolutely learn not to allow this thing to come in, not to indulge and support it when it comes. It is a falsehood and cannot be anything else, and by falsehood I mean not only contrary to the sadhana and contrary to the Divine truth, but contrary to the truth of your own inner being and of your soul's aspiration and your heart's desire. How can such a thing be true? it exists but that does not make it the truth of your being. It is the soul, the inner being that is the true self in everyone. It is that you must know to be your self and reject this as a false thing imposed on you by the lower ignorant Nature.

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You must remember that your being is not one simple whole, all of one kind, of one piece, but complex, made up of many things. There are the inner parts of the being which are easily conscious of the Truth and Divine,—when these come forward, then all is well. There is the external being which is full of past ignorance and defect and weakness, but has begun to change. It is not yet sufficiently changed or changed in all its parts. When any part that is partly changed opens strongly to the peace and force, then all the rest become either quite quiet or not very active and you are aware of the peace and force and at ease or else aware only vaguely of confusion etc. somewhere. But when something ignorant comes up from below or is a little prominent (or else some old movement of consciousness that was thrown out returns and clouds you), then you feel the peace, the force as something alien to you or non-existent or outside you or at a distance. If you keep the quiet persistently, then this instability will begin to decrease, the Mother's Force will get in everywhere and, though there will still be much to do, there will be a firm foundation for what has to be done.

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It is different parts of the being that have these different movements. It is, as you say, something in you, something in the vital that has the "insincerity" or the attraction to the wrong confused condition; but this you should not regard as yourself, but as part of the old nature which has to be transformed. So it is something in the physical that has the obscurity and the unconsciousness; but this too you should not look at as yourself, but as something formed in the exterior nature which has to be changed and will be changed. The real "you" is the inner being, the soul, the psychic being, that which calls the peace and the quiet and the working of the force.

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It is not necessary to put so many questions and get their separate answers. All your ten questions resolve themselves into one. In every human being there are two parts, the psychic with so much

of the thinking mind and higher (emotional, larger dynamic) vital that is open to the psychic and cleaves to the soul's aims and admits the higher experiences and on the other hand the lower vital and the physical or external being (external mind and vital included) which are attached to the ignorant personality and nature and do not want to change. It is the conflict between these two that makes all the difficulty of the sadhana. All the difficulties you enumerate arise from that and nothing else. It is only by curing the duality that one can overcome them. That happens when one is able to live within, aware of one's inner being, identified with it and to regard the rest as not oneself, as a creation of ignorant Nature from which one has separated oneself and which has to disappear and, secondly, when by opening oneself constantly to the Divine Light and Force and the Mother's presence a dynamic action of sadhana is constantly maintained which steadily pushes out the movements of the ignorance and substitutes even in the lower vital and physical being the movements of the inner and higher nature. There is then no struggle any longer, but an automatic growth of the divine elements and fading out of the undivine. The devotion of the heart and the increasing activity of the psychic being, which is best helped by devotion and self-giving, are the most powerful means for arriving at this condition.

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Everyone whose psychic being calls him to the spiritual path has a capacity for that path and can arrive at the goal if or as soon as he develops a single-pointed will towards that alone. But also every sadhak is faced with two elements in him, the inner being which wants the Divine and the sadhana and the outer mainly vital and physical being which does not want them but remains attached to the things of the ordinary life. The mind is sometimes led by one, sometimes by the other. One of the most important things he has to do, therefore, is to decide fundamentally the quarrel between these two parts and to persuade or compel by psychic aspiration, by steadiness of the mind's thought and will, by the choice of the higher vital in his emotional being the

opposing elements to be first quiescent and then consenting. So long as he is not able to do that his progress must be either very slow or fluctuating and chequered as the aspiration in him cannot have a continuous action or a continuous result. Besides so long as this is so, there are likely to be periodical revolts of the vital, repining at the slow progress, despairing, desponding, declaring the Adhar unfit; calls from the old life will come; circumstances will be attracted which seem to justify it, suggestions will come from men and unseen powers pressing the sadhak away from the sadhana and pointing backward to the former life. And yet in that life he is not likely to get any real satisfaction.

Your circumstances are not different from those of others in the beginning and for a long time afterwards. You have come away from the family life, but something in your vital has still kept a habit of response and it is that that is being used to pull you away. This is aided by the impatience of the vital because there is no rapid spiritual progress or continuous good condition — things which even the greatest sadhaks take time to acquire. Circumstances combine to assist the pull — things like X's illness or your husband's appeals which when he soothes and flatters and prays and promises instead of being offensive succeed in mollifying you and creating a condition of less effective defence. And there is the vital Nature and its powers suggesting this and that, that you are not fit, that there is no aspiration, that the Mother and Sri Aurobindo do not help, are displeased, do not care, and it is best to go home.

All that most sadhaks have gone through and come out of it and left the old bonds behind them. There is no reason why you should not do so too. Our help is there always, it is not given at one time and withheld at another, nor given to some and denied to others. It is there for all who make the effort and have the will to arrive. But you have to be steady in your will and not be taken in and deceived by the suggestions from outside or those that come in the shapes of your own adverse thoughts and depressions — you have to fight these and surmount them. It may take a shorter or longer time according to your energy

in combating and overcoming them. But everybody has to make that effort of mastery and overcome the old vital nature.

As for your going over there, you have to look at yourself and see clearly what is wanting to take you there. The plea from inability to do the sadhana has no value whatever. It is merely a plea put forward by the opposing elements in the vital and strengthened by the suggestion of adverse forces. If you say that you find your attachment to husband and son or others is so strong that your soul and your aspiration can do nothing against it and home is the real place for you, then of course your departure is inevitable — but such a statement can hardly in your case be accepted as true. Or if you say that still the pull is so great that you think it better to go for a time and test yourself and exhaust it, then that might just be true for a time, if the vital has risen up strongly; and we would not say no, as we did not say no when you wanted to go and nurse X. But even in that case it would be wiser for you to examine it seriously and not make a decision on the strength of a condition which could pass otherwise. Your husband's letters have no value for us; he has always written like that whenever he saw any hope of your coming away from here; at other times he has a very different tone.

I have put the whole thing before you at length. For us the straight course is always to keep on one's way, whatever the difficulties, until one has got mastery and the way becomes smoother. But at bottom the decision must be left with the sadhak himself — one can press for the right choice but one cannot command that he should make it.

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I don't think it can be said that you have no personality. Coordination and harmonisation of parts is absent in many; it is a thing that has to be attained to or built up. Moreover at a certain stage in sadhana there is almost always a disparity or opposition between the parts that are already turned towards the Truth and are capable of experience and others that are not and pull one down to a lower level. The opposition is not equally acute in all cases, but in one degree or another it is almost

universal. Coordination and organisation can be satisfactorily done only when this is overcome. Till then oscillations are inevitable. As for violence, violence of action has been confined to a few only, but what about violence of speech and the quarrels that take place in the Asram? These are not difficulties that ought to prevent you from looking beyond them to the ultimate spiritual issue out of this flux of contending forces of Nature.

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Aspiration and will to change are not so very far from each other, and if one has either, it is usually enough for going through,—provided of course it maintains itself. The opposition in certain parts of the being exists in every sadhak and can be very obstinate. Sincerity comes by having first the constant central aspiration or will, next, the honesty to see and avow the refusal in parts of the being, finally, the intention of seeing it through even there, however difficult it may be. You have admitted certain things changed in you, so you can no longer pretend that you have made no progress at all.

The peculiarity you note is pretty universal—it is one part of the being which believes and speaks the right and beautiful things; it is another which doubts and says just the opposite. I get communications for instance from X in which for several pages he writes wise and perfect things about the sadhana—suddenly without transition he drops into his physical mind and peevishly and complainingly says—well, things ignorant and quite incompatible with all that wisdom. X is not insincere when he does that—he is simply giving voice to two parts of his nature. Nobody can understand himself or human nature if he does not perceive the multipersonality of the human being. To get all parts into harmony, that is the difficult thing.

As for the lack of response,—well, can't you see that you are in the ancient tradition? Read the “lives of the saints”—you will find them all (perhaps not all, but at least so many) shouting like you that there was no response, no response and getting into frightful tumults, agonies and desperations—until the response came. Many people here who can't say they have

had no experiences, do just the same — so it does not depend on experiences. I don't advise this procedure to anybody — mind you. I only want to say that the feeling of never having had a response does not mean that there never will be a response and that fits of despair at having arrived nowhere do not mean that one will never arrive.

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The thing is that it is unavoidable in the course of the sadhana that some parts of the being should be less open, less advanced, as yet less aware of the Peace and Force, less intimate to them than others. These parts have to be worked upon, and changed, but this can be done smoothly only if you are detached from them, able to regard them as not your very self, even though a part of the nature you have to change. Then when they appear with their defects, you will not be upset, not carried away by their movements, lost to the sense of the Peace and Force; you will be able to work on them (or rather let the Force work) as one would on a machine that has to be repaired or a work that has defects and has to be done better this time. If you identify yourself with these parts, then it is very troublesome. The work will still be done, the change made, but with delay, with bad upsettings, in a painful and not in a smooth way. That is why we always tell people to be calm and detached and look upon these things not as their true selves but as an outer part that has to be worked upon quietly until it is what it should be.

The Good and the Evil Persona

Every man has a double nature except those who are born (not unborn) Asuras, Rakshasas or Pishachas and even they have a psychic being concealed somewhere by virtue of their latent humanity. But a double being (or a double nature in the special sense) refers to those who have two sharply contrasted parts of their being without as yet such a linking control over them. Sometimes they are all for the heights and then they are quite all right — sometimes all for the abysses and then they care nothing

for the heights, even sneer or rail at them and give full rein to the lower man. Or they substitute for the heights a smoky volcano summit in the abyss. These are extreme examples, but others while they do not go so far, yet are now one thing, now just the opposite. If they can convert the lower fellow or discover the central being in themselves, then a true harmonious whole can be created.

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There are always two sides to every human being. In Western occultism they call them the good and the evil Persona (personality). X has a strong personality and a formed, forceful and independent vital. It is a kind of character with great possibilities in it, but not liked by most people because they prefer girls to be soft, butterlike and docile and full of gushing affection and "sweetness". Such characters, if badly used by life, may develop great vital difficulties. Y and Z probably see only this side; the other side is too unusual for them to appreciate.

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What you say about the "Evil Persona" interests me greatly as it answers to my consistent experience that a person greatly endowed for the work has, always or almost always — perhaps one ought not to make a too rigid universal rule about these things — a being attached to him, sometimes appearing like a part of him, which is just the contradiction of the thing he centrally represents in the work to be done. Or, if it is not there at first, not bound to his personality, a force of this kind enters into his environment as soon as he begins his movement to realise. Its business seems to be to oppose, to create stumblings and wrong conditions, in a word, to set before him the whole problem of the work he has started to do. It would seem as if the problem could not, in the occult economy of things, be solved otherwise than by the predestined instrument making the difficulty his own. That would explain many things that seem very disconcerting on the surface.

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Yes, the solution is certainly the Divine Grace—it comes of itself, intervening suddenly or with an increasing force when all is ready. Meanwhile it is there behind all the struggles, and “the unconquerable aspiration for the light” of which you speak is the outward sign that it will intervene. As for the two natures, it is only one form of the perpetual duality in human nature from which nobody escapes, so universal that many systems recognise it as a standing feature to be taken account of in their discipline, the two Personae, one bright, one dark, in every human being. If that were not there, Yoga would be an easy walk-over and there would be no struggle. But its presence is not any reason for thinking that there is unfitness; the obstinacy of the worldly element is also not a reason, for it is always obstinate—in its very nature. It is like the Germans in their trenches, falling back and digging themselves in for a new mass attack, every time they are baffled. But for all that, if the bright persona is equally determined not to be satisfied without the crown of light, if it is strong enough to make the being unable to rest content in lesser things, then that is the sign that the being is called, one of the elect in spite of outward appearances and its own doubts and despairs—who has them not, not even a Christ or a Buddha is without them—and that the inner spirit *will surely win* in the end. There is no cause for any apprehension on that score.

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There are two or three things that I think it necessary to say to you about your spiritual life and your difficulties.

First, I should like you to get rid of the idea that that which causes the difficulties is so much a part of your self that a true inner life is impossible to you. The inner life is always possible if there is present in the nature, however much covered over by other things, a divine possibility through which the soul can manifest itself and build up its own true form in the mind and life,—a portion of the Divine. In you this divine possibility exists in a marked and exceptional degree. There is in you an inner being of spontaneous light, intuitive vision, harmony and creative beauty which has shown itself unmistakably every time

it has been able to throw off the clouds that gather in your vital nature. It is this that the Mother has always tried to make grow in you and bring it to the front. When one has that in oneself, there is no ground for despair, no just reason for any talk of impossibility. If you could once firmly accept this as your true self, (as indeed it is, for the inner being is your true self and the external, to which the cause of the difficulties belongs, is always something acquired and impermanent and can be changed,) and if you could make its development your settled and persistent aim in life, then the path would be clear and your spiritual future not only a strong possibility but a certitude.

It very often happens that when there is an exceptional power like this in the nature, there is found in the exterior being some contrary element which opens it to a quite opposite influence. It is this that makes the endeavour after a spiritual life so often a difficult struggle: but the existence of this kind of contradiction even in an intense form does not make that life impossible. Doubt, struggle, efforts and failures, lapses, alternations of happy and unhappy or good and bad conditions, states of light and states of darkness are the common lot of human beings. They are not created by Yoga or by the effort after perfection; only in Yoga one becomes conscious of their movements and their causes instead of feeling them blindly, and in the end one makes one's way out of them into a clearer and happier consciousness. The ordinary life remains to the last a series of troubles and struggles, but the sadhak of the Yoga comes out of the trouble and struggle to a ground of fundamental serenity which superficial disturbances may still touch but cannot destroy, and, finally, all disturbance ceases altogether.

Even the experience which so alarms you, of states of consciousness in which you say and do things contrary to your true will, is not a reason for despair. It is a common experience in one form or another of all who try to rise above their ordinary nature. Not only those who practise Yoga, but religious men and even those who seek only a moral control and self-improvement are confronted with this difficulty. And here again it is not the Yoga or the effort after perfection that creates this condition;

there are contradictory elements in human nature and in every human being through which he is made to act in a way which his better mind disapproves. This happens to everybody, to the most ordinary men in the most ordinary life. It only becomes marked and obvious to our minds when we try to rise above our ordinary external selves, because then we can see that it is the lower elements which are being made to revolt consciously against the higher will. There then seems to be for a time a division in the nature, because the true being and all that supports it stand back and separate from these lower elements. At one time the true being occupies the field of the nature, at another the lower nature used by some contrary Force pushes it back and seizes the ground,—and this we now see, while formerly the thing happened but the nature of the happening was not clear to us. If there is the firm will to progress, this division is overpassed and in the unified nature, unified around that will, there may be other difficulties, but this kind of discord and struggle will disappear. I have written so much on this point because I think you have been given the wrong idea that it is the Yoga which creates this struggle and also that this contradiction or division in the nature is the sign of an unfitness or impossibility to go through to the end. Both ideas are quite incorrect and things will be easier if you cast them out of your consciousness altogether.

But it is true that in your case as in others this contradiction has been given a special and very discomforting kind of intensity by a hereditary weakness of the nervous parts which has always shown itself in you by fits of despondency, gloom, unrest and self-tormenting darkness and spoiled for you the savour of life. Your mistake is to think that this is something to which you are bound and from which you cannot escape, a fate which makes a spiritual change of your nature impossible. I have seen other families afflicted by this kind of hereditary nervous weakness accompanying very often exceptional gifts of intelligence or artistic capacity or spiritual possibilities. One or two may have succumbed to it, like X, but others, sometimes after a period of acute disturbance, overcame the perturbations caused by this weakness; either it disappeared or it took some

minor and innocuous form which did not interfere with the development of the life and its capacities. Why then despair of yourself or fix without any true cause the conviction that you cannot change and this thing will always be there? This despondency, this adverse conviction is the real danger for you; it prevents you from making a quiet and settled resolution and a permanent effective effort; because of it the return of this darker condition makes you quickly yield and allow the adverse external Force which uses this defect to play and do its will with you. It is this false idea that makes more than half the trouble.

There is no true reason why you should not overcome this defect of your external being as many others have done. It is only a part of your vital nature that is affected, even though it often overclouds the rest; the other parts of your being can be easily made the fit instruments of the divine possibility of which I have spoken. Especially, you have a clear and fine intelligence which, when rightly used, becomes a ready instrument of the light and can be of great use to you in overcoming this vital weakness. And this divine possibility, this truth of your inner being, if you accept it, can of itself make certain your liberation and the change of your external nature.

Accept this divine possibility in you; have faith in your inner being and its spiritual destiny. Make its development as a portion of the Divine your aim in life,—for a great and serious aim in life is a most powerful help towards getting rid of this kind of disturbing or disabling nervous weakness; it gives firmness, balance, a strong support to the whole being and a powerful reason for the will to act. Accept too the help we can give you, not shutting yourself against it by disbelief, despair or unfounded revolt. At present you cannot prevail because you have not fixed in yourself a faith, an aim, a settled confidence; the black mood has been able to cloud your whole consciousness. But if you have fixed this faith in you and can cling to it, then the cloud will not be able to fix itself for any long period, the inner being will be able to come to your help. And even the better self will be able to remain on the surface, keep you open to the light and maintain the inner ground for the soul even if the outer is partly

clouded or troubled. When that happens, the victory will have been won and the entire elimination of the vital weakness will be only a matter of a little perseverance.

Outward Circumstances and Personal Defects

That [*proneness to anger*] is the real reason for all these things happening to X. When there is something in the nature that has to be got over, it is always drawing on itself incidents that put it to the test till the sadhak has overcome and is free. At least it is a thing that often happens especially if the person is making a sincere effort to overcome. One does not always know whether it is the hostiles who are trying to break the resolution or putting it to the test (for they claim the right to do it) or whether it is, let us say, the gods who are doing it so as to press and hasten the progress or insisting on the reality and thoroughness of the change aspired after. Perhaps it helps most when one can take it from the latter standpoint.

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You are quite right — that is the way you must take it, that here is an opportunity given to you for overcoming this stumbling block in the nature. When one does sadhana, it is constantly seen that so long as there is an important defect somewhere, circumstances so happen that the occasion comes for the defect to rise until it is thrown out of the being. If one can take the coming of these circumstances clairvoyantly as a call and an opportunity for conquering the defect, then one can progress very quickly.

On the other point, it is very good that you have taken the right attitude and perception with regard to the criticism of others; but this must be extended to their wrong actions also, if there are any. For if their defects flow from their nature, the common human nature of all, their actions flow from the same source, and it is enough to see and understand — the same rule must apply to both these things.

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Outward difficulties are really nothing — it is the inward that are difficult to get rid of, because something in the nature gives consent to them — or at least is accustomed to suffer and tolerate them.

Chapter Three

Imperfections and Periods of Arrest

Imperfections and Progress towards Perfection

Human nature is always full of impurities and imperfections and of itself cannot reach the Divine. It is by the descent of the higher consciousness from above that all that can change; but you must not expect the change to take place in a few days.

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It is not my working, but your moods that are queer. You get something¹ no reasonable being would expect under the ordinary laws of Nature and then you fancy you haven't got it and wail because everything is not absolutely, continuously, faultlessly, increasingly, illimitably miraculous through and through and always and for ever. In no sadhana that I know of does absolute sustained perfection in everything come with a rush and stay celestially perfect for ever more. If it were so there would be no need for sadhana — one would only have to gaze at heaven a little and grow wings and fly into the spheres, a triumphant godhead.

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As I have a few minutes, I may comment on your today's letter so as to get that out of the way. I must say your arguments about X and Y made me smile. When on earth were politeness and good society manners considered as a part or a test of spiritual experience or true Yogic siddhi? It is no more a test than the capacity of dancing well or dressing nicely. Just as there are many very good and kind men who are boorish and rude in their manners, so there may be very spiritual men (I mean those who

¹ Sri Aurobindo sent the disciple a spiritual force which enabled him to write a very good poem. — Ed.

have deep spiritual experiences) who have no grasp over physical life or action (many intellectuals too are like that) and are not at all careful about their manners. I suppose I myself am accused of rude and arrogant behaviour because I refuse to see people, do not answer letters, and a host of other misdemeanours. I have heard of a famous recluse who threw stones at anybody coming to his retreat because he did not want disciples and found no other way of warding off the flood of candidates. I at least would hesitate to pronounce that such people had no spiritual life or experience. Certainly, I prefer that sadhaks should be reasonably considerate towards each other, but that is for the sake of collective life and harmony, not as a siddhi of the Yoga or an indispensable sign of inner experience.

As for the other matter how can the *écarts* of the sadhaks here, none of whom have reached perfection or anywhere near it, be a proof that spiritual experience is null or worthless? You write as if the moment one had any kind of spiritual experience or realisation, one must at once become a perfect person without defects or weaknesses. That is to make a demand which it is impossible to satisfy and it is to ignore the fact that spiritual life is a growth and not a sudden and inexplicable miracle. No sadhak can be judged as if he were already a siddha Yogi, least of all those who have only travelled a quarter or less of a very long path as is the case with most of us who are here. Even great Yogis do not claim perfection and you cannot say that because they are not absolutely perfect, therefore their spirituality is false or of no use to the world. There are besides all kinds of spiritual men, some who are content with spiritual experience and do not seek after an outward perfection or progress, some who are saints, others who do not seek after sainthood, others who are content to live in the cosmic consciousness in touch or union with the All but allowing all kinds of forces to play through them, e.g., as in the typical description of the Paramhansa. The ideal I put before our Yoga is one thing, but it does not bind all spiritual life and endeavour. The spiritual life is not a thing that can be formulated in a rigid definition or bound by a fixed mental rule; it is a vast field of evolution, an immense kingdom potentially larger

than the other kingdoms below it with a hundred provinces, a thousand types, stages, forms, paths, variations of the spiritual ideal, degrees of spiritual achievement. It is from the basis of this truth which I shall try to explain in subsequent letters that things regarding spirituality and its seekers must be judged, if they are to be judged with knowledge. Let me do that first and afterwards if I am able to give some idea of it, which is not easy, particular questions can be more soluble.

P.S. All these things I say, must not be applied to the personal cases you mention which are only an occasion for saying them. The one thing that applies to them is that they are sadhaks, not siddhas, raw still, not ripe.

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I am glad to have got your second letter in which the psychic being in you expresses itself with such fullness. It would have been impossible for me to go on with my explanations of the case for spirituality if the exposition of it, carrying as it must do many things contrary to your own mental views, were to upset or hurt you. I have no intention of doing that and have always avoided it except that sometimes I had to express an unpalatable view of things rather plainly in answer to your own insistence. If I write about these questions from the Yogic point of view, even though on a logical basis, there is bound to be much that is in conflict with your own settled and perhaps cherished opinions, e.g. about "miracles", persons, the limits of judgment by sense data etc. I have avoided as much as possible writing about these subjects because I would have to propound things that cannot be understood except by reference to other data than those of the physical senses or of reason founded on these alone. I might have to speak of laws and forces not recognised by physical reason or science. In my public writings and my writings to sadhaks I have not dwelt on these because they go out of the range of ordinary knowledge and the understanding founded on it. These things are known to some, but they do not usually speak about it, while the public views of such of them as are known are either credulous or incredulous, but in both cases without experience

or knowledge. So if the views founded on them are likely to upset, shock or bewilder, the better way is silence.

I should like, however, to clear up first some misunderstandings in your letter about what I had written:

(1) What I wrote about politeness had nothing to do with X or the quarrel with Y—I referred to that as an *écart* and I said that such lapses on the part of sadhaks who were far from being siddha Yogis could not be advanced as a disproof of spiritual experience or of its value. My remark was not at all meant as justification of loss of self-control in an argument and getting angry and excited if crossed in one's views. It was merely a refusal to accept that as an argument against spirituality in general—spiritual experience, as I said, does not immediately lead to perfection and you cannot expect it to do so. Equality and self-control are most necessary to Yoga, but also *most difficult*, one has to strive slowly after them; they are not, at least in their completeness, easily attainable. The whole being has to be pervaded by calm and peace; the nerves and cells of the body have to be full of calm and peace. Until then what one has to strive to attain is an inner calm in the inner being which remains even when the outer is disturbed by invasions of grief, unease or anger. The Yogi arrives first at a sort of division in his being in which the inner Purusha fixed and calm looks at the perturbations of the outer man as one looks at the passions of an unreasonable child; that once fixed, he can proceed afterwards to control the outer man also. Whether he can easily control the actions depends on the temperament of his outer man, whether it is vehement, emotional and passionate or comparatively sedate and quiet. But a complete control of the outer man needs a long and arduous tapasya. It cannot be expected and even the assured inner calm cannot be expected of those who are still in a very early stage of the journey, who are still sadhaks and not Yogis.

(2) I said that as regards both cases, Z and X, my remarks must be taken as limited to this proposition that you cannot expect from the raw what you can expect from the ripe, that is from the siddha Yogi.

(3) But even from the siddha Yogi you cannot always expect

a perfect perfection; there are many who do not even care for the perfection of the outer nature, yet they have spiritual experience, even spiritual realisation and the unperfected outer nature cannot be held as a disproof of their realisation or experience. If you so regard it, you have to rule out of court the greater number of Yogis of the past and the Rishis of the old time also.

(4) I said that the ideal of my Yoga is different, but I cannot bind by it other spiritual men and their achievements or discipline. My own ideal is transformation of the outer nature, perfection as perfect as it can be. But it is impossible to say that those who have not achieved it or did not care to achieve it had no spirituality or that their spirituality was of no value. Beautiful conduct — not politeness which is an outer thing, however valuable, — but beauty founded upon a spiritual realisation of unity and harmony projected into life, is certainly part of the perfect perfection. But all that I regard as the ideal, the thing to be attained in the fullness of the siddhi. I do not expect perfect perfection from those who are on the way and as yet far from the goal. If they have it, it is delightful; but if they do not have it, I cannot deduce from that that they have no spiritual experiences or that these experiences are of no value.

You yourself speak of the Baradi Brahmachari. Because of his habits of speech, it is surely impossible to deny greatness as a spiritual man to this remarkable ascetic admired by Ramakrishna and revered by Vivekananda. Even Ramakrishna himself had habits of speech about which Vivekananda in a letter to his gurubhais rates them for translating these portions as it would make a very bad impression on his English readers. But would these English readers have been justified in denouncing Ramakrishna on that account as an unspiritual man or spirituality as therefore without value?

This was my reasoning and, so stated in a clearer way, I hope, you will not find it either irrational or offensive. I wanted to clear this because, if you remain under the impression that I am saying outrageous things, it will be difficult to go farther.

I want to show that spiritual seeking and achievement are

not one limited thing that can be clearly defined in a single mental formula and reduced to a single rule or set of rules but a kingdom like the mental kingdom with all sorts of stages, lines, variations, provinces, types of spiritual men, and it is only by so understanding it that one can understand it truly, either in its past or in its future or put in their place the spiritual men of the past and the present or relate the different ideals, stages etc. thrown up in the spiritual evolution of the human being.

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I reply to your letter as Mother is still too much occupied to write.

What was in her view at the time was what is called in the psychology of Indian Yoga a "sattwic" perfection, perfection in the form of the qualities and actions such as would satisfy a mental idealism and be very visible and appreciable to others. This often generates a kind of pride and self-righteousness, a "sattwic" egoism, which makes the consciousness rigid and not flexible and plastic to the Divine Will. The true spiritual perfection is not so much of form; it is of the very substance of the consciousness and, as it consists at its base in an entire harmony with the Divine Consciousness and a free and plastic self-adaptation at each moment to the Divine Will, its forms and the forms of its action are not so easily visible or appreciable. The word "righteous" does not apply to its movements — they are simply right because they are in unison with the Divine.

Obviously real imperfections are not to be indulged — to take that as a principle would be dangerous; the "apparent" imperfections are those which might appear so to an outward view only. A "righteous" anger might easily be part of that self-righteousness which the Mother had in view, and to be identified with the movement of anger righteous or otherwise is spiritually undesirable. But a movement of the kind meant may seem to an outward view identical with the movements of imperfection in the nature, yet be quite the right one in the sense of rightness which I have indicated above. It is not a question of any particular action or attitude to be taken but of the consciousness

within giving a free and supple expression to the Divine Will acting through it.

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The existence of imperfections, even many and serious imperfections, cannot be a *permanent* bar to progress in the Yoga. (I do not speak of a recovery of the former opening, for, according to my experience, what comes after a period of obstruction or struggle is usually a new and wider opening, some larger consciousness and an advance on what had been gained before and seems—but only seems—to be lost for the moment.) The only bar that can be permanent—but need not be, for this too can change—is insincerity, and this does not exist in you. If imperfections were a bar, then no man could succeed in Yoga; for all are imperfect, and I am not sure, from what I have seen, that it is not those who have the greatest power for Yoga who have too, very often, or have had the greatest imperfections. You know, I suppose, the comment of Socrates on his own character; that could be said by many great Yogins of their own initial human nature. Also, self-expression in some form of art does not preclude serious imperfections and, of itself, does not cure them. Here again my experience is that men of this kind have great qualities, but also great faults and defects as a weight in the other balance. In Yoga the one thing that counts in the end is sincerity and with it the patience to persist in the path—many even without this patience go through, for—again I speak from personal experience,—in spite of revolt, impatience, depression, despondency, fatigue, temporary loss of faith, a force greater than one's outer self, the force of the Spirit, the drive of the soul's need, pushes them through the cloud and the mist to the goal before them. Imperfections can be stumbling blocks and give one a bad fall for the moment, but not a permanent bar. Obscurations due to some resistance in the nature can be more serious causes of delay, but they too do not last for ever.

The length of your period of dullness is also no sufficient reason for losing belief in your capacity or your spiritual destiny. I can look back to periods not of two but of many months of

blank suspension of all experience or progress. I believe that alternations of bright and dark periods are almost a universal experience of Yogins, and the exceptions are very rare. If one enquires into the reasons of this phenomenon,— very unpleasant to our impatient human nature,— it will be found, I think, that they are in the main two. The first is that the human consciousness either cannot bear a constant descent of the Light or Power or Ananda, or cannot at once receive and absorb it; it needs periods of assimilation, but this assimilation goes on behind the veil of the surface consciousness; the experience or the realisation that has descended retires behind that veil and leaves this outer or surface consciousness to lie fallow and become ready for a new descent. In the more developed stages of the Yoga these dark or dull periods become shorter, less trying as well as uplifted by the sense of the greater consciousness which, though not acting for immediate progress, yet remains and sustains the outer nature. The second cause is some resistance, something in the human nature that has not felt the former descents, is not ready, is perhaps unwilling to change,— often it is some strong habitual formation of the mind or the vital or some temporary inertia of the physical consciousness and not exactly a part of the nature — and this, whether showing or concealing itself, thrusts up the obstacle. If one can detect the cause in oneself, acknowledge it, see its workings and call down the Power for its removal, then the periods of obscurity can be greatly shortened and their acuity becomes less. But in any case the Divine Power is working always behind and one day, perhaps when one least expects it, the obstacle breaks, the clouds vanish and there is again the light and the sunshine. The best thing in these cases is, if one can manage it, not to fret, not to despond, but to insist quietly and keep oneself open, spread to the Light and waiting in faith for it to come: that, I have found, shortens these ordeals. Afterwards, when the obstacle disappears, one finds that a great progress has been made and that the consciousness is far more capable of receiving and retaining than before. There is a return for all the trials and ordeals of the spiritual life.

I write all this to show you that there is nothing peculiar to

you in this untoward experience, nothing that would warrant you in thinking yourself less called and fit than others for the Yoga, nothing that would justify you in taking the hand from the plough, even though you find long bits of hard soil that resist and need much labour. The opening you had is sufficient proof that you are meant for the Path; for it is a sure sign of the dawns that are to come hereafter.

Periods of Difficulty and Arrest

These periods of difficulty inevitably come — none is without them, for the lower nature is there in all. What you have to do is to keep the firmness of which you speak and persevere till the Divine Power and your will together have dealt with what rises from below. Why do you regard what rises and shows itself (*hīmatā, kṣudratā, āsakti, lobha*) as if it were peculiar to yourself? They are part of the very substance of the lower vital of the human being and there is no one who is without them. So their presence does not at all mean that you cannot reach the Mother. When the mind and soul have chosen the goal, the rest is bound to follow; only as they are more obscure, the resistance there is more blind and obstinate. But even in your vital there is now fixed the will to attain, it is only a lower part there that has had the habit of responding to these things and therefore when a wave comes, it does not know how to avoid and is swallowed up for a time. It can be for a time only, because these things are no longer really yours, since the central being and the greater part of the nature no longer desire them. You have only to go on firmly and the time will come when the waves no longer rise.

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The real reason of the difficulty and the constant alternation is the struggle between the veiled true being within and the outer nature, especially the lower vital full of desires and the physical mind full of obscurity and ignorance. This struggle is inevitable in human nature and no sadhak escapes it; everyone has to deal with that obscurity and resistance and its obstinacy and constant

recurrence; for the lower nature is not only persistent in its repetitions and returns, but even when it is on the point of changing, the general Powers of that plane in universal Nature try to keep up the resistance by bringing back the old movements at each step in order to prevent the progress from being confirmed for good and made final. It is true therefore that a constant sadhana persistent and unceasing is necessary if one wants to go quickly — though even otherwise one will arrive if the soul within has the call, for the soul will persist and after each obscuration or stumble will bring back the light and drive one on on the path till it feels that it is at last secure of a smooth and easy march to the goal.

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A difficulty comes or an arrest in some movement which you have begun or have been carrying on for some time. How is it to be dealt with? — for such arrests are inevitably frequent enough, not only for you, but for everyone who is a seeker; one might almost say that every step forward is followed by an arrest — at least, that is a very common, if not a universal experience. It is to be dealt with by becoming always more quiet, more firm in the will to go through, by opening oneself more and more so that any obstructing non-receptivity in the nature may diminish or disappear, by an affirmation of faith even in the midst of the obscurity, faith in the presence of a Power that is working behind the cloud and the veil, in the guidance of the Guru, by an observation of oneself to find any cause of the arrest, not in a spirit of depression or discouragement but with the will to find out and remove it. This is the only right attitude and, if one is persistent in taking it, the periods of arrest are not abolished, — for that cannot be at this stage, — but greatly shortened and lightened in their incidence. Sometimes these arrests are periods, long or short, of assimilation or unseen preparation, their appearance of sterile immobility is deceptive: in that case, with the right attitude, one can after a time, by opening, by observation, by accumulated experience, begin to feel, to get some inkling of what is being prepared or done. Sometimes it is a period

of true obstruction in which the Power at work has to deal with the obstacles in the way, obstacles in oneself, obstacles of the opposing cosmic forces or any other or of all together, and this kind of arrest may be long or short according to the magnitude or obstinacy or complexity of the impediments that are met. But here too the right attitude can alleviate or shorten and, if persistently taken, help to a more radical removal of the difficulties and greatly diminish the necessity of complete arrests hereafter.

On the contrary, an attitude of depression or unfaith in the help or the guidance or in the certitude of the victory of the guiding Power, a shutting up of yourself in the sense of the difficulties impedes the recovery, prolongs the difficulties, helps the obstructions to recur with force instead of progressively diminishing in their incidence. It is an attitude whose persistence or recurrence you must resolutely throw aside if you want to get over the obstruction which you feel so much—which the depressed attitude only makes, while it lasts, more acute.

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You should realise that these periods of clouding are not due to any special incapacity or perversity in you—even the best sadhaks have them. It is the difficulty of the human nature in getting transformed. This difficulty sometimes takes the form of a bad will in the vital somewhere or a tendency in the physical to cling to old mistakes and old habits or to shrink from the trouble of transformation—but in these respects you have made a great progress. What is there, is the mechanical habit of the lower nature in general—mechanical, not voluntary—to repeat the old movements to which it has been or was quite recently accustomed when any strong wave of them comes in from the surrounding universal Nature. This creates a kind of recurrence of relapse into the states which the spiritual progress is pushing out and it is not easy to get rid of this recurrence altogether. The one thing when they come is not to get distressed or upset, to realise what it is and to remain very quiet calling for the Mother's Force to push it away. In this way the habit

of these recurrences diminishes, the strength and intensity also, and on the other side one is able to recall the true consciousness and the true force, the bright, happy, peaceful, open condition more and more easily and quicker. One can then proceed on an assured basis to a more and more positive progress.

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Do not allow these ideas [*of unfitness*] to gain on you or even to occupy your mind. It is not by their merit or their effort or the capacity they show that men advance in the spiritual path, but by their opening to the divine help and grace. For that you must have the confidence that whatever your own weakness, the grace will not fail you. Difficulties may come, dry and barren moments or even periods may come, but they will be passed over and overcome. It is this idea and feeling that you must cherish and encourage and make to grow in you. Then it will be easier for you to advance.

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I do not think there is any sadhak however advanced who has the full consciousness all the time. These changes come and one cannot help it because there is something of the ordinary consciousness that is still left and it comes up to be dealt with. One has to understand this and not get upset — for getting upset only delays the process. If the true consciousness were constant in its fullness, the sadhana would be finished and there would be the siddhi. That cannot come at once.

Chapter Four

Resistances, Sufferings and Falls

Resistances in Sadhana

There are always these resistances in sadhana; it is because the world is full of forces that don't want men to find the Divine. Even the Rishis of old times used always to be obstructed and disturbed until they conquered desire, anger and all else and became full of the Divine.

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The resistance is not always an intentional one. It is the resistance of the nature, the mind's personal ideas and preferences, the vital's desires, attachments, depressions, revolts, egoistic insistences on its own ways and freedom to follow its inclinations and fancies, the physical's tamas, want of faith, inertia. These things are parts of human nature. The Force comes to change them, but if the sadhak accepts these things, justifies them, or simply allows them to hold his consciousness without reacting, then their resistance which is always there can last a long time.

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Your proposed remedy would be no remedy at all. One has to go forward not backward to some old starting point.

It is a wrong idea to get disgusted with doing the right thing because you cannot do it absolutely now. It has to be done by a progressive movement. In everyone there is something that resists, until the ignorant parts of the being are transformed. That is no reason for giving up. It is sufficient if there is something behind that feels and can respond even if it is very much covered by the obscure external nature. It is that in you which feels the Force above the head and the atmosphere of quietness, and it is through that that it will be done whatever the amount of the external resistance.

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What you feel coming across the meditation is a resistance in the subconscious material throwing up a thing like the cold or a nervous unrest or a causeless uneasiness. They must of course be dismissed. When this part opens to the pressure from above, then these things are felt no more.

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To break and rebuild is often necessary for the change; but once the fundamental consciousness has come there is no reason why it should be done with trouble and disturbance — it can be done quietly. It is the resistance of the lower parts that brings in trouble and disturbance.

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There is no invariable rule of such suffering. It is not the soul that suffers; the Self is calm and equal to all things and the only sorrow of the psychic being is the sorrow of the resistance of Nature to the Divine Will or the resistance of things and people to the call of the True, the Good and the Beautiful. What is affected by suffering is the vital nature and the body. When the soul draws towards the Divine, there may be a resistance in the mind and the common form of that is denial and doubt — which may create mental and vital suffering. There may again be a resistance in the vital nature whose principal character is desire and the attachment to the objects of desire, and if in this field there is conflict between the soul and the vital nature, between the Divine Attraction and the pull of the Ignorance, then obviously there may be much suffering of the mind and vital parts. The physical consciousness also may offer a resistance which is usually that of a fundamental inertia, an obscurity in the very stuff of the physical, an incomprehension, an inability to respond to the higher consciousness, a habit of helplessly responding to the lower mechanically, even when it does not want to do so; both vital and physical suffering may be the consequence. There is moreover the resistance of the Universal Nature which does not want the being to escape from the Ignorance into the Light. This may take the form of a vehement insistence on the continuation of

the old movements, waves of them thrown on the mind and vital and body so that old ideas, impulses, desires, feelings, responses continue even after they are thrown out and rejected, and can return like an invading army from outside, until the whole nature, given to the Divine, refuses to admit them. This is the subjective form of the universal resistance, but it may also take an objective form — opposition, calumny, attacks, persecution, misfortunes of many kinds, adverse conditions and circumstances, pain, illness, assaults from men or forces. There too the possibility of suffering is evident. There are two ways to meet all that — first that of the Self, calm, equality, a spirit, a will, a mind, a vital, a physical consciousness that remain resolutely turned towards the Divine and unshaken by all suggestion of doubt, desire, attachment, depression, sorrow, pain, inertia. This is possible when the inner being awakens, when one becomes conscious of the Self, of the inner mind, the inner vital, the inner physical, for that can more easily attune itself to the divine Will, and then there is a division in the being as if there were two beings, one within, calm, strong, equal, unperturbed, a channel of the Divine Consciousness and Force, one without, still encroached on by the lower Nature; but then the disturbances of the latter become something superficial which are no more than an outer ripple, — until these under the inner pressure fade and sink away and the outer being too remains calm, concentrated, unattackable. There is also the way of the psychic, — when the psychic being comes out in its inherent power, its consecration, adoration, love of the Divine, self-giving, surrender and imposes these on the mind, vital and physical consciousness and compels them to turn all their movements Godward. If the psychic is strong and master throughout, then there is no or little subjective suffering and the objective cannot affect either the soul or the other parts of the consciousness — the way is sunlit and a great joy and sweetness are the note of the whole sadhana. As for the outer attacks and adverse circumstances, that depends on the action of the Force transforming the relations of the being with the outer Nature; as the victory of the Force proceeds, they will be eliminated; but however long they last, they cannot impede the sadhana, for

then even adverse things and happenings become a means for its advance and for the growth of the spirit.

Pain and Suffering

The sufferings and distress which come to people are part of their karma, part of the experience the being has to go through on its way through life after life till it is ready for spiritual change. In the life of the sadhak all vicissitudes are part of the path and, if he is a sadhak, he will recognise them as such though he may not understand their full meaning till afterwards—good and bad fortune, outward happiness and suffering are to be taken with an unshaken equality and trust in the Divine Wisdom till one has attained a position in which, united with the Divine Will, one can dominate them.

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Suffering is not inflicted as a punishment for sin or for hostility—that is a wrong idea. Suffering comes like pleasure and good fortune as an inevitable part of life in the ignorance. The dualities of pleasure and pain, joy and grief, good fortune and ill fortune are the inevitable results of the ignorance which separates us from our true consciousness and from the Divine. Only by coming back to it can we get rid of suffering. Karma from the past lives exists, much of what happens is due to it, but not all. For we can mend our karma by our own consciousness and efforts. But the suffering is simply a natural consequence of past errors, not a punishment, just as a burn is the natural consequence of playing with fire. It is part of the experience by which the soul through its instruments learns and grows until it is ready to turn to the Divine.

*

Sometimes pain and suffering are means by which the soul is awakened and pushed forward to the Divine. That is the experience on which X constantly dwells as he has suffered much in his life—but all do not find it like that.

*

The idealist's question is why should there be pain at all, even if it is counterweighed by the fundamental pleasure of existence. The real crux is why should inadequacy, limit and suffering come across this natural pleasure of life. It does not mean that life is initially miserable in its very nature.

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Life as it is is certainly full of mishap and suffering and looks like an inconsequence of Nature that has no eventual significance. But even if one does not find the concealed significance, yet if one can live in the higher calm, one can pass through it without being immersed in its bitternesses or its engulfing turmoils. That you have seen for yourself. I certainly hope that you will arrive at stability and security in that higher calm and with it the security of life cannot fail to come.

The divine support will always be there if you hold on to it and our direct help cannot but be yours when you ask and call for it. You have only to hold on to your effort in spite of what seeks to shake you. Then certainly you will reach the height to which you aspire. I do not see why it should not be in the end the highest height—but that we will leave for the future to decide. To have solid calmness is in itself something fundamental and sufficient.

*

There is no need of suffering. Refuse it when it comes.

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There is no reason why suffering should be indispensable for making progress. You bring the suffering on yourself by the wrong ideas of the mind and by the revolts of the vital. The Mother's grace and love are there, but the mind refuses to recognise it. If there is confidence, if the mind and vital consent to surrender and have full faith and reliance, then there may be difficulties but there is no suffering.

There are people who think that the proper way of progress is through revolt, but this is a mistake. Conditions of light

followed by darker conditions come to everyone, but to revolt because there is delay and difficulty does not help. One has to go on in the confidence that in spite of all delays and difficulties, if one is faithful, then in the end, the goal will be reached and one will attain to the Divine.

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I cannot say that I follow very well the logic of your doubts. How does a brilliant scholar being clapped into prison invalidate the hope of the Yoga? There are many dismal spectacles in the world, but that is after all the very reason why Yoga has to be done. If the world were all happy and beautiful and ideal, who would want to change it or find it necessary to bring down a higher consciousness into earthly Mind and Matter? Your other argument is that the work of the Yoga itself is difficult, not easy, not a happy canter to the goal. Of course it is, because the world and human nature are what they are. I never said it was easy or that there were not obstinate difficulties in the way of the endeavour. Again I do not understand your point about raising up a new race by writing trivial letters. Of course not—nor by writing important letters either; even if I were to spend my time writing fine poems it would not build up a new race. Each activity is important in its own place—an electron or a molecule or a grain may be small things in themselves, but in their place they are indispensable to the building up of a world,—it cannot be made up only of mountains and sunsets and streamings of the aurora borealis—though these have their place there. All depends on the force behind these things and the purpose in their action—and that is known to the Cosmic Spirit which is at work,—and it works, I may add, not by the mind or according to human standards but by a greater consciousness which, starting from an electron, can build up a world and, using a “tangle of ganglia”, can make them the base here for the works of the Mind and Spirit in Matter, produce a Ramakrishna, or a Napoleon, or a Shakespeare. Is the life of a great poet, either, made up only of magnificent and important things? How many “trivial” things had to be dealt with and done before there could

be produced a *King Lear* or a *Hamlet*! Again, according to your own reasoning, would not people be justified in mocking at your pother — so they would call it, I do not — about metre and scansion and how many ways a syllable can be read? Why, they might say, is X wasting his time in trivial prosaic things like this when he might have been spending it in producing a beautiful lyric or fine music? But the worker knows and respects the material with which he must work and he knows why he is busy with “trifles” and small details and what is their place in the fullness of his labour.

As for faith, you write as if I had never had a doubt or any difficulty. I have had worse than any human mind can think of. It is not because I have ignored difficulties, but because I have seen them more clearly, experienced them on a larger scale than anyone living now or before me that, having faced and measured them, I am sure of the results of my work. Even if I still saw the chance that it might come to nothing (which is impossible), I would go on unperturbed, because I would still have done to the best of my power the work that I had to do and what is so done always counts in the economy of the universe. But why should I feel that all this may come to nothing when I see each step and where it is leading and every week and day — once it was every year and month and hereafter it will be every day and hour — brings me so much nearer to my goal? In the way that one treads with the greater Light above, even every difficulty gives its help and has its value and the Night itself carries in it the burden of the light that has to be.

As for your own case, it comes to this that experiences come and stop, there are constant ups and downs, in times of recoil and depression no advance at all seems to have been made, there is as yet no certitude. So it was with me also, so it is with everyone, not with you alone. The way to the heights is always like that up to a certain point, but the ups and downs, the difficulties and obstacles are no proof that it is a chimera to aspire to the summits.

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What you said to X is indeed very true, especially the phrase, “However feeble the clay, the flower is in the bud and it will blossom.” That is true not only of individuals, but of the earth as a whole — Earth is a feeble clay for the spiritual planting, but all that is sown in it buds eventually and the bud once there will blossom.

La Rochefoucauld’s saying [“*We are always strong enough to bear the sufferings of others*”] is true in general, but not quite true. There are some who can bear their own sufferings much better than they can bear the sufferings of others, while the Yogi can bear the whole world’s suffering in himself and yet not falter.

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The attitude you express in your letter is quite the right one — whatever sufferings come on the path, are not too high a price for the victory that has to be won and, if they are taken in the right spirit, they become even a means towards the victory.

Dangers, Falls and Failures

I have never said that Yoga or that this Yoga is a safe and easy path. What I say is that anyone who has the will to go through can go through. For the rest, if you aim high, there is always the danger of a steep fall if you misconduct your aeroplane. But the danger is for those who allow themselves to entertain a double being, aiming high but also indulging their lower outlook and hankerings. What else can you expect when people do that? You must become single-minded, then the difficulties of the mind and vital will be overcome. Otherwise those who oscillate between their heights and their abysses, will always be in danger till they have become single-minded. That applies to the “advanced” as well as to the beginner. These are facts of nature — I can’t pretend for anybody’s comfort that they are otherwise. But there is the fact also that nobody need keep himself in this danger. One-mindedness (*ekanisṭhā*), surrender to the Divine, faith, true love for the Divine, complete sincerity in the will, spiritual humility (real, not formal) — there are so many things

that can be a safeguard against any chance of eventual downfall. Slips, stumbles, difficulties, upsettings everyone has; one can't be insured against these things, but if one has the safeguards, they are transitory, help the nature to learn and are followed by a better progress.

*

Men like X and Y are not likely to pretend to have experiences they do not have. Z's fall after his one year's rapid progress had obvious reasons in his character which do not exist in theirs. But apart from that the fall of a sadhak from Yoga proves nothing against the truth of spiritual experience. It is well known to all Yogis that a fall is possible and the Gita speaks of it more than once. But how does the fall prove that spiritual experience is not true and genuine? The fall of a man from a great height does not prove that he never reached a great height. The experiences of Y have been those of many others before him and will be those of many others who do not yet have them; I fail to see why the fact of people having them or their intensity or the joy and confidence they give should make them suspect as untrue.

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A man who has risen high *can* fall low, especially if his experiences are only through the spiritual mind and the vital and physical remain as they were. But it is an absurdity to say that he is *sure* to fall low.

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I have not said that to reach the overmind is impossible; I have only said that it is difficult. Difficulty is not a reason why the things should not be done.

It is not easy for a physical being to reach the highest truth because his consciousness is something ignorant that has emerged out of the material inconscience and is very much tied to and hampered by the obscurity of its origin—in addition to the mental and vital difficulties of ego and desire. Yoga itself is

not easy; if it were so, it would be a multitude and not only a few that would be practising it.

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There is no reason to have a vague doubt about one's own future founded upon no other ground than the failure of others. That is what X and Y are always doing, and it is a great disturber of their progress. Why not instead, if one is to go by others, gather hope from the example of those who are satisfied and progressing? It is true however that these do not show their success as the others do their failure. However, that apart, failure comes by very positive errors and not by the absence of an invariable and unflagging aspiration or effort. The effort demanded of the sadhak is that of aspiration, rejection and surrender. If these three are done, the rest is to come of itself by the grace of the Mother and the working of her force in you. But of the three the most important is surrender of which the first necessary form is trust and confidence and patience in difficulty. There is no rule that trust and confidence can only remain if aspiration is there. On the contrary when even aspiration is not there because of the pressure of inertia, trust and confidence and patience can remain. If trust and patience fail when aspiration is quiescent, that would mean that the sadhak is relying solely on his own effort—it would mean, "Oh my aspiration has failed, so there is no hope for me. My aspiration fails so what can Mother do?" On the contrary, the sadhak should feel, "Never mind, my aspiration will come back again. Meanwhile I know that the Mother is with me even when I do not feel her; she will carry me through even the darkest period." That is the fully right attitude you must have. To those who have it depression could do nothing; even if it comes, it has to return baffled. That is not tamasic surrender. Tamasic surrender is when one says, "I won't do anything; let Mother do everything. Aspiration, rejection, surrender even are not necessary. Let her do all that in me." There is a great difference between the two attitudes. One is that of the shirker who won't do anything, the other is that of the sadhak who does his best but even when he is reduced to

quiescence for a time and things seem adverse, keeps always his trust in the Mother's force and presence behind all and by that trust baffles the opposition force and calls back the activity of the sadhana.

Section Two

Overcoming the Difficulties of Yoga

Chapter One

The Right Attitude towards Difficulties

The Sunlit Path and the Path of Darkness

I don't believe much in this Divine Darkness. It is a Christian idea. For us the Divine is Peace, Purity, Wideness, Light, Ananda.

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I spoke of strange ideas in connection with what you said about peace and cheerfulness being obstacles in the Yoga because they are incompatible with an ardent longing for realisation. Peace was the very first thing that the Yogins and seekers of old asked for and it was a quiet and silent mind — and that always brings peace — that they declared to be the best condition for realising the Divine. A cheerful and sunlit heart is the fit vessel for the Ananda and who shall say that Ananda or what prepares it is an obstacle to the divine union? As for despondency, it is surely a terrible burden to carry on the way. One has to pass through it sometimes, like Christian of *The Pilgrim's Progress* through the Slough of Despond, but its constant reiteration cannot be anything but an obstacle. The Gita specially says, "Practise the Yoga with an undespondent heart", *anirvijn̄acetasā*.

I know perfectly well that pain and suffering and struggle and excesses of despair are natural — though not inevitable — on the way, — not because they are helps, but because they are imposed on us by the darkness of this human nature out of which we have to struggle into the Light. . . .

The dark path is there and there are many who make like the Christians a gospel of spiritual suffering; many hold it to be the unavoidable price of victory. It may be so under certain circumstances, as it has been in so many lives at least at the beginning, or one may choose to make it so. But then the price has

to be paid with resignation, fortitude or a tenacious resilience. I admit that if borne in that way the attacks of the Dark Forces or the ordeals they impose have a meaning. After each victory gained over them, there is then a sensible advance; often they seem to show us the difficulties in ourselves which we have to overcome and to say, "Here you must conquer us and here." But all the same it is a too dark and difficult way which nobody should follow on whom the necessity does not lie.

In any case one thing can never help and that is to despond always and say, "I am unfit; I am not meant for the Yoga." And worse still are these perilous mental formations such as you are always accepting that you must fare like X (one whose difficulty of exaggerated ambition was quite different from yours) and that you have only six years etc. These are clear formations of the Dark Forces seeking not only to sterilise your aspiration but to lead you away and so prevent your sharing in the fruit of the victory hereafter. I do not know what Krishnaprem has said but his injunction, if you have rightly understood it, is one that cannot stand as valid, since so many have done Yoga relying on tapasya or anything else but not confident of any Divine Grace. It is not that, but the soul's demand for a higher Truth or a higher life that is indispensable. Where that is, the Divine Grace whether believed in or not, will intervene. If you believe, that hastens and facilitates things; if you cannot yet believe, still the soul's aspiration will justify itself with whatever difficulty and struggle.

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I am extremely glad to know that the worst of the attack has passed; I hope the after-effects will quickly disappear. You had stood out so well for two months and repelled all incipient movements of the kind, that the sudden violence of this one was not expected — especially as the last darshan had gone off well. But when they get a chance these forces take it.

I quite agree with you in not relishing the idea of another attack of this nature. I am myself, I suppose, more a hero by necessity than by choice — I do not love storms and battles —

at least on the subtle plane. The sunlit way may be an illusion, though I do not think it is—for I have seen people treading it for years; but a way with only natural or even only moderate fits of rough weather, a way without typhoons surely is possible—there are so many examples. *Durgam pathastat* may be generally true and certainly the path of laya or nirvana is difficult in the extreme to most (although in my case I walked into nirvana without intending it or rather nirvana walked casually into me not so far from the beginning of my Yogic career without asking my leave). But the path *need* not be cut by periodical violent storms, though that it *is* so for a great many is an obvious fact. But even for these, if they stick to it, I find that after a certain point the storms diminish in force, frequency, duration. That is why I insisted so much on your sticking—for if you stick, the turning-point is bound to come. I have seen some astonishing instances here recently of this typhonic periodicity beginning to fade out after years and years of violent recurrence.

These things are not part of the normal difficulties, however acute, of the nature but especial formations—tornadoes which start (usually from a particular point, sometimes varying) and go whirling round in the same circle always till it is finished. In your case the crucial point, whatever may have been the outward starting-point if any, is the idea or feeling of frustration in the sadhana; once that takes hold of the mind, all the rest follows. That again is why I have been putting all sorts of suggestions before you for getting rid of this idea—not because my suggestions, however useful and true if they can be followed, are binding laws of Yoga, but because if followed they can wipe out this point of danger. A formation like this is very often the result of something in past lives—the Mother has so seen it in yours—which prolongs a karmic sanskara (as the Buddhists would say) and tries to repeat itself once again. To dissolve it ought to be possible if one sees it for what it is and is resolved to get rid of it—never allowing any mental justification of it, however logical, right and plausible the justification may seem to be—always replying to all the mind's arguments or the vital's feelings in favour of it, like Cato to the debaters, “*Delenda est*

Carthago" — "Carthage must be destroyed", Carthage in this case being the formation and its nefarious circle.

Anyway the closing idea in your letter is the right one. "The Divine is worth ferreting out even if oceans of gloom have to be crossed." If you could confront the formation always with that firm resolution, it should bring victory. In the Mother's vision Kali did express a wish to interfere and break the thing—I don't know how she proposes to do it—by giving you the strength you pray for or by breaking the head of the unwelcome lodger or visitor. I hope she will soon do it.

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A possibility in the soul or in the inner being generally remains always a possibility—at the worst, its fulfilment can be postponed, but even that only if the possessor of the possibility gives up or breaks away from the true spiritual path without probability of early return—because he is in chase of the magnified and distorted shadow of his own ego or for some other distortion of the nature produced by a wrong egoistic misuse of the Yoga. A mere appearance of inability or obstruction of progress in the outer being, a covering of the inner by the outer, even if it lasts for years, has no probative value, because that happens to a great number, perhaps to the majority of aspirants to Yoga. The reason is that they take somehow the way of raising up all the difficulties in their nature almost at the beginning and tunnelling through the mass instead of the alternative way of going ahead, slowly or swiftly, and trusting to time, Yoga and the Force Divine to clear out of them in the proper season what has to be eliminated. It is not of their own deliberate choice that they do it, something in their nature drives them. There are many here who have had or still have that long covering of the inner by the outer or separation of the inner from the outer consciousness. You yourself took that way in spite of our expostulations to you advising you to take the sunlit road, and you have not yet got out of the habit. But that does not mean that you won't get out of the tunnel and when you do you will find your inner being waiting for you on the other side—in the

sun and not in the shadow. I don't think I am more patient than a guru ought to be. Anyone who is a guru at all ought to be patient, first because he knows the difficulty of human nature and, secondly, because he knows how the Yoga force works, in so many contrary ways, open or subterranean, slow or swift, volcanic or coralline,—passing even from one to the other—and he does not use the surface reason but the eye of inner knowledge and Yogic experience.

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There is no contradiction between my former statements about the sunlit path and what I have said about the difficult and unpleasant passages which the Yoga has to pass through in its normal development in the way of human nature. The sunlit path can be followed by those who are able to practise surrender, first a central surrender and afterwards a more complete self-giving in all the parts of the being. If they can achieve and preserve the attitude of the central surrender, if they can rely wholly on the Divine and accept cheerfully whatever comes to them from the Divine, then their path becomes sunlit and may even be straightforward and easy. They will not escape all difficulties, no seeker can, but they will be able to meet them without pain and despondency,—as indeed the Gita recommends that Yoga should be practised, *anirvijnacetasā*,—trusting in the inner guidance and perceiving it more and more or else in the outer guidance of the Guru. It can also be followed even when one feels no light and no guidance if there is or if one can acquire a bright settled faith and happy bhakti or has the nature of the spiritual optimist and the firm belief or feeling that all that is done by the Divine is done for the best even when we cannot understand his action. But all have not this nature, most are very far from it, and the complete or even the central surrender is not easy to get and to keep it always is hard enough for our human nature. When these things are not there, the liberty of the soul is not attained and we have instead to undergo the law or fulfil a hard and difficult discipline.

That law is imposed on us by the Ignorance which is the

nature of all our parts; our physical being is obviously a mass of ignorance, the vital is full of ignorant desires and passions, the mind is also an instrument of Ignorance struggling towards some kind of imperfect and mostly inferior and external knowledge. The path of the seeker proceeds through this ignorance; for a long time he can find no light of solid experience or realisation, only the hopes and ideas and beliefs of the mind which do not give the true spiritual seeing; or he gets glimpses of light or periods of light but the light often goes out and the luminous periods are followed by frequent or long periods of darkness. There are constant fluctuations, persistent disappointments, innumerable falls and failures. No path of Yoga is really easy or free from these difficulties or fluctuations; the way of bhakti is supposed to be the easiest, but still we find constant complaints that one is always seeking but never finding and even at the best there is a constant ebb and tide, *milana* and *viraha*, joy and weeping, ecstasy and despair. If one has the faith or in the absence of faith the will to go through, one passes on and enters into the joy and light of the divine realisation. If one gets some habit of true surrender, then all this is not necessary; one can enter into the sunlit way. Or if one can get some touch of what is called pure bhakti, *suddhā bhakti*, then whatever happens that is enough; the way becomes easy, or if it does not, still this is a sufficient start to support us to the end without the sufferings and falls that happen so often to the ignorant seeker.

In all Yoga there are three essential objects to be attained by the seeker: union or abiding contact with the Divine, liberation of the soul or the Self, the Spirit, and a certain change of the consciousness, the spiritual change. It is this change, which is necessary for reaching the other two objects, necessary at least to a certain degree, that is the cause of most of the struggles and difficulties; for it is not easy to accomplish it; a change of the mind, a change of the heart, a change of the habits of the will is called for and is obstinately resisted by our ignorant nature. In this Yoga a complete transformation of the nature is aimed at because that is necessary for the complete union and the complete liberation not only of the soul and the spirit but of the

nature itself. It is also a Yoga of works and of the integral divine life; for that the integral transformation of nature is evidently necessary; the union with the Divine has to carry with it a full entrance into the divine consciousness and the divine nature; there must be not only *sāyujya* or *sālokya* but *sādṛṣya* or, as it is called in the Gita, *sādharmya*. The full Yoga, Purna Yoga, means a fourfold path, a Yoga of knowledge for the mind, a Yoga of bhakti for the heart, a Yoga of works for the will and a Yoga of perfection for the whole nature. But, ordinarily, if one can follow wholeheartedly any one of these lines, one arrives at the result of all the four. For instance, by bhakti one becomes close to the Divine, becomes intensely aware of Him and arrives at knowledge, for the Divine is the Truth and the Reality; by knowing Him, says the Upanishads, one comes to know all. By bhakti also the will is led into the road of the works of love and the service of the Divine and the government of the nature and its acts by the Divine, and that is Karmayoga. By bhakti also comes spiritual change of the consciousness and the action of the nature which is the first step towards its transformation. So it is with all the other lines of the fourfold path.

But it may be that there are many obstacles in the being to the domination of the mind and heart and will by bhakti and the consequent contact with the Divine. The too great activity of the intellectual mind and its attachment to its own pride of ideas, its prejudices, its fixed notions and its ignorant reason may shut the doors to the inner light and prevent the full tide of bhakti from flooding everything; it may also cling to a surface mental activity and refuse to go inside and allow the psychic vision and the feelings of the inner heart to become its guides, though it is by this vision and this feeling that bhakti grows and conquers. So too the passions and desires of the vital being and its ego may block the way and prevent the self-giving of the mind and heart to the Divine. The inertia, ignorance and inconscience of one's physical consciousness, its attachment to fixed habits of thought and feeling and action, its persistence in the old grooves may come badly in the way of the needed change. In such circumstances the Divine may have to bide his

time; but if there is real hunger in the heart, all that cannot prevent the final realisation; still, it may have to wait till the obstructions are removed or at least so much cleared out as to admit an unimpeded working of the Divine Power on the surface nature. Till then, there may be periods of inner ease and some light in the mind, periods also of the feeling of bhakti or of peace, periods of the joy of self-consecration in works and service; for these will take long to stay permanently and there will be much struggle and unrest and suffering. In the end the Divine's working will appear and one will be able to live in his presence.

I have described the difficulties of Yoga at their worst, as they may hamper and afflict even those predestined to the realisation but as often there is an alternation or a mixture of the light and the darkness, initial attainment perhaps and heavy subsequent difficulties, progress and attacks and retardations, strong movements forward and a floundering in the bogs of the Ignorance. Even great realisations may come and high splendours of light and spiritual experience and yet the goal is not attained; for in the phrase of the Rig Veda, "As one climbs from peak to peak there is made clear the much that is still to be done." But there is always something that either carries us on or forces us on. This may take the shape of something conscious in front, the shape of a mastering spiritual idea, indestructible aspiration or fixed faith which may seem sometimes entirely veiled or even destroyed in periods of darkness or violent upheaval, but always they reappear when the storm has passed or the blackness of night has thinned, and reassert their influence. But also it may be something in the very essence of the being deeper than any idea or will in the mind, deeper and more permanent than the heart's aspiration but hidden from one's own observation. One who is moved to Yoga by some curiosity of the mind or even by its desire for knowledge can turn aside from the path from disappointment or any other cause; still more can those who take it up from some inner ambition or vital desire turn away through revolt or frustration or the despondency of frequent check and failure. But if this deeper thing is there, then one

cannot permanently leave the path of spiritual endeavour: one may decide to leave the path but is not allowed from within to do it or one may leave but is obliged to return to it by the secret spiritual need within him.

All these things are common to every path of Yoga; they are the normal difficulties, fluctuations and struggles which come across the path of spiritual effort. But in this Yoga there is an order or succession of the workings of the secret Force which may vary greatly in its circumstances in each sadhak, but still maintains its general line. Our evolution has brought the being up out of inconscient Matter into the Ignorance of mind, life and body tempered by an imperfect knowledge and is trying to lead us into the light of the Spirit, to lift us into that light and to bring the light down into us, into body and life as well as mind and heart and to fill with it all that we are. This and its consequences, of which the greatest is the union with the Divine and life in the divine consciousness, is the meaning of the integral transformation. Mind is our present topmost faculty; it is through the thinking mind and the heart with the soul, the psychic being behind them that we have to grow into the Spirit, for what the Force first tries to bring about is to fix the mind in the right central idea, faith or mental attitude and the right aspiration and poise of the heart and to make these sufficiently strong and firm to last in spite of other things in the mind and heart which are other than or in conflict with them. Along with this it brings whatever experiences, realisations or descent or growth of knowledge the mind of the individual is ready for at the time or as much of it, however small, as is necessary for its further progress: sometimes these realisations and experiences are very great and abundant, sometimes few and small or negligible; in some there seems to be in this first stage nothing much of these things or nothing decisive—the Force seems to concentrate on a preparation of the mind only. In many cases the sadhana seems to begin and proceed with experiences in the vital; but in reality this can hardly take place without some mental preparation, even if it is nothing more than a turning of the mind or some kind of opening which makes the

vital experiences possible. In any case, to begin with the vital is a hazardous affair; the difficulties there are more numerous and more violent than on the mental plane and the pitfalls are innumerable. The access to the soul, the psychic being, is less easy because it is covered up with a thick veil of ego, passion and desire. One is apt to be swallowed up in a maze of vital experiences, not always reliable, the temptation of small siddhis, the appeal of the powers of darkness to the ego. One has to struggle through these densities to the psychic being behind and bring it forward; then only can the sadhana on the vital plane be safe.

However that may be, the descent of the sadhana, of the action of the Force into the vital plane of our being becomes after some time necessary. The Force does not make a wholesale change of the mental being and nature, still less an integral transformation before it takes this step: if that could be done, the rest of the sadhana would be comparatively secure and easy. But the vital is there and always pressing on the mind and heart, disturbing and endangering the sadhana and it cannot be left to itself for too long. The ego and desires of the vital, its disturbances and upheavals have to be dealt with and if not at once expelled, at least dominated and prepared for a gradual if not a rapid modification, change, illumination. This can only be done on the vital plane itself by descending to that level. The vital ego itself must become conscious of its own defects and willing to get rid of them; it must decide to throw away its vanities, ambitions, lusts and longings, its rancours and revolts and all the rest of the impure stuff and unclean movements within it. This is the time of the greatest difficulties, revolts and dangers. The vital ego hates being opposed in its desires, resents disappointment, is furious against wounds to its pride and vanity; it does not like the process of purification and it may very well declare Satyagraha against it, refuse to cooperate, justify its own demands and inclinations, offer passive resistance of many kinds, withdraw the vital support which is necessary both to the life and the sadhana and try to withdraw the being from the path of spiritual endeavour. All this has to be faced and

overcome, for the temple of the being has to be swept clean if the Lord of our being is to take his place and receive our worship there.

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I know that this is a time of trouble for you and everybody. It is so for the whole world; confusion, trouble, disorder and upset everywhere is the general state of things. The better things that are to come are preparing or growing under a veil and the worse are prominent everywhere. The one thing is to hold on and to hold out till the hour of light has come.

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I am afraid I can hold out but cold comfort for the present at least to those of your correspondents who are lamenting the present state of things. Things *are* bad, are growing worse and may at any time grow worst or worse than worst if that is possible—and anything however paradoxical seems possible in the present perturbed world. The best thing for them is to realise that all this was necessary because certain possibilities had to emerge and be got rid of if a new and better world was at all to come into being; it would not have done to postpone them for a later time. It is as in Yoga where things active or latent in the being have to be put into action in the light so that they may be grappled with and thrown out or to emerge from latency in the depths for the same purificatory purpose. Also they can remember the adage that night is darkest before dawn and that the coming of dawn is inevitable. But they must remember too that the new world whose coming we envisage is not to be made of the same texture as the old and different only in pattern and that it must come by other means, from within and not from without—so the best way is not to be too much preoccupied with the lamentable things that are happening outside, but themselves to grow within so that they may be ready for the new world whatever form it may take.

Optimism and Pessimism

You are quite right in taking an optimistic and not a pessimistic attitude in the sadhana — progressive sadhana is enormously helped by an assured faith and confidence. Such a confidence helps to realise, for it is dynamic and tends to fulfil itself.

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As for the sceptics — well, optimism even unjustified is still justifiable because it gives a chance and a force for getting things done, while pessimism even with all the grounds that appearances can give to it, is simply a clog and a “No going” affair. The right thing is to go ahead and get done all that can be, if possible all that ought to be, but at least do so much that all that ought will feel bound to come along on the heels of my doing. That is the prophets and the gospel.

Treating Difficulties as Opportunities

The attitude you have taken is the right one. It is this feeling and attitude which help you to overcome so rapidly the attacks that sometimes fall upon you and throw you out of the right consciousness. As you say, difficulties so taken become opportunities; the difficulty faced in the right spirit and conquered, one finds that an obstacle has disappeared, a fresh step forward has been taken. To question, to resist in some part of the being increases trouble and difficulties — that was why an unquestioning acceptance, an unfailing obedience to the directions of the Guru was laid down as indispensable in the old Indian Yogas — it was demanded not for the sake of the Guru, but for the sake of the disciple.

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This kind of acute struggle comes very often to a sadhak when he wants to make a complete and decisive progress instead of the slow elimination which is the usual course of nature; the strong urge upward is resisted by a vehement pull-back from below.

But the advantage is that when one persists and conquers, much has been gained by the struggle and in that part of the being that resists a decisive advantage. Persevere therefore and do not grieve for occasional waverings or stumbles which can easily happen in so arduous a combat. It should always be the rule for the sadhak not to linger over such things but to pick oneself up again and go resolutely forward. Our help, our force, our blessings will be with you always aiding each step till the final victory.

*

Why get excited over these small things or let them disturb you? If you remain quiet, things will go much better and, if there is any difficulty, you are more likely to find out a way in a quiet mind open to the Peace and Power. That is the secret of going on, not to allow things and happenings, not even real mistakes, to upset you, but to remain very quiet, confiding in the Power to lead you and set things more and more right. If one does that, then things do get actually more and more right and even the difficulties and mistakes become means for learning and steps towards progress.

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Do not allow yourself to be worried or upset by small things. Look at things from an inner point of view and try to get the benefit of all that happens. If you make a mistake, don't get distressed because you made a mistake — rather profit by it to see the reason so as to get the right movement in future. This you can do only if you look at it quietly from the inner being without sorrow or disturbance.

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Of course, one must not make a mistake for the purpose of bringing it out or accept the mistake once made, — but if it comes, one has to take advantage of it to change.

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An occurrence like that should always be taken as an opportunity of self-conquest. Put your pride and dignity in that — in not

being mastered by the passions, but their master.

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It is indeed true that when one conquers a difficulty or goes forward, it creates a right current in the atmosphere. Moreover each time one gets an opening, it becomes more possible to make it permanent.

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It is true that if one has the true basis, then after every attack one finds oneself farther advanced in progress.

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Yes, a great progress should only spur one on to a greater progress beside which the first will appear as nothing.

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Yes, that is so. Each victory gained over oneself means new strength to gain more victories.

The Certitude of Victory

You must make grow in you the peace that is born of the certitude of victory.

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If these things [*anger, desire etc.*] had disappeared already, there would be the victory already. What I mean [by “*the certitude of victory*”] is the certitude of the eventual victory which is a matter of faith and an inner reliance upon the Divine. The peace born of this certitude carries one through all persistence or return of difficulties.

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Whatever resistance there is in the outer being will go, only it takes time. It is always best to take one's foundation on that certitude and remain quiet and steadfast with it in mind even

when one cannot react actively against the difficulty. For the quiet passive resistance will make it pass sooner,—even if one is disturbed and anxious.

Even when one cannot call in actively the Mother's Force, one must keep the reliance that it will come.

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Do not let the difficulties you feel or meet from outside overcome or depress you. Keep this one thing in your mind that to come to the Divine is your spiritual destiny and since you have been here and been accepted by us that can be taken as the seal upon it. If it takes a little longer time than you could wish for it to materialise, this should not make you think of it otherwise — for these difficulties and external obstacles and incertitudes always come to the seeker. Neither the difficulties in yourself or the obstacles presented by life are as insurmountable as they seem to your physical mind when they are pressing upon it. Remember also that although here the conditions would be more favourable, yet even at a distance the grace and help can be there with you. Only fix yourself on the goal, make the inner choice once for all firmly and completely; it is there in your soul, fix it in your mind also. Once there, fixed and unalterable, it will prevail over the difficulties of your own vital nature and the physical world's opposition, misunderstanding or reluctance.

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The reaching is already assured, as it cannot but be when a sincere and abiding aspiration is supported by a sincere and abiding endeavour. With that and the Grace supporting, all difficulties can be and surely will be overcome.

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The victory is always sure — even when there is difficulty, never doubt that the victory will be there.

Chapter Two

Steps towards Overcoming Difficulties

Ways of Dealing with Difficulties

This sadhana is a Yoga of transformation of the human consciousness into the divine consciousness. The sadhaks who come here are human beings with all the human weaknesses, but with a possibility of the transformation and an aspiration for it. For getting rid of their human weaknesses — such as lust, greed, vanity, pride, falsehood — they must become conscious of them, must always reject them, must call in the Mother's presence, the divine Consciousness, the divine Force to help them in rejecting their defects and to transform them. If they do that, then all that is necessary for the change will be done.

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When the old movements or suggestions or voices come, —

- (1) Reject them always — do not listen, take no interest.
- (2) If they persist, do not believe what they say or allow them to influence you — know that they are voices or movements of a false, confused and inferior consciousness. You have seen what the real Truth is and how great it is.
- (3) Concentrate on something else, as firmly as possible.
- (4) Aspire steadily for contact with the Mother's Light and Force.

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This is the right attitude, to have faith and not mind the difficulties. Difficulties — and serious ones — there cannot fail to be in the path of Yoga, because it is not easy to change all at once the ignorant human consciousness and make it a spiritual consciousness open to the Divine. But with faith one need not

mind the difficulties; the Divine Force is there and will overcome them.

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Whatever is difficult can indeed be made easy by truth in the heart and sincerity and faith in the endeavour, even what is impossible can become possible. It is often found too that after some amount of practice and faithful endeavour, there comes an intervention from within and what might have taken long is decisively and quickly done.

Your prayer will surely be answered, for it is to that you are moving.

Facing Circumstances

You should not be so dependent on outward things; it is this attitude that makes you give so excessive an importance to circumstances. I do not say that circumstances cannot help or hinder — but they are circumstances, not the fundamental thing which is in ourselves, and their help or their hindrance ought not to be of primary importance. In Yoga, as in every great or serious human effort, there is always bound to be an abundance of adverse interventions and unfavourable circumstances which have to be overcome. To give them too great an importance increases their importance and their power to multiply themselves, gives them, as it were, confidence in themselves and the habit of coming. To face them with equanimity — if one cannot manage a cheerful persistence against them of confident and resolute will — diminishes on the contrary their importance and effect and in the end, though not at once, gets rid of their persistence and recurrence. It is therefore a principle in Yoga to recognise the determining power of what is within us — for that is the deeper truth — to set that right and establish the inward strength as against the power of outward circumstances. The strength is there — even in the weakest; one has to find it, to unveil it and to keep it in front throughout the journey and the battle.

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It was inevitable that there should be difficulties once your husband has turned back from his favourable attitude. But as we told you the only way to face and overcome them is to remain firm with a confidence in the Divine that beyond all difficulties lies the realisation and to proceed either boldly or silently on your way in spite of all that people may do or say and in spite of all troubles and trials that may come in the course of the life or in the course of the sadhana. If one keeps this position the difficulties will either diminish or disappear or if for any reason they become acute for a while, will collapse after a time.

You are not at any time out of our minds. We are there with you in your difficulties and troubles — remain calm and assured and you will feel the inner help. Do not yield to depression for depression only gives the opposition and difficulties a hold upon you; call quietly and persistently for strength and the strength will come.

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That is the inconvenience of going away from a difficulty,—it runs after one,—or rather one carries it with oneself, for the difficulty is truly inside, not outside. Outside circumstances only give it the occasion to manifest itself and so long as the inner difficulty is not conquered, the circumstances will always crop up one way or another.

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As for his difficulties and troubles, there is little hope of his overcoming them if he does not realise that they come from within him and not from outside. It is the weakness of his vital nature, the inefficient helplessness of his nervous being always weeping and complaining and lamenting instead of facing life and overcoming its difficulties, it is the sentimental lachrymose attitude it takes that keeps his troubles unsolved and alive. This is a temperament which the gods will not help because they know that help is useless, for it will either not be received or will be spilled and wasted; and all that is rajasic and Asuric in the world despises and tramples upon this kind of nature. If he had

learned a calm strength and quiet courage without weakness and without fuss and violence, founded on confidence in the help he could always have received from here and on openness to the Mother's force, things would have been favourably settled by this time. But he cannot take advantage of any help given him because his vital nature cherishes its weakness and is always indulging and rhetorically expressing it instead of throwing it away with contempt as a thing unworthy of manhood and unfit for a sadhaka. It is only if he so rejects it that he can receive strength from us and stand in life or progress in the sadhana.

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It is also well that you have reconciled yourself with the place [Sylhet, Bengal] and have the feeling of strength to deal with the situation there. A certain power of adaptation and harmonisation of the surroundings is necessary — you had it very strongly and were therefore successful wherever you went. The recoil from Sylhet made you nervous and depressed and spoiled for a time the action of this power in you. Now with your new attitude I hope it will return and bring the solution of all your difficulties.

We send you our blessings. Keep yourself always open to the Power from above and to our help from here and remain firm and strong against all difficulties that may yet remain either in the outer life or the sadhana. On these conditions victory is always sure.

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When the soul is meant to go forward and there is an external weakness like that, circumstances do come like that to help the external being against itself — which means that there must be a truly sincere aspiration behind; otherwise it does not happen.

Recognising One's Weaknesses

To recognise, as you have done, a fault in the nature does not indeed remove it altogether at once, but it is a great step towards

it. It does not remove it at once because of the force of habit in the nature, but still to be conscious and have the will to remove it helps to weaken its force and assists the Mother's working very greatly.

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To recognise one's weaknesses and false movements and draw back from them is the way towards liberation.

Not to judge anyone but oneself until one can see things from a calm mind and a calm vital is an excellent rule. Also, do not allow your mind to form hasty impressions on the strength of some outward appearance, nor your vital to act upon them.

There is a place in the inner being where one can always remain calm and from there look with poise and judgment on the perturbations of the surface consciousness and act upon it to change it. If you can learn to live in that calm of the inner being, you will have found your stable basis.

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If the imperfection is there, one has to see it. The thing to be done is to live in the true self and from there see the imperfection and change it.

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You must remain always aware of the self and the obscure nature must not be felt as the self but as an instrument which has to be put into tune with the self.

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You have to be conscious of the wrong movements, but not preoccupied with them only.

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The defects should be noticed and rejected, but the concentration should be positive — on what you are to be, i.e., on the development of the new consciousness rather than on this negative side.

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It is necessary to observe and know the wrong movements in you; for they are the source of your trouble and have to be persistently rejected if you are to be free.

But do not be always thinking of your defects and wrong movements. Concentrate more upon what you are to be, on the ideal, with the faith that, since it is the goal before you, it must and will come.

To be always observing faults and wrong movements brings depression and discourages the faith. Turn your eyes more to the coming Light and less to any immediate darkness. Faith, cheerfulness, confidence in the ultimate victory are the things that help,—they make the progress easier and swifter.

Make more of the good experiences that come to you; one experience of the kind is more important than the lapses and failures. When it ceases, do not repine or allow yourself to be discouraged, but be quiet within and aspire for its renewal in a stronger form leading to still deeper and fuller experience.

Aspire always, but with more quietude, opening yourself to the Divine simply and wholly.

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While the recognition of the Divine Power and the attunement of one's own nature to it cannot be done without the recognition of the imperfections in that nature, yet it is a wrong attitude to put too much stress either on them or on the difficulties they create, or to distrust the Divine working because of the difficulties one experiences, or to lay too continual an emphasis on the dark side of things. To do this increases the force of the difficulties, gives a greater right of continuance to the imperfections. I do not insist on a Couéistic optimism — although excessive optimism is more helpful than excessive pessimism; that (Couéism) tends to cover up difficulties and there is besides always a measure to be observed in things. But there is no danger of your covering them up and deluding yourself with too bright an outlook, quite the contrary; you always lay stress too much on the shadows and by so doing thicken them and obstruct your outlets of escape into the Light. Faith, more faith! Faith in your possibilities, faith in

the Power that is at work behind the veil, faith in the work that is to be done and the offered guidance.

There cannot be any high endeavour, least of all in the spiritual field, which does not raise or encounter grave obstacles of a very persistent character. These are both internal and external, and, although in the large they are fundamentally the same for all, there may be a great difference in the distribution of their stress or the outward form they take. But the one real difficulty is the attunement of the nature with the working of the Divine Light and Power. Get that solved and the others will either disappear or take a subordinate place; and even with those difficulties that are of a more general character, more lasting because they are inherent in the work of transformation, they will not weigh so heavily because the sense of the supporting Force and a greater power to follow its movement will be there.

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Of course consciousness grows as the opening increases and one result of consciousness is to be able to see in oneself—but not to see the weaknesses only, to see the whole play of forces. Only in the right consciousness one does not regard the weaknesses even in a too personal way so as to get discouraged. One has to see them as the play of nature, mental nature, vital nature, physical nature, common to all human beings—to see them so and remain calm and detached, calling in the Mother's force and light for transformation of this defective play into the true nature—not getting impatient if it is not done at once, but going on steadily and giving time for the change. The full change indeed cannot come till all is ready for the descent of a greater, calmer, larger consciousness from above and that is only possible when the ordinary consciousness has been made thoroughly ready for it.

The intense love and bhakti does not come at once. It comes as the power of the psychic grows more and more in the being. But to aspire for it is right and the sincere aspiration is sure to fulfil itself. Always seek to progress in quietude, happiness and

confidence, that is the most helpful attitude. Do not listen to contrary suggestions from outside.

Stating One's Difficulties

There is no reason why you should stop writing letters — it is only one kind of letter that is in question and that is not a very good means of contact; you yourself felt the reaction was not favourable. I asked you to write because your need of unburdening the perilous matter in you was very great at the time and, although it did not relieve you at once, it kept me exactly informed of the turns of the fight and helped me to put a certain pressure on the attacking forces at a critical moment. But I do not believe any of these necessities now exists. It is rather a discouragement from within yourself of the source of these movements that is now the need; but putting them into words would tend, as I have said, to give them more body and substance.

It is an undoubted fact proved by hundreds of instances that for many the exact statement of their difficulties to us is the best and often, though not always, an immediate, even an instantaneous means of release. This has often been seen by sadhaks not only here, but far away, and not only for inner difficulties, but for illness and outer pressure of unfavourable circumstances. But for that a certain attitude is necessary — either a strong faith in the mind and vital or a habit of reception and response in the inner being. Where this habit has been established, I have seen it to be almost unfailingly effective, even when the faith was uncertain or the outer expression in the mind vague, ignorant or in its form mistaken or inaccurate. Moreover, this method succeeds most when the writer can write as a witness of his own movements and state them with an exact and almost impartial precision as a phenomenon of his nature or the movement of a force affecting him from which he seeks release. On the other hand if in writing his vital gets seized by the thing he is writing of, and takes up the pen for him, — expressing and often supporting doubt, revolt, depression, despair, it becomes a very different

matter. Even here sometimes the expression acts as a purge; but also the statement of the condition may lend energy to the attack at least for the moment and may seem to enhance and prolong it, exhausting it by its own violence perhaps for the time and so bringing in the end a relief, but at a heavy cost of upheaval and turmoil—and at the risk of the recurring decimal movement, because the release has come by temporary exhaustion of the attacking force, not by rejection and purification through the intervention of the Divine Force with the unquestioning assent and support of the sadhak. There has been a confused fight, an intervention in a hurly-burly, not a clear alignment of forces—and the intervention of the helping force is not felt in the confusion and the whirl. This is what used to happen in your crises; the vital in you was deeply affected and began supporting and expressing the reasonings of the attacking force—in place of a clear observation and expression of the difficulty by the vigilant mind laying the state of things in the Light for the higher Light and Force to act upon it, there was a vehement statement of the case for the Opposition. Many sadhaks (even "advanced") had made a habit of this kind of expression of their difficulties and some still do it; they cannot even yet understand that it is not the way. At one time it was a sort of gospel in the Asram that this was the thing to be done,—I don't know on what ground, for it was never part of my teaching about the Yoga,—but experience has shown that it does not work; it lands one in the recurring decimal notation, an unending round of struggle. It is quite different from the movement of self-opening that succeeds, (here too not necessarily in a moment, but still sensibly and progressively) and of which those are thinking who insist on everything being opened to the Guru so that the help may be more effectively there.

It is inevitable that doubts and difficulties should arise in so arduous an undertaking as the transformation of the normal nature of man into the spiritual nature, the replacement of his system of externalised values and surface experience into profounder inner values and experience. But the doubts and difficulties cannot be overcome by giving them their full force;

it can be rather done by learning to stand back from them and to refuse to be carried away; then there is a chance of the still small voice from within getting itself heard and pushing out these louder clamorous voices and movements from outside. It is the light from within that you have to make room for; the light of the outer mind is quite insufficient for the discovery of the inner values or to judge the truth of spiritual experience.

Detaching Oneself from Difficulties

Not to be touched or disturbed by the difficulties, to feel separate from them is the first step towards freedom.

*

If you cannot do anything else, you must at least remain detached — there is always a part of the being that can remain detached and go on persisting, calling down the Force from above.

*

When vital difficulties assail a sadhak, he has not to identify his consciousness with them, but to stand back and remaining quiet in the observing part of his being call down persistently the Divine Force. The help will then come through this steady and silent part of the being.

*

Knowledge in the mind is not sufficient by itself to prevent it [*obscurity*] so long as the whole consciousness is not liberated. What can be done is for the inner being to be always detached and separate so that it does not feel obscured by the obscurity or attacked by the attack and is able to see and deal with it as something of the surface. Your difficulty is that you are constantly identifying yourself with the outer parts and feel yourself submerged by the attacks on them.

*

Do not yield to the Tamas; the more you yield, the more it will stick.

For all these things, the way is detachment, to stand back; separate yourself from the desire, observe it, refuse sanction and put a quiet and persistent will for it to cease, calling on the Mother's force at the same time to dissolve and eliminate the greed, desire, attachment, obscurity and inertia. If sincerely, persistently and rightly done, it will succeed in the end, even though it may take time.

*

These things rise because either they are there in the conscious part of the being as habits of the nature or they are there lying concealed and able to rise at any moment or they are suggestions from the general or universal Nature outside to which the personal being makes a response. In any case they rise in order that they may be met and cast out and finally rejected so that they may trouble the nature no longer. The amount of trouble they give depends on the way they are met. The first principle is to detach oneself from them, not to identify, not to admit them any longer as part of one's real nature but to look on them as things imposed to which one says, "This is not I or mine — this is a thing I reject altogether." One begins to feel a part of the being inside which is not identified, which remains firm and says, "This may give trouble on the surface, but it shall not touch me." If this separate being within can be felt, then half the trouble is over — provided there is a will there not only to separate but to get rid of the imperfection from the surface nature also.

*

The difficulties of the character persist so long as one yields to them in action when they rise. One has to make a strict rule not to act according to the impulses of anger, ego or whatever the weakness may be that one wants to get rid of, or if one does act in the heat of the moment, not to justify or persist in the action. If one does that, after a time the difficulty abates or is confined

purely to a subjective movement which one can observe, detach oneself from and combat.

*

Do not allow yourself to be shaken or troubled by these things [*demands made by others*]. The one thing to do always is to remain firm in your aspiration to the Divine and to face with equanimity and detachment all difficulties and all oppositions. For those who wish to lead the spiritual life, the Divine must always come first, everything else must be secondary.

Keep yourself detached and look at these things from the calm inner vision of one who is inwardly dedicated to the Divine.

*

Well, that is right. The difficulty of the difficulties is self-created, a knot of the Ignorance; when a certain inner perception loosens the knot, the worst of the difficulty is over.

Rejecting Wrong Movements

It is simply a steady and quiet rejection [*of the lower forces*] that is needed and a quiet and steady calling down of the true Force. All this emotional excitability must be quieted down; it is that makes the vital open itself to these forces. If it were not so, all the defects of the nature could be quietly observed and quietly mended.

*

If one part of you keeps its quietude — the inner being — then the rest can be dealt with. So not to allow the vital to be upset and the disturbance cover up the inner self, that is the most important thing. Keep up the rejection always.

*

It would be easier [*to get rid of wrong movements*] when you bring down a settled peace and equanimity into that part of the

being. There will then be more of an automatic rejection of such movements and less need of tapasya.

*

If you accept your weakness which means accepting the thing itself—some part of your nature accepts it and to that you yield—then what is the use of our telling you what to do? That part of your vital will always be able to say, “I was too weak to carry it out.” The only way out of it is for you to cease to be weak, to dismiss this sentimental and sensuous part of you, to call down strength to replace its weakness and to do it with a settled and serious purpose. If we cannot get you who have had some foundation in the sadhana to overcome this element in you, how do you expect us to get X to do it who says he has no firm foundation but is still floating?

*

It is always their [*the lower forces*] endeavour to rise up and get the sanction of the mind and higher vital—or if they cannot do that, to cover them up so that the lower nature may act in its ordinary way without being pressed by the higher consciousness to change. The first thing necessary for the sadhak is not to give any consent of his mind or higher vital and to keep them from being covered. If that can be done, then it becomes possible to push the lower forces out of the lower vital and body and not allow them to return. It is the Mother’s Force which you feel—for all the higher forces are hers.

Chapter Three

Vigilance, Resolution, Will and the Divine Help

The Need of Vigilance

One is always open [*to the surrounding atmosphere*] so long as there is not the final change. If things do not come in it is because the consciousness is vigilant or the psychic in front; but the least want of vigilance or relaxation can allow something to enter.

*

It [*the experience of liberation*] is likely to be fundamental and definite. But in these matters, even after the liberation one has to remain vigilant — for often these things go out and remain at a far distance waiting to see if under any circumstances, in any condition they can make a rush and recover their kingdom. If there has been an entire purification down to the depths and nothing is there to open the gate, then they cannot do it. But it is only after one has been a long time free that one can say, “Now it is all right for ever.”

*

As for your inner attitude, it must remain the same. Not to be excited or drawn outwards by these “incidents” of the outward life or by the coming in of new elements is the rule; they must come in like waves into an untroubled sea and mix in it and become themselves untroubled and serene.

Your present attitude and condition is all that it should be, — only you must remain vigilant always. For when the condition is good, the lower movements have a habit of subsiding and become quiescent, hiding as it were, — or they go out of the nature and remain at a distance. But if they see that the sadhak is losing his vigilance, then they slowly begin to rise or draw

near, most often unseen, and when he is quite off his guard, surge up suddenly or make a sudden irruption. This continues until the whole nature, mental, vital, physical down to the very subconscious is enlightened, conscious, full of the Divine. Till that happens, one must always remain watchful in a sleepless vigilance.

*

It is perhaps that the attitude you took of going on with the calm within and slowly changing what had to be changed, postponing certain things for the future,—though not a wrong attitude in itself,—made you somewhat lax, allowing things to play on the surface (desires etc.), which should have been kept in check. This relaxation may have opened the way for the old movements to rise through this part which was not yet ready to change at all and the hostile forces finding you off your guard took the opportunity to push the attack home. They are always vigilant for an opportunity and there must be a sufficient vigilance on the sadhak's side to refuse it to them. It is also possible that as the Force descending in the general atmosphere has carried in it some pressure on the consciousness of the sadhaks to be more ready, more awake, less engrossed in the movements of the ordinary nature than they are now, it fell upon this part and the resistance in it, which was mostly passive for a long time, became suddenly active under the pressure.

*

There is no reason for despondency; when one has progressed as far as you did, that is, so far as to feel and maintain the calm and have so much of the psychic discrimination and the psychic feeling, one has no right to despair of one's spiritual future. You could not yet carry out the discrimination into an entire psychic change, because a large part of the outer physical consciousness still took some pleasure in old movements and therefore their roots remained alive in the subconscious. When you were off your guard the whole thing rose up and there was a temporary and violent lapse. But this does not mean that the nature is not

changeable. Only the calm inner conscious poise, the psychic discrimination and above all a will to change, stronger and steadier than before, must be so established that no uprising or invasion will be able to cloud even partly the discrimination or suspend the will. You saw the truth but this part of the old nature which rose up did not want to acknowledge—it wanted its play and imposed that on you. This time you must insist on a complete truthfulness in the whole being which will refuse to accept any denial of what the psychic discrimination sees or any affirmation or consent anywhere to what it disapproves, spiritual humility and the removal of self-righteousness, self-justification and the wish to impose yourself, the tendency to judge others etc. All these defects you know are in you; to cast them out may take time, but if the will to be true to the inner self in all ways is strong and persistent and vigilant and always calls in the Mother's force, it can be done sooner than now seems possible.

*

That is all right [*not to worry about the recurrence of thought-movements*]—provided there is detachment and refusal of consent. One ought not to worry, but also one ought not to be negligent, i.e., one ought not to give the consent of the will or of the reason to these movements. For all consent prolongs their action or their recurrence. If they do not go when rejected by the mind and will, it is because of the habitual response in the less conscious parts of the nature. These have to become conscious by receiving the Light and Force until finally they refuse response to the calls of the lower nature.

*

This is quite right. If you keep this condition [*of trust and devotion*], not allowing it to be entirely obscured or long clouded, you can move rapidly towards a new birth of your nature and the foundation of your life and all your thoughts and acts and movements in your true being, the psychic being. Never consent to the ideas, suggestions, feelings that bring back the cloud, the

confusion and the revolt. It is the consent that makes them strong to recur. Refuse the consent and they will be obliged to retire either immediately or after a time.

Remain fixed in the sunlight of the true consciousness — for only there is happiness and peace. They do not depend upon outside happenings, but on this alone.

The Need of Resolution

There is no reason why you should abandon hope of success in the Yoga. The state of depression which you now feel is temporary and it comes even upon the strongest sadhaks at one time or another or even often recurs. The only thing needed is to hold firm with the awakened part of the being, to reject all contrary suggestions and wait, opening yourself as much as you can to the true Power, till the crisis or change of which this depression is a stage, is completed. The suggestions which come to your mind telling you that you are not fit and that you must go back to the ordinary life, are false tamasic promptings from a hostile source. Ideas of this kind must always be rejected as inventions of the lower nature; even if they are founded on appearances which seem convincing to the ignorant mind, they are false, because they exaggerate a passing movement and represent it as the decisive and definite truth. There is only one truth in you on which you have to lay constant hold, the truth of your divine possibilities and the call of the higher Light to your nature. If you hold to that always or, even if you are momentarily shaken from your hold, return constantly to it, it will justify itself in the end in spite of all difficulties and obstacles and stumbling. All in you that resists will disappear in time with the progressive unfolding of your spiritual nature.

The disabilities of your past character and mind and vital habits need not discourage you. Some of them are, no doubt, serious — especially the animal sexuality of the vital parts and the support which the mind has given to it; but others have had to face obstacles as serious in themselves and have surmounted them in the purifying and liberating process of the Yoga. It may

not be easy to get rid of them altogether and it may take time; but if you persist and refuse all justification and all possibility of return to these things, you are bound in the end to conquer.

When you came, the psychic call in you was true and sincere, but in your external nature the response was confused and mixed with foreign elements of a lower kind. What has sunk in you is not the pure psychic urge, even if that is temporarily veiled, but a vital flame that was not entirely pure. It is because these foreign elements have been discouraged, that the vital nature in you feels despondent and refuses its support to the belief of the mind and to the psychic call. This often happens in the process of purification; what is needed is the conversion and surrender of the vital part. It must learn to demand only the highest Truth and to forego all insistence on the satisfaction of its inferior impulses and desires. It is this adhesion of the vital being that brings the full satisfaction and joy of the whole nature in the spiritual life. When that is there, it will be impossible even to think of returning to the ordinary existence. Meanwhile the mental will and the psychic aspiration must be your support; if you insist, the vital will finally yield and be converted and surrendered.

Fix upon your mind and heart the resolution to live for the Divine Truth and for that alone; reject all that is contrary and incompatible with it and turn away from all lower desires; aspire to open yourself to the Divine Power and to no other. Do this in all sincerity and the present and living help you need will not fail you.

*

The resolution, to be a real resolution, must be there always, fixed. If it is dependent on an urge, not self-dependent, it can also be knocked down by inertia.

The Need of Aspiration

It is good. When the external consciousness covers the inner being, then it is by a calm and patient aspiration — without

restlessness or disturbance—that the inner state must be called back until the external consciousness itself gets so habituated to the true condition that it is no longer willing to respond to anything else.

*

I have told you that if you feel quietness somewhere in your consciousness, even if a part is not quiet, that is sufficient to lean on and get the Force to act through it. The quietness is quite as much a fact as the outer confusion. You have to accept it, to stress it, to aspire to keep and increase it—to reject the confusion.

What “reason” do you need to aspire for peace, purity, freedom from the lower nature, light, strength, Ananda, divine love, divine service? These are things good in themselves and the highest possible aim of human endeavour.

*

If not a will, you have a wish in you or an aspiration; the word does not matter, the thing is there. If it gets clouded over, it is not the less there. There are the two things—the inner being with its aspiration, the physical and material with its obscurity and depressions. If you lay stress on the former instead of constantly denying its presence, that would make the progress easy; by laying stress on the outer obscurity and affirming that always and always thinking of it, you help it to last and delay the progress. Even so, if the inner aspiration is there, it must in the end conquer.

*

Yes, but it is an absence of the one-pointed aspiration more than of strength of will—they [*certain sadhaks*] left because some desire or other got hold of them which was incompatible with the steadfast single-minded aspiration to the Divine Realisation.

If Buddha had the will only after tapasya, how was it that he left everything without hesitation in the search for Truth and never once looked back, regretted nor had any struggle? The

only difficulty was how to find the Truth, his single will to find it never faltered; the intensity of his tapasya itself would have been impossible without that strength of will. People less strong than Buddha may have to develop it by endeavour. Those who cannot do that have to find their strength in their reliance on the Divine Mother.

The Need of Will

There must be a fixed will for the spiritual life — that alone can overcome all obstacles.

*

To be conscious is the first step towards overcoming [*lower movements*] — but for the overcoming strength is necessary and also detachment and the will to overcome.

*

There must first be the will to change firmly conceived and held — then to open the consciousness to the Force and let it work with the inner assent to its working. When there is the psychic opening, then even the things most obstinate in the nature can change.

*

Obviously what the Mother told you was the fact — but such missing of opportunities should not discourage, the recognition of it must be a spur to do better in future. Human nature is weak and is always missing the divine opportunities; but if the spirit is willing, the weakness of the nature is obliged eventually to yield to its will. Renew that will always, so that failure as well as success may become an opportunity and an incentive for farther progress.

*

Develop the will — the will grows by a steady use, like the muscles, and grows strong.

*

The only way to do it [*develop the true will-power*] is (1) to become aware of a conscious Force behind that uses the mind etc. (2) to learn by practice to direct that Force towards its object. I do not suppose you will find it easy to do either of these things at once — one must first learn to live more deeply in the inner consciousness than you have done hitherto.

*

I suppose it must be [*weakness of the will*] because you have not been in the habit of using the will to compel the other parts of the nature — so when you want it done, they refuse to obey a control to which they are not accustomed and it also has not any habitual hold upon them.

The will is a part of the consciousness and ought to be in human beings the chief agent in controlling the activities of the nature.

*

If there is a constant use of the will the rest of the being learns however slowly to obey the will and then the actions become in conformity with the will and not with the vital impulses and desires. As for the rest (the feelings and desires etc. themselves) if they are not indulged in action or imagination and not supported by the will, if they are merely looked at and rejected when they come, then after some struggle they begin to lose their force and dwindle away.

*

There is no process [*for using the will*]. The will acts of itself when the mind and vital agree as in the case of a desire. If the desire is not satisfied, it goes on hammering, trying to get it, insisting on it, repeating the demand, making use of this person or that person, this device or that device, getting the mind to support it with reasons, representing it as a need that must be satisfied etc. etc. till the desire is satisfied. All that is the evidence of a will in action. When you have to use the will for the sadhana, you have not the same persistence, the mind finds reasons for

not going on with the effort, as soon as the difficulty becomes strong it is dropped, there is no continuity, no keeping of the will fixed on its object.

*

There can be no persistence or insistence without will.

*

By development it [*the will*] becomes fit to merge into the Mother's will. A will that is not strong is a great hindrance to sadhana.

*

It is of course a fluctuation of the mental will that often prevents a knowledge gained from being put into steady practice. If the will is not strong enough, then the greater Will behind which is the will of the Mother, her conscious Force in which knowledge and will are united, must be called in to strengthen and support it. Very often, however, even if the will as well as the knowledge are there, the habit of the vital nature brings in the old reactions. This can only be overcome by a steady undiscouraged aspiration which will bring out more and more of the psychic and its true movements to push out and displace the wrong ones. The gradual and steady replacement of the old ignorant consciousness and its movements by the true psychic and spiritual consciousness is the nature of the transformation that is to be accomplished in the Yoga. But that takes time, it cannot be done easily or at once. Therefore one should not mind or be discouraged if meanwhile one finds the old movements recurring in spite of one's knowledge. Only one should try to keep more and more separate from them, so that even if they recur the consent of the being to them shall no longer be there.

*

It depends¹ — if the consciousness is developed only on the side

¹ *The correspondent asked whether the consciousness merely warns a person not to do something or whether it also has the power to prevent him from doing it. — Ed.*

of knowledge, it will warn only. If on the side of will or power, it will help to effectuate.

*

The will can make itself work — it is in its own nature a force or energy.

*

The energy which dictates the action or prevents a wrong action is the Will.

*

Peace is not a necessary precondition for the action of the will. When the being is troubled, it is often the business of the will to impose quiet on it.

*

There is no such thing as an inert passive will. Will is dynamic in its nature. Even if it does not struggle or endeavour its very presence is dynamic and acts dynamically on the resistance. What you are speaking of is a passive wish = I would like it to be like that, I want it to be like that. That is not will.

*

It [*a will without much energy*] simply means that your will is weak and not a true will. Queer kind of will! Perhaps it is like a motor car that won't go and you have to push from behind.

*

It is not the right kind of will-power then [*if it increases fatigue*] — probably they use some fighting or effortful will-power instead of the quiet but strong will that calls down the higher consciousness and force.

*

Will is will whether it is calm or restless, whether it acts in a Yogic or unyogic way, for a Yogic or an unyogic object. Do you

think Napoleon and Caesar had no will or that they were Yogis? You have strange ideas about things. You might just as well say that memory is memory only when it remembers the Divine and it is not memory when it remembers other things.

Lack of Will

Why cannot you see that this condition is not a true consciousness, but only a clouding of the truth, a clouding which you can always get rid of if you firmly choose to do so? What you express here is not a lack of understanding, but a lack of will—and this lack of will is not your own, but is forced upon you by a lower consciousness which overpowers you and forces you to reverse all the true values of feeling and knowledge. Your being does want to be free and at peace and happy in the light—it is this Falsehood seizing hold of your external mind that makes you want to be more dark and miserable and revolted and hate yourself and not to live. Such feelings, such a perverted will is entirely opposed to the normal feelings of the nature and cannot be “true” and right. There is nobody who asks you to pretend—what we ask you is to reject false perversions and wrong feelings and ignorance and not to go on supporting them as they want you to do. It is not courage and nobility to accept these things as the law of your nature, nor is it meanness and cowardice to aspire to a higher Truth and try to act according to it and make that the law of your nature.

*

In the indolence of the will which does not want to make a sustained effort for a long period [*lies the difficulty*]. It is like a person who moves slightly half a leg for a second and then wonders why he is not already a hundred miles away at the goal after making such a gigantic effort.

*

That [*the idea that one lacks will-power*] is the suggestion that has been enforced on you by the physical inertia. It has covered

up your will and persuaded you that there is no will left and no possibility of any will.

*

One can always use the will. The idea that you cannot is only a suggestion of the inertia.

Will and the Divine Force or Power

There are always two elements in spiritual success — one's own steady will and endeavour and the Power that in one way or another helps and gives the result of the endeavour.

*

The Force produces no definite and lasting fruit unless there is the will and the resolution to achieve in the sadhak.

*

The higher action does not preclude a use of the will — will is an element of the higher action.

*

These things [*the removal of vital demand and ego*] cannot be done in that way [*by a direct higher action*]. For transformation to be genuine, the difficulty has to be rejected by all the parts of the being. The Force can only help or enable them to do that, but it cannot replace this necessary action by a summary process. Your mind and inner being must impart their will to the whole.

*

Yes. So long as there is not a constant action of the Force from above or else of a deeper Will from within, the mental will is necessary.

*

You had written, "I need not bother about it — if peace is needed it will bring itself." Certainly the main stress should be on the

Force, but the active assent of the sadhak is needed; in certain things his will also may be needed as an instrument of the Force.

*

It is true that the Force can work effectively without any effort on your part. It is not the effort, it is the assent of the being that it needs for its work.

*

The Power can do everything, change everything and will do that but it can do it perfectly and easily and permanently only when your own will mental, vital and physical has been put on the side of the Truth. If you side with the vital ignorance and want to fight against your own spiritual change, it means a painful and difficult struggle before the work is done. That is why I insist on quietude at the very least and patient confidence with it, as far as you can—so that there may be a quiet and steady progress, not a painful and tormented movement full of relapse and struggle.

*

Hardly anyone is strong enough to overcome by his own unaided aspiration and will the forces of the lower nature; even those who do it get only a certain kind of control, but not a complete mastery. Will and aspiration are needed to bring down the aid of the Divine Force and to keep the being on its side in its dealings with the lower powers. The Divine Force fulfilling the spiritual will and the heart's psychic aspiration can alone bring about the conquest.

*

There is only one way if you cannot exert your will—it is to call the Force; even to call only with the mind or the mental word is better than being entirely passive and submitted to the attack,—for although it may not succeed instantaneously, the mental call even ends by bringing the Force and opening up the consciousness again. For everything depends upon that. In the

externalised consciousness obscurity and suffering can always be there; the more the internalised consciousness reigns, the more these things are pushed back and out and with the full internalised consciousness they cannot remain—if they come, it is as outside touches unable to lodge themselves in the being.

*

The Force can bring forward and use the will.

Personal Effort and the Divine Force or Power

If there is no personal effort, if the sadhak is too indolent and tamasic to try, why should the Grace act?

*

All that [*thinking one's efforts are useless*] is the physical mind refusing to take the trouble of the labour and struggle necessary for the spiritual achievement. It wants to get the highest, but desires a smooth course all the way. “Who the devil is going to face so much trouble for getting the Divine?” —that is the underlying feeling. The difficulty with the thoughts is a difficulty every Yogi has gone through—so is the phenomenon of a little result after some days of effort. It is only when one has cleared the field and ploughed and sown and watched over it that big harvests can be hoped for.

*

Of course—personal effort without the supporting Force can do only a little, slowly, with much labour.

*

One can either use effort [*to remove difficulties*], and then one must be patient and persevering, or one can rely on the Divine with a constant will and aspiration. But then the reliance has to be a true one, not insisting on immediate fruit.

*

The only truth in your other experience — which, you say, seems at the time so true to you, — is that it is hopeless for you or anyone to get out of the inferior consciousness by your or his unaided effort. That is why when you sink into this inferior consciousness, everything seems hopeless to you, because you lose hold for a time of the true consciousness. But the suggestion is untrue, because you have an opening to the Divine and are not bound to remain in the inferior consciousness.

When you are in the true consciousness, then you see that everything can be done, even if at present only a slight beginning has been made; but a beginning is enough, once the Force, the Power is there. For the truth is that it can do everything and only time and the soul's aspiration are needed for the entire change and the soul's fulfilment.

*

It does not matter what defects you may have in your nature. The one thing that matters is your keeping yourself open to the Force. Nobody can transform himself by his own unaided efforts; it is only the Divine Force that can transform him. If you keep yourself open, all the rest will be done for you.

*

As I have told you it is no longer useful to think of right understanding and wrong movements and get upset when they are felt to be not there or imperfect. Nobody can change himself — even the strongest sadhaks here recognise that. Their effort is to let the Peace, Force, Light, Ananda of the Mother come in, to let that grow — for that will change them, they know. So long as it is not there, has not yet touched, is not growing, they struggle with the mind and vital, because they cannot help doing so and it is necessary for preparing the consciousness a little to admit the Peace and Force. But once these have touched, the only thing to do is to lay all the stress on that, trust to it, surrender and give oneself to it — for the straight road is found and the true power and consciousness have been experienced.

Letting the Force Work

The way in which the pains went shows you how to deal with the whole nature,—for it is the same with the mental and vital as with the physical causes of ill-ease and disturbance. To remain quiet within, to hold on to the faith and experience that to be quiet and open and let the Force work is the one way. Naturally, to be wholly conscious is not possible yet, but to feel it, to open, to let it work, to observe its result, that is the first thing. It is the beginning of consciousness and the way to complete consciousness.

The Divine Help

Help is given in whatever way is necessary or possible. It is not limited to Force, Light, Knowledge.

*

Certainly, all the help possible will be given. As for the method, there are always the two ways possible—one to overcome the difficulty in its own field, the other to develop the inner realisation until it grows so strong that the roots you speak of have no longer any soil to hold by and come out easily by a spontaneous psychic change.

*

Cling to the help always,—when you cannot feel, call for it and remain quiet till you feel it again. It is only the covering you spoke of that comes between you and the sense of its presence —for it is always there.

*

It [*the need to call for help*] diminishes as one gets higher and higher or rather fuller and fuller, being replaced more and more by the automatic action of the Force.

The Divine Protection

The grace and protection are always with you. When in any

inner or outer difficulty or trouble do not allow it to oppress you; take refuge with the Divine Force that protects.

If you do that always with faith and sincerity, you will find something opening in you which will always remain calm and peaceful in spite of all superficial disturbances.

*

Yes, the Divine's Protection is surely with you, since it sustains you through all. The untoward physical happenings are transient and will certainly pass away leaving full room for a greater state.

*

One should not expect too much from the Divine Protection for, constituted as we are and the world is, the Divine Protection has to act within limits. Of course miracles happen, but we have no claim to it.

Chapter Four

Time and Change of the Nature

Time Needed for Change

The change of the nature cannot take place in a few days. It is a constant progressive movement.

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The change of the lower consciousness (vital and physical) is a big work and takes a long time and much action of the higher forces to accomplish. Nobody has ever done it in a short time.

*

That is nonsense — no one can get free from the lower nature in such a short time [*eight or nine months*]. It takes years for even the greatest Yogis — it is the work of a life-time.

*

As I have constantly told you, you cannot expect all to be enlightened at once. Even the greatest Yogis can only proceed by stages and it is only at the end that the whole nature shares the true consciousness which they first establish in the heart or behind it or in the head or above it. It descends or expands slowly conquering each layer of the being one after the other, but each step takes time.

*

All comes in its time. One has to go on quietly and steadily increasing the higher consciousness till it takes possession of the vital and physical parts.

*

I want you to be open and in contact with the Peace and Presence and Force. All else will come if that is there and then one need not

be troubled by the time it takes in the *péripéties* of the sadhana.

*

It is no doubt the pressure of the psychic in you which you express in the letter. That is how the psychic being wants it to be. But it is a mistake to accept any suggestion of self-distrust or incapacity on the ground that it is not like that yet or is not always like that. These things always take time; even after they have begun, they always take time. It is impossible to expect from the mixed and confused nature of the human being that it should be constantly in a state of ardent aspiration, perfect faith and love or full and constant openness to the Divine Force. There is the mental with its limited knowledge and its hesitations, there is the vital with its desires, unwillingnesses and its struggles; there is the physical with its obscurity, slowness and inertia. Even to clear the field sufficiently for a beginning of experience is usually a very long labour. But afterwards if the peace begins or any other right condition, it comes and stays for a time — then what is left of the lower nature surges up on some excuse or with no excuse and veils the condition. Peace and opening may come so strongly that it seems all difficulties are gone and can never return — but that is only an indication, a promise. It shows that it will be so when the peace and opening are irrevocably settled in all the nature. For that what is needed is perseverance — to go on without discouragement, recognising that the process of the nature and the action of the Mother's force is working through the difficulty even and will do all that is needed. Our incapacity does not matter — there is no human being who is not in his parts of nature incapable — but the Divine Force also is there. If one puts one's trust in that, incapacity will be changed into capacity. Difficulty and struggle themselves then become a means towards the achievement.

*

I repeat what I wrote in the morning that the one thing to be seen is whether there is the true yearning for the Divine or, to put it more strongly, whether that is the one thing that really matters to

the being. If there is that, then all other considerations become minor or irrelevant: what is happening in the world or how others react to the search for the Divine or how long the search takes. One must be prepared to give one's whole lifetime and one's whole self to that and count all well spent for the one only and supreme object. When the Divine is a necessity of the being, what is the use of mental questionings as to whether He exists or what He is like, kind or cruel, slow or swift in response, easy to reach or hard to discover? He appears all or any of these things to different seekers, but to all He is the one necessity of their existence. If one finds Him quickly, so much the better; if it takes long, still one has to go on seeking till one finds. One may have hard moments of anguish or despair because the human vital is weak, but still one goes on because the soul insists. But there is no logic in the position that because my need of the Divine is entire and even in six years I have not got Him, therefore the proper thing to do is to despair and give up. The logical position is, my need for the Divine is entire, so I must go on till I find Him, however long it may take, whether one year or six or twelve; for if my need is entire and persists always, I cannot fail to arrive. That is the position that is taken by the spiritual seeker and it is the true and natural one. It is no use saying that you are unfit and cannot take it; you have to come to it, if your need is true and entire.

The misery of the world or the activity of the Asuras is also irrelevant. Nobody has ever contended that this is a happy and perfect world, nobody in India at least, or the best possible world or put that forth as a proof of the Divine Existence. It is known that it is a world of death, ignorance, suffering and that its pleasures are not enduring. The spiritual seeker takes that not as a disproof of the Divine Existence, but as a greater spur for seeking and finding it out. He may seek it as a means of escape from life and entry into Nirvana or moksha or Goloka, Brahmaloka or Vaikuntha; he may seek the divine Self and its peace or Ananda behind existence and if he attains to that and is satisfied with it he can move through the world untouched by its vicissitudes and troubles; or he may seek it, as I have done, for the

base of a greater and happier life to be brought now or hereafter into the world-existence. But whatever be the aim, the actual state of the world is no argument at all against the seeking for the Divine or the truth of Yoga. Also the accidents of the search, that A is dead and will attain only in another body or B is ill or C misbehaves are side matters altogether. It makes no difference to one's own entire need of the Divine and the necessity of persevering in one's seeking till one finds and reaches.

My words about the great secret of sadhana¹ simply pointed out that that was the most effective way if one could get the things done by the Power behind, did not rule out mental effort so long as one could not do that. Ramakrishna's way of putting it was the image of the baby monkey and baby cat; I have only said the same thing in other words; both are permissible methods, only one is more easily effective. Any method sincerely and persistently followed can end by bringing the opening. You yourself chose the method of prayer and japa because you believed in that, and I acquiesced because it does prepare something in the consciousness and, if done with persistent faith and bhakti, it can open all the doors. Another method is concentration and aspiration in the heart which opens the inner emotional being. Another is the concentration in the head of which I spoke which opens the inner mind or opens the passage through the Brahmarandhra to the higher consciousness. These things are no fantastic invention of mine which one can dismiss as a new-fangled and untested absurdity; they are recognised methods which have succeeded in thousands of cases and here also there are plenty who have found their effect. But whatever method is used will not bring its effect at once; it must be done persistently, simply, directly till it succeeds. If it is done with a mind of doubt or watching it as an experiment to see if it succeeds or if it is continually crossed by a spirit of hasty despondency saying constantly, "You see it is all useless," then it ought to be obvious that the opening will be

¹ "That is a great secret of sadhana, to know how to get things done by the Power behind or above instead of doing all by the mind's effort." Letters on Yoga—II, volume 29 of THE COMPLETE WORKS OF SRI AUROBINDO, p. 215.

very difficult, because there is that clogging it every time there is a pressure or a push to open. That is why I wanted you to get rid of these two things and have harped on that so much, because I know by my own experience and that of others how strongly they can stand in the way of what you seek. For you are not the only one who have been troubled by these two obstacles; most have had to struggle against them. If one can get rid of them in their central action, the survival of their activity in the circumference does not so much matter; for then the opening becomes possible, both to make and to keep and the rest can follow.

The six years of which you speak have been spent by you mainly in struggling with sex and doubt and vital difficulties — many take more than that time about it. What I have been wanting you to do now is to get the right positive attitude within at the centre free from these things. Its basis must be what I have said, “I want the Divine and the Divine only; since I want and need, I shall surely arrive, however long it takes, and till I do, I shall persist and endure with patience and courage.” I do not mean by that that you should have no activity but prayer and concentration; few can do that; but whatever is done should be done in that spirit.

Freedom from the Past

Do not let the things of the past trouble you. Leave them behind and prepare yourself for a new being.

*

To be no longer bound by the past or by surface formations is always a great step in advance.

*

There is no need to give up entirely what you had in the past. Spiritual truths are not warring enemies — they are parts of a single truth and complete each other. It is only the mind that turns them into disputants and wants one to bar out another. That is

the weakness of making something in the past the standard by which you judge the present—the mind takes advantage of its own limitations to declare that the two are incompatible. But it is not so in reality—between two truths of the Divine there is always a reconciliation when to the limiting mind they seem opposites; as one is realised after the other, their unity appears, it is not necessary to deny the past experience in order to go forward to the new realisation.

This will before long become apparent to you if you do not allow the mind to stand in the way of the heart's permanent opening. Let the doors of the heart swing open freely—allow yourself to enter into the stream without making any mental conditions before you plunge in; the stream itself will carry you to your goal.

*

So long as you have not learned the lesson the past had to teach you, it comes back on you. Notice carefully what kind of remembrances come, you will see that they are connected with some psychological movements in you that have to be got rid of. But you must be prepared to recognise all that was not right in you and is still not corrected, not allow any vanity or self-righteousness to cloud your vision.

*

The past actions do count so long as the man does not change.

*

It is not a question of pardon or punishment. The past can be effaced, but only if it is sincerely rejected from within and repaired and atoned for by a change which gets rid of the movements that caused it. A merely external submission, punishment or pardon are of no use. Otherwise the past prolongs itself into the present and the future. To get rid of the self-justifying mind and the mixture of motives in the vital is what would prevent that and give the psychic being a chance.

*

The past can be abolished — on condition that nothing of it is allowed to continue in the present.

*

You ask how you can repair the wrong you seem to have done. Admitting that it is as you say, it seems to me that the reparation lies precisely in this, in making yourself a vessel for the Divine Truth and the Divine Love. And the first steps towards that are a complete self-consecration and self-purification, a complete opening of oneself to the Divine, rejecting all in oneself that can stand in the way of the fulfilment. In the spiritual life there is no other reparation for any mistake, none that is wholly effective. At the beginning one should not ask for any other fruit or results than this internal growth and change — for otherwise one lays oneself open to severe disappointments. Only when one is free, can one free others and in Yoga it is out of the inner victory that there comes the outer conquest.

The Past and the Future

One cannot go back to the past, one has always to go in the future.

*

The past has not to be kept,— one has to go into the future realisation. All that is necessary in the past for the future will be taken up and given a new form.

*

It is always preferable to have one's face turned towards the future than towards the past.

*

Yes — one should always have one's look turned forwards to the future — retrospection is seldom healthy as it turns one towards a past consciousness.

*

Take with you the peace and quietude and joy and keep it by remembering always the Divine.

If the thoughts about the past and the future come merely as memories and imaginations, they are of no use and you should quietly turn away your mind from them back to the Divine and to the Yoga. If they are anything to the purpose, then refer them to the Divine, put them in the light of the Truth, so that you may have the truth about them or the right decision or formation for the future, if any decision is needed.

There is no harm in the tears of which you speak,—they come from the soul, the psychic being, and are a help and not a hindrance.

Chapter Five

Dealing with Depression and Despondency

Despondency over Difficulties

Mistakes are always possible, so long as any part of the mental (even the subconscious part of it) is not thoroughly transformed. There is no need to be disturbed by that.

*

Whatever you see, don't get disturbed or depressed. If one sees a defect, one must look at it with the utmost quietude and call down more force and light to get rid of it.

*

When some weakness comes up you should take it as an opportunity to know what is still to be done and call down the strength into that part. Despondency is not the right way to meet it.

*

Let the peace and self-giving increase till it takes hold also of the parts in which there are imperfections and gets rid of them. As for the imperfections, it is right not to be troubled by them—only one has to be conscious of them and have the steady and quiet will that they should go.

*

There was no true cause for the trouble. You have allowed it to come into you from outside. There are always forces moving about in the atmosphere trying to disturb the sadhana and the progress. You must be careful not to allow them to invade you with their suggestions whether of depression, despondency, discontent or of anger or desire or of any ego-movement, for it is

these things that they try to raise. When they come, instead of remaining in this way and trying to find an external cause for them, recognise them and reject at once.

*

When a habit of these moods (depression or revolt) has been formed, they cannot be got rid of at once. There are three ways of doing it—(1) to strengthen your own will, so that nothing can come or stay as *it* likes but only as *you* like; (2) to think of something else, plunge the mind in some healthy activity; (3) to turn to the Mother and call in her force. One can do any of these or all, but even in doing them, it will take a little time to get rid of the habit.

*

There are two golden rules. (1) Never be depressed or upset by difficulties or stumbles. (2) Press always quietly forward, then however long it seems to take, always progress will be made and one day you will be surprised to find yourself near the goal. It is like the curves followed by the train in the ascent of the mountain—they circle round but always nearer and nearer to the goal.

*

The experience is correct.¹ Everything is prepared above, then worked out through the inner being till the results are accomplished and perfected in the outer personality. Therefore the sadhak ought not to allow himself to be alarmed, upset or grieved or made despondent by any apparent difficulties of the moment. He must know that all has been prepared above and calmly and confidently watch and assist its working out here.

*

There is no need for sadness. Everyone has his difficulties and

¹ In this experience the correspondent rose up into the infinite sky and saw the Mother, who, having prepared things on a higher plane, sent down her Force to work out the results on the planes below.—Ed.

it is a mistake to desire the state of another. One must follow the movement of one's own heart and self and psychic without looking elsewhere.

*

The egoism, desires, faults of the nature are in everybody very much the same. But once one begins to be conscious of them and has the will to be free, then one has only to keep that will and there will be no real danger. For when one begins to be conscious in the way you have begun and something from within raises up all that was hidden, it means that the Mother's grace is on your nature and her force is working and your inner being is aiding the Mother's force to get rid of all these things. So you must not be sorrowful or discouraged or fear anything, but look steadily at all that comes out and have the will that it should go completely and for ever. With the Mother's force working and the psychic being supporting the force, all can be done and all will surely be done. This purification is made just in order that no trouble may occur in the future such as happened to some because they were not purified—in order that the higher consciousness may come into a purified nature and the inner transformation securely take place. Go on therefore with faith and courage putting your reliance on the Mother.

*

These questionings and depressions are very foolish movements of the mind. If you were not open to the Grace, you would not have had these descents or experiences and there would have been no such progress as you have made. You have not to put such questions but to take it as a settled fact, and with full faith in the Mother and her working in you go on with your sadhana. Whatever difficulties there may be, will be solved in time by the natural progress of the sadhana.

*

What you write is no doubt true and it is necessary to see it so as to be able to comprehend and grasp the true attitude necessary

for the sadhana. But, as I have said, one must not be distressed or depressed by perceiving the weaknesses inherent in human nature and the difficulty of getting them out. The difficulty is natural, for they have been there for thousands of lives and are the very nature of man's vital and mental ignorance. It is not surprising that they should have a power to stick and take time to disappear. But there is a true being and a true consciousness that is there in us hidden by these surface formations of nature and which can shake them off once it emerges. By taking the right attitude of selfless devotion within and persisting in it in spite of the surface nature's troublesome self-repetitions one enables this inner being and consciousness to emerge and with the Mother's Force working in it deliver the being from all return of the movements of the old nature.

*

Why do you indulge in these exaggerated feelings of remorse and despair when these things come up from the subconscious? They do not help and make it more, not less difficult to eliminate what comes. Such returns of an old nature that is long expelled from the conscious parts of the being always happen in sadhana. It does not at all mean that the nature is unchangeable. Try to recover the inner quietude, draw back from these movements and look at them calmly, reducing them to their true proportions. Your true nature is that in which you have peace and ananda and the love of the Divine. This other is only a fringe of the outer personality which in spite of these returns is destined to drop away as the true being extends and increases.

*

To be miserable may remind you of the defects of your external nature, but I do not see how it is going to cure them. I am not asking you to be frivolously happy, but to be quiet and quietly confident, rejecting these old movements, but for the rest trusting not in a restless self-torturing personal effort but to the Divine Force to change the external nature.

*

As to your going away for a time in order to get rid of your difficulty with X, a difficulty can never be overcome by your running away from it. And if you cannot overcome it with the direct and immediate help we can give you and have always been giving you and the support of our presence, I do not see how you are going to do it at a distance and without our immediate help and presence.

It seems to me that all this comes from your having taken a wrong way with yourself in meeting the consequences of your stumble. It is not by tormenting yourself with remorse and harassing thoughts and sleepless nights that you can overcome. It is by looking straight at yourself, very quietly, with a quiet and firm resolution and then going on cheerfully and bravely in full confidence and reliance, trusting in the grace, serenely and vigilantly, anchoring yourself on your psychic being, calling down more and more of the love and Ananda, turning more and more exclusively to the Mother. That is the true way — and there is no other.

*

There is no reason to be so much cut down or despair of your progress. Evidently you have had a surging up of the old movements, but that can always happen so long as there is not an entire change of the old nature both in the conscious and subconscious parts. Something came up that made you get out of poise and stray into a past round of feelings. The one thing to do is to quiet yourself and get back into the true consciousness and poise. Always keep within and do things without involving yourself in them, then nothing adverse will happen or, if it does, no serious reaction will come.

The idea of leaving for any reason is of course absurd and out of the question. Eight years is a very short time for transformation. Most people spend as much as that or more to get conscious of their defects and acquire the serious will to change — and after that it takes a long time to get the will turned into full and final accomplishment. Each time one stumbles, one has to get back onto the right footing and go on with fresh resolution; by doing that the full change comes.

Dwelling on One's Weaknesses or Difficulties

Of course it is necessary to see one's own weaknesses, but it is not good to dwell too much upon them,—it only brings sadness and restlessness and despondency. Fix your mind rather on what you want to be, for that concentration brings the power to become it — it is the best way also to get rid of the defects and weaknesses; for it is when something strong and positive fills the nature that it changes and its defects begin to disappear.

*

Mistakes of action and thought and feeling naturally bring these outward reactions [*of regret and sorrow*]; they are an obstinate part of human nature, but one has to outgrow them steadily. If they recur, one must not get upset and brood over them; the aim must be to keep quiet and recover as quickly as possible — so that the Force can at once resume its work and not be held suspended by the mind's preoccupation with mistakes and stumbles.

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Difficulties and perplexities can never be got rid of by the mind brooding on them and trying in that way to get out of them; this habit of the mind only makes them recur without a solution and keeps up by brooding the persistent tangle. It is from something above and outside the perplexities that the solution must come. The difficulty of the physical mind—not the true thinking intelligence—is that it does not want to believe in this larger consciousness outside itself because it is not aware of it; and it remains shut like a box in itself, not admitting the light that is all round it and pressing to get in. It is a subtle law of the action of consciousness that if you stress difficulties—you have to observe them, of course, but not stress them, they will quite sufficiently do that for themselves—the difficulties tend to stick or even increase; on the contrary, if you put your whole stress on faith and aspiration and concentrate steadily on what you aspire to, that will sooner or later tend towards realisation. It is this change of stress, a change in the poise and attitude of

the mind, that will be the more helpful process.

As for details, the method of the mind concentrating on details and trying to put them right is a slow and tardy one; it has to be done, but as a subordinate process, not the chief one. If it succeeds at all, it is because after some period of struggle and stress, something is released and there is an opening and the larger consciousness of which I speak gets through and produces some general result. But the progress is much more rapid if one can make the opening the main thing and keep the dealing with details as something resultant and subordinate. When there is this opening, some essential (therefore general) progress can be made and, as you yourself say, "express and translate itself into details". The mind is always trying to handle details and construct out of them some general result; but what is above mind and even the best powers of the higher ranges of mind tend rather to bring about some *essential* change and make it or let it express itself, translate itself in the necessary details.

I may add, however, that one can feel the essential change without its expressing itself in details; e.g., one can feel a wide silent peace or a state of freedom and joy and rest silent and secure in it without needing to translate it into sundry details in order to feel the progress made.

It is not a theory but a constant experience and very tangible when it comes that there is above us, above the consciousness in the physical body, a great supporting extension as it were of peace, light, power, joy — that we can become aware of it, and bring it down into the physical consciousness and that that, at first for a time, afterwards more frequently and for a longer time, in the end for good, can remain and change the whole basis of our daily consciousness. Even before we are aware of it above, we can suddenly feel it coming down and entering into us. The need is to have an aspiration towards it, make the mind quiet so that what we call the opening is rendered possible. A quieted mind (not necessarily motionless or silent, though it is good if one can have that at will) and a persistent aspiration in the heart are the two main keys of the Yoga. Activity of the mind is a much slower process and does not by

itself lead to these decisive results. It is the difference between a straight road and an approach through constant circles, spirals or meanders.

*

In your dealing with your difficulties and the wrong movements that assail you, you are probably making the mistake of identifying yourself with them too much and regarding them as part of your own nature. You should rather draw back from them, detach and dissociate yourself from them, regard them as movements of the universal lower imperfect and impure nature, forces that enter into you and try to make you their instrument for their self-expression. By so detaching and dissociating yourself it will be more possible for you to discover and to live more and more in a part of yourself, your inner or your psychic being, which is not attacked or troubled by these movements, finds them foreign to itself and automatically refuses assent to them and feels itself always turned to or in contact with the Divine Forces and the higher planes of consciousness. Find that part of your being and live in it; to be able to do so is the true foundation of the Yoga.

By so standing back it will be easier also for you to find a quiet poise in yourself, behind the surface struggle, from which you can more effectively call in our help to deliver you. The Divine presence, calm, peace, purity, force, light, joy, wideness are above, waiting to descend in you. Find this quietude behind and your mind also will become quieter and through the quiet mind you can call down the descent first of the purity and peace and then of the Divine Force. If you can feel this peace and purity descending into you, you can then call it down again and again till it begins to settle; you will feel too the Force working in you to change the movements and transform the consciousness. In this working you will be aware of the presence and power of the Mother. Once that is done, all the rest will be a question of time and of the progressive evolution in you of your true and divine nature.

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The statement² is a general one and like all general statements subject to qualification according to circumstances. What I meant was to discourage what some do which is to be always dwelling on their difficulties and shortcomings only, for that makes them turn for ever like squirrels in a cage always in the same circle of difficulties without the least breaking of light through the clouds. The sentence would be more accurate or generally applicable if it were written “dwell too much” or “dwell solely”. Naturally, without rejection nothing can be done. And in hard periods or moments concentration on the difficulties is inevitable. Also in the early stages one has often to do a great amount of clearance work so that the road can be followed at all.

*

It [*the descent of the sadhana from the mind into the vital*] came by being preoccupied too much with the difficulties of the nature. It is always better to dwell on the good side of things in yourself—I do not mean in an egoistic way, but with faith and cheerful confidence, calling down the positive experience of which the nature is already capable so that a constant positive growth can help in the rejection of all that has to be rejected. But in fact one gets often projected into the vital difficulties at an early stage and then instead of going from the mind into the psychic (through the heart) one has to go through the disturbed vital.

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It [*retracing one's steps from the vital into the psychic*] can be done, if you refuse to be preoccupied with the idea of your difficulties and concentrate on really helpful and positive things. Be more cheerful and confident. Sex and Doubt and Co. are there,

² A statement of Sri Aurobindo which the correspondent wrongly quoted as follows: “It is a mistake to dwell on the lower nature and its obstacles, which is the negative side of the Sadhana. . . . The positive side of experience of the descent is the more important thing.” In transcribing this statement, the correspondent left out two words: Sri Aurobindo wrote “dwell too much”, not simply “dwell”. —Ed.

no doubt, but the Divine is there also inside you. Open your eyes and look and look till the veil is rent and you see Him or Her!

*

You are not asked to do anything that you are incapable of; it is something that you have done already and of which, therefore, you are capable—you are not asked to change your nature by your own effort but only to stand back from these ideas and thoughts, refuse to indulge them and remain quiet within and allow the Force you have repeatedly felt to change you. To repeat constantly, “I am weak, I am unfit, I am bad” will lead you nowhere.

Raising Up Difficulties

As to the obstacles, you should not do anything to call them up or increase their intensity or take pleasure in them. If they come of themselves, you have to surrender your being to the Mother and call in the Light and the psychic being to remove them.

*

The method you speak of is, I understand, that of raising up the difficulties in order to know and exhaust or destroy them. It is inevitable once one enters into Yoga that the difficulties should rise up and they go on rising up so long as anything of them is left in the system at all. It may be thought then that it is better to raise them oneself in a mass so as to get the thing done once for all. But though this may succeed in some cases, it is not even in the mental and vital a safe or certain method. Exhaustion, of course, is impossible; the things that create the difficulties are cosmic forces, forces of the cosmic Ignorance, and cannot be exhausted. People talk of their getting exhausted because after a time they lose strength and dwindle, but that is only by force of the constant rejection by the Purusha and by force of a divine intervention aiding this rejection and dissolving or destroying the difficulty each time it shows its face. Even so, the idea of getting rid of difficulties in a lump seldom works; something remains

and returns until suddenly there comes a divine intervention which is final or else a change of consciousness which makes the return of the difficulty impossible. Still, in the mental and vital it can be done.

In the physical it is much more dangerous, because here it is the physical adhar itself that is attacked and a too great mass of physical difficulties may destroy or disable or permanently injure. The only thing to do here is to get the physical consciousness (down to the most material parts) open to the Power, then to make it accustomed to respond and obey and to each physical difficulty as it arises, apply or call in the divine Power to throw out the attacking force. The physical nature is a thing of habits; it is out of habit that it responds to the forces of illness; one has to get into it the contrary habit of responding to the Divine Force only. This of course so long as a highest consciousness does not descend to which illness is impossible.

*

It is the old habit of the outer consciousness from which it refuses to be delivered. Until this will to repeat the old movements is thrown away, the Force works but under difficulties and behind instead of taking up the frontal consciousness as it would if the assent of the external nature were there. There is also the old persistent habit of raising up and stressing the difficulties instead of rejecting them—the wrong idea that accepting, approving and insisting on their presence is the only way of getting rid of them. I have told you that that is not the way and only prolongs the struggle.

Struggling with Difficulties

There can be no doubt that you can go through—everyone has these struggles; what is needed to pass through is sincerity and perseverance.

There is no use in inviting these struggles, as many do, or even in accepting them when they come for the sake of fighting them out, for they always repeat themselves. When they cannot

be avoided then they must be faced — one cannot be altogether without them, especially in the earlier part of the Yoga; but if you can quietly evade them, that is already an advance. To become quiet and quietly to call back the true psychic state until it becomes normal and either eliminates or minimises the struggle, that is the best way to progress.

*

It is better [*in dealing with the hostile forces*] to proceed by a quiet rejection and growth in consciousness — and not invite battle — though, if a struggle is forced on you, you must meet it with calm and courage.

*

No objection — it is a very good thing to keep working in the higher consciousness. It is more effective than struggling all the time down below with the lower forces.

*

There is no objection to doing the sadhana, but it must be done quietly without this constant struggle and disquietude — not minding if it takes time, not getting into a constant rhythm of struggling against difficulties. That is my point.

*

One must get a knack of remaining quiet and bringing into the quietude the play of the Presence, Force, Light, etc. which is the action of the Sadhana. A struggling effort brings only a minimum result at the price of much confusion and disorder.

*

From your last letter it is clear that it is not your own will that pushes you to go but something that has taken hold of your mind, a clutch of some Force which is using old movements of the outward mind and vital to drive the action. All the more reason to reject this action as contrary to the soul's and heart's true feeling. The pride that says, "I am one of those who can

break but will not bend”, is a poor thing and conceals the fact that one is bending before forces and impulses that are ignorant and obscure. Its result is, as you yourself have seen at the end of your letter, that one bends to the lower forces of nature but refuses to bend to the Divine.

If sadhana is a struggle between the higher will and the old forces of nature bringing suffering and inner torment, we do not want you to do that kind of sadhana. That is not the spirit of our Yoga. What we want you to do is to recover your quietude and go on in that. To have the basis of quietude and allow the Divine Force to work in you firmly and quietly is always the best method — it is not necessary to proceed through a big personal effort, disturbance and struggle. Come back to this — open yourself once more, as you did before — then you could get back sleep or health in a day or two and were growing inwardly without excessive trouble — and let the Mother’s Power and Grace lead you.

I shall do all to help you and pull you out, but that which has closed itself in you must open for the help to work quickly as it did before. Otherwise too it can pull you out, but if there is this strong obstruction that has to be undone, time is needed. A central change of attitude in your mind would, I believe, make all the difference — it has done so before.

*

He can continue his endeavour and let us know if there is any result. The difficulties that have risen in him are quite normal and a natural reaction to the effort he is making. It is usual for these resistances to rise up, for they have to manifest themselves in order that they may be dealt with and thrown out. If he perseveres, that should happen sooner or later. But it is best not to struggle with the resistances but to stand back from them, observe as a witness, reject these movements and call on the Divine Power to remove them. Surrender of the nature is not an easy thing and may take a long time; surrender of the self, if one can do it, is easier and once that is done, that of the nature will come about sooner or later. But for that it is necessary to detach oneself from the action of the Prakriti and see oneself as separate.

That is why I asked whether he had any (major) realisation from his previous sadhana. To observe the movements as a witness without being discouraged or disturbed is the best way to effect the necessary detachment and separation. This also would help to increase the receptivity to any aid that may be given to him and to bring about the reliance, *nirbhara*.

If he turns to us, we will of course give him whatever help he can just now consciously or subconsciously receive.

The Absurdity of Suicide

Suicide is an absurd solution; he is quite mistaken in thinking that it will give him peace. He will only carry his difficulties with him, enter into a more miserable condition of existence beyond and bring them back to another life on earth. The only remedy is to shake off these morbid ideas and face life with a clear will for some definite work to be done as the life's aim and with a quiet and active courage.

*

That is absurd! Dropping the body because of a difficulty does not enable one to come back with a better body. One comes back with the same difficulty to solve.

People do not come here in order to throw off the body. If everybody here dropped his body because of acute difficulties, three quarters of the Asram would be dead by this time.

*

That is not right. Throwing away the life does not improve the chances for the next time. It is in this life and body that one must get things done.

*

Sadhana has to be done in the body, it cannot be done by the soul without the body. When the body drops, the soul goes wandering in other worlds — and finally it comes back to another life and another body. Then all the difficulties it had not solved meet it

again in the new life. So what is the use of leaving the body?

Moreover if one throws away the body wilfully, one suffers much in the other worlds, and when one is born again, it is in worse, not in better conditions.

The only sensible thing is to face the difficulties in this life and this body and conquer them.

*

Death is not a way to succeed in sadhana. If you die in that way [*suicide*], you will only have the same difficulties again with probably less favourable circumstances.

The way to succeed in sadhana is to refuse to be discouraged, to aspire simply and sincerely so that the Mother's force may work in you and bring down what is above. No man ever succeeded in this sadhana by his own merit. To become open and plastic to the Mother is the one thing needed.

*

Despair is absurd and talking of suicide quite out of place. However a man may stumble, the Divine Grace will be there so long as he aspires for it and in the end lead him through.

*

If she remains firm and calm and keeps an unshaken faith in the Divine Power, that will carry her through every trial. Suicide is no solution; it only injures the life of the soul and the problems and difficulties one tries to evade by it seize one again in another form in another life.

*

It [*an impulse to commit suicide*] can come from two sources. (1) An old impression in the subconscious, usually from a past suicide in the family or surroundings. (2) An invasion from one of those around you. Many sadhaks have this suggestion and in some it takes the form of a periodic attack. One must never allow the suggestion to stick or in the least entertain it, otherwise it may fasten in the subconscious and give trouble.

*

It [*the thought of committing suicide*] seems to me an excessive reaction considering that all that is in question is some habitual movements of the external being which do not affect the inner realisation. These external habits have to be changed, but you can do it quietly without allowing their presence to throw you into despondency and despair. It is best done by detaching yourself from them and calling in the Mother's Force to act there and spread the deeper realisation into the outward parts. Your reasoning about violently getting rid of the body in order to get a better one hereafter is entirely wrong. For when one throws away the present life in that way instead of facing its difficulties one not only gets into blacker difficulties after death but in the next life all becomes not better but worse — an inferior embodiment with all the former difficulty from which you fled renewed with less favourable circumstances. There is no way out there. Instead of indulging such feelings, you should put them away from you and turn to the Mother's Grace which has not failed and which is not going to fail you for strength and succour. Recover your balance and develop the psychic progress you were already making so rapidly up to now.

*

Suicide is the worst way that anyone could take to get out of a spiritual difficulty. It only increases and prolongs the difficulty; for it continues it after death, the struggle, the suffering in an exaggerated form and it has to be faced again in another life. The dissolution of the physical elements into Nature would leave the mind and vital as they are, with all their problems present and unsolved. Surely you are not so ignorant as to think that you will cease to be merely by leaving the body?

When the Mother said that by doing that you would bring trouble to the Asram, it is not merely the entry of the police into the Asram, the inquiry and the immediate local scandal that she meant. It would bring a general discredit on the Asram, the Yoga, myself and my work, arm all the numerous enemies here and outside against me, shake the whole Asram and create a terrible example and perhaps make the fulfilment of my work impossible

for some years together. Nothing written by you could prevent that from happening—for it would be the natural, logical and inevitable result and it is what the hostile Influences intend when they put this suggestion into your mind or the mind of others. I write plainly because you must realise what would be the natural consequences of doing what is suggested to you by these Powers in your fits of irrational despair.

In view of what it would mean for yourself and for me and the Divine Work, I ask you to give me your promise never again to yield to this suggestion or contemplate seriously its fulfilment.

I have promised you that, if you keep on, the transformation shall take place and it is not an idle promise that I have made. If once you threw off this Influence, the one that gives you fits like this, the transformation would not only be certain but swift and easy. But in any case, if you keep on aspiring for transformation and not for escape, as you wrote today, the transformation is bound to come.

P. S. I have written in the last paragraph above what I wanted to say in brief. I ask you to react more decisively against the old influence of vital darkness and confusion—to decide firmly not to let it prevail ever again to this extent. It is not even transformation, but a chance that is needed for the true being that is in you, the being of love and radiance and harmony to come out from the clouds in a lasting way. Once it can do that, all trouble would be over.

*

I must remind you of your promise not to yield to sorrow and despair and to face your difficulties with fortitude and patience. Suicide is not only a weak and unmanly evasion, but it is worse than useless since the same misery continues after death intensified in the consciousness which can think of nothing else and one has to come back to earth and face the same difficulties under worse conditions. The Gita has never said that suicide can under any circumstances lead to Nirvana; the death spoken of is a natural or a Yogic death with the mind concentrated with faith and absorption in the Divine. I am sure that Ramakrishna

also never meant such a thing as that anyone dying under any circumstances would have his last wish satisfied. There is no escape by that kind of exit. I do not know either how you can say that you love me and at the same time deliberately decide to deal such a blow to me as your suicide would be. I do not speak of X and others to whom you have still some obligations and what it would mean for them. It is also strange that you should think *I* could be willing to receive your property or any money offered at such a price or ask Y to aid in such an arrangement. You must have been very much clouded by your fit of despair not to see that. All that apart, I must press on you not to allow these dark attacks with their morbid suggestions to carry you away. If you have the true yearning for the Divine, as you have undoubtedly in your soul, it is not by yielding to vital weakness that you will show it but by persisting, whatever the time and the difficulties, till it is achieved. You have promised to do that and I again recall you to your promise. Nirvana itself cannot be so achieved, but only by rising above all other desires and attachments until one has the supreme liberation and peace. Ramana Maharshi himself would tell you that and I suppose you can believe him if you cannot believe me.

It is difficult for me to say anything else since you have told me that no words of mine have any truth or value and that all my experiences also are subjective delusions without any truth or value. I suppose all spiritual or inner experiences can be denounced as merely subjective and delusive. But to the spiritual seeker even the smallest inner experience is a thing of value. I stand for the Truth I hold in me and I would still stand for it even if it had no chance whatever of outward fulfilment in this life. I should go on with it even if all here abandoned and repudiated me and denounced it to the world as a delusion and a folly. I have never disguised from myself the difficulties of what I have undertaken, it is not difficulties or the threat of failure that can deter me.

I hope however that you will get over this attack and see things one day as all the past seekers of the Divine have seen it, viz. that what one seeks is so precious and such a supreme thing

that a whole lifetime of effort however arduous or painful is not by any means too much to give to it. I say nothing else since you say that words of encouragement from me can have no value for you. But this at least is a thing that is true and that others whose spiritual experience and greatness cannot be disputed would tell you.

If you have the love for me you speak of—I will say nothing of mine for you, since you do not seem to believe much in it—you will listen to what I say and renew and carry out your promise to go through with your quest to the end with patience and courage.

*

To characterise suicide as a willed withdrawal from life is the most astounding statement that would not bear a moment's scrutiny. Suicide is accompanied in most cases by a morbid feeling of disappointment with life, a violent revolt against what is considered the imposition of an unjust providence or an adverse malignant fate. It has nothing of the sense of freedom behind it, no knowledge of the play of forces behind the exterior life, no means of mastering them or using them as stepping-stones to a higher freedom, a greater destiny. The calm poise of the soul, the peace that surpasseth understanding are not his. He is moved by dark forces who hold him completely in their grip. The sense of freedom of which he vaunts is the conjuring trick of the black magician by which he is deluded and dragged to a greater degradation. That is why it is said in the Upanishads that those who slay themselves enter into blind worlds of darkness. A violent exit by suicide is an act of excessive egoism, not of freedom.

The true freedom is found in unity with God and in the abiding sense of immortality, when the soul has risen above the bondage of his lower nature, and from the spirit heights of his being can survey his actions seated in a calm, untouched, unmoved by happenings in Time.

*

Suicide is never the right thing to do, but its psychic consequences can be mitigated by the spirit in which it is done or if some feeling of sacrifice or self-offering enters into it as in the case of the Sati. It is always possible to help departed souls in their passage if one has the necessary psychic feeling towards them and the psychic force to make it effective. Contact can also be maintained so long as this passage does not carry them beyond the borders of the communication possible or into the region of psychic sleep or trance in which they remain within themselves and prepare their new birth in future.

The experiences related are of a high character and show an advanced state of the consciousness. The overhead station especially is not common and is usually attained only after a considerable psychic and spiritual growth. It is always possible indeed to ascend and descend in the consciousness reaching very high in planes above the head but usually one does not stay there.

There are always two things possible for the spiritual seeker, remain among others and then they can act, as she puts it, as a ferment, the other to congregate together and even to form a separate body for a common sadhana or for a common work or both as in this Ashram. Which is to be done depends on the urge of the spirit within or on a call from above.

*

Well, that [*the quietude of death*] is not the right kind of quietude. The peace of Nirvana would have some meaning in it, but death into the quietness of exhausted Prakriti is no release at all.

*

The real rest³ is in the inner life founded in peace and silence and absence of desire. There is no other rest—for without that the machine goes on whether one is interested in it or not. The inner mukti is the only remedy.

³ The correspondent expressed a desire for "the long rest that is one's due after death".
—Ed.

Section Three

The Opposition of the Hostile Forces

Chapter One

The Hostile Forces and the Difficulties of Yoga

The Existence of the Hostile Forces

Whenever anything has to be done, there are always forces that want to interfere. I suppose they want to show that smooth walking and the “wide unbarred and thornless path” belong only to the Vedic Ritam satyam brihat and we must get up there — if we can.

*

What occult secret? It is a fact always known to all Yogis and occultists since the beginning of time, in Europe and Africa as in India, that wherever Yoga or Yajna is done, there the hostile forces gather together to stop it by any means. It is known that there is a lower nature and a higher spiritual nature — it is known that they pull different ways and the lower is strongest at first and the higher afterwards. It is known that the hostile forces take advantage of the movements of the lower nature and try to spoil through them, smash or retard the siddhi. It has been said as long ago as the Upanishads, “Hard is this path to tread, sharp like a razor’s edge”; it was said later by Christ, “Hard is the way and narrow the gate by which one enters into the kingdom of heaven” and also “Many are called, few chosen” — because of these difficulties. But it has also always been known that those who are sincere and faithful in heart and remain so and those who rely on the Divine will arrive in spite of all difficulties, stumbles or falls.

*

Yes, certainly [*there are hostile forces active in the outside world*]. Men are being constantly invaded by the hostiles and

there are great numbers of men who are partly or entirely under their influence. Some are possessed by them, others (a few) are incarnations of hostile beings. At the present moment they are very active all over the earth. Of course in the outside world there is no consciousness such as is developed in Yoga, by which they can either become aware of or consciously repel the attacks — the struggle in them between the psychic and the hostile force goes on mostly behind the veil or so far as it is on the surface is not understood by the mind.

*

Yes, of course, there is always a fight between the forces of Light and Darkness.

In sadhana it becomes concentrated and conscious to us.

As for the hostile beings, they are always in battle with each other; but they make common cause against the Truth and Light.

The Function of the Hostile Forces

The hostile forces have a certain self-chosen function: it is to test the condition of the individual, of the work, of the earth itself and their readiness for the spiritual descent and fulfilment. At every step of the journey, they are there attacking furiously, criticising, suggesting, imposing despondency or inciting to revolt, raising unbelief, amassing difficulties. No doubt, they put a very exaggerated interpretation on the rights given them by their function, making mountains even out of what seems to us a mole-hill. A little trifling false step or mistake and they appear on the road and clap a whole Himalaya as a barrier across it. But this opposition has been permitted from of old not merely as a test or ordeal, but as a compulsion on us to seek a greater strength, a more perfect self-knowledge, an intenser purity and force of aspiration, a faith that nothing can crush, a more powerful descent of the Divine Grace.

*

The purpose they [*the hostile forces*] serve *in the world* is to

give a full chance to the possibilities of the Inconscience and Ignorance — for this world was meant to be a working out of these possibilities with the supramental harmonisation as its eventual outcome. The life, the work developing here in the Asram has to deal with the world problem and had therefore to meet, it could not avoid, the conflict with the working of the hostile Powers in the human being.

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The hostile forces make it their function to attack and disturb the sadhaks, but if there were no wrong movement and no imperfection and weakness, they would not be disturbed.

*

It happens so with everybody [*that the external nature responds to lower vibrations*] so long as there is not the positive siddhi of transformation by which it becomes contrary to the very nature of the instrument to respond to these vibrations — because they have become foreign to it. Till then all depends on the vigilance of the consciousness and its will. The repetition of the response does not increase the difficulty — it only retards the clearing out of the invading forces.

*

Whatever point the adverse forces choose for attack, however small it may seem to the external human mind, becomes a crucial point and to yield it up may be to yield to them one of the keys of the fortress. Even if it is a small postern door, it is enough for them if they can enter.

Nothing is really small and unimportant in the Great Path. Especially when the struggle has come down to the physical level, these distinctions cease to have any value; for there “small” things have a not easily calculable index value and are of great importance. On that level to lose a small post may be to make certain the loss of the big battle.

All have had to pass through the ordeal and test through which you are passing. We would have avoided it for you if

it had been possible, but since it has come we look to you to persist and conquer. Patience, quiet endurance, calm resolution to go through to the end and triumph, these are the qualities now required of you—the less spectacular but more substantial of the warrior virtues.

Also perspicacity and vigilance. Do not shut your eyes to the difficulty in you or turn away from it, but also let it not discourage you. Victory is certain if we persevere and what price of difficulty and endeavour can be too great for such a conquest?

*

Hostile forces attack every sadhak; some are conscious, others are not. Their object is either to influence the person or to use him or to spoil the sadhana or the work or any other motive of the kind. Their object is not to test—but their attack may be used by the guiding Power as a test.

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Your description [*of recent tests in sadhana*] is too vague. From what you write it may just as well be the reaction that frequently follows an experience; the adverse Force coming in with a contrary movement. Tests come sometimes from the hostile forces, sometimes in the course of Nature. I suppose they must be necessary, since they always come in sadhana.

*

The method of the Divine Manifestation is through calm and harmony, not through a catastrophic upheaval. The latter is the sign of a struggle, generally of conflicting vital forces, but at any rate a struggle on the inferior plane.

You think too much of adverse forces. That kind of preoccupation causes much unnecessary struggle. Fix your mind on the positive side—open to the Mother's power, concentrate on her protection, call for light, calm and peace and purity and growth into the divine consciousness and knowledge.

This idea of tests also is not a healthy idea and ought not

to be pushed too far. Tests are applied not by the Divine but by the forces of the lower planes—mental, vital, physical—and allowed by the Divine because that is part of the soul's training and helps it to know itself, its powers and the limitations it has to outgrow. The Mother is not testing you at every moment, but rather helping you at every moment to rise beyond the necessity of tests and difficulties which belong to the inferior consciousness. To be always conscious of that help will be your best safeguard against all attacks whether of adverse powers or of your own lower nature.

Testing Oneself against the Hostile Forces

If one knows how to profit by experience, even the Hostile Forces and their attacks can be useful—although of course that does not mean that the attacks should be invited. What they do is to press with all their force upon some weak point of our nature and if we are vigilant, we can see and throw away that weakness. Only the attack method of these Forces is too violent and upheaving and endangers the good things in one also, faith and peace etc.—so one has to be careful to keep these against all attacks.

*

There is no use of testing [*one's capacity*] at all—whatever test is needed, comes of itself in the ordinary way in the very use of the capacity and in the very steps of the progress—no other is needed. Beyond that the tests that come are from the hostile forces—but their way of testing is to take advantage of any point of weakness and push with all their force at that point to break down the sadhana or else to hurl all the adverse forces on the consciousness while it is still in process of transition and not yet mature so as to shatter all that has been done. It is not a true test but mere destruction replacing the constructive method. By unnecessary “testing” one dangerously invites this hostile pressure and raises up things which one has to banish. To be conscious is necessary, but quiet self-examination is sufficient

for that — raising up difficulties under plan of testing is quite the wrong method.

The Divine Force and the Adverse Force

Do you not know the story of the Elephant Brahman? All is Brahman, but in action you have to treat the elephant as the Elephant Brahman and the Asura as the Asura Brahman and neither as merely Brahman pure and simple. One has either to avoid the Rakshasa or overcome him; otherwise the Rakshasa may eat up the man, all Brahman though both be. The Brahman realisation is an inner static realisation, until one has become the dynamic instrument of the Divine Consciousness and Force — then the problem of the elephant and the Rakshasa won't arise, for the Divine Consciousness will know and the Divine Force will execute what is to be done in each case. There is no need to have *vaira* inside, but to be friendly with the Rakshasa is not prudent, as the Rakshasa is impervious to that kind of thing — he will take advantage of it to farther his own purpose.

*

Your description of the “Golden One” was the description of an Asura — how can that be the Divine? — “efficiently cruel” etc. etc. And, taken in that way, submission to such a Power so conceived would justify a yielding to anything coming with sufficient force from the lower Nature on the ground that it is *He* who is making you do it.

There is a right and discriminating use of the Vedantic Knowledge that all is One and there is a wrong and undiscriminating use. The latter is more dangerous than complete ignorance. Especially at this moment sadhaks must be on their guard against the subtle intrusion of this error (the undiscriminating acceptance of all as coming from the Divine) — for more than one has fallen a victim to it and got badly hurt.

*

Your statement about the Shakti. The mere intensity of the force

does not show that it is a bad power; the Divine Force often works with a great intensity. Everything depends on the nature of the force and its working; what does it do, what seems to be its purpose? If it works to purify or open the system, or brings with it light or peace or prepares the change of the thoughts, ideas, feelings, character in the sense of a turning towards a higher consciousness, then it is the right force. If it is dark or obscure, or perturbs the being with rajas or egoistic suggestions or excites the lower nature, then it is an adverse Force.

The Forces of the Lower Nature and the Hostile Forces

There are [*at work in the world*] the higher forces of the Divine Nature—the forces of Light, Truth, divine Power, Peace, Ananda—there are the forces of the lower nature which belong either to a lower truth or to ignorance and error—there are also the hostile forces whose whole aim is to maintain the reign of Darkness, Falsehood, Death and Suffering as the law of life.

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The lower nature is ignorant and undivine, not in itself hostile but shut to the Light and Truth. The hostile forces are anti-divine, not merely undivine; they make use of the lower nature, pervert it, fill it with distorted movements and by that means influence man and even try to enter and possess or at least entirely control him.

Free yourself from all exaggerated self-depreciation and the habit of getting depressed by the sense of sin, difficulty or failure. These feelings do not really help, on the contrary, they are an immense obstacle and hamper the progress. They belong to the religious, not to the Yogic mentality. The Yогин should look on all the defects of the nature as movements of the lower prakriti common to all and reject them calmly, firmly and persistently with full confidence in the Divine Power—without weakness or depression or negligence and without excitement, impatience or violence.

*

No, [*the vital ego is*] certainly not [*a hostile power*] — it is part of the ordinary human nature, everybody has it. It has to be purified and transformed, the ego being replaced by the true vital being of which it is a distorted shadow. The forces of the lower nature are often rebellious and resist transformation out of attachment to the familiar movements of the Ignorance, desire, vanity, pride, lust, self-will etc., but they are not in their nature hostile. The hostile Forces are those whose very *raison d'être* is revolt against the Divine, against the Light and Truth and enmity to the Divine Work.

*

Normal human defects are one thing — they are the working of the lower nature of the Ignorance. The action of the hostile forces is a special intervention creating violent inner conflicts, abnormal depressions, thoughts and impulses of a kind which can be easily recognised as suggestions, e.g. leaving the Asram, abandoning the Yoga, revolt against the Divine, suggestions of calamity and catastrophe apparently irresistible, irrational impulses and so on. It is a different order from the usual human weaknesses.

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The defects of the nature are nothing, they can be dealt with progressively. It is these outward attacks, these suggestions and throwing in of wrong forces to which the sadhak must shut himself altogether.

*

To have weaknesses of the lower nature is one thing — to call in the hostile forces is quite another. Whoever does the latter, takes his risk. He is going towards the opposite camp — for the marks of the hostile Force are contempt of the Divine, revolt and hatred against the Mother, disbelief in the Yoga, assertion of ego against the Divine Being, preference of falsehood to Truth, seeking after false gods and rejection of the Eternal.

*

There are some who are never touched by the hostile forces.

The normal resistance of the lower Nature in human beings and the action of the Hostiles are two quite different things. The former is natural and occurs in everybody; the latter is an intervention from the non-human world. But this intervention can come in two forms. (1) They use and press on the lower Nature forces making them resist where they would otherwise be quiescent, making the resistance strong or violent where it would be otherwise slight or moderate, exaggerating its violence when it is violent. There is besides a malignant cleverness, a conscious plan and combination when the Hostiles act on these forces which is not evident in the normal resistance of the forces. (2) They sometimes invade with their own forces. When this happens there is often a temporary possession or at least an irresistible influence which makes the thoughts, feelings, actions of the person abnormal—a black clouding of the brain, a whirl in the vital, all acts as if the person could not help himself and were driven by an overmastering force. On the other hand instead of a possession there may be only a strong influence; there the symptoms are less marked, but it is easy for anyone acquainted with the ways of these forces to see what has happened. Finally it may be only an attack, not possession or influence; the person then is separate, is not overcome, resists.

*

It is difficult to observe the difference between the action of the hostile Force and the pressure of the lower Nature because it is the latter that the Force takes hold of for its purpose. But there is in the Force a suggestive character, a conscious arrangement of the attack so as to upset or destroy the sadhana which there is not in the ordinary movement of the lower Nature—for that only comes to satisfy itself and then ceases. In your case the tactical use of a suggestion, the sudden rush clouding the knowledge, the rhythmic character of the periodic return, the attempt to bring despondency and hopelessness and push to departure—all these are clear signs of the hostile attack. People like X and Y who are moving forward in a leisurely way, are not usually subjected

to the hostile pressure. One with an intense and sensitive vital nature is more open; also those who have some vital proclivity in a very developed or exaggerated form e.g. pride, ambition, jealousy, sexuality etc. A complete surrender from the beginning does protect — suggestions may come, but they have no power to develop into a crisis.

*

There is a natural movement of the ordinary human nature in the material consciousness which takes time to get rid of. Of course we call them forces of the lower nature but one must not regard them as hostile, but only ordinary. They have to be changed but it usually takes time and it can be done quietly. One must be more occupied with the positive side of the sadhana than with them. If one is always thinking of them as hostile things, getting disturbed when they come, considering as hostile possessions, then it is not good.

The things that are really hostile are few and must be distinguished from the ordinary movements of the nature. The first must be repelled, the second dealt with quietly and without getting troubled or discouraged by their appearance.

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They [*certain lower forces*] are not hostile forces, they are simply the forces of the ordinary Nature. The hostile forces are those which try to pervert everything and are in revolt against the Divine and opposed to the Yoga.

*

The forces of the Ignorance are a perversion of the earth-nature and the adverse Powers make use of them. They do not give up their control of men without a struggle.

*

There is a pressure on the forces of the lower nature to change — through that the pressure is felt by the hostiles; but whether they change or are destroyed seems to be left very much to them to choose.

Vital Resistance, Physical Inertia and the Hostile Forces

There are almost always some parts of the being that are either unwilling or feel an incapacity for the effort demanded of them. It is the psychic and the mind and the higher vital usually that join together for the Yoga — for if these three do not join, it is difficult to do any Yoga at all beyond getting a few experiences from time to time. But in the lower vital there is almost always something recalcitrant and there is much of the physical that is too obscure. If the sadhak were left to himself this could be remedied without much difficulty, but it is here that the hostility in the universal (lower) forces comes in — they want to keep their reign over the being. The result is an exacerbation of the resistance of the lower vital and an exaggeration of the obstruction (inertia, passive resistance) in the physical which then admit these suggestions of self-destruction, depression or despair.

*

It is more the lack of sleep that is responsible [*for the physical weakness*], I think; also the excess of struggle which the constant pressure of the vital disturbances and the physical tamas bring in and by that weaken the nerves.

Like the vital disturbance the physical inertia with all its symptoms is an attack of the hostile forces intended to cut short and prevent the higher opening. The ideas that arise to justify it are of no value — it is not true that physical work is of an inferior value to mental culture, it is the arrogance of the intellect that makes the claim. All work done for the Divine is equally divine, manual labour done for the Divine is more divine than mental culture done for one's own development, fame or mental satisfaction.

This inertia, numbness, pain should be thrown off with the same resolution as the vital disturbances. The only peculiarity of it in your case is the persistent violence of the attack as in the case of the vital — otherwise it is what others get also; but each time they reject, call on the Mother and get free, after a little time if the attack is violent, at once if it is of a lesser character.

If there is temporary physical inability, one can take rest, but solely for the purpose of recovering the physical energy. The idea of giving up physical work for mental self-development is a creation of the mental ego.

*

The inertia gives room and power for the hostile forces to act.

The Hostile Forces and Universal Forces

No, they [*the hostile forces*] do not create universal forces; they are themselves moved by them and move them.

The Hostile Forces and the Spiritual Consciousness

From the higher mind upwards, all is free from the action of the hostile forces. For they [*the higher planes*] all belong to the spiritual consciousness though with varying degrees of light and power and completeness.

Chapter Two

Attacks by the Hostile Forces

Attacks Not Uncommon

I do not see how I could say that you were not fit for this Yoga when you had and still get the experiences that are characteristic of the Yoga. The obstacles in the consciousness and the attacks are no proof that a man is not fit for Yoga. There is no one practising Yoga who does not get them. Even those who have become great siddha Yogis had them during their time of sadhana.

There is not only yourself or X who have been touched, but others have been violently affected. The attack has been extremely serious this time—as these attacks always are at the moment when something is about to be effected in the individual or the general consciousness.

*

There are always hostile forces that try to stop or break the experience. If they come in, it is a sign that there is something in the being, vital or physical, that either responds or is too inert to oppose.

*

The hostile forces do not need a cause for attacking—they attack whenever and whoever they can. What one has to see is that nothing responds or admits them.

*

There is always this critical hostile voice in everybody's nature, questioning, reasoning, denying the experience itself, suggesting doubt of oneself and doubt of the Divine. One has to recognise it as the voice of the Adversary trying to prevent the progress and refuse credence to it altogether.

*

It is not a fact that the Rajayogin or others are not attacked by environmental forces. Whether moksha or transformation be the aim, all are attacked — because the vital forces want neither liberation nor transformation. Only the Yogins speak of it in general terms as Rakshasi Maya or the attacks of *kāma*, *krodha*, *lobha*, — they don't trace these things to their sources or watch how they come in — but the thing itself is known to all.

*

Naturally, the hostile forces are always on the watch to rob what they can of the things received by the sadhak — not that they profit by them, but they prevent them from being used to build up the divine in life.

Attacks Often Follow a Progress

It often happens like that. When a progress has been made (here it is the opening of the inner vision) the hostiles attack in a fury. You must be especially on your guard when you are making a progress — so as to check the attack before it can get in.

*

It is a fact that the lower forces always attack when they see that a sadhak is making too much progress for their taste. But they can do nothing against a clear and steady will and a faithful perseverance.

*

A progress made often stirs the adverse forces to activity, they want to diminish its effect as much as possible. When you get a decisive experience of this kind, you should remain concentrated and assimilate it — avoiding self-dispersion and all externalising of the consciousness.

*

It is very often after a good experience or a decisive progress that the beings of the vital world try to attack and threaten.

The being who took the form of X was one of these. They have always the hope that they can turn back the sadhak from his path by attacks and menaces.

*

About the attacks and the action of the cosmic forces—these attacks very ordinarily become violent when the progress is becoming rapid and on the way to be definite—especially if they find they cannot carry out an effective aggression into the inner being, they try to shake by outside assaults. One must take it as a trial of strength, a call for gathering all one's capacities of calm and openness to the Light and Power so as to make oneself an instrument for the victory of the Divine over the undivine, of the Light over the darkness in the world tangle. It is in this spirit that you must face these difficulties till the higher things are so confirmed in you that these forces can attack no longer.

*

There is always a struggle going on between the forces of Light and the opposing forces—when there is a true movement and progress the latter try to throw a wrong movement across to stop or delay the progress. Sometimes they do this by raising up old movements in yourself that have still the power to recur; sometimes they use movements or thoughts in the atmosphere, things said by others to disturb the consciousness. When a settled peace and working of the Power and self-giving of the being can be fixed in the physical, then there comes a secure basis—there are no more fluctuations of this kind, though superficial difficulties may continue.

*

That is right [*to remain confident, cheerful and hopeful*]. The rest is the remnant of the attack—such an attack, sudden and violent, as sometimes, indeed often comes when one is making full progress to the straight and open way. It cannot permanently deflect the progress and, when it disappears, there is usually a chance of going on more firmly and swiftly towards the goal.

That is what we must do now.

*

Krishnaprem's letter is admirable from start to finish and every sentence hits the truth with great point and force. He has evidently an accurate knowledge both of the psychological and the occult forces that act in Yoga; all he says is in agreement with my own experience and I concur. His account of the rationale of your present difficulties is quite correct and no other explanation is needed—except what I was writing in my unfinished letter about the descent of the sadhana into the plane of the physical consciousness and that does not disaccord with but only completes what he says. He is quite right in saying that the heaviness of these attacks was due to the fact that you had taken up the sadhana in earnest and were approaching, as one might say, the gates of the Kingdom of Light. That always makes these forces rage and they strain every nerve and use or create every opportunity to turn the sadhak back or, if possible, drive him out of the path altogether by their suggestions, their violent influences and their exploitation of all kinds of incidents that always crop up more and more when these conditions prevail, so that he may not reach the gates. I have written to you more than once alluding to these forces, but I did not press the point because I saw that like most people whose minds have been rationalised by a modern European education you were not inclined to believe in or at least to attach any importance to this knowledge. People nowadays seek the explanation for everything in their ignorant reason, their surface experience and in outside happenings. They do not see the hidden forces and inner causes which were well-known and visualised in the traditional Indian and Yogic knowledge. Of course, these forces find their *point d'appui* in the sadhak himself, in the ignorant parts of his consciousness and its assent to their suggestions and influences; otherwise they could not act or at least could not act with any success. In your case the chief *points d'appui* have been the extreme sensitiveness of the lower vital ego and now also the physical consciousness with all its fixed or standing opinions, prejudices, prejudgments, habitual

reactions, personal preferences, clinging to old ideas and associations, its obstinate doubts and its maintaining these things as a wall of obstruction and opposition to the larger light. This activity of the physical mind is what people call intellect and reason, although it is only the turning of a machine in a circle of mental habits and is very different from the true and free reason, the higher Buddhi which is capable of enlightenment and still more from the higher spiritual light or that insight and tact of the psychic consciousness which sees at once what is true and right and distinguishes it from what is wrong and false. This insight you had very constantly whenever you were in a good condition and especially whenever Bhakti became strong in you. When the sadhak comes down into the physical consciousness, leaving the mental and higher vital ranges on which he had first turned towards the Divine, these opposite things become very strong and sticky and, as one's more helpful states and experiences draw back behind the veil and one can hardly realise that one ever had them, it becomes difficult to get out of this condition. The only thing then, as Krishnaprem has told you and I also have insisted, is to stick it out. If once one can get and keep the resolution to refuse to accept the suggestions of these forces, however plausible they may seem, then either quickly or gradually this condition can diminish and will be overpassed and cease. To give up Yoga is no solution; you could not successfully do it as both Krishnaprem and I have told you and as your own mind tells you when it is clear. A temporary absence from the Asram for relief from the struggle is a different matter. I do not think, however, that residence in the Ramana Asram would be eventually helpful except for bringing back some peace of mind; Ramana Maharshi is a great Yogi and his realisation very high on its own line; but it does not seem to me that it is a line which you could successfully follow as you certainly can follow the path of Bhakti if you stick to it, and there might then be the danger of your falling between two stools, losing your own path and not being able to follow the path of another nature.

*

The main obstacle in your sadhana has been a weak part in the vital which does not know how to bear suffering or disappointment or delay or temporary failure. When these things come, it winces away from them, revolts, cries out, makes a scene within, calls in despondency, despair, disbelief, darkness of the mind, denial — begins to think of abandonment of the effort or death as the only way out of its trouble. It is the very opposite of that equanimity, fortitude, self-mastery which is always recommended as the proper attitude of the Yogi. This has been seized upon by the forces adverse to the sadhana with their usual cleverness to prevent you from making the steady and finally decisive progress which would put all the trouble behind you. Their method is very simple. You make the effort and get perhaps some of these experiences which are not decisive but which if continued and followed up may lead to something decisive or at least you begin to have that peace, poise and hopefulness which are the favourable condition for progress — provided they can be kept steady. Immediately they give a blow to that part of the vital — or arrange things so that it shall get a blow or what it thinks to be a blow and sets it in motion with its round of sadness, suffering, outcry and despair. It clouds the mind with its sorrow and then gets that clouded mind to find justifications for its attitude — it has established a fixed formation, a certain round of ideas, arguments, feelings which it always repeats like a mechanism that once set in motion goes its round till it stops or something intervenes to stop it. This justification by the mind gives it strength to assert itself and remain or, when thrown back, to recur. For if these reasonings were not there, you would at once see the situation and disengage yourself from it or at any rate would perceive that such a course of feeling and conduct is not worthy of you and draw back from it at its very inception. But as it is you have to spend days getting out of the phase and getting back into your normal self. Then when you are back to your right walk and stature they wait a little and strike again and the whole thing repeats itself with a mechanical regularity. It takes time, steadfast endeavour, long continued aspiration and a calm perseverance to get anywhere in Yoga; that time you do

not give yourself because of these recurrent swingings away from the right attitude. It is not vanity or intellectual questioning that is the real obstacle — they are only impedimenta, — but they could well be overcome or one could pass beyond in spite of them if this part of the vital were not there or were not so strong to intervene. If I have many times urged upon you equanimity, steadfast patience, cheerfulness or whatever is contrary to this spirit, it is because I wanted you to recover your true inner vital self and get rid of this intruder. If you give it rein, it is extremely difficult to get on to anywhere. It must go, — its going is much more urgently required than the going of the intellectual doubt.

How you got to this condition is another matter. When you came it was not apparent and for a long time did not manifest itself. When Mother first saw you in the verandah of the old house she said, "That is a man with a large and strong vital" and it was true, nor do I think it has at all gone, but you have pushed it to the back and it turns up only when you are in good condition. The other, this small vital which is taking so much space now, must have been there but latent, perhaps because you had had a strong and successful life and it had no occasion to be active. But at a certain moment here it began to be impatient for immediate results, to fret at the amount of tapasya or effort to control its habits and indulgences and the absence of immediate return for the trouble. At a later stage it has tried to justify and prolong itself by appealing to your penchant for the Vaishnava attitude. But the emotional outbreaks of the Vaishnava — or such impulses as Vivekananda's *prāyopavesana* — spring from a tremendous one-minded, one-hearted passion for the Divine or for the goal which tries to throw itself headlong forward at any cost. It was another part of your vital that would have liked to take that attitude, but this smaller part prevented it and brought in a confusion and a mixture which was rather used by the adverse forces to turn you away from belief in or hope of the goal. This confusion of mind and vital you must get rid of — you must call in the true reason and the higher vital to cast out these movements. A higher reason must refuse to listen to its self-justifications and tell it that nothing, however plausible, can

justify these motives in a sadhak; your higher vital must refuse to accept them, telling it, “I do not want these alien things; I do not recognise them as part of myself or my nature.”

Positive and Negative Means of Attack

The hostiles when they cannot break the Yoga by positive means, by positive temptations or vital outbreaks, are quite willing to do it negatively; first by depression, then by refusal at once of ordinary life and of sadhana.

Attacks through Suggestions

Indirect attacks are not of this kind, a violent rush and covering by hostile forces—they are done through covert suggestions, half-truth, half-falsehood, attempts to represent the falsehood in the garb of the Divine Truth or to mix the lower consciousness cleverly with the higher. Their attempt is to mislead by guile rather than to conquer by force.

*

When the vital forces or beings throw an influence, they give it certain forms of thought-action and put them in the minds and vital of people so that they feel, think, act, speak in a particular way. Whoever opens to the influence acts according to this formation, perhaps with variations due to his own vital temperament.

*

Always refuse your assent to these forces and their suggestions and movements—that is the one imperative rule. It is not that you cannot understand the Truth, you understand the Truth perfectly well—but once you begin listening they confuse your mind, cover up the understanding and then torment you with their false suggestions. Always remain quiet, always open to the help of the Force, always call for the peace.

*

Do not allow these suggestions to prevail. Each time these powers attack, if you hold them at bay, you gain an added force for progress. They attack and suggest to you a wrong understanding in the hope that, if you accept, their power to return on you will last a little longer. Do not allow them to prevail for however short a time.

*

I do not see what reasons can be so subtle as to justify or even appear to justify something that opposes and tries to destroy the sadhana. Whatever stands in the way of spiritual progress, must be a falsehood whatever reasons it gives in its own favour. The best thing is not to listen to its reasons.

*

There is no issue out in such persistence in a wrong mood and a false attitude. It is the old foolish idea that the ignorance is the truth for you because you are still ignorant in your external consciousness and that if the divine Light and Truth are not perfectly established in the ignorance, then the Light and Truth are false and the ignorance is the only truth and that to believe in the Truth and the Divine is a pretence. Nothing can be more irrational than these arguments of the dark Forces to which your external vital so foolishly lends its adherence. The Truth remains the Truth in spite of all denial and it is to that you will have to give your assent and allegiance, not to confusion and darkness.

*

But when the suggestions come, surely it is possible to know from their very character what they are and that itself shows that they must come from wrong vital Forces. The only thing is that they must be at once rejected and the entry into your own mind and vital refused to them—i.e. they must not be accepted or allowed to influence. Very few have the direct occult perception of the Forces behind the suggestion—at least until the cosmic consciousness fully opens, for then direct perception

becomes more easily possible,— but the mental understanding can be used with good effect.

*

Vital forces can attack the mind and do. Many receive suggestions from them through the brain, so it is quite possible that it may be felt as coming in through the head from above. That does not mean that it came from regions above the mind (higher Mind, intuition or Overmind). Correct reasoning means no more than coherent argument from a certain standpoint and does not validate a fit of anger or indicate for it a non-adverse source.

*

It [*a vibration of anger which entered the body from behind the shoulder blades*] must have been an indication of the source and location of the suggestion or influence. Either thoughts or vibrations or some pressure of wrong force can be felt being thrown or sent in a very concrete way when the consciousness is open. When it is not, they come in without being noticed, only the result is felt.

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There has been progress in all these parts [*of the being*], but they seem to be subject still to a response to the suggestions of the hostile forces. Everybody gets these suggestions, but they ought not to be allowed to enter inside, especially in the heart, or to be accepted by the vital. Evidently, they enter through the physical mind (from the throat upwards means that) and affect the surface vital and emotional being. You must get the power to reject them from there by a constant and steady denial and refusal of their suggestions. So long as anything in you says “yes” or accepts, there is always the possibility of a return.

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These [*thoughts of unfitness for Yoga*] are the usual suggestions that come when there is the attack of the hostile forces. You should know that they have no value and reject. The spiritual

perfection, the full transformation of the nature is not a thing that can come without long and steady endeavour. Movements like these have many refuges in different parts of the being and it is not till they are driven out of all and out of the environmental consciousness that one can be free from their recurrence. One must learn to be inflexible, fixed in one's aim and not discouraged by the recurring difficulties of the nature, for they have been long ingrained in the vital and physical of the human being and they are also in the play of the universal forces — so if it takes long to get them out, as it does even with the best sadhaks, that is no proof that one is not fit for the sadhana. Reject all that and go on steadily — aim always at getting more of the higher consciousness down, that is the cure for all these things.

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What is there in you is the capacity for response to these suggestions [of *unfitness for Yoga*] that still remains owing to the stamp of the past habit on the physical, especially the subconscious physical. I have explained to you what happens — that these things when rejected by the mind and vital descend into the subconscious or else go out into the environmental consciousness and from there they can return when pushed by the hostile forces. It is in these two ways that the hostiles try to recover their hold. But the rising from the subconscious is not so important except for its long persistence — it comes up in dream or it is, in the waking consciousness, fragmentary. But when it comes from the environmental consciousness then it can be a strong attack and it is evidently that which is taking place now.

I think what lends force to these attacks and tends to upset you, is a feeling of impatience somewhere that things are not going forward, progress of a definite kind is not being made and that these things are not done with already for ever. A period of apparent halt is not necessarily an adverse thing, it can be a preparation for a fresh progress of a more decisive character — that often happens in the sadhana — but you have to keep vigilantly the advance gained in spite of attacks. The next progress ought to be the descent of the full spiritual calm

and peace from above — an opening of the consciousness into wideness. Till it comes, keep yourself firm and do not allow these attacks to shake your basis.

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They [*hostile attacks on the outer being*] are felt as suggestions, or a touch on the surface mind, vital, physical or as movements in the atmosphere (the personal or the general environmental consciousness) — but for the inner being it is like gusts or storms outside. If they penetrate by chance into the house, they are immediately ejected and the doors and windows banged on them — there is nothing that accepts or tolerates them inside.

Attacks through Others

All these difficulties [*in dealing with others*] should be faced in a more quiet and less egoistic spirit.

This Yoga is a spiritual battle; its very attempt raises all sorts of adverse forces and one must be ready to face difficulties, sufferings, reverses of all sorts in a calm unflinching spirit.

The difficulties that come are ordeals and tests and if one meets them in the right spirit, one comes out stronger and spiritually purer and greater.

No misfortune can come, the adverse forces cannot touch or be victorious unless there is some defect in oneself, some impurity, weakness or at the very least ignorance. One should then seek out this weakness in oneself and correct it.

When there is an attack from the human instruments of adverse forces, one should try to overcome it not in a spirit of personal hatred or anger or wounded egoism, but with a calm spirit of strength and equanimity and a call to the Divine Force to act. Success or failure lies with the Divine.

In dealing with others there is a way of speaking and doing which gives most offence and opens one most to misunderstanding and there is also a way which is quiet and firm but conciliatory to those who can be conciliated — all who are not absolutely of bad will. It is better to use the latter than the

former. No weakness, no arrogance or violence, this should be the spirit.

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The attack of illness after seeing the woman is very evidently the result of an adverse Force leaping upon you. There are men and women who are the vehicles of these adverse Forces and if you come in contact with them when you are off your guard and have a movement (in this case a sexual movement) which gives them an opportunity for a grip, then some adverse Force can leap upon you and hold, and the attack takes either the form of a mental unsettling, a moral disturbance (loss of character etc.), a vital upheaval or nervous breakdown or, as in this case, a physical illness. These things are well known to all who are acquainted with the working of occult forces and the details in the letter are quite unmistakable signs; such attacks are always happening to people, but most are unconscious and feel only the results but not the movements that attended the attack or their causes. When the consciousness has opened by Yoga one becomes aware and it is easy to fix the source of the attack and its nature. The illness can only be cured for good by the throwing out or the departure of the force that causes it; a certain quiet will has to be exercised or else a calling in of the Yoga-force or the Divine Sanction for the removal; there should be no struggle but a very tranquil pressure. The greater the faith, the easier it is for the action to be successful.

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Yes, it was an attack — the hostile forces often take the form of this or that person so as to get through the physical associations a more concrete grip on the physical consciousness.

Chapter Three

Dealing with Hostile Attacks

Fear of Attacks

Yes, the adverse forces take advantage of any perturbation of that kind [*mental anxiety and fear when something bad happens*]—for it opens as it were a passage to their action. Fear is the one thing that one must never feel in face of them, for it makes them bold and aggressive. Moreover fear, as you justly say, calls the thing feared—it must therefore be thrown out altogether.

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If you are afraid of the hostile forces when they try to come, you expose yourself to their power.

Thinking Too Much about Attacks

The worst thing for sadhana is to get into a morbid condition, always thinking of “lower forces, attacks” etc. If the sadhana has stopped for a time, then let it stop, remain quiet, do ordinary things, rest when rest is needed—wait till the physical consciousness is ready. My own sadhana when it was far more advanced than yours used to stop for half a year together. I did not make a fuss about it, but remained quiet till the empty or dull period was over.

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How can you have peace and quiet when you are always thinking of “lower forces” and “attacks” and “possessions” etc.? If you can look at things naturally and quietly, then only you can have quiet and peace.

*

Do not think too much of the hostile Force. The only thing you have to do with it is to dismiss it and even the suggestion of it when it comes.

*

It is quite true. To talk of one's experiences to others tends to diminish the power of the experience. Also to think too much of the hostile Powers is to bring in their atmosphere. One has to recognise them when they come and repel them, but to think much about them, to fear, to be expecting or looking out for them is a mistake.

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It is so that they [*hostile suggestions*] must be regarded — without interest, with indifference. That removes the necessity for constant struggle which is itself a form of interest, and it is as discouraging and more to these suggestions.

*

It is better not to trouble about the hostile forces. Keep your aspiration strong and sincere and call in the Divine in each thing and at each moment for support and in all that you feel keep yourself open to us. That is the easiest way to the Divine. If you begin to concern yourself about the hostile forces, you will only make the path more difficult.

*

Write to X that if he indulges these ideas about hostile beings etc., it will be a serious hindrance to his sadhana. It only puts him and others around him in undesirably close relations with the adverse vital world and its forces. These beings can have no "important part" to play in the life and sadhana. The only part they can play is to attack and interfere with the sadhana. When that happens, their suggestions and approaches have to be rejected, at once and summarily, and the power of the Mother called on to clear the nature or the atmosphere. But they must not be dwelt upon by the mind or any kind of relation admitted or

any imaginations about themselves that they suggest entertained or encouraged.

Discouragement about Attacks

These attacks should not discourage you. There are always moments — so long as there is not the complete basis in the physical when old movements seem to revive. But so long as it is only a rush of an outside force churning up the subconscious and it does not last, it does not at all mean that the progress is not there. We have to deal with all the complexity of the human consciousness in its hidden parts as well as on its surface — and there are layers on layers of the consciousness in which something may lurk of the old reactions, but each conquest makes the control stronger and brings the full purification nearer.

*

You need not be upset about the matter; it is sufficient if you note movements like these and are vigilant that they should find no ground in you again. The cause is probably to be found in the contact with the outside world renewing some possibilities of the old Adam in you. When there is some lowering or diminution of the consciousness or some impairing of it at one place or another, the Adversary — or the Censor — who is always on the watch presses with all his might wherever there is a weak point lying covered from your own view, and suddenly a wrong movement leaps up with unexpected force. Become conscious and cast out the possibility of its renewal, that is all that is to be done.

*

It is certainly the force hostile to the Yoga and the divine realisation upon earth that is acting upon you at the present moment. It is the force (one force and not many) which is here in the Asram and has been going about from one to another. With some as with X, Y and Z it has succeeded; others have cast it from them and have been able to liberate the light of their soul; open in that light to the nearness and constant presence of the Mother, feel

her working in them and move forward in a constant spiritual progress. Some are still struggling, but in spite of the bitterness of the struggle have been able to keep faithfully to the divine call that brought them here.

That it is the same hostile force would be shown, even if its presence were not for us visible and palpable, by the fact that the suggestions it makes to the minds of its victims are always the same. Its one master sign is always this impulse to get away from the Asram, away from myself and the Mother, out of this atmosphere, and *at once*. For the force does not want to give time for reflection, for resistance, for the saving Power to be felt and act. Its other signs are doubt; tamasic depression; an exaggerated sense of impurity and unfitness; the idea that the Mother is remote, does not care for one, is not giving what she ought to give, is not divine, with other similar suggestions accompanied by an inability to feel her presence or her help; a feeling that the Yoga is not possible or is not going to be done in this life; the desire to go away and do something in the ordinary world — the thing itself suggested varying according to the personal mind. If it were not this one invariable hostile force acting, there would not be this exact similarity in all the cases. In each case it is the same obscurities thrown on the intelligence, the same subconscious movements of the vital brought to the surface, the same irrational impulses pushing to the same action, — departure, renunciation of the soul's truth, refusal of the Divine Love and the Divine Call.

It is the vital crisis, the test, the ordeal for you as for others — a test and ordeal which we would willingly spare to those who are with us but which they call on themselves by persistence in some wrong line of movement or some falsification of the inner attitude. If you reject entirely the falsehood that this force casts upon the sadhaka, if you remain faithful to the Light that called you here, you conquer and, even if serious difficulties still remain, the final victory is sure and the divine triumph of the soul over the Ignorance and the darkness.

The opportunity for these forces is given when the sadhaka descends in the inevitable course of the sadhana from the mental

or higher vital plane to the physical consciousness. Always this is accompanied by a fading of the first deep experiences and a descent to the neutral obscure inertia which is the bedrock of the unredeemed physical nature. It is there that the Light, the Power, the Ananda of the Divine has to descend and transform everything, driving away for ever all obscurity and all inertia and establishing the radiant Energy, the perfect Light and the unchanging Bliss. There and not in the mind or the higher vital is all the difficulty, but there too must be the victory and the foundation of the new world. I do not wish to disguise from you the difficulty of this great and tremendous change or the possibility that you may have a long and hard work before you; but are you really unwilling to face it and take your share in the great work? Will you reject the greatness of this endeavour to follow a mad irrational impulse towards some more exciting work of the hour or the moment for which you have no true call in any part of your nature?

There is no true reason for despondency; in nothing that has passed in you or which you have written do I find any good ground for it. The difficulties you experience are nothing to those that others have felt and yet conquered them, others who were not stronger than you. All that has happened is that by this descent into the physical consciousness, the ordinary external human nature has come to the front with its elementary imperfections and subconscious unsatisfied impulses and it is to these that the contrary force is appealing. The mind and the higher vital have put away from them the ideas and illusions which gave them a sanction and an illusion of legitimacy and even nobility in their satisfaction. But the root of them, their inherent irrational push for satisfaction, has not yet gone—this for instance is the reason for the sexual movements which you have recently felt in sleep or in waking. This was inevitable. All that is needed is for your psychic being to come forward and open you to the direct and real and constant inner contact of myself and the Mother. Hitherto your soul has expressed itself through the mind and its ideals and admirations or through the vital and its higher joys and aspirations; but that is not sufficient

to conquer the physical difficulty and enlighten and transform Matter. It is your soul in itself, your psychic being that must come in front, awaken entirely and make the fundamental change. The psychic being will not need the support of intellectual ideas or outer signs and helps. It is that alone that can give you the direct feeling of the Divine, the constant nearness, the inner support and aid. You will not then feel the Mother remote or have any farther doubt about the realisation; for the mind thinks and the vital craves, but the soul feels and knows the Divine.

Cast away from you these movements of doubt, depression and the rest which are no part of your true and higher nature. Reject these suggestions of inability, unfitness and all these irrational movements of an alien force. Remain faithful to the Light of your soul even when it is hidden by clouds. My help and the Mother's will be there working behind even in the moments when you cannot feel it. The one need for you and for all is to be, even in the darkness of the powers of obscurity of the physical consciousness, stubbornly faithful to your soul and to the remembrance of the Divine Call.

Be faithful and you will conquer.

Rejection of Attacks

They [*the vital forces*] come because they were freely permitted in the past—so they want to renew and continue their action. An entire rejection and a complete turning to the Divine are the way to meet them.

*

It is sufficient if you can keep in touch with the Force and reject any strong attack of the confusion. The rest will be done by the Force itself—for no one is really strong enough to change himself, it is the Divine Force called down that does it.

*

This kind of attack is always possible. What one has to have is an inner condition which at once throws them off and a faith

in the Mother's power and name which is quite sufficient to dissolve these Rakshasi Maya formations.

*

This state which tries to come upon you and seize is not part of your true self, but a foreign influence. To yield to it and to express it would therefore be not sincerity, but the expression of something false to your true being, something that will grow more and more foreign to you as you progress. Always reject it, when it comes, even if you feel strongly its touch; open in your mind and soul to the Mother, keep your will and faith and you will find it receding. Even if it returns obstinately, be equally and more obstinate against it, firm in rejection—that will discourage and wear it out and finally it will grow weak, a shadow of itself and disappear.

Be true to your true self always—that is the real sincerity. Persist and conquer.

*

You ought to realise that these things [*negative thoughts and feelings*] are attacks which come on you from an adverse Force to which your nature was responsive because of vital desire and the vital ego—what you call selfishness. When it comes, you have to realise that it is an attack and refuse instead of accepting it—and in order to be able to do that you must always discourage desire and selfishness in you and all that comes from them such as jealousy, claim, anger etc. It is no use alleging that there are good reasons for their rising—even if all the alleged reasons were true, they would not justify your indulging them, for in a sadhak nothing can justify that. There is no need to understand—for there is only one thing that it is necessary to understand—that, reason or no reason, desire, selfishness, jealousy, demand, anger have no place in the spiritual life.

If you keep to what you have resolved, then all will be right—and the right knowledge will come not from the mind and its reasonings but from the soul and its true vision of things.

*

You must throw this black poison [*of dissatisfaction and revolt*] out of you at once instead of dallying with it and giving it expression as if it were your own feelings and as if such an attitude could ever be justifiable. It is that weakness in the vital which enables them [*the hostile forces*] to keep up their attack. Instead of allowing the weakness, revive your will and aspiration and love and let them throw out this egoistic darkness.

*

All these things, feelings, suggestions etc. [*depression, wanting to die*], are the workings of an adverse Force which wants to break up the Asram, upset or drive away the workers and prevent the Truth and Light which are descending from having any fruition. There is no truth behind it, it is a Force of the Devil or Falsehood—there is no rational ground for the feelings of despair it suggests, but it throws itself with fury on the mind and vital and tries to possess them, ousting the Truth and the Divine Presence. Even the strongest have felt its attacks. You must understand what it is and, the moment it comes, oppose it with a resolute No. For the more the Truth descends, the more furious this adverse Force becomes. It is making desperate attacks and putting out all its force in the hope of snatching the victory before the full Truth can come down. Remain firm, understand what it is and give it no admission—to reject it, to drive it out of his atmosphere is the greatest help any sadhak can give to the Mother.

*

All naturally in these difficulties has its original roots in the vital and its expectations of all kinds. When one wants to get rid of them, the vital resists and is unwilling to part with them, but this by itself would not be anything more than a work of change, adjustment, rearrangement which might take time but not cause serious conflicts and upheavals. For once the mind and inner will are settled to be rid of these movements, the will of the higher vital would also come into line and the rest which is more obstinate against change because it is a thing of habitual

movements, supported on the subconscious and not governed by reason or knowledge, would yet be unable to resist permanently or vehemently the pressure from the higher will of the being. Its force of resistance would diminish and the habitual reactions wear out or fall away. But the prolongation of the difficulty and its acuteness come from the fact that there are Forces in Nature, not personal or individual but universal, which live upon these movements and through them have long controlled the individual nature. These do not want to lose their rule and so when these movements are thrown out, they throw them back on the sadhak in strong waves or with great violence. Or they create in the vital a great depression, discouragement, despair—that is their favourite weapon—because it is losing its former field of desires and has not yet in any continuity something that would replace it, the assured continuous psychic or spiritual condition or experience. To prevent that is the whole effort of these Forces. So they create these upheavals and the vital admits them because of its old habit of response to the lower Forces. At the same time they put in suggestions to the mind so as to make it also accept the disturbance, discouragement and depression. That is what I meant by saying that these are attacks from outside and must be rejected. If they cannot be rejected altogether, yet one must try to keep a part of the mind conscious which will refuse to admit the suggestions or share in the depression and trouble,—which will say firmly, “I know what this is and I know that it will pass and I shall resume my way to the goal which nothing can prevent me from reaching, since my soul’s will is and will always be for that.” You have to reach the point where you can do that always; then the power of the Forces to disturb will begin to diminish and fall away. Our Force is there with you and will not fail to support and strengthen you. The suggestion that we are indifferent is obviously nothing but a suggestion, intended to help and fortify the depression. As such you should regard it and not accept it as true or as your own thought; for it could not possibly be true. Your success in reaching peace and light is as much our concern as yours and even more so.

*

In your letter you write that you are very tired, restlessness and tamas prevail in the physical, there is a constant struggle more or less intense between the psychic being and the physical nature. Now this was exactly your condition in the last months when you were here. Then you wanted to go because the pressure was too great, because the struggle with the restless and tamasic physical nature and the Asuric influence was too hard and continuous, because you felt very tired and needed to go away for a rest, for respite, to recover.

How then can you come back in the same condition? The pressure will be still greater than before, the struggle constant; you are likely to be still more tired and depressed than you were. And it will be harder for you to bear because the personal position will entirely be changed. You will have no special place, no authority delegated, no work entrusted to you; you will not be near the Mother but at a distance among the others. The Asuric nature in you which had become an intolerable hindrance to the work and dangerous to yourself and to others will be given no kind of indulgence. It is clear that you would find the conditions unbearable unless you had undergone in the meantime a fundamental change. Therefore you must not ask to come here until you have acquired a stable quiet and peace both within you and in your external atmosphere.

Wherever you are, we shall always be near to your psychic being and ready to help it to conquer. As things are with you now, that help is likely to act better at a distance than when you were near and were at every moment repelling it by your wrong inner movements and reactions and your wrong speech and acts. But to profit by our help you will have to do what you have never yet really done, at least in your external being. You will have in your physical nature itself resolutely to turn from the Asura and his ways and refuse to indulge him on any pretext in any thought, feeling, speech or action which would help him still to possess your instruments and determine or influence your attitude and your acts. To become quiet and quietly and simply to maintain this persistent and patient rejection with our help, without rajasic struggle, sincerely and in fact and in every detail,

not merely in wish and idea, is what you need to do. To be divided, to aspire in one part of your being and to indulge and justify and cherish the wrong movements with another part can lead to nothing but endless struggle and fatigue. Only by this turn and change will the struggle and fatigue pass away and purity come.

*

Either to reject by dynamic means¹ or to remain unaffected and let it pass are the two usual ways of dealing with these attacks.

Detachment

Yes, the difficulty is always that something in the nature gives a hold to the attack. It either still indulges it and likes it or even, if wanting to be free, is too accustomed to receive and respond to the old feelings, thoughts, suggestions and does not yet know how *not* to respond. The first thing is for the mental being to stand back, refuse to accept, say "This is no longer mine." Then, even if the vital feeling responds to the attack, one part of the nature can be free and observe and discourage it. The next thing is for this free part to impose the same will of detachment on the vital so that after a time this also when the attack comes feels that it is something foreign, not its own,—as if a stranger had come into the room and was trying to impose his ideas or his will on the inmates. After that it becomes more easy to get rid of it altogether. Of course, there is the Mother's Force working, but this kind of assent from the mind and vital makes the result quick and easy — otherwise it takes time and more labour and struggle.

Dissolution

You can dissolve a thought formation which is made of subtle mental stuff — why not then a mental Asura? There are Asuras

¹ In his letter the correspondent mentioned "a dynamic will and aspiration". — Ed.

who are *predominantly* mental — who live in the false Idea and can even be vitally ascetic and appear to men as great Tapaswis. All the same there is a stern and violent vital as the effective instrument of their nature.

Steadiness and Persistence

The one thing wrong [*when attacked by hostile forces*] would be to allow yourself to be overcome by them. If you remain steady in yourself, you can repel the attack or else it will exhaust itself and pass. In such circumstances you have to be like a cliff attacked by a stormy sea but never submerged by it.

*

Very glad to know that you are able to keep up your wicket so well. These bodyline attacks are always a nasty trick of the retiring hostiles and they go on with it as long as they just can, for they are unrelenting and obstinate even in defeat; but one has only to be as stiff to them as possible and their action will get more and more tired until it stops altogether.

*

They [*the hostile forces*] hope by persistence to tire you out or to get in by sheer obstinacy — or at least to delay the realisation by their attacks. That is always their method. If they can shake the faith, the peace and *samatā*, they think themselves richly recompensed.

Peace and Purity

If you can feel even in these attacks that part in you in which there is constant Peace even amidst the pains and darkness, and if you can keep it always, that is an immense gain. The something in you which does not always feel it, which remains half way, undecided, must also now take the step of complete surrender. It is only a part of your physical mind that does not understand, that receives back the old ideas — that must be converted. It does

not matter about the weakness and incapacities — when the full peace and Power is there in the physical, they will be removed. The new birth in you is certain to come — the first touch of it is already there in the awakened psychic — the rest cannot fail to come.

*

Vital purity is very necessary, but it is not easy to make it immune from attack unless the wideness is there along with a solid *spiritual* purity and peace descending in the wideness. Of course, wideness *by itself* is not sufficient.

Faith and Surrender

If the faith and surrender are complete in all parts of the being then there can be no attack. If there is a strong central faith and surrender at all times, then there can be attacks but the attacks will have no chance of success.

*

There are no sadhaks who are never attacked by wrong forces — but if one has a complete faith and self-consecration, one can throw off the attack without too much difficulty.

*

It is those who are of a highly sattwic nature, especially if strongly surrendered to the Mother, who escape the invasion or attacks of the hostile Forces on the mind and vital. That does not mean that they escape the difficulties of the lower human nature or of the sadhana, but these are not complicated by the effective support given to them by the hostiles. It is not that there is no point in them that might be pressed upon by the hostiles but in actual fact they cannot get at these points because of the build of the nature which is fortified against them owing to the large proportion of *prakāśa* and *sukha* which the sattwic brings with it. But otherwise there is an internal clarity, a balance, a happy composition in the being reflecting sunlight easily, less amenable

to the touch of cloud and tempest, which gives no handle to the hostile forces. The nature refuses to be violently agitated or darkened or upset. At most it is the body that the hostiles can attack and there too because the nervous being is calm and it is only through the most material that it can be done.

Psychic Openness

The experience you write of in today's letter shows clearly the only way of safety against these attacks, to get back to the close and happy connection, the psychic openness to the Mother which has been so long the foundation of your sadhana and the cause of the great progress you were making.

Do not listen to the clamour of the adverse vital Force which has been attacking you, its reasonings or its wrong emotional suggestions — it only wants you to fall from happiness, to suffer and to descend into a lower consciousness and lose your progress.

Get back into the true spirit of love and closeness, surrender and confidence and Ananda and remain there — then in due time all problems and difficulties will solve themselves as the light and power of the Truth descend into the still weak and obscure parts of the nature.

*

If the attacks of the hostile forces have been made less strong by concentrating in the heart (or if they have become less frequent) then you must continue that concentration until you are able to join the head and the heart, the psychic and the higher consciousness. It all depends on that. The psychic must be strong enough to compel the vital and physical to give themselves to the Divine — or the higher consciousness must so descend and occupy everything that the old movements can only at most move on the surface without being able to enter in or touch the inner calm — or the two together, psychic and higher consciousness, must occupy the whole being. These are the three ways in which the Yoga moves. If the concentration in the heart, which

means the awakening of the psychic, is most effective against the attacks, then it is that you must follow.

*

There are two things that make it impossible for them [*the hostile forces*] to succeed even temporarily in any attack on the mind or the vital — first, an entire love, devotion and confidence that nothing can shake, secondly, a calm and equality in the vital as well as in the mind which has become the fundamental character of the inner nature. Suggestions then may still come, things go wrong outside, but the being remains invulnerable. Either of these two things is sufficient in itself — and in proportion as they grow, even the existence of the hostile forces becomes less and less of a phenomenon of the inner life — though they may still be there in the outer atmosphere.

Reliance on the Power or Force

About the contact with the world and the hostile forces, that is of course always one of the sadhak's chief difficulties, but to transform the world and the hostile powers is too big a task and the personal transformation cannot wait for it. What has to be done is to come to live in the Power that these things, these disturbing elements cannot penetrate, or, if they penetrate, cannot disturb, and to be so purified and strengthened by it that there is in oneself no response to anything hostile. If there is a protecting envelopment, an inner purifying descent and, as a result, a settling of the higher consciousness in the inner being and finally, its substitution even in the most external outwardly active parts in place of the old ignorant consciousness, then the world and the hostile forces will no longer matter — for one's own soul at least; for there is a larger work not personal in which of course they will have to be dealt with; but that need not be a main preoccupation at the present stage.

*

Yes, the Power with its help and inner working is always there

with you and always will be. In the strongest attacks and darkest hours it was covered up and hidden, but it was never absent or withdrawn and never will be.

*

Evil forces can always attack in moments of unconsciousness or half-consciousness or through the subconscious or external physical — so long as all is not supramentally transformed. Only if the force is there, they can at once be pushed back.

Reliance on the Mother

Attacks are always going about and it is a period when they have fallen on many. But with a strong faith founded in the Mother and a whole-hearted aspiration, no attack can leave any lasting result.

*

When there is an attack or obstruction the call or the thinking of the Mother may not succeed at once; even the will to get rid of the attack or obstruction may not succeed at once, but one must persevere till the result comes and if one perseveres the result is bound to come.

One sees the negative side only during the attack, because the first thing the attack or obstruction does is to try to cloud the mind's intelligence. If it cannot do that, it is difficult for it to prevail altogether for the time being. For if the mind remains alert and clings to the truth, then the attack can only upheave the vital and, though this may be painful enough, yet the right attitude of the mind acts as a corrective and makes it easier to recover the balance and the true condition of the vital comes back more quickly. If the vital keeps its balance, then the attack touches the physical consciousness only with its suggestions and is much more superficial or even it can do no more than create a temporary restlessness, uneasiness or ill-health in the body — the rest of the consciousness remaining unaffected. It is therefore very important to accustom oneself to keep the right mental

attitude even in the midst of an attack, however strong it is. To keep faith is the best help for that—the faith that the Divine is there always and I shall pass to Him through whatever trials. That helps to look at other things also in the true light.

By tamasic ego is meant the ego of weakness, self-depreciation, despondency, unbelief. The rajasic ego is puffed up with pride and self-esteem or stubbornly asserts itself at every step or else wherever it can; the tamasic ego on the contrary is always feeling, "I am weak, I am miserable, I have no capacity, I am not loved or chosen by the Divine, I am so bad and incapable —what can the Divine do for me?" or else, "I am specially chosen out for misfortune and suffering, all are preferred to me, all are progressing, I only am left behind, all abandons me, I have nothing before me but flight, death or disaster" etc., etc., or something or all of these things mixed together. Sometimes the rajasic and tamasic ahankar mix together and subtly support each other. In both cases it is the "I" that is making a row about itself and clouding the true vision. The true spiritual or psychic vision is this, "Whatever I may be, my soul is a child of the Divine and must reach the Divine sooner or later. I am imperfect but seek after the perfection of the Divine in me and that not I but the Divine Grace will bring about; if I keep to that, the Divine Grace itself will do all." The "I" has to take its proper place here as a small portion and instrument of the Divine, something that is nothing without the Divine but with the Grace can be everything that the Divine wishes it to be.

The Mother's help is always there but you are not conscious of it except when the psychic is active and the consciousness not clouded. The coming of suggestions is not a proof that the help is not there. Suggestions come to all, even to the greatest sadhaks or to the Avatars—as they came to Christ or Buddha. Obstacles are there—they are part of Nature and they have to be overcome. What has to be attained is not to accept the suggestions, not to admit them as the truth or as one's own thoughts, to see them for what they are and keep oneself separate. Obstacles have to be looked at as something wrong in the machinery of human nature which has to be changed—they should not be regarded

as sins or wrongdoings which make one despair of oneself and of the sadhana.

*

You ask whether the adverse Force is stronger than the Divine Force. The implication is that a man has no responsibility for his action and whatever he does or however he errs and falls in consequence, the Divine Force is to blame. It may be so, but in that case there is no need or utility in doing sadhana. One has only to sit still and let the adverse Force or the Divine Force do what they like! According to that theory the Devil was quite right in telling Christ, "Cast thyself down from this mountain and let His angels come and upbear thee" and Christ was quite wrong in rejecting the suggestion and saying, "It is written 'Thou shalt not tempt (put to a test) the Lord thy God.' " He ought to have jumped and if he got smashed, it would only have proved that the adverse forces were greater than the Divine Force!

If an adverse Force comes, one has not to accept and welcome its suggestions, but to turn to the Mother and refuse to turn away from her. Whether one can open or not, one has to be loyal and faithful. Loyalty and fidelity are not qualities for which one has to do Yoga; they are very simple things which any man or woman who aspires to the Truth ought to be able to accomplish.

It is what everybody should realise. It is the psychic fidelity that brings the power to stand against the Asuras and enables the Protection to work.

Chapter Four

Accidents, Possession, Madness

Accidents

There is no such thing as a mere accident. There is some—perhaps a very slight—unconsciousness in the physical and it is taken advantage of by these small beings of the vital physical plane—who are more mischievous than consciously hostile.

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It is not a bad shakti that gets inside you and from there does these things—it is small forces from outside that amuse themselves by creating small accidents of that kind, taking advantage of some inattention or forgetfulness etc.

*

You are right about the accidents. It is chiefly the physical mind's unconsciousness that makes these accidents or interventions of mischievous forces easy.

*

It has often been seen that when an accident takes place at a particular spot, there is a tendency for some time for other accidents to happen there. It was so with a place near Villianur some years ago. There is the same tendency with suicides at a particular place. It is a sort of powerful formation that remains there with or without a vital being (spirit) in charge of the formation.

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It sometimes happens that by a carefully formed formation like this and through the instrumentality of a third person whose movements they control, the hostile forces get through the conscious guard and bring about an accident like this.¹ It is through

¹ *The correspondent was cycling down the road when an approaching cyclist collided with him; he fell to the ground and injured his legs.—Ed.*

the subconscious that they manage to do it, for the subconscious has not yet either the mass of force descended from above which could have repelled the arriving cycle and turned its movement away or the instinctive sureness which would have felt beforehand what the cyclist was going to do and done just the thing to avoid it. However when the protection is there such accidents even when grave in character are usually reduced to something minor in their results.

*

That is right. These accidents happen only to disturb you. You must not allow yourself to be disturbed.

Yes — it is because they [*the hostile forces*] know that Peace is the basis and if that is there in full, all the rest will come. So they want anyhow to prevent it.

Possession by Vital Forces

It is one thing to see things and quite another to let them enter into you. One has to experience many things, to see and observe, to bring them into the field of the consciousness and know what they are. But there is no reason why you should allow them to enter into you and possess you. It is only the Divine or what comes from the Divine that can be admitted to enter you.

To say that all light is good is as if you said that all water is good — or even that all clear or transparent water is good: it would not be true. One must see what is the nature of the light or where it comes from or what is in it, before one can say that it is the true Light. False lights exist and misleading lustres, lower lights too that belong to the being's inferior reaches. One must therefore be on one's guard and distinguish; the true discrimination has to come by growth of the psychic feeling and a purified mind and experience.

*

The first attempt of the possessing entity is to separate the person from his psychic, and it is that that creates the struggle. All

depends on the extent and persistence of the possession — how much of the being it occupies and whether it is constant or not.

*

That is very interesting — for it agrees with the Mother's constant insistence that to feel sympathy or any emotion of the weak philanthropic kind with those possessed by vital forces is most dangerous as it may bring an attack upon oneself which may take any form. One must do what is to be done but abstain from all such weakness.

Neurasthenia

It is not, certainly, your own vital that engenders these movements, but its revolts seem to have made it subject to the suggestions of a hostile force from outside. If the suggestions had been confined to mental thoughts, that would have been normal, but it seems to have taken power enough to hold your mind and to push you to action. That means either an acute state of neurasthenia due to some wrong movements (the sexual habit you speak of, if you have been indulging, that would explain it) or a vital inability to bear the pressure of a spiritual struggle. The Asuric idea of self-destruction or of a solution through violence on yourself is entirely false and a suggestion of the hostile force, as are too the imaginations against the Mother. If the neurasthenic condition has gone so far or if there is so acute a vital inability to bear the pressure of your inner struggle, the one immediate remedy would be a rest and relief from the struggle. A change of air and surroundings, the restoration of contact with ordinary life and the cessation of a constant preoccupation with your difficulties would seem to be urgent and imperative. An appeasement of the nervous system is needed and, at the moment, this seems to be the only way. I am not suggesting a permanent departure or giving up of the spiritual endeavour. It is quiet and repose that you need, a temporary relief and release from the inner struggle. It is better to do this than to go on in the condition you describe in your letter. Consider what I

have written and reply to me in the morning, so that something may be immediately decided; for the sooner you get the relief you need from these suggestions and their nervous pressure, the better.

*

Neurasthenia in the sense it is now given is not nervous debility —that is an antiquated definition. Nervous debility is a special thing, an illness of the physical nervous;—neurasthenia proper is a weakness of the vital nervous. One may be as strong as a bull and hardy as an evergreen, yet have neurasthenia. Its mark is depression, gloom, reiteration of melancholy slogans, broodings on darkness, death, despair. The bull indulges in a sorrowful lowing; the evergreen moans, "Sunshine? sunshine? it is a fable—there is only cloud, mist, rain and tears!" That's neurasthenia! Of course there are other and more exaggerated forms, but those are not in question. One can get rid of this kind, if the will is determined to do so.

*

If you want to get back your faith and keep it, you must first quiet your mind and make it open and obedient to the Mother's force. If you have an excited mind at the mercy of every influence and impulse, you will remain a field of conflicting and contrary forces and cannot progress. You will begin to listen to your own ignorance instead of the Mother's knowledge and your faith will naturally disappear and you will get into a wrong condition and a wrong attitude.

Your ailment is evidently in its foundation an illness of the nerves, not an ordinary physical disease. These maladies are a creation of the pressure of hostile forces; they increase if anything in you assents to them and accepts, and the more the mind gives value to them and dwells on them, the more they grow. The only way is to remain quiet, dissociate yourself and refuse to accept it or make much of it, allow the calm and strength that the Mother has been putting around you to enter your mind and permeate your nervous system. To do otherwise

is to place yourself on the side of the hostile forces that are afflicting you. The cure may take time because your nervous system has been long subjected to these influences and, when they are evicted, they return with violence to re-establish their hold. But if you can acquire and keep patience and fortitude and the right consciousness and right attitude with regard to these things, the hold they have will progressively disappear.

There are defects in your vital nature which stand in the way of a settled spiritual progress: but they can be eliminated if, dropping all exaggerated ideas of "sin" and unfitness, you look quietly at them and recognise and reject them. Tranquillise in yourself all over-eager demands and desires, all excitement and exaggeration of opposite feelings and impulses; seek first intensity of devotion but also calm strength, purity and peace. Allow a quiet and steady will to progress to be settled in you; learn the habit of a silent, persistent and thorough assimilation of what the Mother puts into you. This is the sound way to advance.

Hysteria

The attacks you speak of can come anywhere. It is an attack of the nervous centres and on the nervous being by contrary vital forces. The fact that it was not allowing you to come here and that it began to go when you steeped yourself in the atmosphere and ideas of *The Yoga and Its Objects* is significant of its origin. As for the other symptoms they were amassing to a height of the restlessness of the nervous being and are quite familiar in such cases. The desire to run away somewhere is a very usual symptom. Hysteria is also an attack by similar forces; but it is only one form; the attack need not take the appearance of any illness. The Doctors usually consider it as a type of what they call neurasthenia, nerve-weakness; but that simply locates the thing without explaining its real nature and cause. In both cases, here and there, it was an attempt to come across your spiritual life by creating a disability and state of disturbance in the vital-physical part of the being. Anyhow the fact that you could not go from

here and that the whole thing could be removed by us at once as soon as you opened somewhere by this feeling of sorrow at going shows that the spiritual life is stronger deep within you, even when covered over, than the opposite forces at their height. That is the main thing.

*

In these cases of hysteria usually nothing is gained by humouring or indulgence — firmness generally pays better, because most often there is something there that wants to be interesting and get sympathy and have a fuss made over the person. As for cure, that is a different matter, the subjective cause has to be got rid of and it is not easy.

Epilepsy

It is epilepsy. I had surmised from the beginning — the first attack and fall; but the acute condition must have been developed by the shock of the fall on the head — otherwise it might have taken a longer time to develop.

Epilepsy is itself a sign of vital attack, even if there is a physical cause for it — the attacking force not being able to disturb the mental and vital (proper) falls on the body and uses some physical cause (latent or growing) for the base of its action. For everything manifested in the physical must have a physical support or means for its expression.

*

I don't think — I know it is so [*that epilepsy and insanity are due to the influence of evil spirits*]. Epilepsy however is not possession — it is an attack or at most a temporary seizure. Insanity always indicates possession. The hereditary conditions create a predisposition. It is not possible for a vital Force or Being to invade or take possession unless there are doors open for it to enter. The door may be a vital consent or affinity or a physical defect in the being.

Madness

Insanity is always due to a vital attack, or rather possession although there is often a physical reason as well. Hysteria is due to a pressure from the vital world and there may be momentary possessions also. The same thing cannot be said of ordinary delirium, the cause of which is physical only — except in so far as all illness is an attack of lower forces of Nature, but these lower forces are not vital beings or what we call specifically hostile forces. They are simply performing their role in nature and of course there may be and probably is a being of some kind presiding over each kind of illness — in Bengal they give a special name to some of them and worship them as goddesses to avert the visitation. But as I say these are really Forces, not vital hostiles.

As for the interest of vital beings in possessing men — beings of the vital world are not constituted like men — they take a delight in struggle and suffering and disorder — it is their natural atmosphere. They want besides to get the taste of the physical world without being under the obligation of taking on birth and developing the psychic being and evolving towards the Divine. They wish to remain what they are and yet amuse themselves with the physical world and physical body.

*

Loss of balance produces disorder in the consciousness and the adverse forces use that loss of balance for attacking and wholly upsetting the system and doing their work. That is why people become hysterical or mad or filled with the desire to die or go away.

*

More easily [*a loss of balance*] occurs in the women than in the men but in some of the latter also. What produces the loss of balance is an inability to control the vital movements by the reason and an instability of the vital itself so that it sways from one feeling to another, one impulse to another without harmony or order.

*

Loss of mental balance is due to exaggerated ego, exaggerated sex, acceptance of a hostile force etc.

*

I may observe that X does not seem to me to be mad — there is no sign of a dislocation of the thinking mind due to lesion or accident or illness. What there is is a fixed idea and what is called *folie de persécution*, but that is not due to insanity — people have it who have otherwise an acute and perfectly well-ordered intelligence. X from his photograph appears to have had a mediumistic element in him and to have by some ill-chance entered into contact with powers of the vital plane which were able to put their suggestions in him — in that part of the consciousness which we call the vital mind — so that he is unable to ascertain things in their proper light and is tormented by the suggestions that have driven their furrows there in the form of habitual ideas that tyrannise over him and which he is unable to embrace or refuse. Unfortunately this is a malady of the consciousness, which it is very difficult to cure because the patient himself gives no assistance, as he clings to his fixed idea and even when the influence is taken away, calls it back upon him. Certainly he could be told from here that he is not mad and is not cursed of God — but that of itself might not be sufficient to cure him.

*

Usually there is some predisposition [*to madness*] behind, hereditary, natal (due to some circumstances of birth) or founded in insufficient nervous balance. Often there is in the vital excessive ambition, lust or some other violent Ripu. But these though they might distort or break the sadhana by opening it to undesirable Forces could not bring madness (megalomania, erotic mania, or what is called religious mania) — only if there is some taint or want of nervous balance. Anxiety or excessive stress of meditation would not bring it either except by acting upon some such predisposing weakness. In some cases possession by beings of the vital worlds without any such predisposing cause may be

possible, but that will be more easily curable. There are however cases of people who break down their nervous balance by wrong practices — there the madness has nothing really to do with the sadhana.

*

It is quite impossible for the descent of the Divine Grace to produce nausea and nervousness and a general disturbance like that — to think so is self-contradictory and foolish. Sometimes when one has pulled or strained, there is a headache or sensation as if of headache or if one pulls down too much force, then there may be a giddiness but one has only to remain quiet and that sets itself right by an assimilation of what has come down or otherwise. There is never any adverse or troublesome after-consequence. What seems to have happened is that X's finding the Force he had called down much more than what he was accustomed to, got nervous and went from nervousness into a panic — with the result of an upsetting of his stomach and circulation. If it is not that, then it must have been an attack of illness which he associated with the descent, but the attack seems to be of a nervous character. Probably if he had had the experience of this increased descent some time ago, he would not have been frightened and nothing would have happened, but the madness of Y following on the death of Z has created a panic and at the least thing each person thinks he is going to go mad or die. As nothing upsets the organism more than fear, they create by this general atmosphere of panic danger where there was none.

The idea that Y was sent mad by a descent of Divine Force is an absurdity and an irrational superstition. People go mad because they have a physical predisposition due either to heredity (as in the case of Y and A) or to some kind of organic cause or secret illness, like syphilis gone to the head or colon bacillus similarly misdirected or brain lesion or other material cause, the action being often brought up by some psychological factor (ambition turning to megalomania, hypochondria, melancholia etc.) or on the contrary itself bringing these to the surface. All

that happens in ordinary life and not only in Yoga; the same causes work here. The one thing is that there may be an invasion of an alien Force bringing about the upsetting, but it is not the Divine Force, it is a vital Force that invades. The Divine Force cannot by its descent be the cause of madness any more than it can be of apoplexy or any other physical illness. If there is no predisposition one may have all kinds of attacks from vital or other forces or from one's own movements of the lower nature, as violent as possible, but there will be no madness.

*

As to X's collapse, I did not intend to say anything about it just now,—for mental discussion of causes and consequences is not of much help at this juncture. I must say however that it is not the push for union with the Divine nor is it the Divine Force that leads to madness—it is the way in which people themselves act with regard to their claim for these things. To be more precise, I have never known a case of collapse in Yoga—as opposed to mere difficulty or negative failure,—a case of dramatic disaster in which there was not one of three causes, or more than one of the three at work. First, some sexual aberration—I am not speaking of mere sexuality which can be very strong in the nature without leading to collapse—or an attempt to sexualise spiritual experience on an animal or gross material basis; second, an exaggerated ambition, pride or vanity trying to seize on spiritual force or experience and turn it to one's own glorification—ending in megalomania; third, an unbalanced vital and a weak nervous system apt to follow its own imaginations and unruly impulses without any true mental will or strong vital will to steady or restrain it, and so at the mercy of the imaginations and suggestions of the adverse vital world when carried over the border into the intermediate zone of which I spoke in a recent message.² All the cases of collapse in this Asram have been due to these three causes—to the first two mostly. Only three or

² This message is reproduced in Letters on Yoga—III, volume 30 of THE COMPLETE WORKS OF SRI AUROBINDO, pp. 296–303.—Ed.

four of them have ended in madness — and in these the sexual aberration was invariably present; usually a violent fall from the Way is the consequence. X's is no exception to the rule. It is not because she pushed for union with the Divine that she went mad, but because she misused what came down for a mystic sexuality and the satisfaction of megalomaniac pride, in spite of my repeated and insistent warnings. For the moment that is all the light I can give on the matter — naturally I generalise and avoid details.

*

Those who fall into insanity have lost the true touch and got into the wrong contact. It is due either to some impurity and unspiritual desire with which the seeker enters into the way or some insincerity, egoism and false attitude or to some weakness in the brain or nervous system which cannot bear the Power it has called down into it.

The safest way is to follow the guidance of someone who has himself attained to mastery in the path. Only that guidance should be implicitly and sincerely followed; one's own mind and its ideas and fancies must not be allowed to interfere. It goes without saying that it must be a true guidance, not the leading of a tyro or an impostor.

*

I am not aware that anyone who has made a true surrender [*to his Guru*], loses his balance. Those who allow ego to come in naturally may, whether they follow a Guru as most Yogis have done, or try to go on their own individual strength.

Note on the Texts

Note on the Texts

LETTERS ON YOGA — IV, the last of four volumes, contains letters in which Sri Aurobindo speaks about the transformation of human nature that is attempted in the practice of his system of Yoga. The letters have been arranged in four parts dealing with these broad subject areas:

1. Sadhana on the Level of the Mind
2. Sadhana on the Level of the Vital
3. Sadhana on the Physical, Subconscious and Inconscient Levels
4. Difficulties in the Practice of the Integral Yoga

The letters in this volume have been selected from the extensive correspondence Sri Aurobindo carried on with his disciples and others between 1927 and 1950. Letters from this corpus appear in seven volumes of THE COMPLETE WORKS OF SRI AUROBINDO: *Letters on Poetry and Art* (Volume 27), *Letters on Yoga* (Volumes 28–31), *The Mother with Letters on the Mother* (Volume 32), and *Letters on Himself and the Ashram* (Volume 35). The titles of these works specify the nature of the letters included in the volumes, but there is some overlap. For example, a number of letters in the present volume are also published in *Letters on Himself and the Ashram*. Another volume, *Autobiographical Notes and Other Writings of Historical Interest* (Volume 36), contains letters written by Sri Aurobindo before 1927, as well as some written after that date, mainly to persons living outside the Ashram.

The Writing of the Letters

Between 1927 and 1950, Sri Aurobindo replied to hundreds of correspondents in tens of thousands of letters, some of them many pages in length, others only a few words long. Most of his replies, however, were sent to just a few dozen disciples, almost all of them resident members of his Ashram; of these disciples, about a dozen received more than half

the replies. Sri Aurobindo wrote most of these letters between 1931 and 1937, the prime period of his correspondence. Letters before and after this period were written on a more restricted scale and confined to a few persons for special reasons.

Disciples in the Ashram wrote to Sri Aurobindo on loose sheets or sent him the notebooks in which they kept diaries as a record of their spiritual endeavour and as a means of communicating with him. These notebooks and loose sheets reached Sri Aurobindo via an internal "post" once or twice a day. Letters from outside which his secretary thought he might like to see were sent at the same time. Correspondents wrote in English if they knew the language well enough, but a good number wrote in Bengali, Gujarati, Hindi or French, all of which Sri Aurobindo read fluently, or in other languages that were translated into English for him. The disciples usually addressed their letters to the Mother, since Sri Aurobindo had asked them to do so, but most assumed that he would answer them. He generally replied in the notebook or on the sheets sent by the correspondent, writing beneath the correspondent's remarks or in the margin or between the lines; sometimes, however, he wrote his reply on a separate sheet of paper. In some cases he had his secretary prepare a typed copy of his letter, which he revised before it was sent. For correspondents living outside the Ashram, Sri Aurobindo sometimes addressed his reply not to the correspondent but to his secretary, who quoted, paraphrased or translated the reply and signed the letter himself. In these indirect replies, Sri Aurobindo often referred to himself in the third person.

While going through Sri Aurobindo's letters, the reader should keep in mind that each letter was written to a specific person at a specific time, in specific circumstances and for a specific purpose. The subjects taken up arose in regard to the needs of the person. Sri Aurobindo varied the style and tone of his replies according to his relationship with the correspondent; to those with whom he was close, he sometimes employed humour, irony and even sarcasm.

Although written to specific recipients, these letters contain much of general interest, which justifies their inclusion in a volume destined for the general public. For the reasons mentioned above, however, the advice in them does not always apply equally to everyone. Aware of

this, Sri Aurobindo himself made some cautionary remarks about the proper use of his letters:

I should like to say, in passing, that it is not always safe to apply practically to oneself what has been written for another. Each sadhak is a case by himself and one cannot always or often take a mental rule and apply it rigidly to all who are practising the Yoga.

The tendency to take what I lay down for one and apply it without discrimination to another is responsible for much misunderstanding. A general statement, too, true in itself, cannot be applied to everyone alike or applied now and immediately without consideration of condition or circumstance or person or time.

It is not a fact that all I write is meant equally for everybody. That assumes that everybody is alike and there is no difference between sadhak and sadhak. If it were so everybody would advance alike and have the same experiences and take the same time to progress by the same steps and stages. It is not so at all.¹

The Typing and Revision of the Letters

Most of the shorter items in this volume, and many of the longer ones, were not typed or revised during Sri Aurobindo's lifetime and are reproduced here directly from his handwritten manuscripts. A good number of the letters, however, as mentioned above, were typed for Sri Aurobindo and revised by him before sending. Other letters were typed by the recipients for their own use or for circulation within the Ashram. At first, circulation of the letters was restricted to members of the Ashram and others whom Sri Aurobindo had accepted as disciples. When these letters were circulated, personal references were removed. Persons mentioned by Sri Aurobindo were indicated by their initials or

¹ First and third passages: *Letters on Himself and the Ashram*, volume 35 of THE COMPLETE WORKS OF SRI AUROBINDO, pp. 473 and 475. Second passage: *The Mother with Letters on the Mother*, volume 32, p. 349.

by the letters X, Y, Z, etc. Copies of these typed letters were kept by Sri Aurobindo's secretary and sometimes presented to Sri Aurobindo for revision before publication. These typed copies sometimes contained errors, most of which were corrected by him while revising.

Sri Aurobindo's revision sometimes amounted merely to making minor changes here and there, sometimes to a complete rewriting of the letter. He generally removed personal references if this had not already been done by the typist. When necessary, he also rewrote the openings or other parts of the replies in order to free them from dependence on the correspondent's question. As a result, some of these letters have an impersonal tone and read more like brief essays than personal communications.

The Publication of the Letters

Around 1933, Sri Aurobindo's secretary Nolini Kanta Gupta began to compile selections from the growing body of letters in order to publish them. During Sri Aurobindo's lifetime, four small books of letters were published: *The Riddle of This World* (1933), *Lights on Yoga* (1935), *Bases of Yoga* (1936) and *More Lights on Yoga* (1948). Sri Aurobindo revised the typescripts of most of the letters in these books. During this revision, he continued the process of removing personal references. A letter he wrote in August 1937 alludes to his approach to the revision:

I had no idea of the book being published as a collection of personal letters—if that were done, they would have to be published whole as such without a word of alteration. I understood the book was meant like the others [*i.e., like Bases of Yoga, etc.*] where only what was helpful for an understanding of things Yogic was kept with necessary alterations and modifications. . . . With that idea I have been not only omitting but recasting and adding freely. Otherwise as a book it would be too scrappy and random for public interest. In the other books things too personal were omitted—it seems to me the same rule must hold here—except very sparingly where unavoidable.

A number of letters not included in the four books mentioned above were published in the mid and late 1940s in several journals associated with the Ashram: *Sri Aurobindo Circle*, *Sri Aurobindo Mandir Annual*, *The Advent* and *Mother India*. Many letters in these journals were revised by Sri Aurobindo before publication.

By the mid-1940s a significant body of letters had been collected, typed and revised. In 1945 plans were made, with Sri Aurobindo's approval, to publish a collection of his letters. The work of compiling and editing these letters was done under his guidance. At that time, many typed or printed copies of letters, some revised, some not, were presented to Sri Aurobindo for approval or revision. The resulting material was arranged and published in a four-volume series entitled *Letters of Sri Aurobindo*. Series One appeared in 1947, Series Two and Three in 1949 and Series Four in 1951. The first, second and fourth series contained letters on Yoga, the third letters on poetry and literature. In 1958, most of these letters on Yoga, along with many additional ones, were published under the titles *On Yoga II: Tome One* and *On Yoga II: Tome Two*, as Volumes VI and VII of the Sri Aurobindo International University Centre collection. The first tome, with further additions, was reissued in 1969. In 1970 a new edition of the letters was published under the title *Letters on Yoga*; this edition contained many new letters not included in *On Yoga II*. The three volumes of the enlarged edition constituted volumes 22, 23 and 24 of the Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary Library.

The present edition, also titled *Letters on Yoga*, incorporates most of the Centenary Library letters, but also contains a large number of letters that have come to light in the four decades between the two editions. One source of new letters is the correspondences of several disciples which were published in books after the Centenary Library edition had been issued. Govindbhai Patel's correspondence was published in 1974 in a book entitled *My Pilgrimage to the Spirit*; an enlarged edition appeared in 1977. Nagin Doshi's correspondence, *Guidance from Sri Aurobindo: Letters to a Young Disciple*, was brought out in three volumes in 1974, 1976 and 1987. Nirodbaran's Correspondence with Sri Aurobindo came out in two volumes in 1983 and 1984. Sahana Devi's correspondence came out in 1985 in a book entitled *At the Feet of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother*. Prithwi Singh's correspondence

came out in 1988 as *Sri Aurobindo and the Mother to Prithwi Singh*. Dilip Kumar Roy's correspondence was issued in four volumes in 2003, 2005, 2007 and 2011 under the title *Sri Aurobindo to Dilip*. A second source of new material is individual letters and small collections of letters published in Ashram journals and elsewhere after the Centenary Library had been issued. A third source is letters transcribed from manuscripts or from early typed copies. Many unpublished letters were discovered while reviewing correspondences long held by the Ashram; some of these had never been assessed to find letters for publication; others had been assessed, but relatively few letters were selected at the time. Additional letters were received by the Ashram upon the passing away of disciples. From the three sources mentioned above, many letters have been found that are worthy of publication. The present edition contains about one-third more letters than appear in the Centenary Library.

The Selection, Arrangement and Editing of the Letters

In compiling the present edition, all known manuscripts, typed copies or photographic copies of manuscripts and printed texts of letters were checked. From these sources, letters that seemed to be of general interest were selected. Electronic texts of the letters were then made and carefully checked at least twice against the handwritten, typed, photocopied, and printed versions of the texts.

The selected letters have been arranged according to subject and placed in the four volumes of the present edition. Each volume is divided and subdivided into parts, sections, chapters and groups with descriptive headings; each group, the lowest unit of division, contains one or more letters devoted to the specific subject of the group.

The present volume consists of 2147 separate items, an "item" being defined as what is published between one heading or asterisk and another heading or asterisk. Many items correspond exactly to individual letters; a good number, however, contain only part of the individual letters; a small number consist of two or more letters (or parts of them) that were joined together by early typists or editors and then revised in that form by Sri Aurobindo.

Whenever possible, the letters are reproduced to their full extent.

In some cases, however, portions of the letters have been omitted because they are not of general interest. A number of letters, for example, begin with personal remarks by Sri Aurobindo unrelated to the more substantial remarks which follow; these personal openings have often been removed. In some letters, Sri Aurobindo marked the transition from one part of a letter to another with a phrase such as "As to"; these transitional phrases have often been retained and stand at the beginning of abbreviated letters — that is, letters in which the first part of the letter has been omitted or placed elsewhere.

A number of letters, or portions of them, have been published in more than one volume of THE COMPLETE WORKS OF SRI AUROBINDO. Most of this doubling of letters occurs between *Letters on Yoga* and *Letters on Himself and the Ashram*. The form of these letters is not always the same in both places. In *Letters on Himself and the Ashram*, the manuscript version of a given letter has often been used because it contains Sri Aurobindo's remarks on himself or the Mother or members of the Ashram. These personal remarks, as noted above, were usually removed by Sri Aurobindo when he revised the letter for publication as a letter on *Yoga*. This revised form of the letter has generally been reproduced in *Letters on Yoga*. Thus, a number of letters are available both in their original form and their revised form.

As in previous collections of Sri Aurobindo's letters, the names of Ashram members and others have often been replaced by the letters X, Y, Z, etc. In any given letter, X stands for the first name replaced, Y for the second, Z for the third, A for the fourth, and so on. An X in a given letter has no necessary relation to an X in another letter. Names of Ashram members to whom Sri Aurobindo referred not as sadhaks but as holders of a certain position — notably Nolini Kanta Gupta in his position as Sri Aurobindo's secretary — are given in full. Sometimes the names of people who played a role in the history of the period are also given.

In his letters Sri Aurobindo sometimes wrote Sanskrit words in the devanagari script; these words have been transliterated into roman script in this edition. Words in Bengali script have likewise been transliterated. This policy is in accord with the practice followed in Sri Aurobindo's lifetime.

The reader may note that Sri Aurobindo almost always spelled

the word “Asram” without an “h” in his manuscripts. Around 1945, due to failing eyesight, he began dictating most of his writings to his amanuensis Nirodbaran; Nirodbaran sometimes spelled the word without an “h”, sometimes with one. In the present edition, the word is always spelled as it occurs in the manuscripts, both those of Sri Aurobindo and of Nirodbaran. In headings and other editorial matter, the spelling “Ashram” has been used, since this is now the official spelling of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram.